



The Self-Disruptor's Manifesto

Jay Samit

All disruption starts with introspection.

Self-disruption is akin to undergoing major surgery, but you are the one holding the scalpel. Most people avoid this painful process because they are not willing to risk what they have built for the opportunity to have something better. When I travel the world speaking at conferences, I ask people one key question: Are you really living life, or just paying bills until you die? To thrive in this era of endless innovation, we all need a better understanding of our own internal value chains. How we view ourselves and how we interpret our personal strengths is at the core of all external success.

I have applied these insights to raising over \$800 million for startup companies as well as launching new businesses in billion-dollar industries as diverse as telecommunications, music, and ecommerce. I didn't go to the right schools or know the right people, but I did learn how to disrupt my own belief systems to be able to reposition myself to take advantage of new opportunities and achieve success. And I've been able to do it again and again—achieving resilience and security in an oftentimes unstable, disruptive business landscape by disrupting myself.

The self-made billionaire in his twenties, an unheard of possibility a decade ago, now happens with regular frequency. The startup company, with little funding and a small staff, displaces hundred-year-old companies with billions in revenues virtually overnight. The consultant, with no background in technology or operating a business, makes millions of dollars from teaching one course online. The Arab Spring, which peacefully overthrew long-standing governments in Bahrain, Tunisia, and Yemen, is able to successfully force rulers from power without weapons or international support. This tightly interconnected world of the 21st century is exploding with new opportunities for personal empowerment and financial independence. What did all of these disruptions have in common? They were led by people who understood how to analyze their internal value chains to pinpoint their unique talents and capabilities and then analyzed the value chains of their industries to find opportunities for disruption.

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Richard Branson founded Virgin as a record store only to discover that the real value was in creating, not just selling, records. The most successful serial disruptor in history, he has created billion-dollar companies in eight different industries.

Lowell “Bud” Paxson deconstructed the value chain of his failing Florida radio station. When no one would advertise on his station, he bought surplus goods and sold them on air instead of running commercials. This idea was so successful that he transformed his local station into the billion dollar retailing empire now known as the Home Shopping Network.

A century ago, Joyce Clyde Hall was going broke selling penny postcards until he killed the big idea that people wanted to write to home to loved ones. His realization that most people can't write led him to fill out the postcard for them. With a stroke of the pen he created Hallmark and launched the entire greeting card industry.

A few years ago, the website Tune In Hook Up was designed by Chad Hurley, Steve Chen, and Jawed Karim to disrupt the world of online dating. Most dating sites featured still images of prospective partners, so the former PayPal employees thought showcasing dating videos would be much better. While the dating site was a failure, Hurley, Chen and Karim realized that people really enjoyed watching the uploaded videos. Abandoning their original dating site concept, the team pivoted and renamed the site YouTube.

The steps for disruption are not taught in college or business school. Yet every successful entrepreneur's story, and decades of quantitative research, prove the validity of the disruption process. It makes no difference if your goal is to make millions of dollars, solve global warming, start a restaurant, or start a revolution.

For years I have mentored entrepreneurs and aspiring college students on how to disrupt. What I have discovered is that these techniques can be applied to virtually any field or endeavor. I truly believe that everyone can achieve personal success. All that is missing are the instructions for self-disruption as well as the tools for applying that knowledge to the business and non-commercial worlds. For those wishing to get more out of their jobs, careers, and lives, self-disruption is all that is required. It can also be a guide for changing our world, as disruptors are the only ones capable of dealing with the macro issues affecting society and our planet as a whole.

Renaissance Florentine philosopher Niccolò Machiavelli said that entrepreneurs are “simply those who understand that there is little difference between obstacle and opportunity and are able to turn both to their advantage.” It's this type of thinking that will lead to success in today's world.

You have a choice: pursue your dreams, or be hired by someone else to help them fulfill their dreams. The great disruptors constantly reinvent themselves and their careers. They never fear losing their jobs because they create jobs. They control their own destinies.

We all start out life filled with big dreams and ambitions. Your future, our world's future, is far more malleable and controllable than most people realize. By studying how our business and social institutions are constructed, it is possible to determine how they can be disrupted. No one writes books about those that failed to take risks. History doesn't remember those who maintained the status quo. The glory comes from being a disruptor. Every man and woman would like to leave their mark—some evidence of their existence—on this world. This is the self-disruptor's manifesto: to transform yourself, your business, and the world.

We are all born into an imperfect world filled with opportunities for improvement. For some, the improvement is building a business that provides products that make life better for your customers. For others, the improvement comes by working to create a more just and verdant society. Still others are driven to connect people in ways never before possible or even imaginable. But anyone setting out to change the world will follow the same path. First, they will have to transform themselves to maximize the opportunities in their lives. According to Forbes, only 13% of the world's billionaires were born into money. The vast majority of today's most wildly successful individuals changed themselves in such a way as to make becoming a billionaire possible.

Sir Richard Branson said once said, “My interest in life comes from setting myself huge, apparently unachievable challenges and trying to rise above them.” Branson’s first business experience was modest; he sold Christmas trees when he was just twelve years old. He had no formal business training and didn’t even go to college. But he is a genius when it comes to just putting his mind to overcoming obstacles. Mary Kay Ash, Simon Cowell, Michael Dell, Barry Diller, Haim Saban, John Paul DeJoria, Steve Jobs, and dozens of other business icons achieved their goals by deciding that nothing would stop them. All of these business disruptors also looked for where their efforts could make the biggest impact and change the status quo. Innovation is merely problem solving, and problems are merely opportunities waiting to be seized. No obstacle is so big that one person with determination can’t make a difference.

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The more world leaders I have the privilege of meeting, the more I realize that they are no different from you or me. They are simply men and women determined to make the greatest amount of impact they can in the time they have. No one who ever led a nation got there by following the path of another. Isn't it better to walk alone than to follow a crowd going in the wrong direction? Disruptors just set higher, loftier goals for themselves and those around them.

Lack of access to capital is no longer an excuse for today's disruptors. When Larry Page and Serge Brin founded Google back in 1998, the search engine needed the processing power of a \$1 million DEC AlphaServer 8400 and a server farm with racks of hard disk storage. Today, an iPad is more powerful than the AlphaServer and storage in the cloud is a cheap, universally accessible commodity. Researchers spent over \$1 billion sequencing the first full human genome at the turn of the 21st century and now software can do it for under \$3,000—and the process may soon cost only \$100. The latest technology is waiting for disruptors. Low cost smartphones will bring another one billion people into the digital age and greatly enhance the interconnectivity between billions around the globe. The Internet of Things will connect some 50 billion IP devices by the year 2022. In 2016, IP traffic will grow to over 1.3 Zettabytes – ten times all the global data traffic of 2008. Online connections are now 180 times faster than they were at the turn of the 21st century. The actual cost to start a globally disruptive business is 95% lower than it was just a decade ago.

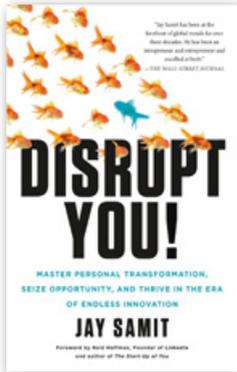
These developments have given all of us the same knowledge and computing power that was limited to very elite institutions just a generation ago. What will we create and what challenges will we be able to overcome? This is my true purpose for being a disruptor and paying forward. I want to help foster a new generation of disruptors; visionaries unfettered by the limitations of the past who will solve the issues other generations thought impossible.

Even our greatest accomplishments are destined to be disrupted. In 1492 Christopher Columbus was granted a lifetime pension from Spain's Ferdinand and Isabella for making it across the Atlantic. Today, there are over 700 transatlantic flights a day and no one thinks twice about it. People don't drive Model T Fords or use Microsoft DOS computers. These revolutionary advancements were merely a moment in the never-ending cycle of disruption and they are made all the more special because of how quickly they empowered the next generation of disruptors. The joy of disruption comes from accepting that we all live in a temporal state. In this era of endless innovation, each of us has the power to seek out new problems to solve, to look inside and reexamine our strengths, and to develop a disruptor's mindset. Our purpose is to contribute to our time by reinventing ourselves and our world.

Daydreams and role models continue to foster my sense of wonder. I feel a deep sense of gratitude for all those who have inspired me, and by example proved that anything can be disrupted for the betterment of others. Disruptors benefit society by bringing positive change to all aspects of life.

“You cannot teach a man anything; you can only help him to find it within himself,” Galileo wrote. This is a call to action, a cry for positive change, but it is only the beginning of the process. I hope my manifesto has inspired you to transform yourself, your industry, and the world. I wrote my book, *Disrupt You!*, to answer two very basic questions: “How did others change the world?” and “How can I do it?” **The third question is entirely up to you: Will you do it?** 📖

Info



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ABOUT THE AUTHOR | Jay Samit is a serial entrepreneur and intrepeneur who is widely recognized as one of the world's leading experts on disruption and innovation. An adjunct professor at USC, Samit teaches innovation at America's largest engineering school. He is author of the best-selling book *Disrupt You! Master Personal Transformation, Seize Opportunity, and Thrive in the Era of Endless Innovation*, and is a regular contributor to the *Wall Street Journal* and host of its documentary series WSJ Startup of the Year. Samit tweets daily motivation to the over 100,000 business professionals who follow him on twitter [@jaysamit](#).

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