

REINVENT. REVITALIZE. RECONNECT.

10+ PIVOTAL QUESTIONS FOR MID-CAREER RENEGADES

By Kathleen Romaniello

“To be in transit is to be in the process of leaving one thing, without having fully left it, and at the same time entering something else, without being fully a part of it. It is a gestation period of provisional, tentative identity when many different selves are possible and none are obvious. The psychology of this in-between period has been described as ambivalence: We oscillate between “holding on” and “letting go,” between our desire to rigidly clutch the past and the impulse to rush exuberantly into the future. Over a period of months or even years, we move back and forth between these poles as we explore new roles and possibilities. Rather than being a sign of one’s lack of readiness, this moving back and forth is in fact the key to successful transitioning. It is how we stave off premature closure until we have fully explored alternatives.” (Herminia Ibarra)

IS IT TIME TO REINVENT YOURSELF?

Have you lost the enthusiasm and direction you used to have?

Are you at a work/career crossroads?

Are you feeling frustrated, unsatisfied, or stuck?

Is it time to stretch yourself and take on new challenges?

Think back to your first important life and career decisions. **Did you have a vision for your life and work** when you were just starting out after finishing your education? Were you clear on your values and have a good idea of what you

wanted in your life? How much thought went into your career choice or the contribution you wanted to make in the world? Are you happy with where you've ended up at this point in your life?

For many of my clients, they admit that some of their most significant life and career decisions were pure happenstance. Some choices worked out well, others not so well. The same may be true for you. You probably didn't think that much in your early twenties about whether that first job would move you toward a life of meaning or whether it was in alignment with your core strengths. It was impossible to imagine the sacrifices or how difficult it would be to master balance in all things. You just wanted to jumpstart your career path and assumed that at some point you would figure out what you really wanted to do with your life.

WHAT'S NEXT FOR YOU?

Even professionals who still find enjoyment in their work may be ready for a change after 15 or 20 years of following the same life course. **No matter how satisfying work is or has been, the thought of doing the same things for the same clients or organization for another 10 or 20 years has you questioning whether there is more, or better or different in your future.**

Change equals growth. Life is cyclical and the need to learn new things and challenge ourselves is normal. Those who see transitions as opportunities and a natural part of life fare better when they find themselves at a crossroads. **They're ready to stretch themselves and try something different.** Sometimes it's an entirely new career. Other times it's a personal pursuit they're ready to incorporate into their life.

If you've been muddling along in a profession that you've never truly enjoyed and that causes you more anxiety than satisfaction, mid-career is often the time to question whether it makes sense to keep moving in the same direction. This is especially true if you sacrificed life quality for the sake of your career.

The quest for greater satisfaction becomes more urgent at mid-career. With more working years behind you than ahead of you, you're ready to spend the time to step back and figure out what's next. You want greater freedom and control over your own success and decision-making. Some of those "good enough" life choices have started to feel too confining.

MID-CAREER IS AN IDEAL TIME TO REEVALUATE PAST CHOICES

By mid-career it's not unusual to begin to question or regret those early life and work choices. Sometimes life forces you to stop and reevaluate your life. The death of a parent. Health issues. Job loss. Divorce. Sometimes, it's an internal conflict. You feel undervalued. You've stopped growing. Your business offerings feel stale. You've been in the same position for too long and the promotions aren't coming. Too many tradeoffs between work and family. Too much travel or commuting time. Life seems to just pull you along and you're always trying to keep pace.

You feel torn between your current commitments and breaking free. There never seems to be a minute to figure out if your current path has you moving in the right direction. Over time, your needs and values change but your choices don't change with them. The quest for serenity and a sense of personal

satisfaction is an ever-moving target that always seems to be just out of reach. You tell yourself to stop complaining and stop expecting too much. But you want more.

DON'T FRITTER AWAY YOUR FUTURE

Letting life just happen is a choice, but not necessarily a good one. You ignore the signs. You waste time. You wait (hope) for the promotion instead of devising a solid plan to make it happen. You fantasize about starting a business or getting a graduate degree or relocating to a different part of the country, but you don't act on it. You make excuses. It's never a good time. When you're on more solid financial footing. When the kids are out of college. When hell freezes over. When it comes to the big picture of your life, you keep settling for what shows up instead of orchestrating your future.

What separates those mid-career professionals who make a successful transition from those who never make it out of the gate? Commitment and just plain chutzpah. The decision to just do it. They believe in themselves and their abilities. They own their power and command the respect they've earned and deserve. **They become less willing to settle and more willing to make things happen.** They don't wait for someone to give them permission. They believe that they have every right to make different choices for themselves. They focus more on what inspires them instead of worrying about what others will think. They gather information, flesh out a game plan and get into action. **They create new habits that support their future goals.**

YOU ARE MORE THAN YOUR JOB TITLE

Transitioning at mid-career increases your chances of success because you have a longer personal history that you can mine for clues. You have the advantage of the many personal and professional twists and turns you've already navigated and **possess a more solid appreciation of your strengths and weak spots.** You have experience and skills, a body of work. You're resilient. You have connections and know how to get things accomplished. You're a master juggler—work, family, community responsibilities. You amaze yourself sometimes by the multitude of plates you keep spinning. You know what drives you and what makes you crazy! The success, failure, and wisdom you've accumulated by mid-career helps you sort through your future options with a more discriminating eye.

How to get started? Take an honest and all-encompassing assessment of your current reality. What needs work? What do you need to eliminate? What inspires you? What weighs you down? Honesty is crucial. You can't revitalize yourself without acknowledging exactly where you stand in the here and now. Ask yourself what YOU can do today to move in a more positive direction.

OWN YOUR CHOICES

If most of your life feels out of your control, one simple way to take back control is to live more intentionally. Your future success hinges on taking ownership for how you're spending your time and energy. Don't wait too long. Only YOU can make the decision to shift your priorities. Blaming people or circumstances places you in the role of victim and makes you feel powerless. When you feel powerless, you keep yourself imprisoned in a dark place living a "less than" life. You absolutely deserve better than that.

You must be willing to put EVERYTHING on the table and reevaluate what in your life should stay and what should go. Just acknowledging the things that you'd like to change starts a domino effect of positive shifts. You begin to see the world and yourself through a broader lens. It emboldens you to leave a little early to try out a new networking group. You suddenly begin to engage more with your team. You feel lighter, even if you're still not sure where you're headed. In short, you begin to see your life with eyes wide open.

RESISTANCE IS FUTILE

It's normal to avoid making significant changes. You're established in your career or business. People expect certain things from you. You have personal and financial responsibilities. Even if your over-committed and over-structured life makes you unhappy, you know where you stand. **Resistance is usually fear of the unknown and untested.** Yet, make even the smallest shift toward something you want—because you're sick of letting fear limit you—and you often realize that your fear was out of proportion with reality. You discover support from someone or something unexpected.

The trouble with resisting change is that it begins to haunt you and you end up wasting a lot of years and a lot of opportunity. Instead of facing a career shift straight on, you buy a new house or a new car. You ignore minor health or financial issues until they spiral out of control. You take the same type of job in a new company but realize all too quickly that you still don't like the work.

Acknowledging the need for change often enables you to exhale. You may not know what comes next, but just admitting to yourself that something needs to

change is the impetus you need to start seeing options, to take more care with how you spend your time and even your money.

The thought of turning your world upside down or inside out can feel insane even if the idea of it excites you like nothing has in a very long time! How to maintain your momentum without feeling as if you need to toss everything? Take your time and gather information. Focus on small changes. **Your mid-career reinvention is as much a state of mind as it is a change in direction.** Relax. Don't expect the answers to just appear in a flash. Create a little mental and physical space for yourself so you can remain open to possibility. Focus initially on what you want and NOT on how to get or accomplish it.

FIVE MISTAKES MID-CAREER RENEGADES MAKE WHEN CONSIDERING A TRANSITION

Do less of what lessens you. Do more of what magnifies your soul, your gifts, and your higher purpose. (Anne Bruce)

- **They expect to have an “aha” moment about how to reinvent their life or work**—Maybe you know exactly what you’d like to do next. But if all you know is that you need to make a change, that’s enough! Don’t remain stuck because you don’t immediately have a clear vision for what comes next. Work through the pivotal questions for starters and see where the answers lead you.
- **They ask the wrong people for advice**—change is scary and it’s not unusual to look for validation and permission. If you don’t want your ideas to crash and burn, seek support from like-minded renegades or work with a coach. Don’t let those closest to you talk you out of your dreams and ideas. Well-meaning friends, family or associates are often the very people who are swift to voice their disagreement or disapproval. Often, they’re afraid your plans will shift the balance of power between you, and they may feel threatened or left behind if you succeed. They may be just as unhappy as you, but are too fearful to move forward and they don’t want you moving ahead of them. In short, don’t let other people snuff out your plans before you even get started.
- **They wait for permission**—grant yourself permission to explore your options and at least identify the areas in which you seek to change your life. The only permission you need is your own.

- **They allow their mid-career pivot to be driven by finances**—Money is certainly a consideration when making a transition but don't let it stop you from transforming yourself. Better to create an appealing vision for the next phase of your life that you find exciting. If your vision is sufficiently compelling, you'll be inspired to find ways to finance it, make tradeoffs, and/or begin to use your money more mindfully.
- **They give up too quickly.** A major transition may take time, even years. Every small change builds momentum and ultimately adds up to a significant transformation. Remember that **your reinvention is a state of mind, an openness to new ways of being, doing and thinking.** Keep yourself open to all possibilities. You'll need to dive deep enough, ask the right questions, build new habits, and do the foundational work that will support your success. The answers don't always come easily but sometimes it's because you're resisting what your heart or your gut tells you is right for you. You may need to cut through a lot of forest before you see any clearing. With that in mind, challenge yourself to incorporate small changes immediately to gain momentum. Use the SUCCESS STRATEGIES in this workbook to support your progress.

INFORMATION IS POWER—10+ PIVOTAL QUESTIONS TO IGNITE YOUR MID-CAREER TRANSFORMATION

“The one who asks questions doesn’t lose his way.” (African proverb)

If you are ready to shake things up but not sure how to get started, the following PIVOTAL QUESTIONS will inform and enlighten your personal mid-career renaissance.

To get the greatest benefit from these questions, take your time with them.

Don’t just think about your answers; write them down. Answer honestly. Keep going back to them. Don’t censor yourself. The questions are an exercise in self-discovery.

Keep your responses private. This exercise is between you and the page. Don’t let outside influences stifle your journey toward discovery.

1. ARE YOU SATISFIED WITH WHERE YOU ARE IN YOUR LIFE AND CAREER?

2. WHO OR WHAT IS DRIVING YOUR CURRENT LIFE AND/OR CAREER PATH?

3. ARE YOU COMMITTED TO YOUR CURRENT BUSINESS OR CAREER PATH OR ARE YOU READY TO EXPLORE NEW OPTIONS?

4. WHAT ARE YOU AVOIDING?

5. IF YOU COULD START OVER, WHAT WOULD YOU DO DIFFERENTLY?

6. WHAT ADVICE WOULD YOU GIVE YOUR FIVE-YEAR-OLD SELF ABOUT LIFE AND WORK?

7. IF YOU COULD CHANGE OR ELIMINATE ONE THING IMMEDIATELY, WHAT WOULD IT BE? WHY?

8. IF YOU CONTINUE ALONG YOUR CURRENT PATH WITH NO SIGNIFICANT CHANGES OR COURSE CORRECTIONS, WHERE DO YOU EXPECT TO BE IN FIVE YEARS? 10 YEARS? HOW DOES THAT MAKE YOU FEEL?

9. WHAT'S STOPPING YOU FROM DOING WHAT YOU REALLY WANT?

10. HOW MUCH TIME DO YOU DEVOTE EACH DAY TO THINGS THAT MATTER TO YOU?

11. WHEN DO YOU FEEL POWERFUL, PASSIONATE, FREE, INCREDIBLY USEFUL, EXCITED, INSPIRED? (Thanks to Danielle LaPorte—The Fire Starter Sessions—for this one).

12. WHO OR WHAT INSPIRES YOU?

13. WHO DO YOU NEED TO BECOME TO HAVE WHAT YOU WANT IN YOUR LIFE?

14. IN WHAT WAY(S) HAS YOUR LIFE BECOME TOO COMPLICATED?

15. HOW MUCH DOES MONEY DRIVE YOUR CHOICES?

16. WHAT ACTION CAN YOU TAKE TODAY TO MOVE YOURSELF 1% CLOSER TO YOUR IDEAL LIFE?

When we have arrived at the question, the answer is already near. (Ralph Waldo Emerson)

MID-CAREER SUCCESS STRATEGIES

Shun the incremental and go for the leap. (Jack Welch)

I encourage you to work with the pivotal questions. There's no down side to reconnecting with your best self. **If you answered the pivotal questions, yet find the idea of transforming your life more than you can handle, focus first on how you can keep growing and developing as the multi-faceted person that you are.**

If the pivotal questions *have* inspired you to keep exploring your options, here are some additional recommendations in creating your mid-career transformation:

1. **Do the Nine Lives exercise.** If you need inspiration for the next stage of your life/work, imagine having the opportunity to be nine different people! Which one appeals the most? Find common threads/clues. Use this information as a starting point for your reinvention.

2. **Identify what you don't want.** Sometimes it's easier to identify what you don't want in your life. You don't want to focus too much on the negatives but use it as a starting point to focus more positively on what you do want.
3. **Uncover your limiting beliefs.** What are the beliefs you hold to be true but that hold you back and keep you from reaching your potential? Do you tell yourself that you're too logical to be creative? Do you believe that you're not smart enough, rich enough, or attractive enough to do what you really want? Pay attention to statements that start with "I never" or "I don't normally" or "I could never." Discover all the ways you limit yourself and **ask yourself if you're willing to continue to let these limiting beliefs keep you stuck.**
4. **Find your people.** Use your network and social media to connect with people in the field you're considering. Audit a class. Volunteer for a cause you believe in. Take a trip to an artist supply store. Find a group in the field(s) you're considering and attend a few events. It's a great way to build connections and gather information for a potential career pivot.
5. **Avoid thinking in terms of a job title.** Focus on what you like to do. List the tasks, projects, or people that energize you. Focus on interests and less on strengths. Why? It's often your strengths that got you to your current level of success but you may have lost interest in mastering those skills beyond a certain level of competence.
6. **Focus on feeling, not just doing.** Identify your top five negative feelings and figure out what you're doing when you're having those feelings. Then do the reverse and identify your top five positive feelings. Describe what you can do to increase the amount of time you're feeling those good vibrations!
7. **Find your pain points.** Identify the top three issues in your life that keep you up at night. Brainstorm strategies to resolve those issues.
8. **Reexamine your priorities.** Using the list of things in your life you don't want (refer to Success Strategy #2), experiment with saying "yes" when you normally say "no." Say "no" when you normally say "yes." Make time for things that add meaning to your life and work.

9. **Identify the activities or people that leave you feeling “less than”** and strategize ways to change those situations.

10. **Focus on a bigger and broader picture.** Assess all aspects of your life—this is often referred to as the Wheel of Life exercise, or, what Vishen Lakhiani refers to as Areas of Balance—work, finances, wellness, relationships, personal development, skills, intellectual aspirations, fun/passion, spirit, environment. Whatever areas are most important to you. Rate each segment on a 1-10 scale, with 10 being FABULOUS. Identify at least one positive action or habit you can implement to increase your level of satisfaction in all areas of your life.

11. **Create your “Absolute Yes” list.** What are your highest priorities? What needs doing? How can you be your absolute best self? Commit to doing those things daily, even if just five minutes a day. Small actions done consistently over time can drastically improve the quality of your life.

12. **Find the time.** Find 30 minutes a day to begin to envision the next stage of your life and to incorporate life-affirming new habits. Ask yourself what you would do if you had more time. Better yet, challenge yourself to track your time and your spending for one week and identify weak links.

13. **Do something radical.** Make it something that you never seem to have time for. Find the time and do it. Remind yourself every single morning that this is YOUR life. Make it matter.

14. **Respect yourself and be willing to go for what you want.** Don't play the victim. What support do you need right now in your life? If you're not comfortable asking for that support, identify what you can do to support yourself.

CONCLUSION

There is never a perfect time to begin something new but every day offers you the opportunity for a fresh start and a new perspective. Why bother? Why not

just maintain the status quo and convince yourself that life isn't so bad? Believe me, I've asked myself that question countless times. But if you're in a place that has you feeling less than or anxious too much of the time, you owe it to yourself to move in a more positive direction.

Sometimes you just know you need to make a change because there is something in you that won't be ignored, a feeling that you just can't shake no matter how hard you try!

Yes, change can be hard. There are no guarantees. But lots of people do it. And many of them do it under less favorable circumstances than you may be facing. I'm sure you know some of them.

Transitions and pivots often have more to do with enjoying the journey and trusting that each turn in the road will offer new discoveries and opportunities that you just can't anticipate from your current vantage point.

If the thought of taking on a major life or career pivot feels overwhelming right now, go easy on yourself. Begin by **granting yourself permission to at least explore your options**. Sometimes, just opening yourself up to the idea of changing your life empowers you. I guarantee it.

In closing, remember this: Stop waiting for your real life to happen. This is your real life. If you don't like where you are or where you're headed, make changes NOW. Tackle your fears NOW. Stop making excuses NOW. Commit to making better choices NOW. Live more fully NOW.

All my best to you in creating your mid-career renaissance. Just imagine the possibilities!

Transformation always involves the falling away of things we have relied on, and we are left with a feeling that the world as we know it is coming to an end, because it is. (Mark Nepo)

CALL TO ACTION

Is your business or professional advancement on life support? Are you feeling stuck, bored or undervalued? Did the promotion (or partnership) you were expecting go to someone else? Are you considering self-employment but find yourself overwhelmed by fear?

If you're ready to **infuse new energy into your life and work**, contact me to schedule a **complimentary one-hour Jumpstart session** to get you unstuck and moving in a more positive direction. By the end of the session, you can expect to:

- ❖ Identify three tangible next steps you can implement immediately
- ❖ Uncover the hidden challenges or limiting beliefs that are holding you back
- ❖ Gain a renewed sense of energy and enthusiasm for your life and work.

It never hurts to get a fresh perspective!

About Kathe Romaniello

Kathe has been coaching and consulting on leadership, career transition, self-employment, and personal development for almost 20 years. **She specializes as a business and career coach to successful mid-career professionals who are ready to reinvent, revitalize and reconnect with their life and work and flourish through the second half of life.** Kathe supports mid-career renegades who are ready to take a stand for themselves and who are ready to live life on their terms—more creative, more unorthodox, more inspired. After all, life is short.

Kathleen Romaniello

Helping Mid-Career Professionals Reinvent and Revitalize their life and work so they can Reconnect with their Highest Potential

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