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Business New and Old and New Again

Disruption has become the norm in business. But this doesn't always mean massive and world-changing disruption. Sometimes, it just means that the world is a bit more open to conducting business the way you'd prefer to do it these days.

I'm writing these lines in a hotel room, but I could just as easily be staying in someone else's guest room, thanks to AirBNB.

Earlier today, I had a call with a woman who heads marketing for a software company. She chose the job so she could work from home, spend more time running, and not have to spend time in a cubicle. I referred a purple-haired girl who used to work at a reputable Canadian company for a freelance gig in Dallas where the young woman will be working at the kind of company that wouldn't normally hire someone with purple hair. But these days, they will.

Why? Because the freaks are about to inherit the earth.

Okay, What Does This Really Mean? —

You picked up this book for one of a few reasons:

- You know me already and just want to see what I'm jabbering about this time.

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- You want to know what a book about freaks is really about.
- You've felt like a freak (or like one that is in hiding) for much of your life and are wondering if I can offer any advice.

The premise of this book is really simple: How can I do business my way and be successful, when the way I think and the goals I have aren't in line with conventional thinking?

Does that resonate with you? Then you're in the right place. Not sure? Well, perhaps you should keep reading. If you love fitting in, doing what you're told, and being just like everybody else, you're going to have a bad time (<http://hbway.com/badtime>).

This book is designed to help you stop doing the things that aren't working for you, and start taking action with the things that will. It will enhance your confidence and understanding of who you really are, and help you determine how to develop an approach that works best for the people you intend to serve. That's one of the best things about this book's message: In the old days, you had to conform. Now, you only need consider your choices and choose the options that feel most right to you.

Am I a Freak? Are You?

Are you a freak? Are you a misfit? A world dominator? A small army? I'll let you know right off the bat that I am a freak. I've always had to do things my own way. I don't usually fit in, at least not without having to make a lot of effort. I don't choose the easy route. If there's a difficult way to get something done, I'll choose that way. Case in point: I wrote this entire book twice because I didn't like the way it came out the first time. From an early age, I felt that the world at large seemed like it was running on autopilot. And I wanted to take the wheel.

What's your story? Maybe you are the CEO of your own cubicle, or an *employeepreneur*, a title coined by my friend James Altucher—never quite satisfied to toe the line, but instead, working hard from your corporate role to make the company far more amazing. Maybe you're

the 61-year-old grandmother who is a rock vixen at heart, who can't get over the fact that you have grandkids, and who still wears leopard-print pants to the business mixers.

Or maybe you're a business owner who has never really done business the way the rules dictate that you should. Maybe this has worked great for a while, but now you're feeling pressured to do things "the regular way" to get through tough times. Perish the thought, I say. Stay the freak that you are! We'll figure out how to get through together.

Let's agree to this: You can call yourself whatever you like, but you're a freak if:

- You don't fit in without some serious effort.
- You are not a big fan of settling or compromising.
- You're looking for ways to allow your weirdness to be an asset, and not as the deficit that people have tried to convince you it is.

Is There Some Age Limit to Freaks? —————

People often wonder whether freaks are more frequently young people. But some of the most interesting freaks are older than you might imagine. Here's a story about one.

Many years ago, I worked in a nursing home. One of our residents was Helen. She was 104 years old. Her breakfast, every morning, was oatmeal with black licorice on top. I asked her about it one time. She said, "I can eat whatever I like at this age. Who will say a thing about it?"

Many older people tend to take a magical viewpoint as they age: They simply don't care if they don't fit in. Admittedly, this is a broad generalization, but it does beg the question: Why wait to be old to do what you want to? You can start deciding to be who you want to be—not caring what people think about it—whenever you choose. It's yours to explore.

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But What Does This Have to Do with Business?

For quite some time, there has been only one mainstream method of operating in the modern business world: fit in, or get out. The industrial era encouraged the notion that we needed consistency, that there had to be regular hours of operation, that people had to conform to very specific and measurable modes and decisions. If you weren't willing to follow these standards, you were an outcast and business wasn't going to happen.

So many things have changed in recent times. For one, new opportunities for employment have surfaced. Let's say you have always wanted to work for a car company—but not any of the established ones. Nowadays, you can work with Local Motors (localmotors.com), and simply design your own car. Maybe you've always wanted to design every single texture used in a room of your house. That's an option now, thanks to 3-D printing (hbway.com/3droom).

You want to create and sell your art? Great. Mobile payment company Square makes that easy (squareup.com). Need a place to meet that isn't a coffee shop or hotel lobby? Breathe can find you exactly the right space (breather.com, which happens to be run by my sometimes coauthor and all-times friend, Julien Smith). You want to rent out your place in New York so that you can travel the globe? Make money by putting your apartment up for rent on AirBNB (airbnb.com).

Opportunity abounds where there were never any before. For instance, I'm a magazine junkie. I love to read them, and I've had the pleasure to write for several great ones. But then I launched my own because, why not? (ownermag.com).

That's just it. The challenge for the past 100 years or so was to find a job and *maybe* a career. Today, you can choose the work you want to do and find a way to do it the way that makes the most sense for you and your buyers.

Marie Forleo found this out for herself early in life: "I used to work on the floor of the New York Stock Exchange. That was my number-one

job pick out of college and I loved it because there were no chairs. I had a lot of energy and I felt like, ‘This is the only kind of environment where I can be as crazy as I am and I’m going to match with everybody else.’ ”

But Marie soon came to see that the fit wasn’t *entirely* there.

“[When I was on] Wall Street, I realized, ‘God, this isn’t *it*—because my heart isn’t in it.’ I kept having this intuitive gut feeling, ‘This is not where I’m supposed to be in life.’ The scary part was, I didn’t know *what else* I should be doing because all the other job descriptions I’d been exposed to at that point sounded boring as hell.”

Marie went on to try out magazine publishing, starting out in ad sales and moving around a bit more. She then moved into the editorial side at *Mademoiselle* magazine, but it still didn’t feel quite right. As she tells it:

I was on the Internet, probably when I shouldn’t have been, and I stumbled across this article about a “new profession” at the time called life coaching. And I kid you not, something in me just [knew this was for me]. I was about 22 or 23 years old—and even though I knew it was ridiculous to think that anyone in their right mind would [hire me; after all], who would hire a 23-year-old life coach? I could not deny that something inside of my heart and my being was lighting up like nothing ever had lit up before.

So fast-forward a couple of months. I had signed up for a coach-training program. It was a pretty lengthy one, but I got a call from Condé Nast HR. They wanted to offer me a job at *Vogue*—the queen bee of fashion magazines. That was my fork in the road, [the moment] when I said to myself, “Okay, either you’re going to take this job at *Vogue*, and continue on this kind of publishing career, or you’re going to quit and start your own life-coaching business at 23.” So, of course, you know what I decided to do. I quit, started bartending at night, and began building my coaching business during the day. That’s really where it all came from.

Marie is still writing her success story. But she crossed the seven-figure line in earnings for her business a few years ago and there’s no

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end in sight. Marie Forleo definitely qualifies as a freak inheriting the earth. Her quirky humor and style shines through in everything she does. Check her out at marieforleo.com, and also see <http://hbway.com/marievideo> for an example of her video stylings.

You Don't Have to Wait for Permission —

John Saddington loves creating useful software—and he loves it when an itch that he needs to scratch in his own life turns out to help others, as well. Such was the case when Saddington developed Pressgram (pressgr.am), an application and WordPress theme pairing that allows you to easily post photos from your smartphone to your website. If it sounds just a *little bit* like Instagram, that's because it is. Only you can create your own Instagram-like experience using Pressgram, and obviously have a lot more control over it.

Saddington was just launching the software when I interviewed him. I asked him how he went from being a guy with a day job to a guy running his own small business. He claimed it wasn't all that difficult; he launched a Kickstarter program and asked people whether they'd support his project. They funded him to the tune of about \$56,000, which let John focus full-time on Pressgram. The people voted with their money, with no middleman in sight. That's how we will inherit the earth, my fellow freaks.

Saddington is already working on new projects and developing whatever else makes sense for the community he has built around himself. He does this from the empire of his own home, with his children happily running around him. The business could exist literally anywhere there's a decent Internet connection—like so many other businesses out there, including my own.

This book isn't about the Internet being the salvation of all companies out there. And even though you don't need to be some kind of online business to be a freak, I can say that the Internet is one of the tools that is helping to empower people to be who they want to be.

Can You Be Sure of the Outcome Before You Start? Not a Chance!

R.J. Diaz runs Industry Portage (industryportage.com), a company that produces laptop bags, duffel bags, and other utilitarian goods with a kind of rugged beauty. R.J. comes from the construction industry, which isn't a field that's generally known for its fashion sense. I asked him whether his friends and business colleagues teased him when he first launched the company. He replied:

I don't have a background in textiles or fashion design at all. They know that there's an artistic side to me, but I still got a strong reaction of, "Why would you ever do that? What do you know about making a product?" That reaction was tough to take. However, a lot of people were very supportive. Some members of the construction industry gave me sort of a smirk, like, "Okay, that's a nice hobby." They discounted me for awhile until I kept up with newsletters and new product designs. Soon they realized [it was time] to take me seriously.

I asked R.J. how hard it was to pull off this kind of project.

If I [had known] then what I know now about having to develop this idea, I honestly don't know that I would [have done] it. [In the beginning], I talked to a bunch of different retailers, a lot of different material sources, both domestic and outside the U.S. [I wanted to find out] who would be willing to do small minimum quantities, who would be willing to work with me in terms of prototyping, sampling, and testing out products. That process took about a year. It was less than a year when I launched the website from the time I conceived of the Industry Portage brand and concept. I launched it on October 22—[which happens to be] my wedding anniversary and my daughter's birthday. I wanted to tie that all together with the hope that it becomes

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something [of] a legacy that maybe my kids can carry. But for now, I'm still in building mode.

Diaz continues to work on building Industry Portage into a brand that makes sense for both construction and architectural workers, but also for people who appreciate style and rugged good looks. To look at him, you wouldn't think R.J. Diaz is much of a freak. He's fashionable, stylish, and quite successful both in his construction business and on the path to success with Industry Portage—which just goes to show that freaks aren't always easy to spot.

Freaks Often Find Their Own Distribution Paths

You don't have to wait for permission to turn your entrepreneurial vision into a reality. However, you *do* have to find a way to get your product or service to the people who will want to purchase it. Hugh Howey didn't wait for permission when he published his Wool series of science fiction books, about life in a series of silos in a postapocalyptic world. He just wrote the books and published them on Amazon's Kindle Direct Publishing platform. After some fairly significant sales via his own efforts, publishing giant Simon & Schuster inked a deal with Howey for the print distribution rights to the book—which ended up being worth another \$500,000 on top of what he'd already made on his own via digital distribution.

And just in case that wasn't interesting enough, Howey sold the rights to the movie version of the Wool series, showing us yet again that the mainstream doesn't have to be your only path into a success that matters to you.

Challenges That Stand in Your Way

Of course, there are many ways you might find your path to success thwarted. You might find money getting tight and feel the urge to

surrender your unique style and intentions and try to fit in. You might quit too soon.

Some other challenges you might face along the way:

- **Lack of a clear goal.** How will you know what success means to you if you don't define it? Make sure you have a clear and defined idea of your goal. It's okay if you don't end up there as long as you are moving in that general direction. I go into this in detail in Chapter 2 for the very reason that so few people have a goal in mind.
- **Seeking money from the wrong part of the value chain.** Looking for your money in the wrong part of the chain may thwart you early on. I meet a lot of people who want to build businesses to serve bands. But most bands don't have a lot of money. However, the *venues who book bands* make money from bands. The organizations that supply and equip bands with their gear have lots of money. Be sure you know both who you are serving and who your customer is.
- **Feeling of isolation.** Being different (a freak!) means often being surrounded by people who don't "get" you. There's a huge push to surrender, to conform, to think, "maybe I *am* wrong." But get a second opinion before you agree, and even a third opinion—and from freaks, not from "normals." You'll soon find that your gut feeling has been right all along—and that *being different* is what will keep you headed toward success.

Business Is about Belonging

I've received compliments with a consistent theme over the past decade or so. People tell me, "You really do care about people," and "I feel like you see me and understand me," and "I've really enjoyed meeting and getting to know the people you've gathered into your community." I'm proud of this, of course—but only because it continues to confirm a business tenet in which I believe strongly. Though you'll rarely find it out there in the textbooks, if you listen

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and read closely, you'll find in the works of many successful people: Business is about *belonging*.

It might seem strange that a book that encourages freakiness and the refusal to fit in praises the idea of belonging. But you can see how these two ideas are different, correct? "Fitting in" often means shaving off your unique edges, hiding and masking what defines you, discarding any behaviors or appearances or images that prompt others to question you or push away from you. "Belonging" is about finding that place where you finally let out a deep breath you had no idea you were holding and feeling with great certainty that the people around you *understand you*.

Raul Colon is a friend of mine and a successful business consultant, as well as one of the Spanish-language writers inside the pages of my magazine, *Owner*. Raul is also a vegan, which means that he doesn't eat or use any animal products whatsoever. This is a challenge because Raul lives in Puerto Rico, where meat is a big part of the culture. He's told me many stories of friends and relatives saying to him that they are vegetarian, and then watching them eat pork. When questioned, they say, "Well, it's not beef."

Restaurants everywhere face a challenge when considering whether and *how* to serve the vegetarian and vegan (and other dietary choice) communities. Raul wrote a piece for *Owner* where he commented on the big difference between a restaurant that grudgingly ensures that a salad has no animal products, and one that proudly displays a wide selection of dishes specifically targeted for vegans. The difference, of course, is that when Raul finds a restaurant that welcomes his business, he spends more of his money there. He feels that he *belongs*.

Harley Davidson might be one of the brands that is most famous for creating a sense of community. People who wear suits and dresses during work hours keep their Harley keychains and "My Other Car Is a Harley" bumper stickers handy to remind themselves and others that *this is where they belong*. Some books have looked at this kind of branding as tribal. What we've come to co-opt as the concept of tribes is built on belonging, as well.

I started by telling you how business was new and old and new again; how this concept of belonging has been with us since before commerce. Yet we tend to create complexities that try to smother that sense of belonging, or we attempt to be all things to everyone. And all that does is to make us lose our powerful edge. When you make it your business to find the people who are the same *kind* of freak as you, you'll profit from serving that community in some form or fashion.

