

## Praise for *Radical Reinvention*

"If you're serious about unlocking your full potential and becoming the best version of yourself, then *Radical Reinvention* is the book you simply can't afford to overlook. As someone who has personally had to rebuild their reputation and start from scratch, I can tell you that this book speaks to the very heart of transformation. The eight stages presented will demystify the reinvention process and make it feel achievable, while the truly transformative results will leave you stunned. The 'Re-Inventor's Playbook' is packed with gripping stories of real-life Re-Inventors who have successfully transformed their lives, providing irrefutable evidence that it's never too late to start anew."

--Tom Hardin, former FBI informant "Tipper X"

"With disruption all around us, the pace of change overwhelms us. In *Radical Reinvention*, Maureen Lippe shares the secrets to surviving and thriving by navigating the waters of change. Through her inspiring stories and examples, we can all learn to embrace and master reinvention."

--Greg Morley, Global Head of Diversity, Equity & Inclusion, Moët Hennessy

"*Radical Reinvention* is the life-changing guide we have all been begging for without even realizing it! Maureen does a knockout job at explaining why each of us should welcome reinvention as an organic, ever evolving entity within our very beings. Not only is *Radical Reinvention* a healing process and survival tactic; Maureen also discusses why we owe it to ourselves to look deep within our very souls, expand outside our contrived boundaries and literally create beauty from chaos."

-Mandi Chambless, 14-Year Stage IIIIC Ovarian Cancer Survivor and Thriving  
*Re-Inventor*

"Maureen Lippe has created lightning in a book! She's put it all on the table to take readers through the journey of a lifetime. The pandemic left many searching for their purpose and it is at this moment that Maureen can help readers to radically reinvent themselves. This is the moment to step into courage and take an adventure of a lifetime."

--Holland Haiis, Leadership Consultant, Speaker, and Award-Winning Author

"*Radical Reinvention* is a must read for everyone who wants to improve themselves. It describes 8 stages everyone must go through to achieve success through this process. Maureen Lippe goes beyond personal

experience and includes many personal stories of others, supported by the experience of industry experts. Our only suggestion to those raising dual-career families is that they don't try to reinvent both partners at the same time!"

--*Ilene Gordon and Bram Bluestein, Co-authors, Doubling Down: The Secret Sauce for Dual Career Families*

"This is a book you will pick up and not be able to put down until it's finished. Never have we had a time in our lives that *Radical Reinvention* was more needed. This is an action that we must demand of ourselves. We must be courageous in calling out what we no longer can allow to remain silent within us, and in so doing, we create the future that we have longed to have. If you ever thought you were alone and no one saw you, know that after reading this book you will walk away with the tools to stand and face who you are truly purported to be. Be unapologetic in embracing your purpose! Life is too short. The world needs your voice, now."

--*Donna M. Wilson, President of Strategic Intersections LLC, Global Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Executive*

“An exciting and educational glimpse behind the scenes of *Vogue* and career building in the world of fashion, as well as an inclusive and interesting exploration of reinvention, through various perspectives with helpful resources from experts like Idea Whisperer Mitch Markson, author of *The Imagination Playbook*.”

-Jazz Biancci, Author, Speaker, Conscientious Advisor

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# re-

*back, back from, back to the original place;*

*undoing; again, ANEW*

In the world of *Radical Reinvention*, second chances entice you to roll the dice again. Look closely this time. Savor the possibilities. **Rediscover, realign, recharge, rebuild, realign, recover, and rebrand** for a more splendid you. It's all within your grasp, your nature. Be unapologetic.

Embrace the future you have longed for most of your life. Never has there been a more perfect time for reinvention. The world needs your voice and power now. It takes brave work. Nobody said it would be easy. Have the courage to develop your potential and your purpose. Put your whole heart into it and let's rise strong together.

## Introduction

### Survive or Thrive Now

“For me, 'revolution' simply means radical change.”

--*Aung San Suu Kyi, activist*

The steady, classic turtle isn't exactly known for its swagger, but its reinvention as a species has endured for about 90 million years. Respect! Turtles have been around longer than dinosaurs. They survived the asteroid that crashed into the Yucatán that killed the dinosaurs 86 million years ago. It's probably because they were still buried in the ground. When they came up, it was dark and cold, but they could live. Scientists from the Smithsonian recently traced back the inception of its shell: ribs and spine, which grew steadily thicker before eventually fusing together to form an exterior shell made up of about fifty pieces—all to adopt new ways of breathing and moving from its complex structure. A beacon of persistence, survival, and reinvention. They can easily retract into their shell for long periods of time. That is exactly what we do when we're in dark places hurting or in danger; we retract into our shells when life gets hard. That is exactly what we don't want you to do and why I wrote this



book to prevent that from happening to you and to me. The oldest living tortoise, Jonathan, just turned 190 years old. He is also the oldest known living land animal. Let that set in. Talk about *resilience*!

And what about you? Have you retracted? Are you now ready to take risks? Do you need to reinvent to survive? To break out of a miserable, painful, traumatic setback, loss, or failure? To breathe again? To test your courage and rise? To explore the full spectrum of your potential? To build an abundant life after losing it all to rebuild magnificent you? To make the rest of your life the best you could imagine? A personal brand that sustains, never retracts?

Alongside the wondrous animal planet in constant regeneration, people are ascending the scale of regeneration to *Radical Reinvention*. Chances are, this is *you*. The planet is exploding with brave reinventions. Radical Re-Inventors are the fire starters, casting the sparkling flames above the rest. They are not only rebranding their minds but often, their bodies. They are setting humanity's table with abundant fruits of ingenuity, empathy, truth, excitement, and rising stronger than ever.

**Drastic Disruption Calls for Radical Reinvention**

In *The Pandemic Is a Portal*, author Arundhati Roy writes, “Historically, pandemics have forced humans to break with the past and imagine their world anew. This one is no different. It is a portal, a gateway between one world and the next.”

Thank you, Arundhati, we’ll surely be imagining and reimagining soon! First, let’s reflect a bit, as what we’ve gone through is unmatched in our lifetime. My God, how did we all get through this period? Did we? We need to Review (see Chapter 1) the experiences, the emotions inside of us, the fear and uncertainty to understand what we’re working with to begin our Radical Reinvention odysseys.

Pandemics disrupt civilizations. Now, you and I know firsthand! We must Radically Reinvent despite what the catalyst is though. This moment is the time for reset and thinking about how to reinvent, then realizing that prized vision with deliberate actions. We’re all in this together and we’ve got to get through it. Self-care has never been more important. Mental wellness and loneliness are world dialogue right now and it should be because of COVID-19 and what this radical era has dumped on us.

At the same time, we can't ignore other great catalysts for change. My life blew up on steroids because my life as I knew and loved it was swept away from me due to the loss of my big love of almost forty years, Jerry Taylor, causing terror, uncertainty, and painful loss. I had to try hard to reclaim my identity and become a whole human again. Miraculously, over time, I created a toolkit of what really helped me with many emotional moments and resonance that it could help others; thus, this book.

I knew serial reinvention and even welcomed it, enduring the growing pains and embracing the new features. This was my life, but then horrible things happened in the last few years that violated my existence and forced me to look inside. I had to reconcile existence without my husband, my love and partner for so many glorious years. Previous reinventions were never spun out of profound loss and grief. The bigger reinventions were never without my loving partner by my side.

To be fully transparent, I was always able to elevate my personal brand, as well as the brands of my clients, but now, I had to build a new life despite fear, loneliness, and uncertainty. I had to lead from my heart,

not my hurt. It took brave work and hard conversations with myself.

These are not merely words.

Whether you also lost your greatest love, fell ill, a mind-blowing technology upended your product or brand, or you have a marvelous dream of your future self unprovoked by a tragedy (and good for you!), I want you to consider following the path to peace, serenity, love, and safety again. I passionately want to help you become whole again. I will hold your hand, guiding you through my journey and what brought me back.

Get ready because I'm going under the knife, revealing raw tissue, muscle, and heart to share these learnings with you. It's makeover time, and it may even get a little bloody. Sometimes they do. We don't need to grow a shell like the radically resilient turtle to reveal the anatomy of Radical Reinvention. It can be a slaughterhouse of emotions to paint the picture. However, Francis Bacon said, "The best part of beauty is that which no picture can express."

Reinvention is a fundamental part of me, as well as my personal brand. I believe in the power of makeovers, whether a redo of our entire

life or one specific area, whenever we desire. In fact, makeovers are the gateway to reinvention. Who doesn't love a great makeover?

After leaving my editorial positions at *Vogue* magazine and *Harper's Bazaar* to launch my own consulting firm and then PR agency, I was a spokesperson for Clairol, and their biggest PR challenge was getting on Regis Philbin's show. I wrote a segment idea, which their PR department pitched, and they accepted. When I got on the air, Regis launched into, "This is Maureen Lippe, former beauty editor...*former?* I thought you were the beauty editor of *Harper's Bazaar*." He chuckled in his hearty way. We had this banter back and forth, and I called him a "low-life creep" on the air! An irreverent moment, but apparently, my sarcasm scored points. Two New Yorkers having some fun with each other. His producer asked me if I wanted to do something permanently for the show: I said yes, makeovers. I had already been doing makeovers in the magazines and now on TV for the last two years. I was the 'makeover queen.' I landed a weekly Friday spot, which would eventually optimize my impact and set my PR agency up for success in fashion, beauty, wellness, and health sectors, as we did beauty/wellness segments on

Regis. That never would have happened if I hadn't had the confidence to come back at Regis with humor when he hit me with "you're the former beauty editor." Humor works and it's a big part of my success DNA both personally and professionally. Then I appeared on Charlie Rose and Maury Povich's daytime shows. I loved these two because they intellectualized the discussion of reinvention through makeover. They fully understood the power. I loved doing full-body makeovers on women and men all over the country for one reason: the transformation I saw from all those who were made over both inside and out. Some of their reinventions were simply life changing, and it was only the beginning physical transformation. I could see in their eyes the spark to thrive. The thrill of a personal makeover or reinvention was life changing. As one woman said to me after her head-to-toe makeover, "I never knew I was beautiful."

Surviving or thriving is a decision to be made in this moment. What is going on? What is giving you anxiety? What is breaking your heart? As you discover and disclose information, if you lead people or an entire brand, reconcile that so much of what we talk about regarding personal

development and home life applies to leadership also. Leadership is not for the office only; it's everywhere, it should permeate your life if you're brave enough. You must have internal power wherever you work and inside your home, too, with your spouse and family including your pets. People are not talking about it as much because it may have been construed as too private or too vulnerable. What happens inside will happen outside. But if you cultivate the skills for outside, it will also work inside.

Reinvention is a road. Radical Reinvention is a rough road that opens to a major highway to majestic destinations. It's painful. It cries for courage. It's illuminating. Sometimes construction locks the brakes for a while before you see the new, shiny reconstruction. You must reinvent with what you have. Avoidance is the internal dialogue, *I don't want to go there*. Avoidance is comfort with no courage. Not thinking, not feeling, certainly not acting. I have experienced all of this. And giving in is merely survival. Stepping out is thriving.

When is it time to reinvent? A series of setbacks and obstacles leading to a lot of confusion, forced action, and meaningless days and

relationships have railroaded your life. Perhaps you were complacent, satisfied but not fulfilled. It takes Radical Reinvention to better position yourself for opportunities. You have to fight through, take responsibility, be vulnerable, do the reset and come out swinging in this Radically Reinvented world. Loving ourselves during this process of owning our personal story is possibly the bravest thing we will ever do.

And brands...wow, look at you! Amazon, Netflix, Zoom, Door Dash, TikTok, YouTube, but the new kids are brands like Etsy, Ford Motor Co. with the F150 Lightning, Disney winning the streaming wars, brands like Gushers using TikTok to return from obscurity to being hot...and how about all the innovation of AI and ChatGPT, and all the rest to follow? So exciting! These are only a handful of the darlings of the corporate arena and the new upstarts that are Radically Reinventing with technology, innovation, and imagination. My company, Lippe Taylor, certainly had to reinvent to survive. We had to dive in headfirst to survive. Thousands of small businesses, hundreds of nonprofits, underwent rebranding. Some made it; many didn't. It was hard work.

What your personal Radical Reinvention is must be explored inside-



out. But you're already living radically now, being forced to change behavior, health, family, and home patterns—all uniquely human. No matter where you are on the spectrum of change, the environment you once operated in, the people in your life have radically shifted with the pandemic of coronavirus, COVID-19. For brands, service and product array, dissemination, consumer base, messaging, mission, and even the very creation of personal brands may have altered. Teams engaged differently. Many of these teams disbanded. Leaders responded by recalibrating their approach toward employees, seeing authentically *seeing* them as whole individuals, and infusing purpose in their missions. My own longstanding values as a leader—vision, empathy, trust, accountability, authenticity, empowerment of others, taking a results-oriented approach without a frantic sense of urgency—elevated during this difficult time because of my concern for my staff of more than 250 marvelous human beings at Lippe Taylor. While professional, my affection and care for our people was unconditional. I refused to lose any of them from the company, at least not due to my own shortcomings as their leader, and while they were experiencing their own fears and loss,

no doubt. Win or lose together, no other way in my world. It took courage. It took brave work, care, and connection with our people. It was hard and it was scary, but the leadership, our CEO and brilliant teams were all great allies, helping every step of the way.

All this disruption and disorientation got me to thinking about the tenants of this book and the components of reinvention: feeling, processing, reimagining, resetting, and doing. Bravely living and ready to recover. Getting that spark of inspiration that won't burn out upon the first obstacle, distraction, or worse, demon – an illogical element that attempts to scare us from reinventing (see Chapter 6). Under the work tent, there's also what I have coined "bleedership". Wow, some bloodsucking leaders will drain you dry! No empathy, courage or even connection with their people. How do we start to develop braver, more daring, caring, and courageous leaders?

In case you can't already tell, this is not a conventional self-help book about mere change. Change is constant. Change is hard. Why do status quo? It's in my inherent curiosity and authentic nature to take risks, push limits, and try to live fearlessly. It was difficult these last two

years to live authentically. It was a struggle for me. These traits serve a Radical Re-Inventor, but it was painful for me much of the time. These traits take courage and are empowering. I don't say that lightly because every board and brand I've been involved with has centered on women's equity and empowerment particularly in under-served communities. I've reinvented many times, and I have learned so much from every round. We must have the pure courage to fully develop our potential and it can get messy.

One thing I know for sure is, though it's not something you feel and think every day; reinvention is in your human nature. The reason for embarking on the reinvention and results are radical, as mine was, but the way you get there is in stages that are sometimes unpredictable, uncontrollable at first but imperative to develop your potential and live authentic lives. Those 8 stages are:

1. *Review*
2. *Recover*
3. *Reawaken*
4. *Remember*

5. *Reimagine*

6. *Reach*

7. *Replenish*

8. *Rebrand*

As further proof, I have help from friends who are Radical Re-Inventors spilling it all in the “Re-Inventor’s Playbook” at the end of each chapter. You will not be the same after you read about these courageous, brazen people, like Samantha Lux, who Radically Reinvented her body to affirm her gender, with her mother, Irene Brank, who guides others to the radical resources they need for affirmation; Eric Alva, who served in the Marines and helped to reinvent human rights in America after losing his leg in the Iraq War; Fern Mallis, who reinvented the entire fashion industry; Alina Lee, teen golf star-turned lawyer and activist reinventing how lawyers treat their clients; Craig Stanland, who made it his business to help people reinvent after he served two years in a federal prison and lost it all; Liz G. Bailey, who fled her abuser to start over with her two kids, reinventing herself to teach the signs of domestic violence and speak

out loud for other survivors to leave; and Halena Cline, whose paintings and sculptures grace galleries, museums and private collections worldwide only after she released her mind, body and spirit from an infamous cult obsessed with Armageddon, a place where personal reinvention – not to mention, invention – is forbidden.

These individuals represent their personal brands as fiercely as the companies we discuss, like Lippe Taylor, LVMH (Louis Vuitton Moët Hennessey), and Wells Fargo. We've got brand transformation experts like Barri Rafferty, one of the top women in PR and communications; Carlos Zepeda, who says he has the “reinvention gene”, an energy he applies to every second of his life; Chief Reinvention Scientist Dr. Nadya Zhexembayeva, who has helped thousands of leaders reinvent; the best therapists helping us to recover and reset, Weatherly Camacho, LPC, MAC, and Dr. Ann Turner; self-development coach, Liza Andrews, who founded the PictureCure® Methods for reinvention; Keiya Rayne, intuitive healer, success coach and transformational speaker whose own reinvention was nothing short of an earthquake; and all-out branding innovator Irina Soriano, who advocates that personal brand and company

brand are cojoined inside “life-brand” and shows us how to understand it and maximize it. I’m thrilled to include my son, Nick Taylor, who has been my reinvention sidekick lifting me up with love and inspiration, plus Lippe Taylor’s CEO Paul Dyer, our fearless leader, who speaks about our company and our client and staff reinventions with full transparency and candor.

If you’ve gone through anything like I have, you feel me, and I feel you. Let’s get on with it together. We know it’s not easy and takes a lot of strength. So, let’s feel, even fall together if we must. Just remember that you are not freakishly alone, even in the scary places that may be simultaneously beckoning you and throwing up a locked, black door. This is how change, trauma, fear, and loss can show up. Just remember that you must reinvent before you lose yourself. Through Radical Reinvention, you will know that the inner strength you can summon is powerful like the regenerating turtle. Somehow, they understand it. So must we.

*--Maureen Lippe*

## Chapter 1

### Review

“Out of suffering have emerged the strongest souls; the most massive characters are seared with scars.”

*--Khalil Gibran, author and professor*

### **Stage 1 of Your Radical Reinvention   REVIEW**

*Resolution and Recommendations for:*

Loss | Grief | Devastation | Change | Contemplation | Acceptance

What happened to you? Where are you now? Do you even know? If you've been spacing out or fogging up lately, you're not alone. But it's time to come clean with courage and vulnerability. I won't say anything like “snap out of it” because that's harsh on an already fragile, vulnerable mind and body. Cue to the yoga instructor's soothing voice. “Feel the waves of your breath, sense the movement of breath beneath your heart center, through your nose...elongate the breath waves...feel your fingers, toes and gently move...gradually surface from your depth. Open your eyes.” ...All right, skip the rest if you're not the type, but do *open your eyes*

and open your whole heart and let's heal together with no shame or blame.

To reimagine, you need a full *review* of what's going on first. Know where you are. Have the courage to reassess your life journey to discover how to transform your future from one of disappointment into an opportunity for progress. So, what do you do when you want to change goals and shift gears? How do you honor your own grief? Trust me. We'll get there together. Let's put one foot in front of the other. Our lives are continuing and we're going to be a part of it. It's a new and different normal. People are resetting in droves, figuring out what their lives really are and what they're not getting, not doing, not feeling. Never have we experienced a time like this when Radical Reinvention was so necessary.

### **Review of the Big Picture**

The International Monetary Fund asserts that COVID-19 changed the world with a shift in behavior, the economy, medicine even how we communicate, care for others, and educate our children. And of course, the digital economy, with the rise of digital behavior such as remote



working and learning, telemedicine, delivery services and now AI. The future of work has arrived faster, along with its challenges — many of them potentially multiplied — such as income polarization, worker vulnerability, health equity, more gig work, and the need for workers to adapt to occupational transitions.

Brookings sums it up perfectly: Many, including myself, contracted the virus, and some for the dreadful long haul of symptoms and uncertainty of how our bodies will react in the future from the virus and the vaccine. Americans alone lost over 1 million loved ones and more than 104 million contracted the virus, and still counting. Many lost their jobs and often, their employer-sponsored healthcare. Approximately 31.6 million people had to go to work to provide the rest of us with frontline services, while others worked from home. Schools converted to online instruction. Parents struggled to juggle childcare and work. First responders and medical care providers worked overtime in the most hopeless context to save the lives that they could save with brave empathy. In the end, we lost close to 7 million people worldwide as of March 2023, and we're still losing people.

Are you one of the millions who took part in the Great Resignation?

According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, the number of Americans quitting their jobs hit a record high 4.5 million in November 2021. The hardest-hit sector has been the hospitality industry, followed by entertainment, retail and health services. Major strikes have also taken place across the country, with workers demanding higher pay and better working conditions. COVID-19 seems to have shifted the balance of power between American employers and workers.

Others are not happy with themselves, and blame it on their jobs, relationships, cities. Sometimes it's in your head. You must work on yourself with intention bringing a sense of meaning and purpose to your life. If that inner voice is poking at you, something is misaligned. Only you can identify what that is. Only you can realign. The sooner you are aware, the sooner you hit the road with your emotional belongings. These belongings may only be the mental material of a disruption.

Or could grief be the connecting factor to your Radical Reinvention? This certainly is mine.

**My Review**

It had to happen when I lost my husband, my person, my everything. I had to embrace my fears, faults, and uncertainties. I had to confront the painful truths before I could begin to find the courage and confidence to heal and lead a more secure, meaningful life. And be sure, pain is part of the process. I disintegrated. I was exhausted and drained. I came to the realization that I had to reinvent, and only a Radical Reinvention would save me.

As of this writing, I'm so much better, happier, and more secure, but my new self-invention is still taking shape. That's a process. The horrifying grief is behind me but sneaks up when I least expect it. It was a terrifying process in which tough questions needed to be addressed. How do I move forward bravely when I'm living with fear, loneliness, and uncertainty? Who am I? How do I rise strong? I've learned a lot. Learning is growth.

My exuberant, loving husband, Jerry Taylor, was a COVID-19 long hauler who had recently been diagnosed with diabetes and AFIB (atrial fibrillation, the most common type of treated heart arrhythmia). He never felt these conditions. He worked every day and operated with youthful

energy until COVID-19 scooped us both up and never planted us back down on our solid ground. How would we survive when we were both so sick at the same time and when doctors knew nothing about COVID-19 or how to diagnose or treat us? There wasn't even a test. We were treated for bronchitis in those early weeks. We were both empty.

Jerry and I had long-term care insurance, so I was so fortunate to be able to bring in a beautiful Jamaican soul by the name of Heather, to help us navigate my husband's every physical and medical need. Heather was sent from the gods. They both went for walks, and in a short period of time, they knew everything about each other. I took video and many photographs of them together just walking and sharing secrets. Their friendship was like a tender movie and was a gift to the entire family. My husband had a secret garden of lilies that he had planted for me years ago. She took video of him talking about how much he loved me while he was cutting and tending to his flowers on unsteady feet. What a long-lasting video treasure for me to discover over and over from season to season. It's the little things that mean so much when you're longing for someone you lost. In some ways, you have to honor your grief.

A favorite cemetery is located not far from our house, which we would visit frequently when walking. I would visit my departed friends and say hello to them and observe the beautiful headstones, marveling at the symbols chosen to represent the families and remember the lives of those no longer on this earth. Yet I never thought death would encroach upon my life with my husband anytime soon. This is the fairy tale of love, our sweet love. In the hours you live, laugh, play, and even work with the person you love, as we did, why contemplate a finality that slices you and leaves searing pain and loneliness that could bring you to your knees? Why would you ever go there in your mind?

Soon after the diagnosis of the virus, Jerry became tired a lot of the time. Total fatigue soon took over. I, too, was struggling with the effects of COVID-19 to the point that I couldn't make it upstairs sometimes. We had the early devastating March 2020 strain. My poor lungs were struggling so hard. To see the doctor, it would take me an hour to get dressed. Put my pants on, back to bed. Put on a sweater, back to bed. Sit up to take a phone call or at least try to work, back to bed. As a couple, we went through this dreadful routine every day for weeks and then months,

in the case of my darling husband. When I thought we might be out of it together, I lost him.

We had worked and driven home together for over a decade. To have that piece to your life puzzle be removed is devastating. It's a gargantuan shift because he is gone forever; I will never see him again or feel his hand in mine. You are so alone and so vulnerable like never before. I lost my life charge. When we were together, my heart was at peace. You make all your decisions alone now. There's nobody there when you go to bed or when you wake up. Empty space all around you. Who are you going to talk to about well, everything? Forty years of being so much in love and so close and in one day, they are gone forever. How do you come back? You never "get over it" — you just hope you get a bit more used to it each day. How could we possibly make the last part of our life the best part now?

Jerry knew he was dying, and he told me he was dying only hours before he passed. I held his hand, told him of my forever love not knowing that he meant he was dying that night. He wasn't in pain. He was so handsome. It was so peaceful, so final. I can respect all the gifts I

received inside his illness, dying and death; it could have been so much worse, but how could I ever live bravely again? I felt no connection to my body or mind. Our family lived together under one roof for more than a year during COVID-19, loving and laughing and desperately trying to heal my husband. We all tried so hard, but we couldn't take him to a hospital for fear of picking up the virus once again and eventually could only do Zoom doctor visits.

Grave loss is excruciating. Would I survive or would I surrender?

A rude awakening was when I went to a doctor's appointment after my husband's death. I still checked 'married.' I couldn't accept checking "single" on the forms. It was too soon. Who was I? Who did I identify with? How would I move forward during this most unpredictable and uncontrollable time? My center was off. I went from living my life as a married woman for all those years to being a widow, no longer married and a single woman alone. Titles that are hard to comprehend. I knew I had to build something around my total devastation. I was devoid of life. These markers of identity are the mundane reminders that you need to reshape components of your identity. Even if you don't participate and

control the rebrand of you, it will happen anyway. Why not reframe it yourself? Reinvention works like time. Even if you refuse to pay attention to the clock, the hours pass. And how not to lose your identity while trying to find your reinvention is important.

The mundane occurrences of your life are reminders that bring you to a place of *acceptance*. Erasing the checkmark next to “married”, looking for parking on the busy streets of New York City in the coldest winter of my life, having my meals alone and my life alone, I realized that it was time to reinvent myself again. I had to accept that I lost a life partner, a love partner, a family partner, and even a business partner. As the serial re-inventor, instinctually, I knew I had to grow through my sorrow, not just accept it. I needed to make the last chapters of my life filled with purpose and ever so meaningful. Rise and shine. Time to move on.

Sometimes you want to reinvent. Desire seduces. New territory feels exhilarating when it's a *choice*. But death is radical, so reinvention comes from a radical place. It's a call to your courage.

Very fortunately, I am well-adjusted and grounded, gifts my parents gave to me. Knowing these strengths was part of my review. Months into



this adjustment, I realized that I was no longer fixated on trauma and grief, but loss was all around me. I know people who lost their spouses in the last few years, and they are dysfunctional coping with their grief through alcohol and drugs, burning through weeks in bed brushing off their basic responsibilities. They are barely surviving but uniquely human. They have allowed grief to overwhelm and identify them.

Growth or going down a dark road is your choice. The guiding force for me is my wonderful son, Nick Taylor, and my great friends and family. Also, I go to work and that is my lifeline to the reality of getting up and getting out with purpose and service. Work is transformative for me and keeps me on the straight and narrow. My colleagues in the office gave me the strength I needed those first months with their tender hearts and humanity. My son's nanny, Remy, is now my nanny, best friend, and bodyguard! She rarely left my side. Nick and Remy are the secret sauce of my survival. And Lippe Taylor gives me the courage to keep developing my potential. Deep gratitude for all the wonderful people and things in your life is foundational to the review.

During the early stages of my loss, I interviewed a therapist who instructed me to “punch a pillow and scream in the shower daily and set up an altar with candles and photographs of my husband.” Are you kidding me? That’s not who I am. I am very lonely for my Jerry Taylor, but I’m not angry. How would she know, however, when she didn’t take the time to get to know me and what I personally needed as an individual woman, mother, business owner? Being the curious and diplomatic person I think I am, I gave her the benefit of the doubt for a moment and pictured me going to battle with a pillow! At least it gave me a good laugh. Laughter is restorative, and I try to laugh a lot every day. The wild image in my mind, crazed, bed-headed and furious, reminded me of a scene from a Lifetime movie. But in truth, I was never angry, so I didn’t have the energy to feed the fantasy of an angry widow. How could I be angry at this beautiful man who contracted COVID-19 and couldn’t get out of it? We disconnected from the reality of COVID-19. I was so fortunate for everything we had together. That was never lost on me; I was grateful for everything we shared and tried to remain in that state of constant gratitude. Sometimes it worked and sometimes it didn’t. I felt

sad, grief-stricken, messed up, but never angry. We were together living, loving, and working for all those years. Is there life after big loss? Is there anything left?

### **Perform the Self-Exam, Dammit!**

This very reflection is *review*, coming to terms with the full breadth of experience and emotions. Without it, you float or wallow with no anchor, and you might find yourself in oblivion. You pay attention to nothing. If you don't perform a review, an assessment of what occurred, along with your current circumstances, the lack of concrete data in your heart and brain is dangerous, causing an explosion of consequences that may set you back twice as far as the actual event. Judgment is impaired. There is no clarity. Some decisions can't wait. It's all overwhelming filled with uncertainty, but you must ask yourself who you want to now be. The review is the beginning of the journey to survival; it is unpredictable and uncontrollable at first. It takes brave work.

For example, that November and December after Jerry died, the family celebrated Thanksgiving, my birthday, my anniversary plus Christmas and New Year's all the 'firsts' without my person, my partner.

It was heart-crushing. I had to get through the ‘firsts’ not only for me but also, for my family. I thought, if I get through it, so will my son and his wife, Holly, Julie, Scott, Marianne, Remy, Kay, and our grandchildren. We were all in it together and we wanted to feel the joy of each occasion. I also tried to do it courageously for my husband. I wanted him to be proud of me. If you experienced such great loss, too, crossing the doorframe of the grand, emotional ‘firsts’ where memories and yearnings will taunt you the most, you’ll know what I mean. It’s an extreme challenge. Missing him became part of remembering him. It was a way of keeping him alive in my mind and my heart.

Death is not an ending; I try to keep my husband very present in my memory. I hope to hold him within me. But how do you overcome the darkness? The heaviness of grief? The level of pain you never experienced before? There is no precedent for radical loss. It takes strength to process everything. Think of it as tinder for the fire of your reinvention. You’ll need a lot of it.

Many people look for ‘closure’ after a loss without accepting all the parts. In his book, *Finding Meaning*, David Kessler argues that it’s finding

meaning beyond the stages of grief most of us are familiar with—denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance—that can transform grief into a more peaceful and hopeful experience. Kessler provides a roadmap to remembering those who have died with more love than pain; he shows us how to move forward in a way that honors our loved ones. Kessler’s insight is both professional and intensely personal. His journey with grief began when, as a child, he witnessed a mass shooting at the same time his mother was dying. For most of his life, Kessler taught physicians, nurses, counselors, police, and first responders about end of life, trauma, and grief, as well as leading talks and retreats for those experiencing grief. Despite his knowledge, his life was upended by the sudden death of his twenty-one-year-old son. How does the grief expert handle such a tragic loss? He knew he had to find a way through this unexpected, devastating loss, a way that would honor his son. That, ultimately, was the sixth state of grief—*meaning*. “Meaning appears in the small moments. Name the moment. Find a way to connect,” Kessler recommends.

I can relate to all this. At the same time, being imperfect human beings means that awareness is progress, but there are setbacks in the

process. My heart started to race a little bit as I was learning about all the different stages that I have not gone through. I don't harp on the negative. When my husband was sick, I didn't feel sorry for myself or fixate on fear. I kept living in the moment with him, trying to make him happy, listening to his music, watching "Grace and Frankie", on all...the...time. I could recite all the dialogue. It gave him comfort. Our family household accepted that show would be on day and night. I still hear the lines from the show, see me and Jerry holding hands and smiling together. I have not been able to watch the show again since his death. I love Jane Fonda and Lily Tomlin, but enough is enough.

One day, I met Sharon, a good friend and former assistant when I worked at *Harper's Bazaar*. She was by my side when I met Jerry and when I fell so deeply in love with him and just so hard and so fast. I couldn't work. I couldn't sleep. I would just pine for our moments together. It was painful but pure bliss when we were together. Not very liberated, just totally in deep love. I recently showed Sharon photographs. We talked about Jerry's life. I allowed myself to talk about how much I missed him, and I talked about the series of medical issues that led to his

death. Before I knew it, we had been talking for hours, and it dawned on me that I was processing my feelings out loud, which felt very stabilizing and connective. You see, I had also been dealing with mental confusion, which I referred to as ‘COVID brain’. I didn’t want to speak too much about it or any subject for that matter. Me: the founder of a digital media and communications agency. I had been a spokesperson for top brand clients. My leadership impact depended on me to speak with authority and passion both internally and externally. I wasn’t doing any of this. I was retreating inside for a long time, and I thought this fog, standstill, disconnection was the long-term effects of COVID-19, *long Covid* we’re calling it now. Which from a branding perspective, sounds exactly as it should – ominous and awful! I also thought sometimes you just have to surrender to grief, but that didn’t feel right to me either. I’m a fighter, a survivor born in New York City. *New York tough*. I was not going to surrender. It’s a struggle that never leaves you, but you must find your own path to peace when you’ve lost big, bold love.

Then I listened to a discussion on the science of the brain at the precise time I couldn’t concentrate or retain anything. I was in a daze,

unable to focus, aimlessly mentally going in circles at times. My brain was focused on the feelings and symptoms of grief, not the tasks of the day. It was difficult to read and impossible to memorize. I had to do a series of podcasts with industry leaders during this time. I was terrible. It was very frightening, and I felt shame and hoped nobody would pick up on it.

Listening to the interview on the brain, they said, “When you’re going through grief and trauma, the emotion can become overwhelming and debilitating in numerous ways. It’s sometimes referred to as ‘grief brain’ where your brain is being overloaded with thoughts of grief, sadness, loneliness, etc. It affects memory, concentration, and cognition. Your brain is focused on the feelings and symptoms of grief leaving little room for anything else. Your brain does not and cannot function properly.

You’re not able to find the right words naturally.” *Wow*, I thought. What a relief! I was in denial of the effects of COVID-19 and the depression that comes with the severe grief of death making me feel mentally scattered and empty. This was very revealing. It rang true inside. It was a huge relief. I’m not losing my mind, I was grief stricken with sadness and it was affecting me cognitively, as well as emotionally, and might be a lingering



effect of having had early COVID-19. I could use this information to carry me to next steps in my life review and ultimately, reinvention. If I understood the natural effects of grief, I didn't have to blame myself or feel shame every time I didn't quickly remember something critical or couldn't find the perfect word.

Negative self-talk doesn't serve anyone. Experts on death say the grief never completely ends, but the suffering is optional. Did you hear that? Suffering is optional. When someone dies, there's probate, the children, the bills. Jerry was also a visible partner in our company with pending projects and decisions that couldn't wait. I was trying to stay on top of all this, when on many nights, I wanted to pull the covers over my head and my dog, Willie's, and not give or respond to anything.

Sometimes the fog is trying to slow you down so you can fully grieve.

These abilities I prided myself on could return — and maybe in a stronger version — if I allowed myself to grieve properly, then review. Instead of burying me and my dog in the bed, which is devoid of meaning, I could switch my mindset to one of review and not put my entire well-being at risk with denial. Denial breeds isolation, anxiety, and unhealthy levels of

stress. If COVID-19 didn't do the trick, severe stress makes you sick, showing up in at least twelve illnesses. That alone should jolt you into processing your feelings. If you're having a hard time being deliberate about reviewing what you're going through, or you're not in the space of sharing with others quite yet, write or audio-record it all out. No one is checking grammar, punctuation, or sequence of events. This is not the way we are designed to recall. Journaling your days of grief can be healing, but you must journal gratitude each day as well. I would also use voice memo on my phone to record when having an important client conversation that had to be remembered with precision.

What matters is that you know where you are at this moment. It's an intense personal journey. If you don't perform the review, you won't know you need reinvention. It's intervention! Before you know it, you will be able to relax and get a good night's sleep and look forward to promising mornings again. You will want to take care of yourself again. You will be in recovery and on your way to renewal.

I now live comfortably while also appreciating my husband's legacy. I use my married name of "Taylor" more often to connect and honor him.

It gives me comfort.

## **Re-Inventor's Playbook**

### **Samantha Lux and Irene Brank: Diary of Unicorns**

Samantha Lux is a social media influencer and YouTube content creator who has amassed 630,000 subscribers and 60 million channel views. She uses her platform to promote social change, specifically aiming to reduce discrimination against the transgender community. I'm all ears but wait...there's more! For these Radical Reinvention tips, she's coming in an exciting package deal with her mother, Irene Brank, who leads a Learning & Performance Team and serves as her company's Pride ERG Vice Chair, Transgender Liaison & Gender Transition Partner. Their reinvention as individuals, roles models, spokespeople, and as a family is nothing short of ultraradical.

*Realization must lead to reinvention.*

When I think of Radical Reinvention, this is a big switch living as a male to living as a girl. There was no other option. When I realized I was trans,

it was like a truck hitting me. There was no way out of it. There was no way around it. I was going to have to deal with it. That was my path.

The moments mimicked the scene in “Little Miss Sunshine”. The son realizes he can’t fly a plane because he’s colorblind. His whole world comes crashing down. I had this vision of my life and how I planned on things going, what steps to take, and who I was going to be in the future, then when I realized I needed to transition, it was like that “Little Miss Sunshine” moment when everything I had planned was no longer possible. I had always wanted to be on YouTube and talk about things via video to an audience, but I didn’t think I could do it as a trans person. Who’s going to want to watch a trans person on YouTube? It was an internal battle: This is who I am, who I want to be, what I have to do, but I still want to follow my dreams.

*Identify your why, which will carry you through the pain.*

The most exciting part was being able to let go of all these pressures and expectations of what everybody else had for me. Boys are supposed to act a certain way and do certain things. Those voices constantly telling me, “You’re not going to be a cool boy. You’re not a normal boy.” Being able

to let go of that was a big relief. When the surgeries finally came, it was part of the path. This was about my own alignment, my journey. Being able to be proud of who I am and work my dreams into it.

*Truth is not conformation; truth is breath.*

My dad and I didn't have the best relationship growing up because I was trying so hard to fit into his perception of what a boy was and I could never live up to it. It was heartbreaking for me. Now that I can let go and be myself, he sees me a lot happier, confident, and he's able to get to know me and understand the pressures I placed on myself. When I first transitioned, I would either try to hide it or try to make guys more comfortable with me being trans and deal with others' insecurities. Now, I go into it and say, "Just so you know, I'm trans and I hope that's okay and if it's not, that's okay too, I'm not here to convince you of anything. I am who I am and I'm not going back pre-reinvention."

Know you can't chase after your dreams if you don't reinvent. It might not be exactly what you had planned or the path you set out, but there are ways to make everything happen. If I had to transition again, I wouldn't think of my physical transformation first. I tried to conform to

what society thinks a girl is. I would have tried to reframe my mindset, so I didn't think of it like that. It needed to solely be for me, my body, my image, my identity. Importantly, reality is not all beautiful right now. From society, there are so many attacks on trans people and mainly against trans youth. This is the hardest part in acting on reinvention. It's scary, but you need to do your best to live your truth.

*Irene reinvented as Samantha's parent.*

There's no greater reinvention than what Samantha has undergone. We also don't hear enough on how the family must reinvent upon gender transition. If 5 percent of the world is trans, and maybe more since you can still get killed depending on what country you live in, that means we're the cool parents that got one. But there's no role model for this.

What am I supposed to be like? What am I supposed to do? How do I reinvent this world I live in? We socialize our children to be a certain sex. How do we keep her safe as a girl on campus? Help her reinvent herself in college? We teach girls never walk alone in a garage, always cover your drink at the bar, keep your keys out to stab someone in the eye.

*Don't wait until it's too late to rebrand.*

Reinvention comes from a reason. We don't just wake up and reinvent. When I talk to corporations, I tell them, you're going to have to reinvent. Don't wait until it's too late. Make sure you have policies and procedures for people to transition while they work for you. Don't be the company that just flies the Pride flag in June. People will look under the hood to see if you're supporting gender identity, pronouns, etc. If you wait, you will call me and say we need help today, which is always difficult. And you're not gonna hire the young people who are curious intellectuals, who you want. If you don't support the world they live in, they won't work for you.

My personal reason for reinventing myself was protecting my child. We never said, "If our kids are blond, then we'll keep them and be good parents!" I'm not even close to the same person. Neither is our family. First, I needed to realize my husband loves his kids *no matter what*. I worried because I was a different person then. Now I realize there was never any question of the person he is. Samantha even said, "He may hate what I am, but he loves me." Our other daughter was at the table, and

someone said, “Why all this hoopla about the pronouns?” He said, “Because they’re nonbinary!” This was not the same man I married.

I went to my physical the other day. My doctor said, “I heard you and Sam are speaking all over the country.” How did you hear that? “Tom told me all about it!” I couldn’t even imagine my husband starting that conversation.

*Be your own unicorn.*

As a mom, I got a unicorn, and not everyone gets one. Why did I get one? Why do I get the privilege of having a unicorn in my house? Maybe 70 million of us got one. I’m special. I get to have one of these very unique people in the world. And why doesn’t everyone hire trans people? Sam is white. She has seen the world and the world has seen her as a white male. Now she lives as a woman and sees the world as a woman. The perspective transgender people have is 100 percent different than ours. They are the rarest asset you could possibly get with a perception very few people can have.

*Reinvention is an individual thing.*



It's important to honor what "transition" means for you. For everyone, it's different. I am working with a woman who says, "Below the waist doesn't bother me. I want breasts." For Samantha, it was everything. Is this type of reinvention a risk? Hell yes, in every sense of the word. It's not easy. It has to come from within. All motivation is intrinsic. Some people will shy away from that spark, the need to reinvent inside, or you can just go for it to be the better person, to be the next you. It's a choice. Everyone in this whole world will go through something that requires change, whether radical or not. If you've come out of a tragedy with life to still live, give that reinvention your best shot.

### **Reflection on Samantha Lux's Radical Reinvention**

Imagine the steady supply of courage and confidence needed for Samantha's RADICAL REINVENTION. I know many people my age who resist basic levels of self-reflection, yet Samantha entered the realm of unbridled self-awareness, then she couldn't return to her former self. Couldn't think the same or look the same. She needed to carry on through the whole process of her transition to align with Samantha, no one else. I am so pleased she had her mother, Irene, by her side the

whole way, who supported and protected her while also overseeing the reinvention of her dad and the whole family. Their courage is contagious. I applaud them all. Such brave people tackling tough and uncomfortable work while self-protecting all the way through. Too bad it's not always like this. Let's hope together it gets better.