



Redefine and Reinvent to Seize Tomorrow's Opportunities

By Daniel Burrus

In my new book *Flash Foresight*, I share seven principles that can make invisible opportunities visible. Knowing how and when to redefine and reinvent yourself and your company is critical.

In the twenty-first century, the one and only thing you can depend on is *transformation*. Technology-driven business process transformation is a hard trend; it will happen, and it is happening now! Using this hard trend to redefine and reinvent your business and career is a soft trend; some will do it and prosper, others will not. For those who want to use the forces of change and transformation to grow and prosper, this article is for you. It is important to understand that you can't go backward, and you can't stand still; you can't rest on your laurels, and you can't keep doing what you've always done and expect to thrive, even if you do your best to keep doing it better. The only way to survive, let alone thrive, is to continuously reinvent and redefine.

Reinvent and redefine what? *Everything*.

Transformation is an accelerated, magnified force of change. Redefining and reinventing is a way of harnessing that wild force and applying it to a product, a service, an industry, a career. Redefining and reinventing mean seizing the opportunity to rewrite your own history—before a competitor does it for you.

Lee Iacocca and Hal Sperlich reinvented an entire marketplace back in 1983 when they redefined the family station wagon. At the time, station wagon sales were not growing, even though baby boomers were in their prime childbearing years and the nation was bursting with new families. Why? Because even though baby boomers needed a set of wheels with substantial family room, they did *not* want to look and act just like their parents.

But vans? They were kind of cool (at the time)—and more importantly, their parents never drove vans. Chrysler introduced the Dodge Caravan in November 1983, creating an entire automotive category—the minivan—that would continue to dominate for the next quarter century. It was a stroke of flash foresight, based on the hard trend of baby boomers and their needs (along with the eternal insight that people don't want to look or act like their parents).

Reinventing has always been a powerful strategy. But in the past, corporate and product reinvention was an *option*; today it is an *imperative*. We live today in a unique context, an environment we've never seen or experienced before. We have never had this kind of processing power and bandwidth, this kind of runaway acceleration in technological capacity, and it has completely transformed our relationship to the concept of *stability*. In the past, stability and change were two contrasting states: when you achieved stability, you did so *despite* change. Today change itself has become an integral part of stability: today you can achieve stability only by *embracing* change as a continuous and permanent state.

But even change itself has changed. Information and new knowledge now travel around the world at the speed of light, and technological innovation proceeds at close to the speed of

thought. Today you cannot just reinvent now and then: to survive and thrive in a time of vertical change, you have to be redefining and reinventing yourself, your business, and your career *continuously*.

If you are a business, this means you have an urgent question in front of you every day: are your customers changing faster than you are? Are they learning faster than you are? Because they are changing and learning *fast*—and if you are not already designing and providing the solutions to the problem they are going to have next week and next year, you are behind a curve you cannot afford to be behind. And this is true whether you are an individual, a small business, or a multinational corporation.

Thus, the question becomes, will we let ourselves see the opportunities and become motivated by foresight, or wait until we are seeing the crises happen before our eyes, and become motivated by hindsight? It's time to stop mourning the "good old days" and start reinventing the new ones.