

**Making
the
Pivot
to**
Plan B





*Is Your Enterprise
ble to Pivot When
Circumstances Force
You Out of Your
Comfort Zone?*

BY CRAIG HARRISON

There comes a time in every speaker's career when, by choice or circumstance, they must pivot to a new direction, alternate course, or new focus. It may be anticipated, planned methodically, and executed strategically via a business plan. Or it may be foisted upon them suddenly, without warning, imposed by exigent circumstances. All of our enterprises are being affected by the COVID-19 pandemic—all that it has wrought and all it continues to foment as we approach a year of its worldwide impact.

For professionals accustomed to believing they are “in control” and the commanders of their own ships, mid-sea corrections, while essential, can be foreboding and traumatic. They can shake our confidence and challenge our core beliefs. How do we pivot to plan B when internal or external circumstances throw us off course?

WHAT'S A PIVOT?

Simply put, a pivot is a reorientation of direction and focus. It's a conscious change in course, whether brought on by external or internal stimuli. And plan B represents an alternate plan or strategy we develop in the present which we pivot to.

According to Jenny Blake, author of *Pivot: The Only Move that Matters Is Your Next One*, pivoting throughout our careers is the new normal. For our purposes, pivoting describes our response to dramatic changes to our marketplace, the economy, and even the nature of our work, as humankind reels from the effects of this pandemic and its specters of illness and death. As entire industries are evaporating, the very nature of live events is being redefined.

Since last spring, most NSA members have pivoted from live to virtual delivery of content. Many have pivoted to different or new topics to address their clients' immediate needs. Others are pivoting to different markets. Here are a few examples of speakers who are executing a plan B.

- For destination business expert Jon Schallert of Longmont, Colorado, pivoting meant going virtual. He converted the delivery of all keynotes, workshops, and bootcamp deliverables from the historic Emerson Buckingham Building he owned to online offerings. Building five websites in five days, he pivoted to delivering virtual town hall meetings, transitioned to online training of his facilitators, and even expanded his offerings to Canada in the midst of the pandemic.

- For “The Kindness Catalyst,” Linda Cohen of Portland, Oregon, pivoting meant simultaneously looking forward and backward. As she adapted her kindness keynotes to online audiences and went into beginner mode to absorb all she could about online presentations and studio setups, she also returned to her roots, bringing her message back to the Jewish community where she worked actively before joining NSA.

- Returning from presenting in New York City just as COVID-19 was gaining ground, Ann Steiner, PhD, MFT, Certified Group Psychotherapist and Fellow of the American Group Psychotherapy Association, did the quickest pivot of her life: shifting her entire psychotherapy consultation practice and speaking engagements online in one week. Within two weeks, she was doing webinars teaching other therapists to work virtually and creating new group agreements for making online groups effective.

- At *Influence 2020* in his Virtual Summits Playbook session to help us pivot, James Taylor related the story of a solopreneur in England whose stream of income in 1606 derived exclusively from stage shows. When the plague arrived and theaters closed, William Shakespeare pivoted to writing sonnets!

AUTOPILOT DISABLED ... NOW WHAT?

Turbulence surrounds us. How do we pivot? What does adaptation look like? Must we reinvent ourselves and start anew? Shelve our business plans and proven business models? Where do we begin? What if we fail? Must we start over after years and decades of building our enterprise? And if so, where to begin?



5 Steps to Get Back on Your Feet

Rosemarie offers us advice from her book *Take Back Your Life!* about how to regain your footing after life throws you a curve.

1

Do something new every day.

2

Focus on a hopeful future, not your self-pity.

3

Believe the impossible just might be possible.

4

Have more patience.

5

To lower your stress, lower your expectations of other people.

IN THE BLINK OF AN EYE

“After 11 years as a faculty member at The Ohio State University, in January 1997 I launched Rosemarie Rossetti Enterprises Inc.,” recounts Rosemarie Rossetti, PhD, CSP, of Columbus, Ohio. “It was a sweet life.” Under contract with a Canadian train-the-trainer company, she was enjoying the content, remuneration and travel of the speaker/trainer lifestyle. “My life was great. I was celebrating the new business.”

Less than 18 months later, it all came crashing down upon her in an instant, literally. While out on a bicycle ride with her husband, Mark, in a local park, “a 7,000-pound tree fell on me. My spinal cord was crushed. I became paralyzed from the waist down.” Her career, and life, changed in a matter of seconds. Yet even with multiple surgeries and years of rehabilitation ahead of her, she recognized “No matter what, I will deal with this. I have a second chance. I will take this and do whatever I can to get better and recover.”

ROSEMARIE AND TIME

Through a long and painful recovery, with the help of Mark, her family, her mastermind group, her incredible NSA Ohio Chapter and an assist from the NSA Foundation, Rosemarie pivoted, learning or relearning how to live a full life as a paraplegic and how to again be an effective speaker, educator, and inspiration to all. Her business had ceased and despite depression and initial thoughts of suicide, she summoned her own courage, and, buoyed by her support system, turned her tears into traction. She began journaling, writing articles that became a book, and creating a keynote based on her experience. Her outlook brightened as she swung into action.

Twelve years later, when COVID-19 arrived, she applied all she had learned to pivot her business yet again. She asked herself:

- What am I going to talk about now?
- What do I know that can help my audiences?
- What new equipment do I need?
- What do I need to learn to be more effective?
- How can my message of resilience comfort and inspire others?

Like professional athletes, predisposed to a bias to action, Rosemarie got busy. We must all ask these and other questions as we pivot to our plan B. Yet before we can, we must first make peace with what’s happened to our enterprises, opportunities, and outlook.

For professionals accustomed to believing they are “in control,” mid-sea corrections, while essential, can be foreboding and traumatic.



Your challenge is first to acknowledge your losses.

LAMENTING OUR LOSSES, DISCOVERING OURSELVES ANEW

As speakers, we're experiencing loss now on multiple levels: from loss of income to topics suddenly out of favor to the disappearance of live presentations and our standing ovations. Our business models may be broken. And toughest for many of us: the loss of our identity!

"How did you define yourself? The top three descriptors for who we are and what we do are key to our identities," explains Ann Steiner, PhD, MFT, who is a psychotherapist, author, former wheelchair warrior, and professional speaker of almost 40 years. She reminds us, "The Buddhists teach that the only thing we can count on is change."

Your challenge, she explains, is first to acknowledge your losses. Second, do an honest review of your strengths and skillsets. Next, be open to and consider making changes, and then do the hard work of rediscovering who you are right now, whether through

assessments or inventories, freewriting, mastermind groups, coaching, counseling, or other tools and processes.

Ann, the author of *Help Your Group Thrive: A Workbook and Planning Guide*, continues, "Once you accept that the key to pivoting successfully is being able to redefine yourself, you can identify strengths you haven't attended to, considered, or valued as a potential new path for your career. The bottom line is doing the time-intensive work of redefining and updating yourself, your work, your values, and your priorities. Doing that work now makes it possible to create new pathways to unexpected opportunities and potential audiences." She goes on to say, "When talking to fellow speakers who have successfully navigated these challenging times and found new niches, the most common comment is 'If you asked me 10 years ago whether I could possibly do what I'm doing now, I would've said no way!'"



Izzy's Core Tenets of Improv

■ BE PRESENT.

Stay in the moment.
(Think of improv as a form
of mindfulness.)

■ ACCEPTANCE.

Deal with what is
rather than what you'd
like it to be.

■ TRUST.

Honor the process
and suspend judgment
in the moment.

WHAT'S YOUR PLAN B? SAY YES TO WHAT IS AND CREATE WHAT COULD BE

"We're living in a snowglobe. And the universe has picked it up and placed it down and we don't know where things are going to land!" That's the metaphor that veteran improv speaker and consultant Izzy Gesell, MSED, CSP, uses to describe our reality since COVID-19 arrived.

To many, the word improvisation (or improv) conjures up images of winging it, flying by the seat of one's pants, or playing seemingly frivolous games. Yet it may surprise you to learn that tenets of improv can form the cornerstones of your pivot.

Why are improv skills helpful in this pandemic? "At their conceptual core, they train you to look at the essence of your situation and identify where the most effective use of your actions and time reside," Izzy explains. The author of *Playing Along: 37 Group Learning Activities Borrowed from Improvisational Theater* continues, "What improv teaches you is not to be tied into one particular path to that goal. As the French say, *l'homme propose et Dieu dispose* (Man plans and God decides). How do you deal with the fact that you need a plan B or there's a roadblock? As improvisors, we expect it. It's not a roadblock."

Izzy continues, "Improv is a skill based on making choices in the moment while keeping a goal or end result in mind. Being able to react and be adept at dealing with what you have, rather than what you wish you had, is an improv principle that helps us feel our way to plan B."

Before he became a professional speaker, Gesell was an educator and at one time owned a New York-style deli in western Massachusetts. He ultimately filed for bankruptcy because, he says, "I was a terrible restaurant owner. It was the low point in my life in 1989, before I started speaking, but I've had a very successful career." Did he plan it that way? No. "But that was a roadblock that I needed a plan B for because I couldn't afford any other plans!" He reminds us that as speakers we're all already improvisors.

MINDSET MATTERS

For confidence, Izzy reminds us to look how far we've all come in 10 months, becoming savvy about online platforms, home studios, and distance learning. His advice: "Look how much you learned, adapted to, and have grown since the lockdown. Honor the changes in your lives that you did not plan on or even welcome at the time."

As you pivot to plan B, your ability to explore, take risks, accept and build on offers that come your way, and even encounter dead ends are all part of the pivot process.

WELCOME TO THE EYE OF THE HURRICANE

In times of disruption, where chaos reigns and uncertainties abound, pivoting to plan B is more than revising a business plan, announcing a new direction or initiative, or unveiling a new campaign. Changes beget more changes. Every day brings new challenges, reversals of trends, and new variables that impact our forecasts, strategies, and tactics. How does one achieve traction, let alone keep it? What skills can help us stay calm and carry on? What tools help us maintain our course amidst the storms, the stresses, and the geopolitical forces swirling around us?

AUSTRALIAN KAREN TO THE RESCUE

Beyond the soothing voice heard in 400 million GPS and smartphones worldwide, Karen Jacobsen, CSP, is our navigational Polaris and Sigma Octantis, our North Star and South Star. And she's also an expert on a key skill required for pivoting to plan B: *recalculating*.

"Recalculating is redirecting." *The GPS Girl* elaborates, "It's being able to let go of what did or didn't happen, on a daily basis; the ability to return yourself to possibility quickly and, really,



effortlessly and without struggle and without pain.” Indeed, life comes with struggle and pain. Yet she sees a silver lining: “Sometimes, that’s often where we grow and learn the most—when life hands us challenges and calamities that are opportunities for growth. But instead of being stopped and stuck when challenges arise, being able to recognize them and to build the ability to move through difficulties and back into possibility—that is what recalculating is really about.”

Like Rosemarie, Ann, and Izzy, Karen has sung the blues ... she’s known the highs and lows of life and business and recognizes well the importance of resilience. She knows things won’t one day reset to the way they were. Of the future, she reminds us, “It’s going to be something different, and that’s jarring and very difficult news for a lot of us. Does that mean we’re throwing in the towel in our lives? I think not! It means, it’s OK. We’ve been through a tremendous shock, collectively and individually. And those shockwaves are still reverberating. The question is: What decisions, what choices do I make now? What actions can I take to set myself up to thrive?”

Karen’s catchphrase, “It’s never too late to recalculate,” is apropos. Even as we make our

pivot, recalculations will be in order. Amidst big decisions, there are many more that come on a daily basis that affect our direction, progress, and outcomes.

PLAN B BECOMES YOUR NEW PLAN A

Pivot author Jenny Blake reminds us, “You will never see the entire pivot path at the outset, nor would you want to.” Risk and uncertainty are a part of the equation. The key is to make the pivot with confidence. As you’ve read, you have many of your own tools to draw from, as well as the ability to improvise and recalculate as necessary. And when you do, your plan B will become your new plan A. ■



Karen’s 5 Tips for Recalculation

1

Notice you are off route.

2

Be willing to change direction.

3

Clarify your destination.

4

Embrace the steering wheel.

5

Accelerate.

PIVOTING RESOURCES

BOOKS

- *Pivot: The Only Move That Matters Is Your Next One* by Jenny Blake
- *Take Back Your Life! Regaining Your Footing After Life Throws You a Curve* by Rosemarie Rossetti, PhD,
- *Man’s Search for Meaning* by Viktor E. Frankl
- *Playing Along: 37 Group Learning Activities Borrowed from Improvisational Theater* by Izzy Gesell, MEd, CSP
- *Help Your Group Thrive: A Workbook and Planning Guide* by Ann Steiner, PhD

LINKS

- UDLL.com is Rosemarie’s ultimate Plan B, a one-of-a-kind National Demonstration House built in Columbus, Ohio, that employs universal design.
- DrSteiner.com includes a variety of tools and resources for helping people cope with major professional and life changes.
- TheGPSGirl.com, Karen Jacobsen’s website, offers 44 directions for driving performance success.
- Izzy’s Improv class is on LinkedIn Learning at <http://spkr.bz/improv>.
- improv4you, Izzy’s Improv application, is available on Apple and Google.

CRAIG HARRISON’S

Expressions of Excellence helps clients tell their stories and their clients’ stories, and create new stories through the design and delivery of amazing customer experiences.

