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Author Shira Miller: Second Chapters; How I Reinvented Myself In The Second Chapter Of My Life

An Interview With Pirie Jones Grossman



It's okay to pivot. Things change, and so do people. Focus on what you gained from the people you worked with at the time and certain experiences and move on when it's time. You don't have to keep doing something that worked for years if it no longer works for you.

Many successful people reinvented themselves in a later period in their lives. Jeff Bezos worked in Wall Street before he reinvented himself and started Amazon. Sara Blakely sold office supplies before she started Spanx. Dwayne "The Rock" Johnson was a WWE wrestler before he became a successful actor and filmmaker. Arnold Schwarzenegger went from a bodybuilder, to an actor to a Governor. McDonald's founder Ray Kroc was a milkshake-device salesman before starting the McDonalds franchise in his 50's.

How does one reinvent themselves? What hurdles have to be overcome to take life in a new direction? How do you overcome those challenges? How do you ignore the naysayers? How do you push through the paralyzing fear?

In this series called "[Second Chapters; How I Reinvented Myself In The Second Chapter Of My Life](#)" we are interviewing successful people who reinvented themselves in a second

chapter in life, to share their story and help empower others.

As a part of this interview series, I had the pleasure of interviewing Shira Miller.

[Shira Miller](#), CPCC, is a two-time TEDx Speaker, Author, Certified Professional Co-Active Coach and Chief Communications Officer of a \$2 billion corporation. Her new book, [Free and Clear: Get Unstuck and Live the Life You Want](#), features a step-by-step process for getting unstuck and staying that way for good. Getting unstuck and manifesting goodness is her superpower, and Shira is passionate about teaching people how to do the same for themselves.

Thank you so much for doing this with us! Before we start, our readers would love to “get to know you” a bit better. Can you tell us a bit about your childhood backstory?

I was born the daughter of a delicatessen owner in Columbia, SC, and no, that is not the punchline to a joke. The eldest of three children, I relished my role as “ringleader,” cajoling my younger brothers to sell lemonade in front of our house, organize puppet shows and other performances to entertain our parents, and play “molten lava” (our variation on the Floor is Lava). I was pretty much a pop culture addict from day one. Read books and watched TV shows voraciously, wondering why my hair could never look like Farrah Fawcett’s no matter how hard I tried and crushing on Richie Cunningham over Fonzie any day. Like many young kids in the 1970’s, I was obsessed with outer space and my dream career at age 11 was to be a “space engineer” — which to my pre-teen mind

meant I would design rocket ships and then be the astronaut piloting them into the final frontier. Then the advent of algebra during middle school killed that ambition and I started daydreaming about other ventures.

My parents worked constantly at the delicatessen; it was called Groucho's because my grandfather, who started the business in 1941, resembled Groucho Marx. (Fun, completely unrelated fact — my youngest brother took over the family business over 20 years ago, franchised it and now has over 35 restaurants in the Carolinas and Georgia.) As a result, we kids did too. From the summer of seventh grade on, working in the deli was how I earned spending money — and it helped me finance travel to debate tournaments when I discovered that passion in high school.

So let's get to public speaking. Competing in tournaments nationally in high school changed my life. It was the first thing at which I really excelled and helped build my self-confidence. It also allowed me to meet smart kids from some of the most academically rigorous schools in the country. Shining in that rarified company showed me that I could have a bigger impact in the world. I got into Emory University in Atlanta, Ga., and that was another major formative experience. Stayed after graduation, primarily because I really don't like cold weather. I started my career as a peon at the NBC News Southeastern Bureau while still in college and shifted to Public Relations after graduation.

Can you please give us your favorite “Life Lesson Quote”?
Can you share how that was relevant to you in your life?

It sits in a beautiful frame on my desk at work, and makes me smile every time I see it:

“Never give up on what you really want to do. The person with big dreams is more powerful than one with all the facts.” —
Albert Einstein

This quote resonated deeply with me because I’ve always had naysayers claim my goals weren’t possible. My big dreams were more powerful than any facts and statistics others could claim as potential obstacles, whether that was getting into Emory and becoming the first person in my immediate family to graduate from a college like that, or when I decided to pivot back into corporate in a C-Suite role that also allowed me to use my certified coaching skills.

You have been blessed with much success. In your opinion, what are the top three qualities that you possess that have helped you accomplish so much? If you can, please share a story or example for each.

1. Ability to see possibilities — for myself and others. In strength finder-type tests, this typically comes back as “imaginative.” This talent has set me apart in my career, as I could identify directions and opportunities for people that may have not been immediately recognizable. I’m going to share two examples here. The first is with Spanx, when it was a \$2 million company put on the map by Oprah. I came in as a PR consultant to help launch a new product line in 2002 and recognized that Spanx was much bigger than shapewear — the brand should be elevated as empowering women to look and feel their best in

life overall. Created a plan called Project Household Name to help achieve that goal and went after media coverage and awards recognizing the founder's business acumen and passion for helping other women. The campaign was a huge success.

The second example took place on my birthday eight years ago, when I was offered two different corporate jobs. One was with a huge corporation that I did consulting work for in the past, and the other was for my now current corporate job, which happened to be a \$2 billion company that acted like a scrappy start-up. I could see the opportunity to bring all of my communications skills AND coaching talents to the table in taking the second job and being able to play a significant role in transforming its culture. So while others might have gone for the cushier role with the bigger corporation, I took the one with the most juice in allowing me to make a major impact. And that's exactly what happened.

2. Determination. When I set a goal, especially one that taps into my heart's desire, I will do whatever it takes to make it happen. The best example here is my new book, [Free and Clear: Get Unstuck and Live the Life You Want](#). I wrote it because I've gotten stuck and unstuck so many times in my own life, as is explained in more depth below. Started working on it on the side in 2018 and completed it, under a different title/focus, in February 2020 — just in time for the pandemic to shut everything down. Took a few months to figure out how it needed to shift and change in light of our new normal and rewrote it again. Then I reworked it a final time last year when

working with a professional editor, to present a step-by-step process for helping anyone get unstuck from whatever is holding them back. Many people talk about their dream of writing a book, but few people actually bring that to life. It was one of the most satisfying and challenging things I've done.

3. Building mutually respectful relationships. One of the best things that ever happened to me growing up in Columbia, South Carolina was attending excellent public schools whose student bodies were racially, culturally and economically diverse. I was raised to be comfortable with people from multiple perspectives and backgrounds from day one — and wasn't aware that wasn't typical in the 1970's and 80's until attending college. From that place of openness and acceptance, I learned how to build sustaining, mutually respectful relationships with peers in clubs, at school, and then later at work. We've all heard of the challenges of working in a matrix environment, where you need to influence others who don't report into your team. That has never been an issue for me, as I naturally wanted to get to know others as individuals, thought about what was important to them and how we could best work together. Today, that skill has allowed me to have incredible friendships and relationships with others.

Let's now shift to the main part of our discussion about 'Second Chapters'. Can you tell our readers about your career experience before your Second Chapter?

Normally people define a chapter with a very specific delineation — when they left a corporate job to become an entrepreneur, vice versa, or pivoted to a completely different

experience. As

I'll explain more below, my second chapter has been focused on living a purpose-driven life, which started to take shape in 2018.

Prior to that time, I was a conventionally successful corporate communications/public relations executive. My first Public Relations job was at Days Inns of America's headquarters 30 years ago. Except for a few years at a non-profit, I spent the first decade of my career working in communications leadership roles at corporations, ending up as the Director of Corporate Communications for a billion-dollar retail company. At that time, like with many others, my purpose was just wrapped up in career aspirations and external validation — I didn't know to look deeper.

In my thirties and early forties, my purpose had evolved into using my powers of communication for good: representing great companies and people I believed in, influencing organizations to explore corporate social responsibility programs, and more opportunities that could make the world a better place. Still, I continued to place too much emphasis on what others thought.

Launched my own PR firm in 2001 and grew to quickly represent some big brands. Had all of the trappings of success — office space in a fancy tower, great employees and won lots of awards. Then the Great Recession Struck in 2009, killing 200,000 small businesses, including my own. It was an awful time — I had to fire great people and do all of the work myself,

was over \$100k in debt and on the hook for a six-year office lease I had recently renewed. (Much of this is the basis of my 2019 TEDx Talk — 5 Ways to Let Go of a Dream.) I handled the entire client workload — by myself — for the next four years to pay it off. That stress did a nasty number on me. When I could finally breathe again in 2013, I was diagnosed with Crohn's Disease.

Simultaneously, some wonderful things happened in my life. After being divorced for years, I learned to trust myself again in romantic relationships and met my husband, the love of my life, in 2009 — we got married in 2013. I've always been very interested in human potential and became a certified executive coach. Done with trying to have my own PR business, I decided to go back into corporate America in a C-Suite job in 2014 that allowed me to positively influence the culture of the business. I joined a \$2 billion supply chain management company called National DCP as the EVP, Corporate Communications and several years later was promoted to Chief Communications Officer. In addition to handling all aspects of brand management, internal and external communications, I was also thrilled to help shape the development of leadership programs for years.

At that point in my life, I'd learned to follow my inner compass over the voices of others. It was a relief to trust and listen to myself, getting clear about what mattered most rather than muddying the waters by relying so much on external approval. Before, I'd used my communication skills to promote and amplify positive developments. Like eating oatmeal or flossing

daily, it felt like the “right” thing to do and helped validate my sense of accomplishment and worth.

In 2018, I realized that I needed more when I recognized that my purpose had evolved to helping people get unstuck and activate their full potential. A corporate job, albeit a great one with co-workers I liked and respected, wasn’t going to be enough on its own. That’s when I began transitioning into my “Second Chapter” — but instead a job change, it was a shift in attitude and priorities.

And how did you “reinvent yourself” in your Second Chapter?

My reinvention has been about consciously living a purpose-filled life. As mentioned above, this has been about shifting my priorities and mindset while continuing to work successfully in a corporate environment. You don’t have to “go big or go home” to have a reinvention — sometimes it is a strategic internal shift that can ultimately change everything for the better.

Over the years, getting unstuck became my superpower of sorts, probably because I’ve gotten stuck and unstuck numerous times. My personal transformations have included transitioning from financial ruin to prosperity, chronic health challenges to a constant state of wellness, obesity to sustaining a healthy weight for nearly 30 years, divorce to lasting love, and an unfulfilling career to a purpose-driven life, which I’m describing below.

The first step in my reinvention was being willing to share my experiences to help others overcome obstacles, because there

are not a lot of C-Suite executives who show that kind of vulnerability. I'm part of Generation X and when we were entering the work force, a high value was placed on "being perfect," which was never actually achievable. When I realized being open about my challenges would help people embrace more authenticity and get unstuck themselves, it became a no-brainer to be more open and vulnerable in public forums.

In 2018, I started writing and speaking about topics related to well-being. Since that time I have written over 100 articles on Medium, LinkedIn and Arianna Huffington's Thrive Global platform about well-being at work and home, prioritizing self-care and creating wellness-based cultures.

Then speaking — one of my first great loves — came in play. In late 2019, I delivered two TEDx talks on topics that I'm passionate about which people can be hesitant to discuss. That included discussing my business failure and ultimate reinvention at TEDxBoggyCreek in Orlando, FL — "5 Ways to Let Go of a Dream" — September 2019. Then I spoke about how so many people, particularly women, need to stop sabotaging themselves by apologizing when they haven't done anything wrong while participating in TEDxBayRidgeWomen in Brooklyn, NY — "Stop the Apology Speak" — December 2019.

At the same time, I wanted to create a tool that would empower as many people as possible to get unstuck and gain more fulfillment. Conducted over 100 interviews with individuals who have overcome obstacles to identify a pattern of 7 things that get people stuck while also interviewing dozens of experts to get actionable advice. That turned into my new book, Free and

Clear: Get Unstuck and Live the Life You Want, which I described earlier.

Something to note is that I'm still working as the Chief Communications Officer of National DCP, but my reinvention included being different in that role too. Self-care is my top priority. I create healthy boundaries with work. Right now, I thrive on having the combination of a corporate leadership role while building my personal platform, which helps as many people as possible get unstuck and activate their full potential. Living my purpose through mentoring, coaching, and speaking fills me with a burst of happiness.

Can you tell us about the specific trigger that made you decide that you were going to “take the plunge” and make your huge transition?

The specific trigger took place in January 2018. I was seriously interviewing with another corporation for a similar job. However, I realized that this was the time for me to claim what I truly wanted, which was to start writing, speaking and working on the book I had been talking about for so long. Saw my CEO for my annual review, got promoted, and told him that I planned to work on writing and speaking for my personal development — and got his full support. So I decided to stay and realized it was time to “put the pedal to the medal” and share my opinions and voice with the world at large.

What did you do to discover that you had a new skillset inside of you that you haven't been maximizing? How did you find that and how did you ultimately overcome the

barriers to help manifest those powers?

A willingness to try new things that interested me, but which I didn't have any experience in, helped me grow in so many ways. I discovered it is perfectly fine to be awkward when striving for good, and then to take chances and explore new ideas and possibilities in trying to be great. As long as I could laugh at myself and also learn to celebrate steps in the right direction, I'd be fine.

In terms of a new skillset, it would have to be becoming more process-driven. I'm naturally more of a creative person who is also good at strategy — but the nuts and bolts of making things happen that were out of my wheelhouse could feel overwhelming. However, the only way I learned how to write a book, was to write a book. And being willing to rewrite and pivot as needed to make it better. That involved embracing a process mentality of defined steps and deadlines to keep advancing my goals. Now, I value that newly discovered part of myself and know it is what will enable other aspects of my dreams to come true long-term.

How are things going with this new initiative? We would love to hear some specific examples or stories.

I have been struck speechless, which is rare for me, with gratitude. Things are going great. I've had so many people reach out after reading my articles or watching a TEDx talk to share their own experiences — and now that has been amplified with the release of the book. The reviews and positive reception *Free and Clear* is receiving has been both

humbling and gratifying. At the heart of it, I want to help people get unstuck and gain more meaning and fulfillment. Yesterday, I got an email from someone who read my book that was like a book report from an A-student; she highlighted parts that deeply resonated, and life changes already made from the process. Now getting that was better than discovering a healthy version of a peanut butter cup treat, which says a lot if you know about my obsession with nut butter.

Is there a particular person who you are grateful towards who helped get you to where you are? Can you share a story about that?

A couple of people come to mind, and I'd like to call out two individuals. My executive coach, Michelle Goss, first helped me see that I could create a professional/personal blend in life that worked on my own terms while working a C-level job. When I took that role, I was still a workaholic and hadn't learned how to set boundaries. So I'm grateful for her role in providing encouragement and practical steps of reflection along the way. The second person is my husband, Justin Mason. He has always been supportive of my goals and called me out specifically at the end of 2020 when I was losing steam on the rewrite after months of enduring pandemic-related malaise. Yes, I felt like giving up. But when he said if I didn't complete it then, I probably never would, it mobilized me. Got that draft done and then persevered while working on the major rewrite with my editor throughout 2021.

Can you share the most interesting story that happened to you since you started in this new direction?

Have you ever had everything go wrong, and then end up just right at the moment that counts the most? That was my experience with TEDxBayRidge in Brooklyn, NY in December 2019. When speakers from around the country arrived at that first-time event, we discovered that the facility was in a state of upheaval. The room had just flooded and despite their best efforts, the carpet was damaged and organizers had to scramble for another space. As a result, the event room was cramped and in disarray. Some of the participants were unhappy because the stage wouldn't look as bright and shiny as other TEDx events and bailed. Yes, actually decided not to make their presentation after making the commitment to do so, which blew me away. The misfortunes continued the next day when the event started. Video technology failed and the images that were supposed to accompany our presentations couldn't be shown. Microphones weren't working up until the last minute. Loud street noises could be heard periodically inside our space. And then, when I got up to present, a sense of rightness clicked intently within. I looked at the audience, diminished in size, and gave it my all in delivering my heartfelt message of stop apologizing when you aren't doing anything wrong. I felt like I reached them, and really connected with others and it ended up being exactly the experience I was supposed to have, in true service to whomever would ultimately watch the video.

Did you ever struggle with believing in yourself? If so, how did you overcome that limiting belief about yourself? Can you share a story or example?

Oh my, YES. One of the seven things I found that get people stuck is called You Don't Trust Yourself. It involves always second-guessing yourself and was my albatross for years. I've overcome it by journaling and following a lot of the advice presented in the book — yes, I do drink my own Kool-Aid. When I was in the middle of the substantive rewrite with my editor, a grueling process that took place last year when my corporate job was especially busy, I got stuck in doubt. Had a couple of weeks where it felt like everything I wrote was lousy and I felt defeated. What got me unstuck was an exercise I created called a Reverse Bucket List.

A bucket list (as in “kicking the bucket”) contains the things you wish to experience before dying. In a reverse bucket list, you list those things you've already accomplished to serve as irrefutable evidence of your commitment to yourself. Listing these items reinforces that when you have a goal, you can be trusted to accomplish it. That's what it did for me, as did focusing on my purpose of helping others. Those efforts got me out of my head and I got my momentum back.

In my own work I usually encourage my clients to ask for support before they embark on something new. How did you create your support system before you moved to your new chapter?

I already had an excellent executive coach, and circle of great friends. What I really needed was birds of a feather with similar goals and drive to support my process. That all started with a consultation I had with Dorie Clark, a bestselling brand strategist, in May 2018. She gave me tremendous insights

about my personal brand and goals. I was also delighted to gain entrée to her private community of recognized experts — a group of highly thought leaders Dorie worked with who were trying to impactful personal brands and advance their professional goals. A number of these people are authors or want to be, so they provided great insights and support on that journey and many other aspects of my second chapter.

Starting a new chapter usually means getting out of your comfort zone, how did you do that? Can you share a story or example of that?

For me, it was about being vulnerable and discussing Crohn's Disease in a public forum. Years of stress resulted in my contracting that inflammatory bowel disease, and it hit me hard until I was officially diagnosed in 2014. However, I went into remission in 2016 after getting the right treatment. You'd never know, as I'm very healthy and active. Also there can be a stigma attached to autoimmune diseases, which can impact your ability to obtain certain kinds of insurance and more. It was something I was quiet about, out of fear of being judged as less capable or impaired in some way.

Then I was interviewed on a podcast in early 2019 called Life Through Transitions with a great host. We talked openly about my business failure, resulting challenges and my gut told me it was time to share that I had Crohn's Disease. So I did. It was the first time I had done so publicly, and I wasn't sure how it was going to land with others. But then something interesting happened when I posted the podcast episode on my LinkedIn. It got hundreds of likes and people shared it frequently from

their feeds with others, because it offered hope that no matter what obstacles you faced, you could overcome them. It gave me a glimpse of the positive impact I could make and felt like a sign that I was on the right track.



What are your “5 things I wish someone told me before I started leading my organization” and why? Please share a story or example for each.

I need to be my top priority. It’s so easy to work 24/7 if left unchecked. That’s what I was doing when I went back into my C-Suite role in 2014. Determine to prove myself, I worked non-

stop and as a result, was often exhausted. Finally, my executive coach made me realize that I had the power to prioritize myself ahead of work and other demands, trusting that I would always generate the desired results on my own terms. That was transformative.

I get to set boundaries. I was a classic “people pleaser” for most of my life. Saying yes to everything and everyone when I really wanted to say no. Part of my reinvention is learning how to create healthy boundaries and stick to them.

Focus on a work-life blend, because “balance” is a misnomer. We read a lot about the pursuit of a healthy work-life balance, but nothing is ever 50/50. Sometimes I’m going to lean more into my work, or my writing and speaking, or the need to focus on a healthy living behavior like getting more sleep — and that’s perfectly fine.

You need to be an advocate for yourself and ask for what you want. Don’t assume people are going to read your mind. The best example that comes to my mind is when I got promoted in January 2018. I had asked my CEO before about becoming the chief communications officer, and he said it would happen in the future — but nothing happened. Finally during my review that January, I brought it up, and he said they had been waiting for me to ask again and of course it would happen now. If you don’t ask for something, there’s no guarantee you will ever receive it.

It’s okay to pivot. Things change, and so do people. Focus on what you gained from the people you worked with at the time

and certain experiences and move on when it's time. You don't have to keep doing something that worked for years if it no longer works for you.

You are a person of great influence. If you could inspire a movement that would bring the most amount of good to the most amount of people, what would that be?

Well, I'm trying to do that right now! It started with my new book, *Free and Clear: Get Unstuck and Live the Life You Want*.

Millions of people feel stuck in some area of their life. They aren't living in alignment with their desired circumstances, goals, or purpose. They are beyond a short-term kind of stuck, like having a bad day at work or being late for an important meeting because of an intense traffic jam. Their "stuckness" has become a chronic state of being.

It might be tied to a particular time in their life — like a milestone birthday or experiencing a midlife malaise — which causes people to second-guess major decisions. There may have been major disappointments with your love life and relationships with others. Or, you're feeling as if you keep letting yourself down when it comes to money, health, parenting, your career, or other areas. Even when you try to shake it off, that spiraling sense of being stuck inevitably comes back, like a boomerang, or shoulder pads as a recurring fashion trend. Once they are ready to break that cycle of stuckness and gain more meaning and fulfillment along the way, I can help with my *Free and Clear* movement.

Wherever people find themselves today — still relatively new

to “adulting” and all it brings, actively reassessing your midlife circumstances, or considering how to build a lasting legacy — they deserve to get unstuck and live the best version of your life. I hope to be a helpful part of that journey!

We are very blessed that some very prominent names in Business, VC funding, Sports, and Entertainment read this column. Is there a person in the world, or in the US with whom you would love to have a private breakfast or lunch with, and why? He or she might just see this if we tag them. :-)

Why yes! I’m going to name one company — Hello Sunshine, and two leaders from it — Reese Witherspoon and CEO Sarah Harden.

So here is the why. I’ve been a fan of Reese Witherspoon’s work for decades and cheered loudly when she won the academy award and then moved into becoming the person who shares other engaging, inspiring stories of women through her media company. Sarah Harden, who has tremendous credentials, appears to be the central force running Hello Sunshine each day. I’d love to have a streaming show, podcast or other media outlet that shares the positive stories of women and inspires them to get unstuck from whatever is holding them back.

How can our readers further follow your work online?

Please go to my website — <https://shiramiller.com/> You can access a quiz to determine how you are stuck and what to do about, read 100+ articles on getting unstuck, self-care, and

gaining more well-being at work and at home, and check out other helpful resources.

**Thank you so much for sharing these important insights.
We wish you continued success and good health!**

About The Interviewer: Pirie Jones Grossman is a certified Life Coach, TedX Speaker, influencer, best selling author and co-founder and co-host of the podcast, "Own Your Throne". She has shared the stage with speakers such as Deepak Chopra, Elisabeth Gilbert, Marianne Williamson, Kris Carr, His Holiness the Dalai Lama and Dr. Jill Bolte Taylor. She coaches women on focusing on self esteem, and helping women reignite the second chapter of their lives!

She's a writer for Thrive Global and Huffington Post. She's a former TV host for E! Entertainment Television, Fox Television, NBC, CBS and ABC. She was Co-Chair for the Special Olympics International World Winter Games in Idaho and spoke at the UN on behalf of Special Olympics. She is the founder of the "Love is Louder" Brain Health Summit with Suicide survivor, Kevin Hines, focusing on teenage depression and suicide. She gave a TedX talk about, "How To Heal A Community from Suicide."

Pirie has her Masters in Spiritual Psychology from the University of Santa Monica, California. She is a Sun Valley Wellness Institute Board member and lives in Sun Valley, Idaho with her two teenagers where she has a private Life Empowerment coaching practice.