Preface

As the chairman of a cloud computing company that creates work opportunities for thousands of people (contractors and employees) each month, I see the world of work as very different from the one that's being reported in the headlines. I'm convinced that this is one of the most exciting times in the history of work—and one of the best times for anyone to enter the workforce. Just as the Industrial Revolution was defined by manufacturing that gave people jobs, today's IT revolution—defined by new technologies—is giving people more flexible and empowering opportunities for work than ever before.

When I started working, I had to leave my home in Florida and take a permanent job with IBM in Minnesota. I've moved nine times for a job, and I moved three times in less than two years. We all know that this model is steeped in the past, but two years ago, as I started to think about what was happening in the world of work—and about writing this book—I realized that even though those IBM days were long behind me, there were other outdated work models that I was perpetuating and that were not right for me or my family. My career was still defined by

the limits of working for a company. I was working with assigned teams that were static, and we worked from the same location. I spent set hours in an office building and not enough time with my wife and family.

Once I became involved with LiveOps and became inspired by the twenty thousand independent agents who were truly working on their own, I realized that there was a better model for working. They were paid for performance, but they worked on their own terms and were happy with their freedom. It was great for them and great for our company. It was a win-win for workers and management like nothing I had experienced before. I bought into it so much that I decided that I needed to walk the talk myself. I gave up formal operating roles and began to reframe the way I thought about my career.

In many ways, I've been very blessed—I am married to the love of my life; I have wonderful children and grandchildren. I've enjoyed a career in technology that has inspired me and provided for my family beyond my wildest imagination. I've also had some body blows. The times I've been thrown a curve ball or knocked down have been just as influential—perhaps more influential—in determining the ultimate outcome of my life.

Over my career, I have had the good fortune of being in the right place at the right time in several industries. I was thus able to witness and participate in significant transformations in technology, which gave me good strategic insights into where the world was going. I worked at IBM during the PC revolution, focusing on computer security long before it was "cool" or even possible to be a hacker. During the PC heyday, I was transferred to Boca Raton and put in charge of financial systems integrity, which at the time was in a shambles. I worked at Thomas-Conrad

as "networking" began taking off, and at Bay Networks as the Internet exploded. I was at the epicenter of Internet commerce at eBay and in the middle of the revolution in work at LiveOps. My extracurricular activities as a board member at Gartner and at visionary companies including salesforce.com and AdMob allowed me to see such technology trends as cloud computing and mobile long before they were hot.

With the insight that comes from hindsight, I now realize that the most interesting parts of my career happened when there was something that urgently needed fixing, and it was also in an area of nascent strategic importance. I was never interested in just doing something that anyone could do; I was always fascinated by aiming high—shooting for something that would be truly marvelous.

As lucky as my story is, it is also in many ways an unlikely one. I grew up in West Palm Beach, Florida, the third of five kids, and my family was considered upper-middle class. My father was a real estate appraiser and the president of his own company. My mother was a stay-at-home mom who took care of the kids and my father's mother, who lived with us. Life was good: playing outdoors, figuring out ways to finagle out of piano lessons. Then, everything changed dramatically when my father died suddenly from a stroke ten days before my seventh birthday.

My father held no life insurance, and our small savings account quickly ran out. Growing up with little money, we learned to make sacrifices. For several months, we lived without hot water. For a couple of years, we lived without a TV. I couldn't join the Cub Scouts because it required my mom to serve as a den mother, which she didn't have time to do because she was working. Of course, the biggest loss was not getting to live with—or really know—my father.

My mom had a college education and went back to teaching to support the family, first as a boys' physical education teacher, the only opening at the time, then as a science teacher. Two years after my dad died, she decided to pursue her master's degree so that she could make more money. I was nine at the time. That summer, Mom enrolled at San Jose State in California, and with her five children moved into the dorms. There, our after-school fun involved learning to play poker from the other grad students. My mom was incredibly strong, and also industrious. After that summer in California, we moved back to Florida, where she would eventually run the Jupiter Marine Science Center and was voted Teacher of the Year for the State of Florida, one of many accolades she would receive. I had so much love and admiration for her, but was troubled by the position in which my father had left us.

I promised myself then that when I had kids, I would not leave them unprotected as we had been. I also became convinced that I would die at a young age, as my father had. That drove me; I expected life to be short, so I needed to get going at achieving all that I wanted.

I always wanted to work, and when I was ten, I secured a route selling TV guides. (It was small; I had three customers.) By the time I was twelve, I took on a paper route. My mom would wake me before dawn to get to the local gas station and fold the papers before delivering them. I was so exhausted by the end of the day that I'd fall asleep on the floor of the living room.

The thing I loved the most about being a paperboy was the tips I earned around Christmas. One year, I used these funds to buy a Ping-Pong table for my family. I worked several jobs over the next several years: at a gas station, cleaning toilets at

Mister Donut, busing tables at the Pancake House, working at an outdoor store, and doing the night shift at a mattress factory.

These were small jobs, but I dreamed big. As a kid, that meant a career as a Major League Baseball player. When I was nine, I was told I shouldn't try out for Little League, as the rest of the new kids were ten. I wanted to anyway. I had my brother's hand-me-down glove, and because he was left-handed, I struggled to catch well as a righty, but I practiced relentlessly and ultimately made the team. I played sports throughout school; our Babe Ruth All-Star team even won a state championship. My athletic career culminated in being recruited for football to the U.S. Naval Academy in Annapolis.

That was 1974, and I had grown long hair and decided I didn't want to go to Annapolis. My mom was very disappointed, as my dad had been a naval officer, and she felt that I was throwing away an opportunity for a great (and paid for) education. I found myself on a different path, though. I went to college in Florida and studied criminal justice. I worked throughout school, even creating a retail business at a local wholesale nursery, and I interned at IBM during my senior year.

Upon graduation, I was offered a full-time job as an entry-level security guard at IBM in Minnesota. Considering my thirty-five-year career in the technology industry, some people assume I mean computer security, but at the time, computer security was in its infancy. (It was a mainframe and minicomputer world.) I worked in physical security, protecting the buildings and its employees.

Every day brought something different. I worked in the lobby of the office building. I also toured through the halls, ensuring that the building was safe and that people got to where they needed to go. No job was too small or too big. I took the flag down at night,

assisted with first aid, and one time had to handle a situation where an employee murdered his wife and then killed himself.

Within a year, I was offered a chance to move to a new facility in North Carolina, and shortly thereafter was promoted to become a supervisor of security guards. The physical security work segued into product security—I was in charge of securely administering the most confidential documents at our location and also checking up on how our vendors secured our information.

Then, within five years, as technology evolved, I moved into computer security. Both computer and physical security were becoming hot topics, as we had experienced attacks on our physical premises and had concerns about computer espionage. Although I transitioned from blue collar to white collar, I never gave up my blue-collar approach to work. I continued to understand the value of heavy lifting, and perhaps my willingness to do heavy lifting became my greatest strength.

Breaking Systems

I love new technology, and I'm obsessed with how it makes our lives better, but my role in the technology industry has never been that of the dreamer. I've always been the doer. I've been fortunate enough to work for companies that allowed me to witness the birth of new groundbreaking technologies, but in every company in which I worked, I was brought in because there was a difficulty on the path to growth or advancement. In each job there was a problem, a big issue that seemed insurmountable. While others seemed turned off by these types of challenges, I was really excited by the opportunity to fix something—the chance to make a difference.

Sometimes my job also meant that in trying to fix something, I had to figure out how to break it. At IBM, one of my early jobs in

computer security was indeed breaking systems. That was a very cool job. I would be sent to a location, given general access to the systems, and told, "See what you can do." With that mandate, I was able to confiscate highly confidential documents, take over operating systems, and once even cut a check for a significant amount of money. (I returned it.) It was fun breaking systems, and it gave me insight into how to fix them. Determining what is wrong with something and trying to find a solution has been the thread that has tied my career together.

The truth is, I was unqualified for many of my career roles when I was assigned to them. However, no one else was willing to do them, so I volunteered. Some people called me insane, but in every opportunity that I signed up for, I was very confident that I could do the job well, and tackled the challenges with gusto and no fear. Several times this led to approaches that weren't considered normal practice, but to me they made common sense, and I've always allowed common sense to lead.

For example, when I was doing product security at IBM, vendor security was taken very seriously—vendors were required to log visitors, physically lock documents, and track the removal of files. Amazingly, though, no one thought to lock up the files on the computers. There was no security system in place to protect the digital versions. That was a big gap. The product and security guys had to learn to become more computer literate, and I helped lead that charge. At first this idea was seen as unconventional, but soon, as everything went digital, it became an everyday imperative.

Later, when I was working as a network director at Quantum, a disk drive manufacturer, we had a pressing deadline to get long-distance circuits and technology infrastructure into new factories that were coming on line. Not one telecom vendor said it could

meet this deadline. This was not a good outcome; it would delay everything, thus costing us a considerable amount of money. I called a meeting with all the vendor representatives together to address the situation. I explained that the suppliers who were willing to find a way to work with us would build a long and profitable partnership with our company. I then challenged them to find a way to help us. All it took was for one rep to raise his hand and say he could do it. The others followed, all committing to find a way to make an exception. We delivered the project on time.

I went from Quantum to Bay Networks as CIO. The CIO role was very new and was just beginning to be elevated to the executive table. It is actually the only job in my career that I have done multiple times. It is very strategic, very hard, and very risky; at the time, most people said CIO stood for "Career Is Over." I loved the role and the challenges that came with it.

At Bay Networks we faced very serious issues. We were merging two companies, SynOptics and Wellfleet, onto a common architecture and platform. I agreed to do an aggressive enterprise resource planning (ERP) implementation worldwide, which had been tried several times before and met with failure. I committed to do the implementation in twelve months, and the first step was to ensure that everyone was playing on the same team. I created a mandate that enforced timely decisions (within twenty-four hours) and key executive involvement. I created an untraditional bonus structure that was collaborative with our vendors. For example, our consultants at Accenture were on the same bonus plan as our executive stakeholders, which created a win-win environment. Nobody could go home on Friday unless the week's open issues were rectified. And there were consequences: one factory wouldn't go fast enough, so we pulled it out of the scope. We completed the effort in nine months—at the time it was one of

the fastest ERP implementations in the world. We even received a Computerworld Smithsonian IT nomination for the project.

I left Bay Networks after about four years to join Gateway Computers, which was facing many growth challenges. I was hired to significantly improve its web capability, but was surprised to learn upon arrival that although the year 2000 was only two years away, the company was not Y2K ready on its legacy systems. I led a major project to address that, as well as developed a radically different systems architecture.

In 1999, I was heavily recruited by eBay to become its president of technology. The company had some very sizeable technology issues, including one twenty-two-hour outage of its whole service. It was a very public debacle, and unfortunately the site had become the poster child for instability. I found that a crucial part of the solution involved taking a collaborative approach. I encouraged our partners to work with us in a way that they had not in the past. For example, we were using Sun servers, and as a way to motivate our vendor to be a real partner, I suggested that it carry our availability as a metric for executives' bonus plans. This had never been done before, but it worked for both parties, and later Sun adopted this model with its top customers.

The team was fabulous; we worked extremely hard and turned things around. We were growing so fast that we outgrew being able to use one big back-end database server to run our site. We either had to transition to a mainframe system or implement a dramatically different approach. We chose to implement a distributed architecture (what we called a small soldiers approach), which enabled us to achieve scale and stability much more quickly by distributing the database traffic across many different servers as opposed to one. We became world class at innovating on time and at a high velocity without impacting

site availability. It was at the time unprecedented to be able to fix the site and keep it running while simultaneously adding new features, functions, and capabilities.

I stayed at eBay for seven years, the last four as chief operating officer. As COO, I helped codify and establish the company's culture, implement decision-making models, and oversee the budget process and corporate initiatives, along with managing all my functional areas (trust and safety, customer support, HR, billing, technology, and product management). I was charged with managing executive staff and helping to administrate the board. I did the same thing for the company that I had done for the technology: implement processes that would ensure that it could scale while facing hyper growth.

Early on in my career, a very seasoned technology veteran at IBM once told me, "What's beautiful about working with you, Maynard, is you haven't been trained on why this is impossible."

It's true: my training happened on the job, so I didn't know what was deemed unprecedented or insurmountable. I'm grateful for the fresh perspective that inexperience provided; it not only gave me the confidence that I could get the job done but also afforded the most interesting and most rewarding opportunities. I began to become recognized for my willingness to do the jobs no one wanted, and top technology leaders began to rely on me to solve daunting problems. That's how I became known by some as Mr. Fix-It.

Although this book is not my memoir, in some instances my personal experiences can help illustrate some of the big ideas here—on how we can transform the way we work in a shifting global workforce. The one thing my career has taught me is that

instead of fearing change, you must be willing to embrace it is key. With this attitude, in addition to a passion for understanding technological breakthroughs, you can often be the first to new markets and new opportunities.

In addition to using examples from companies where I have worked and companies of which I am a board member, I will mention companies I have invested in, as those are the ones I know the most about and can give detailed examples for.

If I did it—an underdog with a humble beginning and no special connections, raised by a single mother with five kids; someone who didn't go to the best schools, get an engineering degree, or earn a master's degree; someone who started his career as a security guard and never had the "executive look"—then, without a doubt, you can do it too. Sometimes it just takes the right attitude and the confidence to know that the old way isn't necessarily the right way—and the belief that better days are always ahead.

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