



How to Be Everything: A Guide for Those Who (Still) Don't Know What They Want to Be When They Grow Up

Emily Wapnick

HarperCollins : HarperOne (2017)

Hardback 240 pages	\$25
Paperback	\$16
Kindle	\$10.86

ISBN: 9780062566652 / ISBN 10: 0062566652

<https://www.harpercollins.com/products/how-to-be-everything-emilie-wapnick?variant=3212218547810>

Review by Marie-Eve Monette. First published online 11 September 2020 and will appear in Volume 8 of *The Independent Scholar*.

Emily Wapnick's *How to Be Everything: A Guide for Those Who (Still) Don't Know What They Want to Be When They Grow Up* is an introductory guide to becoming a "multipotentialite," what Wapnick calls those trying to find alternative and flexible professional paths that are defined by interests, skills, and finances. Wapnick argues against the "Myth of the One True Calling," and invites her readers to embrace creative pursuits, rather than follow linear and vertical career trajectories. Her aim throughout the book is to guide her readers towards identifying their motivations and their needs, and for planning ways to unleash their multifaceted potential at different stages of their professional lives.

The book follows a simple structure, and is divided along three themes: 1) defining and ascribing positivity to being a multipotentialite; 2) the four approaches and work models for multipotentialites to explore; and 3) suggested ways of overcoming the challenges of leading a multipotentialite professional life. Throughout the chapters, Wapnick introduces blocks of questions that include exercises to guide the readers towards identifying what kind of multipotentialite they are. These activities also propose ways of experimenting with the models that best suit the readers at that particular moment in

time, and of facing the inevitable challenges encountered while pursuing the selected approach. Wapnick concludes by inviting her readers to play and lead with their multipotentiality, and to join Puttylike, an online community of multipotentialites begun in 2010 that has grown into thousands of members since. The book closes with additional examples and resources, including a list of famous multipotentialites along with their several interests and pursuits; examples of interdisciplinary fields in which multipotentialites can thrive; and notes on selected further reading.

In the first three chapters of the book, Wapnick suggests that multipotentialites need to embrace their multifaceted qualities even though they may be deemed incoherent and lacking in direction by people following more traditional career paths. Among these many qualities, she claims that multipotentialites' powers of synthesis, intellectual curiosity, adaptability and resilience make them ideally suited to taking creative risks, adjusting rapidly to changing situations, and finding innovative solutions to problems. Contrary to experts who are restricted to the narrow focus of their fields, multipotentialites are systems thinkers, and can apply their passions and skills in unusual and transdisciplinary ways. In order to lean

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To be published in a forthcoming issue of *The Independent Scholar*.

into these qualities and apply them to designing their professional lives, multipotentialites must explore the resources, motivations and levels of variety they need to do so.

In "Part II: The Four Multipotentialite Work Models: Different Strokes for Different Folks," she describes the four approaches and work models that multipotentialites generally follow. The first, the Group Hug Approach, implies having one multifaceted and interdisciplinary job or business that allows the multipotentialite to shift between many projects and activities while enjoying the financial stability of the one job. The Slash Approach is evocative of the portfolio career, allowing the multipotentialite to simultaneously work on multiple projects and jobs, all of which are driven by their passion rather than financial necessity. In order to make this approach possible, readers may hold multiple part-time jobs, own a few different businesses, and/or do freelance work. The multipotentialite selecting the Einstein Approach prioritizes financial stability. Having a stable source of income from one job that does not require much effort or energy frees these multipotentialites to work on their projects during their free time without feeling the pressure of monetizing them. Finally, the Phoenix Approach will fit what Wapnick calls the sequential multipotentialites because they enjoy delving deeply into an industry or career, before switching to a new industry or career. Choosing the Phoenix Approach may also work for those interested in building up rather than running businesses, allowing them to dedicate their time to serial entrepreneurship.

Part III introduces the readers to some of the obstacles multipotentialites often face: a lack of resources, difficulties with scheduling and logistics, and impostor syndrome, to name a few. Wapnick seems to suggest that what is central to confronting these challenges is for the readers to redefine their productivity system. Whatever approach the readers select, there are different ways of structuring professional time. She proposes that the readers redesign their time structures around a combination of needs-based, creative and energetic rhythms. She offers the examples of the prepared schedule, modeled on the school/work day; the project immersion; the flow state; and what she calls the 3Cs: the schedule divided between creation, connection/interaction with others, and consumption (the act of

researching and learning). Along with these possible productivity systems, Wapnick shares different steps the readers can take to set up the best state and space to get to work. Productivity systems, according to Wapnick, must also include accountability methods, such as keeping a small-wins journal, finding accountability partners, and completing self-reflection exercises to understand whether moments of resistance are signs of boredom, impostor syndrome, or that it is time to move on to another job or project.

Many components of *How to Be Everything* can resonate with academics and post-academics alike, and be a useful tool as they explore professional possibilities linked to their interests, work and productivity systems. For those interested in taking the independent scholar route, it can be of particular interest as it invites them to consider ways of finding financial stability while making time and space for research and writing. However, the book is only a short overview of the introduction to the life of the multipotentialite. The structure includes many sub-sections that often interrupt the flow of the writing, and does not delve into an in-depth exploration of the approaches, methods and exercises that Wapnick proposes. Readers can walk away with renewed ideas to define their career paths, and their transitions alongside or outside of academia, but they will certainly need to find other resources to strengthen and complement the materials found in this book. *How to Be Everything* can be a good, if introductory, starting point for independent scholars and post-academics interested in building non-linear and non-traditional professional paths beyond academia based on their own strengths, interests and expertise.

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