

PAPER MANG

[Q&A](#)

Rana Florida on Not Scrutinizing Women's Work Outfits and Being Stranded by a Helicopter

by David Hershkovits



Rana Florida loves an "upgrade" and thinks you will too. Along with her husband, public intellectual and urbanist Richard Florida, she's one-half of the power couple that runs Creative Class Group, a consulting firm that works with governments and companies like BMW, Zappos and Johnson & Johnson. Her Huffington Post column "Your Start-Up Life," through which she has interviewed many of the thought leaders in business and the arts, serves as the starting point for her book, [*Upgrade: Taking Your Work and Life from Ordinary to Extraordinary*](#). Marc Cuban, Tory Burch, Tomas Meier, Kenny Scharf, Andre Agassi, Mario Batali are just a few of the bold-faced names that offer advice for those interested in taking their personal and professional lives to the next level. Those like me who are both repelled and attracted by books purporting to help "get you there" will find Rana's voice refreshing -- as real as a memoir and a great vessel for this self-help and business book wrapped up in one easily-digestible package.

David Hershkovits: Why should we read your book? I'm a skeptic about self-help books.

Rana Florida: I'm a skeptic too! The market is saturated with self-help books, which is why I wrote a business book. I could have used a book like this in business school, where they didn't school us about real-world challenges, like the necessity of risk-taking, the need to encourage stupid ideas -- which often lead to breakthroughs -- and the importance of embracing failure, which is sometimes just the beginning, not the end.

I like how you weave your own life experiences into the book. What do you think you still need to do to improve yourself?

I had a lot of effing crackpot bosses who thought chaining people to their desks and telling them to work harder was the way to lead. I endured my fair share of painful corporate retreats and senseless performance reviews. I vowed to never be like that, but I always need to improve. I learned from those I interviewed that you should lead by serving. This is one of the most difficult tasks. To be an effective leader you need to inspire, educate, and engage your team while setting a vision for the future. It's every leader's job to take a C player and turn them into an A player.

When I interviewed Tim Brown, the CEO of IDEO, the design firm that created the first mouse for Apple and the second mouse for Microsoft, he said, "I try to be the right leader for the moment. Sometimes that means trying to inspire the organization with new ideas that might challenge the status quo. Sometimes that means jumping in and helping solve a problem with a client or IDEO team. Sometimes it means stepping back and leaving room for someone else to take the lead but being there to support them."

What role did luck play in the success of the people you spoke with?

I think it's 75% hard work and persistence and 25% luck and happenstance. A lot of us are presented with open doors every day that for one reason or another we don't walk through. Being afraid of failure and not taking risks is what keeps most of us from moving forward. Many people have the same opportunities, but only a few seize and take advantage of such lucky

breaks.

All of this talk about play and health and purpose goes well beyond the world of work. Do you think of yourself as a life coach?

I'm not a fan of the conventional terms of "self-help" and "life coach." I'm not a guru or an expert, I'm someone who's had a lot of different experiences in the business world and I've paid close attention. We should be developing a real strategy based on where we want to go in life and why, and most of us don't think about how we can optimize our lives. I believe it's never too late to envision an entirely different future -- or to actively upgrade your work or life.

You are the CEO of the Creative Class Group and married to its founder Richard Florida. Would you recommend this kind of work/life relationship to others?

I was a relationship columnist with my three sisters at *The Detroit News* and *Fox News* for years, so I can dole out advice about that anytime! Every relationship and circumstance is different. At first, I thought that working together would be insanely risky, personally and professionally, but fortunately it worked out for us. Traveling and working together is great as long as you have boundaries on the work. We've been dune bashing in Abu Dhabi, we've celebrated Valentine's Day at a bonfire party on a ski slope outside of Krasnoyarsk Krai in Siberia, and been left stranded by a helicopter on the roof of the wrong building in Oslo at 3am. Work and life has been one crazy adventure.

Do you believe in dressing for success?

I don't believe in uniforms and generally think people should dress in what makes them comfortable. Too often however, people make snap judgements within seconds of a first impression and what you wear speaks volumes. Women have it harder in the business world. Bosses telling me that my skirts were a "distraction" is BS. I don't think you have to wear a lady-pant suit to portray an image of seriousness, intelligence and leadership. It really is okay to have long hair and don a skirt and killer high heels. Let's just all get over it.

This story was published on October 15, 2013 12:07 PM

Tags: [books](#), [Q&A](#)