

# Stepping Into Your Preferred Future

Kent Redfearn, Ph.D. · Coach K

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Living the life you have always imagined is as close as one or two decisions away. Personal joy, purpose, meaning, and significance are just around the next bend. Yet for months and years, some folks don't direct their lives toward their own wishes, plans, and dreams. We often fail to step into our preferred future for many reasons (excuses).

The most captivating option in your life isn't necessarily the best one – it is the current one. Status quo bias powerfully deters the decisions and adjustments you need to fulfill your own second curve. When Samuelson and Zeckhauser (1988) presented people with the same set of choices, simply labeling one option “your current plan” gave it a clear advantage. They compared it to an incumbent who wins an election 59 to 41. Companies use status quo bias to their advantage, knowing that once you are in their ecosystem, you will most likely never leave. However, we're talking about something far more essential to personal fulfillment than staying in a company's product line. These are your personal life dreams waiting for you.

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Time in place strengthens it. In real decisions, Harvard employees in every age group stayed with their existing health plan far more often than new hires of the same age chose it, and only about 3 to 4 percent switched plans in a given year. Understanding the components of this bias will help you overcome it.

Status quo bias isn't always irrational. You are rationally planning to adjust, adapt, or transform your life trajectory to fulfill deeply valued hopes and dreams. At the same time, the part of you that resists change is trying to keep you safe. Drawing on their work and later research, I picture five engines all pushing in the same direction:

1. **Loss aversion** – the status quo becomes the marker by which everything else is measured. New or different alternatives are seen as potential losses that may hurt far

more than the new trajectory pleases. In this way, stepping into your preferred future may be measured as “look at all the things I might lose.”

2. **Regret avoidance** – your current place in life is predictable and feels safe. If you step into the unknown and something feels uncomfortable, you might blame yourself. Avoiding change feels safer and helps you avoid regret.
3. **Sunk costs** – Leaving what you have invested years and resources to develop may feel like you are viewing your previous trajectory as wasted years.
4. **Cognitive dissonance reduction** – Defending the predictable reduces the dissonance generated by the unknowns of launching into a new space.
5. **Mere exposure and longevity** – You become familiar with life as usual, and this familiarity is comfortable and loved. This familiarity developed over a long period of time, and you begin to feel that “the way it has been for many years” is “the way it should be forever,” even when you know there are more fulfilling alternatives.

You may feel a tug-of-war between the gas pedal and the brake as you consider your next curve. Harvard’s Robert Kegan and Lisa Lahey describe this in *Immunity to Change* (2009). One foot is energetically on the gas pedal. The other foot is on the brake. Invisible self-defeating forces are actively working against your visible commitment to your second curve. For example, sick folks who don’t want to pass away somehow skip taking their medications. Interestingly, they may not be failing to take their meds; they may be succeeding at keeping their identity as a “person who isn’t sick.” Their nervous system is fabulously doing its job: scanning for threat and protecting a familiar sense of self. Unfortunately, living only where you feel safe in the moment may hinder you from stepping into the unknowns of fulfilling your lifelong hopes and wishes.

Your fun, enjoyable, and helpful preferred future is something you desire. No one forces it on you. It is your heart’s longing. Please receive my encouragement to conquer the invisible forces that hinder you from moving into your visible dreams. Jesus’ disciples did this, and you can too.

Many of the disciples quickly launched into their surprising new futures. For example, as Jesus walked by the Sea of Galilee, he said to Andrew and Peter, “Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men.” They overcame the invisible forces that oppose making significant life changes. “Immediately they left their nets and followed him” (Matthew 4:20). The faith required to step into what became a glorious, preferred future is astonishing. They didn’t ask, “What is the pay?” Or “What will we eat if we aren’t catching

fish for dinner?” Or “Where will following you take us?” They simply left their nets and followed Him immediately. Often, we move into what is next without asking our questions or having them answered.

This is a prototype for launching into your second curve. There are things you will be leaving. Leaving is part of movement. You move from, and you move to. Walking, for example, includes one foot stepping into what is ahead and one foot leaving what is behind. Both movements are necessary for walking. Andrew and Peter moved from their fishing career and into becoming pillars in the kingdom of God. Your progress into your preferred future will include stepping into and stepping out of a variety of things.

The mere exposure and longevity aspects of status quo bias influenced me greatly. I found significant stability in my forty-year first-curve life and, in some ways, hated to move on to what was next. Unlike Peter and Andrew, I did not immediately launch into my second curve. By God’s grace, I developed the courage to reach toward my preferred future. My life, at this moment, is different from what I predicted, yet I am fulfilled and have a sense of meaning and purpose. God is faithful and fully present in the past, present, and future of our lives. Thankfully, He is already present where you are stepping into now.

Key relationships will strengthen your step into your preferred future. Clear communication with trusted family members or close friends opens the door to receiving healthy input from those who love and support you. Including those close to you shifts the preferred-future journey from “I” to “we.” Having someone with you on the journey is stabilizing and life-giving.

Holding tightly to your preferred future vision while holding loosely to the specific details will foster healthy optimism and reduce disappointment. Undoubtedly, something will not go as planned on this journey. When it comes to moving into our preferred future, the path from here to there is not a straight line. The detours, delays, and denials will become part of the journey’s beauty.

Overcoming the paralysis of status quo bias moves you into your preferred future. One foot lifts into your bright future, and the other foot leaves the past behind. Both processes are necessary for a successful journey.

**About the author** Kent Redfearn, Ph.D. (Coach K), is founder and CEO of Second Curve Coaching, an Arizona-based nonprofit at the intersection of pastoral ministry, trauma-informed care, neuroscience, and leadership development.