

THE COURAGE TO CURVE: A JOURNEY FROM CONCRETE TO CALLING.

In memory of Charles Handy, whose insights on growth and renewal lit the way for many, this essay is both a reflection and a roadmap—a lived testimony to the Second Curve.

I was once confident that my life would be defined by **cement, steel, and blueprints**. As a **civil engineering student**, I imagined my future **rising skyward, structure by structure**, with precise calculations guiding my every move. But life, as Charles Handy reminded us, is rarely **linear**. It follows curves—**arcs of growth, decline**, and, with **courage, renewal**. The **Second Curve is not merely a theory. It is the quiet revolution that saved my purpose and gave my life a deeper meaning.**

The concept of the Second Curve struck me not just as an idea to be admired, but as a call to introspection and boldness. It revealed itself to me not in a grand epiphany, but in a series of subtle moments—moments of discomfort, of longing, of invisible dissatisfaction. These moments slowly gathered like mist on a morning field until the view ahead was no longer clear, and I knew I had to change direction.

From Structures to Souls: My Career Pivot

During my final year in civil engineering, I began volunteering in youth mentorship programs, eventually leading weekly gatherings in local communities and schools. What started as a side passion became a mission I could not ignore. **I found that while concrete could build cities, empathy, faith, and compassion built lives.**

These community engagements didn't begin as a career strategy. They were spontaneous, arising from my desire to contribute something beyond myself. I saw young people grappling with identity, poverty, and the silence of absent role models. **The more I showed up, the more I realized that the blueprints I had been taught to draft in classrooms were useful**, but the blueprints I was beginning to draw with my heart—those shaped by faith and mentorship—**were transformative in ways engineering never taught me.**

In retrospect, I was approaching the apex of my First Curve—the growth cycle of my civil engineering aspirations. Yet, I felt a restlessness, a whisper from within that something was missing. The late Charles Handy captured this moment well: **"If you leave it too late, you won't have the energy to climb the second curve."**

This whisper, once easily dismissed, grew louder with each passing day. **It wasn't loud like a shout; it was consistent like a heartbeat. A calling had formed, distinct from my plans but aligned with my values.** There was a choice to be made—not between good and bad, but between **good** and **true**. So I pivoted. I stepped away from a **secure, socially approved path** to follow a new one: working with NGOs, engaging in missionary works, and mentoring youth from marginalized communities. **It was not just a career shift. It was a soul realignment.**

Why the Second Curve Must Begin Before the First Ends

Waiting until the decline begins is human nature—we cling to familiarity. But **the Second Curve demands foresight. The moment of change is not when failure strikes but when success feels hollow.** In business, leaders who embrace this principle pre-empt stagnation. In life, individuals who recognize emotional fatigue amidst success are best positioned for renewal.

Many people ask, “**Why not wait until your engineering career played out a little longer?**” It was a reasonable question. **But success, unchecked, can become a seductive cage.** The irony is that **success can dull the senses to purpose if we do not remain vigilant.** When I began to feel disillusioned even while excelling academically, I realized it wasn’t failure, but a calling. **The First Curve had brought knowledge and discipline. But it was not built to carry my deeper purpose.**

And here’s the crux: recognizing that **"this is no longer enough" is not a betrayal of your past. It's a celebration of growth.** I had to honor what engineering taught me, while also honouring what it could never teach me—how to build inner resilience, **how to shepherd others through pain, and how to listen when no one else would.**

Timing the Transition: Signs from Within

The question then becomes: how do we recognize the right moment to jump? The answer is in **stillness.** Like Stoic philosophers advised, **self-awareness and detachment from ego are essential.** I began **journaling, praying, observing my energy levels,** and noticing where I felt most alive. **The missionary work, though unpaid and uncertain, sparked joy. That was my sign.**

Stillness doesn’t mean inactivity. It means intentional pausing—a deliberate pulling back from the noise to tune into one's soul. I learned that **stillness is where wisdom whispers.** And in that space, I discovered the simple truth: **your real calling doesn’t shout. It hums quietly, consistently, waiting to be heard.**

We often ignore these clues, fearing the cost of change. But the cost of staying past our curve’s peak is **steeper: burnout, regret, irrelevance.** The signals are **rarely dramatic;** they’re found in **boredom with things that once thrilled us,** in energy that fades at the thought of “**more of the same.**” I knew I had to leap before **the fire completely died.**

The Mindset of Renewal: Courage, Curiosity, and Service

Stepping onto a Second Curve requires more than insight; it demands **courage**. You must let go of **reputation, pay checks, and prestige**. I faced scepticism from peers and even mentors. "Why abandon engineering?" "Why let all your years of efforts in engineering school go to waste?" they asked. But **I wasn't abandoning; I was transforming.**

Courage in this context does not look like fearlessness—it looks like walking forward while still afraid. I leaned on curiosity, the same curiosity that once drew me to math and materials science. But now, it was curiosity about people—how they heal, how they hope, how they survive and thrive despite odds.

The mindset required is not one of rebellion but of **stewardship**. What have I been given? And where am I most needed? **I had been trained to calculate loads and stresses—now I apply those skills metaphorically to communities under strain. My civil engineering background helped me structure projects, manage logistics, and communicate across cultures. Nothing was wasted. That is the beauty of the Second Curve: it redeems the First.**

The ability to design and problem-solve in engineering helped me approach community issues with systems thinking. I realized how infrastructure, psychology, and faith intertwine. **Where one person saw brokenness, I saw load-bearing walls in need of reinforcement—emotional and spiritual ones, not concrete.**

Stoicism: A Guide Through Uncertainty

Stoicism taught that we cannot control events, only our response. Marcus Aurelius advised: **"You have power over your mind—not outside events. Realize this, and you will find strength."**

These words became lifelines. In times when I faced criticism, when projects failed, or when resources ran dry, I returned to the wisdom of the Stoics. **I remembered that control over outcomes is an illusion, but integrity in effort is a choice.** When funding dried up, or a project failed, I returned to these words. **When internal doubt crept in, I practiced reflection and grounded myself in the service of others. Stoicism helped me detach from outcomes and focus on intention. It was not about being successful in the world's eyes but about being faithful to the path.**

I learned that renewal is not a one-time act—it is a **posture**, a way of living with **flexibility and humility**. That posture is what made my new curve not just sustainable, but sacred.

The Second Curve and Personal Growth

Growth in the Second Curve is not explosive—it is expansive. In my work with NGOs and mission fields, I learned languages, cultures, and the dynamics of sustainable change. **I became a better listener, a more adaptive leader, and a more resilient individual.**

While the First Curve gave me technical rigor, the Second Curve gave me emotional intelligence. I began to understand community development not as charity but as partnership. I moved from "**helping**" to "**co-creating**." This curve also taught me to see time differently. **The world chases quick results. The Second Curve honours seeds that grow slowly,** as Handy wrote of Golden Seeds—**ideas and talents that take time to sprout. Many discouraged me from this path, claiming I was wasting my engineering potential.** Yet today, I lead regional youth initiatives, manage cross-cultural projects, and speak at community forums.

None of this happened overnight. It took years of consistency, of saying yes to small opportunities, of believing in impact even when it wasn't seen or applauded. Growth, I found, is often invisible until one day it isn't.

Society's Role: Embracing Career Fluidity

One obstacle to the Second Curve is **societal rigidity. In many cultures, a linear path is glorified. To change course is to admit failure.** But we must shift this narrative. As we move into the future, careers will be plural, and reinvention must be normalized.

We must also stop framing transitions as losses. They are often evolutions. Society's institutions—schools, workplaces, churches—should prepare people not just for careers but for re-careering. **Flexibility should be a value taught early and embraced openly.**

NGOs and mission-driven organizations have a vital role here. They can become havens for Second Curve professionals—those with skills but seeking deeper purpose. Businesses, too, must stop seeing such transitions as defections and instead see them as evolutions.

We are no longer in an age where 30 years in the same profession is a badge of honour. **In today's world, adaptability, not longevity, is the hallmark of wisdom.**

Organizations That Embody the Second Curve

Redcross Society and Young Life organization. The two NGOs I've worked with, exemplify my Second Curve thinking. When donor fatigue hit or social dynamics shifted, they pivoted. They didn't cling to outdated models. Instead, they empowered local leaders, redesigned programs, and embraced digital tools for impact. **Their agility inspired my own.**

Their example showed me that institutions, like individuals, must read the signs of their curves. They must dare to disrupt themselves before they are disrupted. These organizations demonstrated how one can keep the heart of a mission while changing its form.

The Second Curve Is the Future

In a world of disruption—from climate change to AI—stability is no longer the norm. **The Second Curve offers not just survival, but significance. It is the way of the phoenix, the arc of rebirth.**

We must prepare ourselves and others not just to succeed, but to renew. To young professionals, I say this: **your degree is not your destiny. Your first job is not your final form. Begin looking for signs. Trust your joy. Seek mentors, not just managers. And above all, plant Golden Seeds.**

Charles Handy and Peter Drucker understood that management was never just about business. It was about meaning. It was about people. And it was about time—our most finite resource—use wisely to create something that lasts.

The Second Curve is not a detour. It is the main road for those who dare to ask: what else am I capable of becoming?