In case of personal Armageddon, flee to the sea. That’s all I’ve been able to think about these days each time I run from my house to the ocean and back again, usually about 4.5 to 5 miles, three times per week. I think about it because along the way I witness the destitute, the disenfranchised, the drug addicts, the mentally ill, and the miserably lost—the entire spectrum of fringe, from those who have chosen to live this way to those who have not.

Some are camped out in their cars, moving from space to space, sometimes just one space over to adhere to loitering and parking regulations. Others walk listlessly along the water, rifling through public and private trash cans for food while scanning the ground for change and smokable cigarette butts. And then there are those I can’t see, but I know are there—those camping in the creases, crevices, and cliffs in and around Santa Cruz. As I run along the water, I note at times that I’m less than five feet from the cliff edge that drops off to the cold Pacific below.

The fictionalized images from novels, stories, and movies about the end of the world come to mind vividly, but these individuals are real, and their stories real. To those who have experienced more recent personal Armageddons,
who have lost most if not everything during the past four years, and who have
given up on finding work, on getting back on their feet, and on staying relevant
and marketable in the world of work—in life for that matter—I empathize. I
do. It’s tougher than it’s ever been to stay gainfully employed over the long
term. We’re all competing with five generations now for fewer full-time jobs
in a world where being a generalist is as ubiquitous as a quick keyword search
in Google or Bing, meaning you’ve been scrapped for automated efficiency.
Pack your things and begin the exodus to the sea.

But even the sea brings red tides of danger for those without hope, especially
those camped out on the cliffs. Job report after job report includes a recurring
theme: “The changes don’t account for people who stopped looking for jobs.”

There are red tides that produce natural toxins, that suck the air from the
sea, and that can kill marine and coastal life. The red tide of inaction in this
constantly changing world of work is sucking the air from adaptability, driving
many to the fringe, even those in the IT hot spots.

As I’ve written this book, I can’t help but think about why I run, about why I
stretch my older self with cross-training to shave seconds off my mile times.

It’s for the same reasons I’ve stretched myself professionally, taken chances,
failed, failed again, succeeded (a little), pushed myself to learn new skills and
to remain relevant and marketable in an ever-connected global economy.

And I’m not talking about going back to school, not in the traditional sense.
I’m talking about self-educating via reading, listening to, and watching relevant
content found online across multiple social and professional networks,
publications, blogs, and more (Chapter 3), or to “skill-up” as we’re saying at
BraveNewTalent these days. We’re also skilling-up in the associations we
belong to as well as the volunteer work we do.

And even more important to skilling-up, it’s about the networks we keep. I’ve
reached out to my network to be mentored, and in turn have been a mentor
to others.

It’s not the cliff that bothers me the most while I’m running. It’s the rising red
tide without mentors to shadow our paths.

In case of personal Armageddon, stretch yourself and ask for help.

Which is why I’m writing this book, volunteering to help job seekers, and
participating in career panels, as I’ve mentioned elsewhere: I’ve experienced
career development and management angst as much as the next person. I’ve
become an informal mentor in a sense, not for the sake of saying it to make
me feel better, but to do something that makes others feel better, and