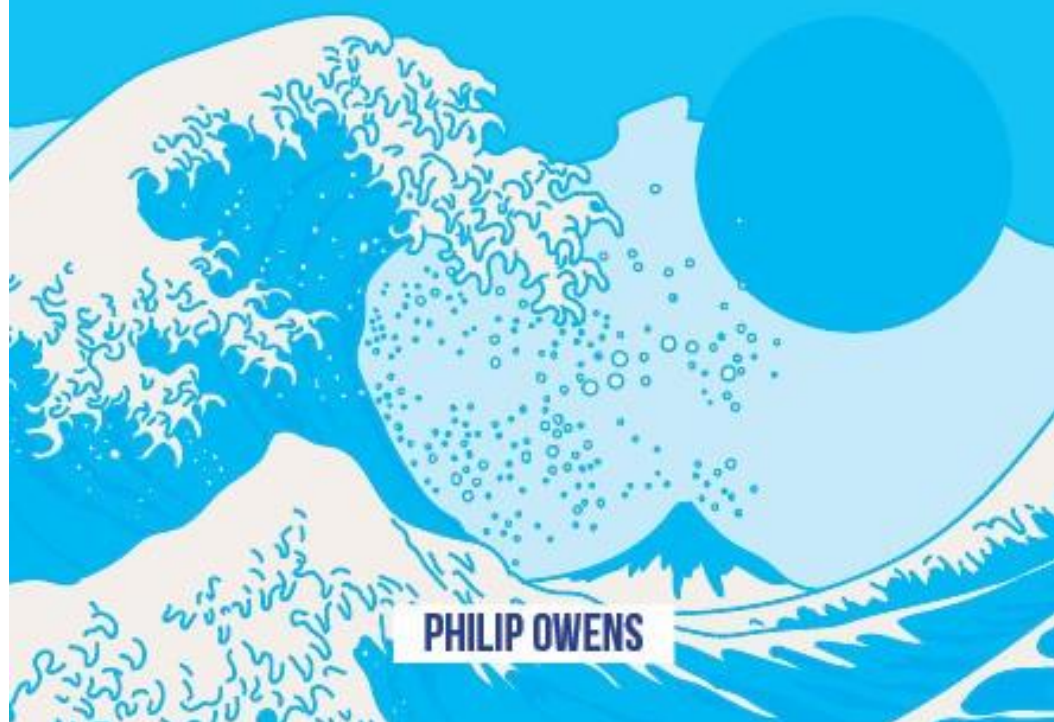


MASTERING THE CHANGE CURVE

Getting **UNSTUCK** and moving on with your life!



PHILIP OWENS

Mastering the Change Curve

Getting unstuck and moving on with your life

Philip Owens

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Mastering the change curve

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Dedication

This book is dedicated to the three people in my life that inspire me to keep being the best version of myself that I can be. They remind me daily of the greatness of human possibility - by being exactly who they are. To my family: Nicole, Alexander and Cameron, with love.

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Foreward

Over the years, I have immersed myself in the world of change, something that's not always an easy process yet so rewarding when you do. Through the changes in my own life, it has given me a much deeper understanding of its importance in the wider population of the people we serve through the charity, Restoring Hope. At Restoring Hope – as the name suggests – our aim is to make a small and significant difference in the lives of children who have suffered abuse and offer them hope of something better. We know that a small change made at the right time can have a massive impact on people for the rest of their lives. Our efforts aim to offer children who feel there is no hope as they pass through complex forensic processes a glimmer of something different – a sense that someone cares, that something can be different, that things can in some small way be better for them from here.

I am therefore delighted and honoured to write the foreword for this book. I've known Phil for over a decade, and throughout those years I have seen firsthand how passionate he is about helping people create significant changes that has enabled people to live more fulfilling lives. He was a founding volunteer board member on Restoring Hope, my neighbour and now a dear friend. It's an absolute joy to read this book as he shares his wisdom and knowledge that offers his thinking and support around change to a wider audience. I know and wholeheartedly believe that so many people will benefit from his approach.

I remember once at a barbeque that I'd mentioned to Phil that I had a real fear of snakes and lizards and was really keen to create a shift so I could at least coexist more calmly if I were to encounter them. Over a glass of wine and with a curious conversation, Phil helped me overcome this fear. So much so that I was even able to have a bearded dragon lizard sit on my shoulder – something I would never have imagined or allowed before!

This is only one example of how Phil helps people master their own 'change curves'. By helping people identify with what's keeping them currently stuck, he is then able to help create those small changes, which leads to really big outcomes. Phil really cuts through to the core of the issue and therefore helps people generate their own desired change. What is so powerful about this is that his skilled approach makes those he works with hopeful. He gives them a great

Sense of positivity that change is not only possible, but it's something within their reach. This is something that deeply resonates with my values, and the values of Restoring Hope.

So, I invite you to take curiosity and hope into this book – and then take that hope and encouragement out of it that will help you implement some of those desired changes into your own life. Phil brings a unique view to the idea of change (I personally found the 3 behaviour change processes a novel and powerful way to understand change). Throughout the book, Phil provides case examples from different people from all walks of life who were all experiencing different challenges that are currently keeping them stuck. Working with these people he's been able to offer a powerful and encouraging voice that has helped create the shift they needed to allow these people to move forward in a more resourceful and productive way that has given them a new lease on life. Once their perspective changed, everything around changed around them.

If you ever wanted a dose of hope that you can change, then the idea that Phil builds this book around - that it is not 'you' as a person that is somehow 'broken', but rather that you are stuck because of how you're currently processing your thoughts and doing what you do – provides such a generous space to approach learning about personal change and growth.

I highly recommend this book to you – as a groundbreaking look at how to create personal change, as an invitation to hope and as an encouragement to get on and create a much better and needed quality life. I am confident that like so many others that Phil has helped, this book can help you. It is accessible, enjoyable and most of all deeply powerful in offering you a path to master the change curve – and start getting more of the life that you want.

Kim Elzaibak

Founding President

Restoring Hope

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Introduction

The one skill I wish that I had learnt growing up was how to change. It is also the one skill that I wish so many of my coaching and clinical clients would have mastered because of all the unnecessary distress, discomfort and suffering that they could have avoided in their lives.

We are taught so many things and we change so many times throughout our lives. Change is something that people do automatically and is a cornerstone of what makes us human - an innate capability to adapt to our circumstances, to want to achieve and to strive to achieve it.

So why would I want my clients to have learnt how to change?

Because when we master a skill, it means that we can apply it in so many different ways to our advantage. Rather than just teaching someone a specific new thing so they can get unstuck now, what if we taught people how to master change in such a way that they could consciously and skilfully get unstuck whenever they had the need to?

Just because people have an inherent capacity to change does not mean they do it well. From developing bad habits, getting stuck in old stories from the past, developing addictions, generating limiting beliefs to wanting things that you simply cannot get - life is full of opportunities to get stuck.

You may have come to this book because you have something specific that you are currently grappling with or perhaps you have an interest in learning how to master the skills of personal change. Either way, this book is for you. We all get stuck and having the ability to master the change curve—to be able to consciously make positive change where and when it suits us is an incredible skill that you can develop. A skill you can deploy now or at any time that you find that positive change is needed in your life.

People get stuck all the time. People stay stuck for much longer than they need to because they have not had the opportunity to learn how to change. When we are stuck change never seems like a straight line—it always seems like a massive mountain that we have to scale. Change is curved, and by mastering the change curve it can reduce it from appearing like an insurmountable peak to a series

of logical, actionable steps that you can learn and apply to shift rapidly and powerfully. This is the shift I see in my clients all the time.

From what I have learnt about adaptivity, innovation, complex systems, behaviour and psychology, there appeared to be tools and resources that people had at their disposal that they just were not accessing. It struck me that rather than telling you ‘how to fix’ a specific issue, it would be more valuable to share with you a framework for change that you could master. This mastery could help you consciously and capably navigate whatever change curve you face into.

One early reader gave me this feedback, “This took me on a journey and I have such a deeper insight into change and how I can deal with so many things in my life.” This is what I would recommend to you: go on the journey that this book offers, do the exercises and build your skills. Become a master of your own change tool kit and the master of whatever change curve comes your way.

First Person, Third Person

As you read through the book it can be useful to take an ‘observer position’ on your experience – not only pay attention to what you are reading and learning (operating in the first person), but also pay attention to how you are reacting to it (in the third person). It may be a case study, a description, an exercise or just a concept which raises a reaction. Take note of that! That can be a valuable gateway to finding places where you are stuck and where applying the skills you learn in this book can really make a difference in your life.

As you move through the book we will discuss many of the things I just mentioned in the last paragraph – taking an observer position, considering where you are stuck, stories we tell ourselves, triggers and responses – and of course the skills of mastering the change curve.

Sometimes you may notice a reaction and not know what to do about it, or even know where it comes from. I would suggest that you don’t be too harsh on yourself (which, incidentally, is an interesting way that you choose to respond) and instead continue to build your change curve mastery. Remember that you do not have to do this alone – you can reach out to a real person at any time, either simply as a circuit breaker or to get support on your change journey from a coach or counsellor. It may be a family member, a spiritual counsellor or friend. Reaching out and asking for help is not a burden on these people, it’s a gift you give them by allowing them to help you. This human connection can be so valuable and help you feel less alone in your problem. It can give you a ‘time out’ to allow you to reset yourself and approach the topic of personal change with a fresh view.

If you're not comfortable with reaching out to someone that you know, there are a number of great organisations, such as Lifeline and other phone-based counselling services specifically trained to provide confidential help and support.

Someone Like You

Throughout the book, you will read a number of real-life cases offered as examples. Each case is real; however, names, ages and details have been changed. Confidentiality is critical. It is likely that you may recognise 'someone like you' in this book. As human beings, we are more similar in our experiences than different. However, whether you are a first-time reader or past client, I can assure you that no specific client or case can be identified.

The case studies are included to show how people like you have worked on similar issues and hopefully they will allow you to deepen your connection to—and understanding of—the concepts they demonstrate. All of this is designed to help you build your mastery of change.

An invitation – explorations and experiments

At the end of each chapter I invite you to engage with a small number of explorations and experiments. Through these you can apply some of the lessons from that chapter to your personal situation. As you take the time to explore and experiment, you will may gain insight into your own processes. If it is an area which has kept you stuck, then you can take a first person/third person approach and gain insight and take actions; both of which might help you on your own personal path to mastering your own experience.

The nature of these explorations and experiments are such that you may not be able to answer to a question that is posed yet. It may be that the question is challenging, or you simply don't know. By noticing your response it can offer a highly valuable outcome regardless of the 'answer'—it can provide a torchlight on something that may be contributing to you being stuck. There are no right or wrong answers, simply an opportunity to reflect on what is presented in the chapter and apply the ideas to your own unique experience.

At the end of most exercises I will ask an important question: "What did you learn from this exercise?" Often the real value comes from taking a step back and reflecting on not only the answers that we came up with but how we came up with the answers, what else happened while we responded and what it might start to inform us about ourselves. I would suggest that this could be the most valuable part of the exercise – to not just take the action of answering, but to take the time

to reflect on what can be learnt (you will learn why this is so important as you learn to master the change curve).

Anything that is an exploration will ask you to consider and explore your own perception of the topic. Any experiment will be geared to offering you a way to take action. These ideas of reflection, action taking and learning are all fundamental to change and these explorations and experiments are offered to assist you in deepening your experience and understanding to help you build your mastery of the change curve, and the toolkit to get unstuck.

Chapter 1

Change seems hard

“If I knew how to change, I would have done so already!”

How many times have you heard a version of this statement from someone who is stuck? Often it is the refrain of people who come to see me in clinic, or the underlying theme in coaching and business consulting sessions.

It is what people are busy telling themselves and telling others who attempt to help them. It may also be what you are telling yourself right now.

Because when you are stuck change seems *hard*.

When you are stuck in the gap between wanting to change and making the change it can create significant discomfort. It is human nature to put our efforts into overcoming the immediate problem in front of us to remove the discomfort and get on with our lives. If we had a way to get unstuck and make the change then we would have already done so. We remain stuck because we do not yet have a valuable solution to where we find ourselves stuck.

Humans have always innovated, found new ways, learnt and adapted. It is the story of our lives. There is a time when babies cannot stand. There is a time when they cannot feed themselves. There are times when they cannot talk or write their names. At the time, these could seem like insurmountable hurdles—and yet all of these hurdles were in some way overcome. Most people walk, talk, eat and write effortlessly. Often people will do many or all of these things at the same time!

If you asked someone, “How did you learn to do that?” the likely answer is that they couldn’t tell you. It is human nature to face into *this problem*, create *this solution*, and simply move onto the next problem. When we find the way to move past what keeps us stuck that works for us now, we simply integrate it into what we are doing and move on.

Doing it differently

What if there was a common pattern behind every change that we had to make? While at an immediate level we seek to solve the immediate problem, we often fail to look at the underlying processes of getting stuck, making the change and embedding those new ways so that we remain unstuck.

What I have learnt from helping people is that much of what happens when we change is based upon common processes and ideas. While we are so busy looking to solve immediate problems and remove the discomfort we feel in the moment, we often overlook the structure and process of all the problems that we encounter. While any single problem is unique, what keeps people stuck is not. While your solution will be specific to you, the nature of change and adaptation is consistent. The structure and the processes that help people get unstuck are often the same and are independent of issue and context.

This means that there are common frameworks and patterns that you can apply to your circumstance that can help you change your life. Maybe as you do, you can make better changes, faster changes, easier changes that could help you resolve where you are stuck and allow you to move forward with your life.

Understanding the structure of problems and the process of change can help you get unstuck. Your problem is unique, but the structure and process are likely to follow a common pattern that you can master.

We all face change. We all experience being stuck. What if we could decode the process of change in a way that would provide a valuable toolkit to help you face into each unique situation you faced in a new way? What if change did not have to be so hard?

This approach has been incredibly effective in helping people suffering significantly in their lives. For these people where they were stuck was *hard*. They were struggling with things like chronic depression, anxiety, fears and phobias, relationship issues, professional roadblocks, trauma and dealing with crises. Using this approach, I have helped people find a path forward and seen the change in their lives as they have become unstuck.

Applying the 'Insane Approach' to change

When people feel stuck, they respond to the feeling or thoughts that it creates for them. This motivates them to focus on the immediate problem and start taking action. Many people apply considerable effort and energy only to stay stuck in the same place. It is a common error when we are stuck to do the same thing over and over, expecting that the old way of solving this problem will somehow suddenly work.

Albert Einstein is quoted as saying, “The definition of insanity is doing the same things over and over and expecting a different outcome.” Unfortunately, when it comes to where we are stuck in our lives, we often apply such an ‘insane’ approach.

The reliable way to keep your problem or issue is to keep doing what you are currently doing. Do nothing different and you will continue to get what you have always gotten—which is to say that if you do nothing different then you will just stay stuck.

As we face into the immediate problem without a deeper understanding of the common structure and processes of problems, we can apply Einstein’s ‘insane’ approach. We can keep battering against our issue with the same methods that haven’t worked in the past in the hope that things will be different in the future. By learning to master the change curve, you can take a different approach to solving this problem, and in fact, any problem that you encounter in future.

If what you have done in the past has kept you stuck, then consciously deciding what to change can be powerful to getting unstuck and moving on with your life.

Coping

Until people find a valuable way forward, they find other ways to deal with being stuck. This includes developing coping strategies that don’t provide a solution, but rather create a way to manage as best they can. Sometimes this is the best that they can do.

People find ways to manage through various coping strategies so that they can continue to do what they need to do while carrying around what keeps them stuck. Think of how much effort it takes for someone with severe anxiety, post-traumatic stress, or severe depression to simply get through the day in modern society. They find ways to cope to get them through without addressing the underlying issue that causes them distress. They don’t overcome what causes them to be stuck, they find valuable ways to carry on anyway.

Change can be hard but staying stuck can be harder.

There is incredible value in what people do to cope. It is not doing nothing. The effort and skills that are invested simply to cope are both valuable and worth acknowledging. It’s not easy. But every coping strategy that the person comes up with demonstrates that they have skills, capability and capacity to take some form of action. It is something that most people who are stuck fail to notice but can acknowledge and be proud of.

Imagine for a moment if that effort, those skills and that capacity to act can be redirected to something that actively makes a difference to the underlying issue rather than just coping with it? Perhaps there is a different way to consider how you are stuck. For this you could consciously choose to apply different change skills. By mastering the change curve, you can do something different and get a different outcome.

A framework for thinking about change

While we all get stuck in unique ways, the underlying processes and concepts of change are constant and can help us make decisions and take actions that can help us shift. By understanding our current circumstance as a unique example of a common theme, we get to make decisions and take control of our journey and experience. By becoming the ‘master’ of your own change curve, you can access a valuable toolkit that can help you wherever you are stuck—and whenever you get stuck.

Instead of responding to the discomfort, consider how we could reframe where we are stuck. To make a considered and valuable change, it would be useful to:

- > Create a definition of the ‘problem’ or ‘challenge’ that we actually face
- > Explore and test the motivation for wanting to make a change
- > Understand and refine our expectations in regard to changing
- > Reflect on what we have tried but hasn’t worked in previous attempts to change
- > Understand the nature of change and how lasting change can be created
- > Consider what timeline we are setting for the change to happen
- > Work out how to know if we were successful.

These seem like a useful set of basic processes that would allow us to shift from ‘being stuck’ to generating a process-oriented view of the challenge. We can now apply skills and strategies through co-ordinated effort to resolve where we are stuck.

The importance of action

The change in your life that you want is on the other side of an action. Without action, the only thing that you can guarantee is that you will stay stuck.

If you do nothing, nothing will change.

The change you want to make may not even require a massive leap. Surprisingly, your path to getting unstuck may come from just taking the smallest action or experiment. It is the *right* action that matters, and sometimes we need to experiment to find which action will start the shift. Doing nothing keeps you stuck. Taking action—even experimenting—is a necessary step in getting unstuck.

While taking action can sometimes seem difficult, the outcome you seek is only possible when you take it. I encourage you to always err on the side of *doing something* in your search for ways to get unstuck. As we will discover, sometimes the smallest actions lead to surprising results.

Key points:

- **Change seems hard, especially when we are stuck in a particular problem or issue.**
- **We often respond to the thoughts and feelings of being stuck, rather than what is keeping us stuck.**
- **Staying stuck can be harder than making the change to get unstuck.**
- **Doing more of the same will not solve the issue, doing something different might.**
- **Coping is changing to accommodate where you are stuck, rather than getting unstuck.**
- **Getting unstuck only happens with action.**
- **Each time you get stuck it is unique, but it is based on a common pattern that can be decoded and mastered to make your change efforts more effective.**

Explorations and Experiments

Exploration 1: Exploring being stuck

We have all been stuck. Consider how you are stuck right now, where you might just be coping or think some big challenge you faced in the past.

- > What is like to be stuck? What do you experience?
- > What do you want to be/do/feel differently?
- > Consider the ways you have attempted to change already.
- > Consider the ways you have tried to cope or manage. What did you learn from this exercise?