

THE ART OF

Changing

Course

**A 3-Step Strategy
to Get Unstuck and
Solve Your Real Problems**

CHRIS RUDEN

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WILEY

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*To my beautiful life partner, Paula. In this life and 1,000 others,
it will always be you. Thank you for being my #1 fan
and lending me your belief when I've run out of my own.
I know you said to never call you up on stage as you'd
probably croak, so here is my compromise.*

—Love, Chrustopher

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Foreword

When Chris approached me to pen the foreword for his book, I was overwhelmed by a whirlwind of emotions: gratitude, excitement, and yes, even tears. You might wonder about the tears—they stemmed from the profound privilege of witnessing Chris’s journey toward authentic confidence. It’s a journey that has profoundly affected my life and one that I’m deeply honored to articulate in this opening page.

I’m Mindy Scheier, a fashion designer by trade, and also the proud mother of a son with muscular dystrophy. My quest began when my son Oliver simply yearned to wear jeans like his peers—a seemingly simple desire complicated by his inability to manage buttons, zippers independently, or accommodate leg braces. I was astounded by the lack of mainstream, stylish, and functional clothing options. Thus, armed with my background, I embarked on a “modest” mission to revolutionize the fashion industry. In 2014, the Runway of Dreams Foundation was born. Our mission? To educate the fashion world about the significance of including people with disabilities in the conversation—not just as consumers, but as integral voices shaping the industry’s future. In 2016, our partnership with Tommy Hilfiger marked a historic milestone: creating the first-ever mainstream Adaptive clothing line. Yet, to truly make waves in the fashion world, we knew we had to step onto the grand stage of New York Fashion Week, showcasing Adaptive apparel through groundbreaking runway shows spotlighting models with disabilities. Our journey led us beyond NYC, with our sights set on Las Vegas.

I vividly recall meeting Chris for the first time, as he prepared to grace the runway in our Las Vegas show. His infectious smile

illuminated the room, instantly forging connections with the diverse array of models with varying disabilities. It was a sight to behold. Beneath his vibrant exterior, Chris harbored a sense of trepidation—a fear born from unfamiliarity with both the runway and the shared experience of countless individuals with disabilities, being vulnerable in new situations. Reflecting on the show, Chris confided in me: “It was exhilarating yet nerve-racking. But the rapid sense of connection, the overwhelming support, and the profound inclusivity I experienced were unlike anything I’d ever known. To feel celebrated and embraced in a world that often felt exclusive was truly eye-opening.” His words have stayed with me since, a testament to Chris’s indomitable spirit.

In 2019, I embarked on another venture: GAMUT Management, a consultancy and talent community exclusively for people with disabilities that helps companies find authentic ways to engage with, create products for, and represent people with disabilities both internally and externally. One of the first people I called to come join GAMUT was Chris. Without hesitation, he embraced the opportunity to amplify not only his voice but all voices of people with disabilities, recognizing the seismic impact of their perspectives on any industry finally willing to listen. This encapsulates the magic of Chris.

As someone who has dedicated my life to making change happen in our mainstream world, I firmly believe in the art of changing course. Chris exemplifies this artistry, offering a beacon of hope to those navigating life’s tumultuous waters. His story resonates deeply for anyone grappling with upheavals of any kind, reminding us that resilience, adaptability, and determination can conquer even the most daunting challenges.

Chris’s narrative underscores the transformative power of change management. Through perseverance and unwavering resolve, he has surmounted seemingly insurmountable obstacles, inspiring countless individuals to do the same. In today’s rapidly evolving landscape, mastering the art of change is

imperative—personally, professionally, and organizationally. By embracing change, we unlock boundless potential, propelling ourselves toward greater heights of success and fulfillment. And in Chris, we find not just a teacher of change management, but an embodiment of its essence—a testament to the triumph of the human spirit.

Thank you, Chris, for this privilege and honor. You are a gifted storyteller, and I'm proud to call you a friend. To those about to turn the page, enjoy the journey.

With tremendous respect and admiration,
Mindy Scheier
Founder and CEO, GAMUT Management and Runway of
Dreams Foundation

“He who rejects change is the architect of decay. The only human institution which rejects progress is the cemetery.”

—*Harold Wilson*

Coroner: She's really, most sincerely dead.

Mayor: Then this is a day of independence for all the Munchkins and their descendants!

Barrister: If any!

Mayor: Yes, let the joyous news be spread.

Mayor: The Wicked Old Witch at last is dead!

Munchkins: (sing) Ding Dong! The Witch is dead. Which old witch? The Wicked Witch! Ding Dong!
The Wicked Witch is dead!

Introduction

There's an old saying that goes, "Be like the wind and change with ease and without contempt."

The only problem is that you're *not* wind, and change is *not* that easy.

Philosophically, change is the only constant in life, so you'd think it would be relatively easy to master over time. Yet, change remains one of the most difficult recurrences in life.

From growing up and no longer being able to eat chicken nuggets every day to navigating corporate mergers and everything in between, change is constant.

And it can be exhausting at times.

Twelve-year-old me wanted nothing more than to be a veterinarian.

Seventeen-year-old me would have joined the military if he didn't have diabetes.

Nineteen-year-old me knew he would become a lawyer.

Twenty-two-year-old me graduated with an exercise science degree.

Twenty-seven-year-old me stopped hiding his disability.

Thirty-year-old me built a professional speaking business on change.

Thirty-three-year-old me still loves chicken nuggets.

You could say changing course is my forte, but to be honest, I've been forced to change course many times—positive changes and negative changes, internal changes and external changes—and it took me a long time to learn how to navigate change effectively.

Unless you're dead, you've also experienced change. And if you're living, you will continue to experience change.

While change is constant, there is an art to it. I believe that our ability to adapt (or not) to our evolving needs determines our quality of outcomes and quality of life.

You can adapt to the changes that are happening, or you can adapt in order to change yourself. Both reacting to change and initiating change are skills that can be improved that set you up for effective choices as life changes or you find yourself needing to change the direction your life is heading.

Whether you like it or not, you will become a master of change reaction. You either become really good at it or really bad at it. Or you simply master not changing at all. A choice is always made whether you react effectively or ineffectively—whether you act or do nothing at all. Navigating unfamiliar territory such as health, financial, and relationship changes along with any other disruptive events that range from uncomfortable to traumatic will influence your path in life. That influence, depending on your change management resolve, will be the wind guiding your boat either to the shore or the rocks.

Reacting to change is not the only disruptive force you need to prepare to manage, though.

Sometimes, you might find yourself *wanting* to change—maybe even needing to change. Not necessarily because of some sort of cataclysmic event but rather a realization that the track you're on or the actions you are taking are no longer serving you. And as you think about it, maybe they never did.

What could be worse than realizing you're no longer happy or fulfilled in one or more areas of your life? Realizing you

know you haven't been happy with those areas for years so you mastered the reaction by inaction, leaving you feeling stuck.

"Something has got to change," you say to yourself.

When that happens, it's usually because you're experiencing some sort of pain or lack of contentment or progress that makes you wish for something different for yourself.

No matter what you're looking to change, pain points act as catalysts, motivating change to alleviate discomfort, dissatisfaction, or challenges.

Conversely, "desire points" represent the aspirations, goals, and positive outcomes you're looking to achieve through change. They also can serve as drivers to help maneuver you through the stuck inertia.

You will always react to change in some way. But you might not always initiate the change you want. You will undoubtedly find yourself needing to become your own pattern disruptor if you ever genuinely want the pattern that no longer serves you to be disrupted.

Reacting to change has to do with how you perceive change (threat vs opportunity), the lens through which you view change (negative, positive, or neutral), and your urgency to act accordingly.

Not all who react well to change initiate change for themselves.

So if you're living with pain or a desire to change or you're just flat out exhausted keeping your head barely above water in areas of your life that don't fulfill you, I'm going to ask you a very difficult question:

Why haven't you done anything about it yet?

What the stuck?

The one common thread among situations calling for change is "stuckness." At the cusp of change is a deep, innate desire to maintain familiarity.

People defend their familiarity by staying stuck in a place that no longer serves them, whether that is a relationship that should've ended years ago, a dream that should've been pursued, or an organization failing to innovate because it wants to stay the same.

Sameness is stuckness.

Feeling stuck used to send me in a spiral, frustrated to the point of inaction. After all, nothing is worse than feeling stuck in a situation where you hoped you would succeed.

This book aims to help you navigate change to alter your course from stuckness to reinvention by turning uncertainty into clarity. Your needs evolve. Your circumstances change. What once excited you might cause you heartburn now.

Maybe you've lost that inner flame you once had. Maybe your mental health has started to suffer due to your values and aspirations being disjointed from your current life.

And maybe—just maybe—you know there has to be more to life (and more you can give to life) than what you are currently experiencing.

This process, if you allow it, will help you to “unstuck” yourself. For good.

Maybe you're thinking that this all sounds great, but you're being forced to deal with some sort of disruptive change. Losing a job, a relationship ending, car breaking down, etc., are all examples of external disruptive change.

How do you intentionally manage disruptive changes like these? It can seem that you don't have a choice when external circumstances disrupt your plan or comfort. The natural response is to dwell on how terrible or inconvenient the change is. Without negating or invalidating natural feelings, there comes a point where labeling a disruption *good* or *bad* does nothing for you. At a certain point, it is up to you to stop

describing the disruption and start managing it in a way that helps you rather than hurts you. Not wanting to change does not shield you from events outside of your control. When situations change, you respond. And that response will be either effective or ineffective. External change acts on you, but that is not the only disruptive force of change.

Sometimes, there is also the need to create your own disruptive change to break patterns and cycles that are not paying off for you. You find yourself needing to change an area of your life on your own, without the aid of some cataclysmic occurrence. From your health to wealth to relationships, we all fall in ruts and at times can feel trapped in a life we wish was just better. Despite the lack of fulfillment and results we crave, we sometimes go on autopilot, oblivious to the fact that the life we are choosing to repeat is not the life we want to lead. There will be times where you need a wake-up call. And that wake-up call might have to come from you.

Sometimes disruption is the best thing that can happen to you.

The Art of Changing Course applies to disruptive change. The Changing Course process, covered in this book, will help you learn how to handle disruptive change and use it as a catalyst to transform a passive autopilot life.

In most cases, you're stuck because you're afraid—you're not sure what to do—and your autopilot is on stuckness. That is a tough spot to be in because time vanishes when you are stuck on autopilot. Going from knowing you're stuck (aware) to not even thinking you're stuck anymore (unaware) sucks. When you normalize and accept being stuck, you live according to limitations that don't actually exist. Are you really stuck at that job? Are you really stuck with that mindset? Are you really stuck being who you are? Or are you just accepting something that you could actually change?

I believe that everyone should learn acceptance—except when you’re stuck. Acceptance is necessary to make peace with what you cannot change—losing a loved one, changing the past, fear of the future, and so on. But when you accept something that you can change, you lie to yourself about what is possible. Accepting a lie is dangerous. I know because I was there for a long time, accepting that I needed to hide my disability forever.

Too many people accept their life for what it is, not realizing that they just have to make one step toward change.

Throughout this book, I’ll be referring to parts of *The Wizard of Oz* storyline and character development to bring the examples to life.

Why? Because the classic tale, written by L. Frank Baum, is a great study of change management. If you’ve read the book or watched the 1939 film, you know that each character experiences change, and (spoiler alert), in the end, we learn that their solution is in their problem.

The task of traveling to see the wizard, which at first seems like a means to an end, actually becomes a transformative journey for Dorothy and her friends. *The Wizard of Oz* reinforces the idea that growth comes from facing our challenges and drawing upon our inner strengths instead of searching a sketchy yellow brick road for answers.

In the movie, we’re able to see that each character obviously already has what they need without having to steal a broomstick or a pair of ruby slippers to get it.

If the scarecrow didn’t have a brain, he obviously wouldn’t be able to think or reason or communicate with Dorothy.

If the Tin Man didn’t have a heart, he wouldn’t be so sad about his situation.

If the lion didn’t have courage, he wouldn’t have been brave enough to make the journey to Oz.

A great leader allows people to be their own All Great and Powerful Oz.

A great leader exposes the good in the deficit.

And a great leader should know whether their people have a whole damn “ding dong the witch is dead” flash mob routine prepared for the day that they resign, retire, or get crushed by an airborne farmhouse.

So what can you expect from this book?

In simple terms, *The Art of Changing Course* is about learning how to effectively change course and get unstuck.

Change can definitely suck; don't get me wrong.

The real issue we have to deal with though is what sucks about change to *you*?

If you want to grow, you have to change. It's a fundamental truth of life.

Some changes are easy and appealing ...

- ◆ You get a raise. **Amazing.**
- ◆ You get to go on vacation to a place you've never been before. **Can't wait.**
- ◆ You get a lower interest rate on your mortgage. **Sweet.**

Other types? Not so much ...

- ◆ Something in your business is broken and needs to be fixed. **F*ck.**
- ◆ You can't fit into your favorite jeans. **F*ck.**
- ◆ A relationship is ending, and you don't want it to. **F*ck.**

And yet, we come back to that unavoidable fact: if you want to grow, you have to change.

We all have hurdles that need to be addressed as we move toward the life we desire.

Though many hurdles seem obvious, the true root of our problems often lurks in our subconscious minds and masquerades as a more superficial problem.

For example, I was born with a physical disability: I have only two fingers on my left hand, and my left arm is shorter than my right. I kept my hand buried in my pocket or hidden in a glove for the majority of my life, refusing to take ownership of the real problem: A fear of being alone. A fear of being judged. A fear of never being good enough. I imagined people being so put off by my arm that they wouldn't want to spend time with me.

After getting approved for a prosthetic arm, I decided to make a video and post it on YouTube. I went to sleep thinking maybe a few thousand people would see it. I woke up to find that it had been viewed millions of times. I received hundreds of emails from people who could relate to my message.

Each of those interactions made it easier for me to start showing up as the real version of myself instead of the false version I had been selling for so many years.

Now, I speak on stage to thousands of people all over the world, where I pull off my prosthetic and proudly raise my half-arm in the air for all to see.

I've been featured on Dwayne "The Rock" Johnson's hit TV show *Titan Games*, have had media coverage across huge platforms such as *Men's Health*, *The Washington Post*, and Netflix, and modeled for the likes of Tommy Hilfiger, Nike, and Zappos.

Over time, I codified my journey of owning both my physical disability and the emotional problem behind it into what is now the Changing Course process.

I share this process with organizations that want problem-solving frameworks and communication models they can apply to their situations and teams.

The Changing Course process is very intentionally elegant in its simplicity. I'm not here trying to sell you on a 12-part plan that you must follow for the rest of your life to get better or for your team to be more productive.

Instead, I'm asking you to make three distinct shifts:

- ◆ **Get honest** with yourself about whatever it is you need to change. (subconscious → conscious)
- ◆ **Be accountable** and share your commitments with people you trust and respect. (conscious → communicated)
- ◆ **Live by example** and operate daily as a better role model than you already are. (communicated → broadcast)

The Changing Course process is backed by a variety of psychological principles, management techniques, and organizational change theories, including Lewin's Three Step Model of Change, designed by psychologist Kurt Lewin, who was regarded as the intellectual father of organizational change (Burnes 2020).

Lewin's Three Step Model of Change suggests that sustainable transformations occur in three stages:

- ◆ **Unfreeze:** Accept that change is necessary, which mirrors the subconscious → conscious step.
- ◆ **Change:** Look for new ways to do things, which we find in the conscious → communicated step.
- ◆ **Refreeze:** Let the change sink in broadly and affect more people, which is what happens during the communicated → broadcast stage.

The Changing Course process works for just about any imaginable problem, from not feeling motivated at work to wanting to lose weight, from feeling unsatisfied in the place