

The Top 10 Change Hacks

**Get yourself and others
engaged in change!**



Gregg Brown

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The Top 10 Change Hacks

*Get yourself and others
engaged in change!*

GREGG BROWN

Thank you for being interested in my work.
With my deepest appreciation, this book is
dedicated to YOU!

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To all the people in my life who have influenced
my thinking on change.

Personally, and professionally.

My deepest thanks.

Introduction

Over the last 30 years of working with diverse groups of people in many different environments, I've discovered that there is one thing we have in common in order to thrive: the power to break through limitations and create positive change in our world.

As Rumi, the 13th-century Sufi poet and mystic put it, “Out beyond ideas of wrongdoing and right doing there is a field. I'll meet you there.”

This quote perfectly summarizes my philosophy to lead change and build resilience. If you want to help or coach change, you must meet in the field Rumi refers to. This involves suspending judgment about what you feel is right or wrong about the change and developing a strategy to bring skeptical

team members on board. (This is different than discernment, which I will explain later.)

If you do the above, you will get into the change mindset, which involves anticipating and seizing the opportunity that change provides.

As leaders, we know that organizational change cannot be executed successfully without the support of our team. This means that we have to see the change from their viewpoints and show them how to overcome the issues – both positive and negative.

The questions on the following pages arise in my speaking engagements. I hope you enjoy the conversational style of this book, gain some new insights and refresh your memory of material you know.

CHANGE HACK #1

What is the first thing I need to do to create change in myself and others?

You can't be open to change unless you're in the right mindset. It's not about the changes, it's about our reaction to them. Our mindset triggers our skill sets and practices. And when we're dealing with change, you only have two options: to be open or closed. You can be open at 10%, 20%, or 30%, but if you're closed, that's 100%.

If you're trying to be open to new ideas, new experiences and new information, you don't want to be doing the exploration (creative thinking) at exactly

the same time as you're doing the decision-making (critical thinking).

Now critical thinking doesn't mean being 'critical' or the 'devil's advocate'. Critical thinking means determining which ideas to take action on.

Why don't we do creative and critical thinking at the same time?

Because what happens is you will have good ideas coming up, and then they're being shut down at the same time. Think of a ping-pong ball being batted back and forth across the table. You don't want that in a meeting.

What you want to do is *idea exploration* or *creative thinking*. You want to allow the ideas to collide for innovation to occur. You want ideas to collide, because that's when one plus one can equal five. And that's when creative thinking and exploration happens. Then you decide which ideas to act on!

CHANGE HACK #2

Why do I have to suspend judgment for change to occur?

We've all been in situations where we want to create change, whether it's personal, such as losing weight, or at work, where we must get on board with the new direction of our organization. Sometimes we're afraid to say what our issues or concerns are, because we're afraid we will be judged. And by judged, I mean being told we're wrong, or that we need to get on board with a new direction, or frankly that our concerns don't matter.

One thing I realized in working with various people and groups that are involved in change regularly, or with professions that change quickly, is that we must create a space of non-judgment.

As mentioned earlier, Rumi, the 12th century poet says, “Beyond ideas of wrongdoing and right doing there is a field, I'll meet you there.”

It's in this field I believe change occurs. Suspending judgment doesn't mean you give up discernment, knowing what is right and wrong, or the correct way to do something. You still need to adapt to change, to create that space of non-judgment, so you can have the conversations to guide someone to change.

To do that, it is necessary to understand individual differences. Use your gut instinct to find something that works for you. And ultimately, if you really want to create change with or for someone else, you have to get into their mindset, to think about what their challenges and issues are. It's not about labeling them right or wrong. Once you get into their mindset, you will wind up asking them a lot more questions and listening to their responses.

I often recommend to think about how your change targets would react. Research and ask questions. Or use the Internet!

A non-judgmental mindset is the key to leading change and being resilient.

CHANGE HACK #3

How do I expand people's thinking to embrace innovation and change?

We talked about being open to new ideas, but it's hard to be open when we're under pressure. We all know they will ask more of us at work. And if you are retiring, you may be asked to take on more at home!

We're all aging at the same time. Aging doesn't necessarily mean we have less energy. What it means is our lives become more complex, and our energy gets dispersed across those complexities. By energy, I mean physical, mental, emotional energy that we give to tasks or work into our lives. If more is asked of us, it doesn't mean we have more energy to give in to all these changes. What it means is that we have

to become more *efficient* with how we handle those changes—more efficient in how we use our energy.

When we get stuck during change, it costs us useful energy. It will happen sometimes!

How do we get people unstuck from a change so they can embrace innovation? One technique is to manage expectations realistically and rigorously. Don't set people up for a goal that's not within reach.

When I was a kid, my mom had a picture on the fridge she used to motivate her to lose weight. My mom was a tall woman and what she would call “big boned.”

She had a Farrah Fawcett photo from the original Charlie's Angels on the fridge! And she said, “I will look like that one day.” And I thought, “No, it’s not possible – no one can look like that but Farrah!” She had this unrealistic goal set for herself. Every time my mom went to eat, she'd look at this and think, “I will never look like this woman in a skimpy little red bathing suit.” This discouraged her and she didn’t stick to her plan! However, when she put a photo of herself 10 years before at the weight she wanted to be at – that motivated her!

When leading, managing, or responding to change, we have to be realistic. We need to be honest, and to know we don't have all the answers. And whenever changes happen, we have to let people know around us what's going on as much as possible.

That's the first part.

Another way to expand peoples' thinking when we encounter disruptive ideas or ones that we don't agree with is to stay open to the new ideas instead of shutting them down. One technique to stay open that has worked for me (as I can easily shut down ideas I disagree with or find disruptive!) I ask, what's good about this idea? This goes back to the concept of allowing ideas to come out and collide. Even if I think it's not a great idea, it might not be 100% perfect. Perhaps there's 25% of that that we can use. No one brings up ideas they think aren't useful. That's how companies grow and expand. If we're not open to innovative ideas, nothing new would ever be developed.

And last, to help people embrace innovation, *reduce uncertainty as much as possible*. When we feel out of control or uncertain, it's often difficult for us to take action. Sometimes, we need to tell people we

don't have all the answers. That's not always going to happen, but it's important to be honest if it does.

Another method to help reduce uncertainty, is to find evidence and proof of something similar that has happened successfully.

When you find proof, it removes doubt. When you remove doubt, it gives people courage to face the change.

CHANGE HACK #4

Is positive thinking enough to create change?

No! There are so many books and courses that say if you think positively a lot of magic stuff will happen. I don't believe that. You can think positively about getting a job all you want, but unless you combine that with action, nothing will happen.

It's about taking a positive approach for creating change.

At work, we often hear people say, "if we think positively, we can get through this." But that change might be an increase in workload to someone else. And no amount of positive thinking will get them engaged in that change.

Sometimes it's not appropriate to stand around thinking positively. If your house burns down, and you're standing there saying, "Oh, my gosh, I can't believe it. I lost all my stuff, my iPhone, my pictures and my computer." It doesn't help to have a neighbor come up to you and say, "Hey, just think positively, you will get a new kitchen in six months."

Timing is everything. Most likely, you'll tell your well-meaning neighbor to go back to their own house (in probably a not-so-nice way!), because it's not time for you to think about the kitchen. Maybe six months from now, sure. But right now, you're thinking, "What am I going to wear tomorrow? What about my kids?" And all the other immediate details. It's about timing.

That challenge is the media message. We often hear from TV commercials and other people if you talk about the benefits, others will get on board with the change. That's not true.

You want to ask instead: What's the impact? What are your concerns? The impact doesn't have to be negative. An example is buying a new house. You could have two bathrooms, a two-car garage,

a dishwasher! Those are the benefits. The impact is having higher mortgage payments.

There is value in positive statements or affirmations, but to be truly effective you have to combine with action. If I'm unemployed, I can sit at my desk, affirming, "I'm employed, I'm employed, I see myself in a great job." But your subconscious mind will say, "No, you're not. You need to get a job." A better statement to use is "I am in the process of getting a new job."

You can visualize the outcome, you can do all the additional mindset work, but you still have to take the action and realize that you're in process.

CHANGE HACK #5

What is False Positivity?

False positivity refers to a time when bad things happen, and you try to put a positive spin on it.

Politicians do this all the time, but people aren't ignorant! And when you put a positive spin on a bad situation, if you're a leader or an individual contributor, people think you're out of touch with reality. That's why when politicians acknowledge they have done something wrong, we tend to have more trust in them (not always of course!).

The other issue with false positivity is that it causes you to lose credibility. If something bad is happening at work, yes, you want to take a positive

approach, but putting a positive spin just makes you look insincere.

Here are five tips to help you develop a positive approach.

1. Know the Difference Between a Positive Spin and a Positive Approach

When something bad happens, you acknowledge the bad. And sometimes, you need to stick with the negativity for a while. As mentioned above, if you lose your job, you're probably not going to go job hunting that same day. Sometimes you need to be angry for a while (just don't stay angry too long!), then take positive action. Timing is everything.

2. Ground Yourself in Facts While Balancing the Emotional Aspect

When bad things happen, it's wise to ground yourself in the facts while balancing the emotional aspect of it. Sometimes, people get lost in the emotional impact. Look at what the data says. What is the evidence? Is that a possibility?

3. Be Prepared to Be Unprepared

One trick I've learned and used over the years is to be prepared to be unprepared. Sometimes you do not know what will happen. Even if you have all the academic credentials and all the leadership experience under your belt, sometimes you have to realize you will not know what to do. That's about managing uncertainty and being willing to face the unknown.

As an example, let's say you're going through a merger or acquisition. You might have the change management in place, the purchase plan, and other requirements. You want to manage everything as best as you can, but until it happens, you will not know how it will work out. Be prepared to be unprepared!

Another example is when a family member dies. Having worked in a hospital, I know what goes on during the death and dying process. When my mom died, I knew that I would be unprepared for what it really was like, and I was. I needed to be prepared to be unprepared and to have that space of non-judgment as I went through that change. That's for any big change in someone's life. Be prepared to be unprepared. Get comfortable with ambiguity.

4. Don't Label

Separate the action from the person. Don't label a co-worker as good or bad. It goes back to that space of non-judgment. Someone's not necessarily *bad* because they don't know how to do something. A coworker isn't *bad* because they show up late at work. Their action or behavior might need to change. It's important to focus on the action and not label people.

5. Focus on Daily Interactions

If you're a leader, people will not quit their job because you don't know how to balance a budget or write a good report. People will judge you based on the way you interact with others.

CHANGE HACK #6

I like change, but I'm having difficulty. Why would that be? What do I do?

The first thing to know is, we're all good at handling change that we agree with – change that's your idea, change that comes from someone you like, or change that will not have a negative impact on you. Additionally, if you initiate change at work, you're already on board with the idea, or you wouldn't be going down that path.

We all have a different response when change is imposed upon us, the change comes from someone we don't like, or a change we disagree with.

If you're let go from your job, you have a very different response than if you quit your job. The

situation is the same, you're leaving your job, but your response will be different.

Use perspective to your advantage. Look to your past and look for how you've handled changes in the past. What is the knowledge, skills, or abilities that helped you do that change? Apply those to the current situation.

If you've been in the workforce for 40 years, and there's new technology coming down the pipe, and you're wondering how to learn to use it, I can tell you with certainty that if you were a manager 30 years ago, you can learn this technology. How you managed data back then and the skill set you used is similar to the way you manage data today. The only difference will be the tools. In this case technology.

If I was working with a client who was a bank manager 20 years ago and they were 'stuck' learning a new technology today, I would ask questions like this: How did you do learn the technology? What skills did you develop? The person might say, "I determined what my priorities were; I had a plan in place. I knew who to call when I didn't have all the answers. I took calculated risks."

Those are the skills and talents used in the past.

I'd tell you to apply those skills to learning technology, as they are transferable, and I know you could do it! Technology changes and our world is different. But the fundamentals are essentially the same.

When we ask for help, when we acknowledge what we don't know, we humble ourselves, our lives become better. And whatever stress we're dealing with diminishes a bit!

Here's one more example of identifying transferable skills: If you can plan a fun barbecue or birthday party, you can manage a project at work. The only thing you might need is some new terminology and processes.

Years ago, I taught project management to nurses. Sounds like a stretch, right? Not really!

When nurses deal with patients, they assess, plan, develop an intervention and evaluate; that is the nursing process. It's almost the same as the project management process. To work with the nurses, I had to create alignment between their current skills and the new content they were learning. (Yes, I was lucky with that one!)

Another reason you may find it difficult to respond to certain changes is that when we're under

pressure, we're not thinking clearly. We don't want help, yet we need it.

I was working with one of my colleagues who was stuffing envelopes for assessments we were sending out. Other people went over to help her. She said, "No, no, no, I can do it myself. You don't know how to stuff envelopes the way I do." Because she's under pressure, she's not thinking clearly, like all of us in a similar situation. When you create perspective and take a step back, you think, "Oh, how stupid of me, of course you can stuff envelopes." But under pressure you lose that ability.

CHANGE HACK #7

How do I deal with a negative change?

As we said earlier, not all change is positive. And you don't want to put a positive spin on a bad situation. One of the most important things I share with people is, *you* must embrace the negativity and step into it.

And you might not be able to solve the problems that are happening. Many of us are good problem solvers, but sometimes we can't solve everyone else's problems!

I worked in an office when they moved office locations. The team I was working with were a little upset (legitimately) about the office move for many reasons, such as a longer commute time. One tool

I've found useful is to take the first 10-15 minutes of your meetings and get all the negative crap on the table. Even if we can't change it, we can still talk about it. Doing so allows us to process the change then move on.

Another technique is to be open and honest about what will change. We can help people manage uncertainty by telling them what will stay the same and what will change.

CHANGE HACK #8

How do I transform a change resistant mindset?

There are several things we can do. First off, look for evidence. This is especially in the case when people say they cannot do something. Look for proof that something like this has happened in the past. This helps remove doubt. When we remove doubt, it allows us to step into the change. Anytime you can find precedents, evidence or proof that something's been successful, it can help you break through a change resistant mindset.

Another technique is to celebrate the closeness or alignment with what you want to have happen. When most people are trying out a new behavior or

a task, and they don't get it 100% right, you celebrate the closeness of their efforts.

As an example, many years ago, our company came in second on a complex training proposal that we had bid for. The organization that won the bid was a huge international corporation. We were only a “little” national one. Even though we came in a second place, I thought that was a great accomplishment.

I could have said, “Oh, we aren’t good enough. We didn’t get the business.” And some people did that. But not us. I felt it was more important to celebrate the closeness of the win, to stay in the celebration of that and move on to the next sale. (Of course, we debriefed about why we didn’t get it!)

I wanted people to know it wasn’t appropriate for everybody to be discouraged. I thought it was great. We came in second place. That’s not putting a positive spin on a bad situation. It IS saying: We didn’t get it, and that’s too bad. It amazed me that we came so close.

And there’s no way we could have won because it was an international organization. We couldn’t offer

what they did. But that we came in second out of 30 people, I thought our team did something right!

That approach helps people move through change. It also includes positive feedback on what you can do to improve next time.

Remember, change happens in the mind of the other person!

CHANGE HACK #9

How do I take a risk and step into the new?

This is what we spoke about earlier, that it's okay to explore options without committing. Often people will say to me that they want to apply for a new job. Then they get afraid that they actually might get it! My response? "You're already talking yourself out of it. You haven't even submitted an application!"

A better response for that individual is: Let's explore the options. You can always say no if they offer the job to you. You don't have to say yes; you have options. You can explore options without committing.

If you want to buy a house, but don't have all the

money yet, you have a few options. You can look at a place without committing to buy it, you can step into it, you can try it out, just go house hunting one day, get the options out there.

It will help you determine what you do and don't like. That's important!

Another option when you want to manage risks is to look at what might go wrong. And if it goes wrong, what are you going to do about it? You also want to determine the likelihood of something happening before you back away from it.

People often say, "Oh, my gosh, what if this happens? What if that happens?"

Examine what's the likelihood of that happening? Low, medium, or high? If it's high, then let's talk about it. That's about grounding your experience in facts. You'll get down to the data.

Another good technique to risk and step into the new is to write down a list of what could go wrong, and how you will *prevent* it from happening. Then if it *does* happen, what is your contingency plan?

CHANGE HACK #10

How do I take action and make change stick?

For many people, they think that reading a book and taking courses will help them change. And yes, books and courses can give you information and motivation. Yet wisdom without action is meaningless. Taking action is the only way to make change stick.

Remember the Indiana Jones movie where he has to step across the cavern, and he has to trust that a bridge is there that he cannot see? He doesn't know what to do, but he puts his foot down and the bridge appears.

I'm not saying to do that all the time, and definitely not on a cliff! Sometimes you have to take a

risk without knowing all the answers. And you have to take small, simple, manageable steps, depending on how critical the issue is. If something's critical, and you want to avoid risk, you want to make sure you know you've got all angles well thought out.

In most cases, any step forward is better than no action at all. It's about timing, too. Use your professional judgment.

If you're sitting at your desk wanting a promotion, your computer will not manifest that promotion magically! Talk to people. Network. List your accomplishments. Develop a strategy. With all the people I've coached and worked with over the years, I've noticed that when they take just a little deliberate action, the path unfolds before them, often in unforeseen ways.

To make change stick, you also need support, which could involve training, coaching, one-on-one sessions, or other types of support structures. You need to look at all the potential barriers you need to face and how you will get through them.

If you're quitting smoking, you will want to think through what will happen if you go to somewhere for a glass of wine or a beer. What will you do?

Thinking through these scenarios in advance will prepare you to handle them.

The second aspect is accountability. If I don't do "x" what will happen?

If there is a form put into the system at work to get paid, you have to learn how to use it. The old one might exist for a while, but eventually it will be taken away. If you don't fill in the new form, you don't get paid.

From a leadership perspective, sometimes that means having difficult conversations, ones that might lead to an improvement in performance. We cannot be afraid of the accountability, with ourselves or others. The accountability ensures we follow through and get results.

Final Note

I know with the rapid amount of change we experience, that change can be overwhelming. Practice these various hacks. It's the small, simple manageable steps that will make the biggest difference in your career. I know you can do it!

Thanks!

Thank you for reading this short book on The Top 10 Change Hacks! I hope you've found the tips and techniques useful. If you have any questions about them, reach out to me at Gregg@GreggBrown.ca Make sure you sign up for my monthly change resources and tips at www.GreggBrown.ca Until next time!

Testimonials

Game Changer

“Gregg has been a game changer for our organization. His ability to connect with any audience and at all levels combined with his knowledge of our business and culture are a force multiplier. We seek him out any chance we get.”

—**HILARY QUOSAI, VP CLIENT & PARTICIPANT SERVICES, JOHN HANCOCK FINANCIAL**

Engaging and Thought Provoking

“Our conference guests were engaged from the moment Gregg took the stage with his combination of knowledge, meaningful real-life experiences and some fun audience participation. Gregg’s high energy presentation and thought provoking message were perfect. He received rave reviews.”

—**THOMAS TICKNOR, CHIEF OPERATING OFFICER, QAI GLOBAL INSTITUTE**

An Excellent Speaker

“Gregg is an extremely engaging and entertaining speaker. His thoughts on how to develop our resilience intelligence are relevant to all of us as we deal with more and more complexity in our day to day jobs. We wouldn’t hesitate to have him back!”

—**KRISTEN CARSCALLEN, PARTNER, CHIEF HUMAN RESOURCE OFFICER, KPMG**

Entertaining and Informative

“Gregg’s keynote at our recent company event was fantastic. It was informative, eye-opening and utterly entertaining. Our team were very engaged and all spoke so highly of the presentation. Gregg really put effort into ensuring he knew about our company’s operations and the event rationale and purpose. We definitely recommend Gregg.”

—**JUDY HARKAI, MANAGING DIRECTOR, CAPREIT INVESTMENT TRUST**

Infectious Energy and Strong Takeaways

“Gregg is a true pro! His attention to detail in the development of content, keynote promotional language and onsite logistical details is impeccable. He put great effort into connecting with the audience. His energy is infectious and his insight provided strong takeaways and a-ha moments for conference delegates.”

**—NICOLE ETHERINGTON, EVENT MANAGER –
GLOBAL EXHIBITIONS, INFORMA**

About the author



Gregg has been helping leaders and teams seize opportunities, create positive change and be more effective in the workplace for over 25 years. He is the best-selling author of *Ready, Set, Change AGAIN!*

Gregg was part of the ground-breaking team that opened the first wave of Starbucks stores in Canada. With a strong interest in creating behavioral change, he then worked with one of the most challenging

– and rewarding – groups: inmates in federal penitentiaries.

Now, as a seasoned speaker, facilitator and consultant, he assists numerous Fortune 500 companies, as well as public and not-for-profit organizations. To give back to the community, he mentors young entrepreneurs, many of whom run busy, diversified businesses.

Gregg is featured nationally and internationally in media such as Entrepreneur, Thrive Global and a wide range of HR publications. Gregg is called “The Fixer” by CKNW-I Heart Radio, and has shared his expertise on Global News and CTV’s The Social. More on Gregg, his clients, testimonials and speaking videos can be found here: www.GreggBrown.ca.

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“Out beyond ideas of wrongdoing and right doing there is a field. I’ll meet you there.” — RUMI

This quote perfectly summarizes my philosophy to lead change and build resilience. If you want to help or coach change, you must meet in the field Rumi refers to. This involves suspending judgment about what you feel is right or wrong about the change and developing a strategy to bring skeptical team members on board.

If you do that, you will get into the change mindset, which involves anticipating and seizing the opportunity that change provides.

The questions in this small book arise in my speaking engagements. I hope you enjoy the conversational style, gain some new insights, and refresh your memory of material you know.

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