

*How to improve your change fitness
and thrive in life.*

STRETCH FOR CHANGE



Gustavo Razzetti

Chapter 1

UNSTUCK — Shake Up Your Current Mindset!

Our mindset is the lens through which we perceive reality. When we feel stuck, everything around us appears to be stuck, too. As a result, we discern fewer (or no) options and we feel out of control. Negative emotions soon overwhelm us, we become increasingly frustrated, and consequently we disengage. That's when apathy and fear consume our lives, and we become immobilized in this vicious cycle. The question is, how can we get out of it and regain control of our actions?

Moving Beyond Apathy and Fear

To embrace a new mindset, first we need to let go of older ones. Toxic behaviors need to be purged; our brains and predispositions toward achieving goals need to be rewired and reset. And that includes, fundamentally, letting go of two of the most harmful emotions: apathy and fear.

For a Changemaker, Everything Is His Job

I've always hated job descriptions. I believe that our role as leaders is to inspire those around us to be purpose-driven, rather than to provide a list of tasks they need to complete. Unfortunately, many organizations

continue this tradition of prescribing job descriptions for their employees. What they fail to realize is that in their pursuit of standardized clarity, most of the time they end up limiting their biggest asset: their human capital.

I remember once, at a previous job, I observed a small leak in the bathroom, which resulted in water slowly accumulating on the ceramic floor. Considering that the chances of significant damage were small, I decided to say nothing. I ran an experiment instead: I simply waited to see how long it would take for someone to report the leak. After two hours or so, when the water started running out of the bathroom and onto the carpet, I finally notified our floor assistant. Surprisingly enough, no one had told her about the incident. She immediately called the building maintenance that promptly took care of the leak.

Why am I sharing this story? Because it reveals a good lesson. Within those two hours, at least 20 to 30 employees must have noticed what I saw, yet no one notified the floor assistant so that she could remedy it. Why? Well, unless they were all running the same experiment that I was, they simply didn't care. Or, to put it more accurately, they thought that it wasn't their job—reporting a leak in the men's room fell beyond their “established” responsibility.

Most people live within a “Stuck” Mindset without realizing it. As demonstrated in this anecdote, they often observe “leaks” or other problems, and, at best, register that something has gone wrong. But very few actually do something about it. This illuminates the difference between being a passive observer and a changemaker. While regular folks normally complain about what's not working, changemakers jump into action. They don't expect the mythological “someone else” to solve things for them; they take ownership and make the change happen—especially when things are beyond their “established” job

descriptions. When you fully embrace a “Change” Mindset, you cease being apathetic. If something needs to be fixed, you jump into action.

Stop Saying “That’s Not My Job”

Take, for example, these two very different experiences I had on the Stanford University campus. After a three-month innovation program, on my last day, I made my way to the place that meant the most to me: Coupa, the best coffee shop on campus. At first, I thought I was craving a sip of espresso. As I got closer, however, I realized I was looking for something else: I wanted to express my gratitude to one of their staff members. This woman, a barista, is a great example of *working with purpose*. Every time I visited Coupa, whether for lunch or an espresso, she was very much aware of who I was. Not only did she remember my name, but she also understood the kind of experience I was looking for, when and how I wanted to enjoy my espresso. At one point, the building right in front of the café was being demolished. It was so dusty that they were only offering service to go. By then, she had realized how much I enjoyed coffee in a ceramic cup. (Hey, it’s my Italian genes.) She went above and beyond her role to make it happen, without me even requesting it. She expressed surprise when I gave her a nice tip on that last day, yet deep down, she recognized what it meant.

The second story is quite a bit different. The previous night, a couple of colleagues and I were enjoying some delicious food and wine at a fancy restaurant in Palo Alto. We were sitting at the bar and asked the bartender—several times—for some water. He was probably too busy; in any case, the truth is that the water never came. After waiting for a while, and with the bartender gone, we asked a waiter, who was right in front of us filling a couple of jugs with water, for help. His response was all-too clear: “Sorry, that’s not my job. Ask your waiter.” And he left. We were still thirsty, and now also disappointed.

These two stories are clear examples of starkly opposite mindsets: the “Change” versus the “Stuck” one. You can’t blame the employees—their behaviors reflect the way they were trained. Ask yourself: What kind of behaviors are you developing within your team? Are you inspiring them to pursue a bigger purpose? Or are you simply telling them what they should (and should not) do? Think about it. As for me, I definitely don’t want to hear: “Sorry, that’s not my job.”

Taming the Beast of Fear

We all feel pain and have a learned apprehension of it. We experience fear on a regular basis—sometimes more consciously than others—and that’s OK. That’s part of being human and being alive.

We are afraid of making mistakes, of being rejected, and, most importantly, losing those we love; that’s all part and parcel of our human nature. Fear is a chain reaction in the brain that starts with a stressful stimulus—the fear of what we don’t know.¹ The critical question is, how do we deal with that reality?

Think of fear as a dangerous beast, whether you first visualized it like that or not. Every time you come face to face with fear, your mind tells you to either panic and become agitated in preparation for a battle or to run away. That “fight or flight” mode is your body’s primitive and automatic response to a perceived attack or threat. And that’s OK. But you have to learn to tame it or fear could take over your life.

If you panic and get caught up with fear, you become the prey. If you get stuck, overwhelmed by your emotions, you lose your ability to act with agency. After something “bad” happens, many people feel so sad that they become stuck. But there’s a huge difference between feeling hurt but acting with resilience and getting stuck in an agitated state and consequently becoming inert. And if you wish to overcome a setback,

your pain cannot become an excuse or an impediment to your long-term goals.

On the other hand, **if you run away from your fears, you are just pretending to escape the beast.** You might not be the prey but you are not living freely either, worried that you soon may become one. There are countless ways to run. You can check your phone screen to escape from your worries. Or binge watch one show after another to keep your mind busy and distracted. That doesn't mean that the beast is not imminent, waiting to ambush.

Your Mind Is Not Afraid

“Courage is not the absence of fear, but the triumph over it. The brave man is not he who does not feel afraid, but he who conquers that fear.”

—Nelson Mandela

Failure. Rejection. Being wrong. All these emotional experiences are connected to our primal fears. When we try to avoid getting hurt, we become paralyzed. We don't act. Thus letting the beast consume our minds and freedom.

We all need to learn how to live with and become masters of fear: domesticate the beast.

For me, it all starts by understanding the source—and thus reducing the power—of negative thoughts.

Avoid anticipation—worrying about what *might* happen. **Avoid generalizations**—thinking that because one thing went wrong, *everything will go wrong*. **Avoid labels**—putting ourselves in a box that we can't get out of. **Avoid obsession about others' acceptance**—limiting our potential to be unique, to be who we want to become.

Zen Buddhism has a term, *Mushin*, which literally means “the mind without mind,”² commonly referred to as “the state of no-mindedness.”

This state of pure mental clarity is not so much an empty shell but rather one that's unrestrained and fully present. Empty of worries, distractions and preoccupations, it is a mind that is free of fear.

Though this state of mind takes years and years of practice to develop and master, becoming more aware of my feelings and reactions has helped me a lot. It is, ultimately, how I deal with and channel fear into a productive energy.

I can hardly say that I have mastered the art of acquiring a “mind without a mind.” But this state is one that I've experienced ephemeral-ly, on many occasions, which has allowed me to intuit how liberating it can be.

The beast of fear can either prey upon me or transform itself into my greatest motivator. Which one it becomes is up to me. Instead of adopting a “fight or flight” reaction, I've learned to turn my fears into an ally, into motivation to grow as a person. I want to encourage you to do the same.

In short: stop being paralyzed. Taming the beast of fear will help you build a “Change” Mindset.



Stretch Exercise: Use Fear as Motivation

Absence of fear: When you can be present, facing your internal beast, and not feeling afraid.

As should be clear by now, I'm not immune myself. That's why I've developed an approach that has proven to be effective when I panic (the telltale sign of the “fight” response) or try to run away (“flight”)

from the beast. It's a simple three-step process with some foundational questions. Put it in practice. Tweak it. Make it your own.

1. Understand the beast:

- What worries you? Really.
- What exactly are you afraid of?
- Why? Why? Why? (yes, three times)

2. Move beyond life or death consequences:

- What's the worst thing that can happen? Be objective.
- How will those consequences affect you? Make a list.
- Has something similar happened in the past? Well, you survived... How did it feel?

3. Accept living with the beast:

- How might I let this fear go?
- How might I allow this fear to be here?
- How might I welcome my fears every time they show up?

Resilience in the face of fear: When you've conquered your fears or at least begun to tame your beasts.

Hopefully, with a little practice, you will start to feel more open to experiment with a new mindset.

The Importance of Building a Strong Foundation

It's not just your mindset that needs to stretch for change. You need to build a strong foundation: to thrive in changing environs you need to build endurance and the capacity for resilience. Passion without effort is a waste of love. And effort without preparation is the perfect recipe for frustration.

Be curious and make time for exploration. Be smart and take care of yourself. Have fun. Exercise. Relax. Sleep restfully. When your resilience is put to test, your body and mind will thank you.

A Break Is a Double-Edged Sword

We all look forward to taking a break, to having quality time to rejuvenate and recover. But then, once the period of rest is over, we start to realize how completely unplugging from our good habits and behaviors might damage our chances to succeed in both the short- and long-term.

I see this a lot. Those who tend to over-work tend to over-disconnect during breaks or holidays. *To solve the work-rest tension, balance is the best solution.* Instead of jumping from one extreme to the other, remember that life is not a sprint but a marathon. Stamina is good for reaching intermediary benchmarks but endurance is what counts the most for the long run.

Working too much ruins our productivity: our ability to do our best work gets destroyed by stress, lack of objectivity or simply feeling tired. On the other hand, if you neglect positive behaviors, you are putting your long-term performance at risk. It can take you weeks, or even months, to recuperate your prior level of performance.

Breaking Your Cadence Can Ruin Your Potential

I'm an avid road biker. But when winter arrives in Chicago, it becomes almost impossible to bike outside. I must either shorten my rides or spend more hours biking indoors to make sure I stay fit. Either way, even though I push myself, my overall performance drops during the wintertime. When I literally get back on the road, it takes me some time to get back to my best performance.

Like regular exercise, good sleep and continuous learning are critical to refuel our bodies and minds. But, most important, they are indispensable for building a strong performance foundation. Being conscious of

your cadence is critical if you want to be a successful changemaker. **Consistent cadence increases our chances to perform well in longer rides.**

Regular exercise is not only good for your body; it also has a positive impact on your brain. It decreases stress, helping you to build a more positive attitude towards life. And what's more important, regular exercise also improves memory and thinking skills.³

You might slow down, but don't give up exercising during the break. Most people's bodies start losing strength after about two and a half weeks of inactivity, according to Molly Galbraith, co-founder of Girls Go Strong.⁴ Though the strength and flexibility of elite athletes is less affected, even they lose a significant amount of slow-twitch muscle fibers that they worked so hard to build.⁵

Work Hard and Sleep Tight

Sleep is one of the most important activities you can do. Even though it feels as though you are not doing anything, sleep plays an important role in your health. It's not just good for recovery of general equilibrium but also helps to repair our heart and blood vessels. What's more, a good night's sleep replenishes our creativity. Powerful research shows how we might be at our most creative when we are still emerging from the realm of sleep.⁶

During holidays, vacation or weekends, stick to your wake-up time like glue. Our internal clock is mostly influenced by our wake-up time. Sleeping 90 minutes past our regular wake-up time will affect our body clock, according to Dr. Helene Emsellem, director of the Center for Sleep and Wake Disorders in Chevy Chase.⁷ Thus, getting extra sleep really doesn't provide any benefits.

In addition to increased creativity and a consistent body clock, there are many other benefits from waking up early in the morning, including

improved mental health and having more time for exercise. I'm not an early riser so I'm not here to convince you to wake at 5 o'clock in the morning. My point is the importance of valuing quality sleep and not oversleeping so your internal clock doesn't become maladjusted.

If you get to sleep later than normal, don't overcompensate by waking up too late. That won't help. It's better to have a power nap or go to bed earlier the previous night. If you want to be energized, sleep well. And the rule that counts most is sticking to your wake-up time.

Never Stop Learning

“Learning without reflection is a waste, reflection without learning is dangerous.”—Confucius

We all look forward to our holiday break, but once it's over, we feel guilty and find ourselves wanting to recover from the effects of “downtime.” Be mindful and aim for balance. **As with exercise, giving our mind a complete break can have a devastating effect.**

Malcolm Gladwell's book *Outliers* describes the negative impact that summer breaks can have on children's learning, especially among those from lower income households.⁸ When they are not in school, no one is overseeing their education or encouraging them to continue reading. If kids cannot take inspirational vacations, join clubs or play educational games, their break accrues significant disadvantages.

A break is a perfect time to unwind but is also an ideal opportunity to work on projects that we otherwise never make time for. As an example, I've been procrastinating with my KitchenThief recipe website for years. Last year's holiday break turned into the perfect occasion for me to build it. I wrote and uploaded 40 recipes in just three days. I knew nothing about coding, so I took advantage of the break as a great opportunity to learn a new skill and to experiment.

With fewer distractions and most people busy doing nothing, vacation time can become a fortuitous occasion for deep focus work.

Taking a well-chosen pause is indispensable to refresh your mind and body. However, completely disconnecting from everything and becoming stagnant can corrode your overall performance.

Chapter 2

OPEN - UP — From a “Stuck” to a “Change” Mindset

Everything Changes When You See “Change” As a Verb

I’m not just playing with words here. The way we talk, the words we use define our relationships with things. In this case with change, which, no pun intended, happens to be a very volatile word.

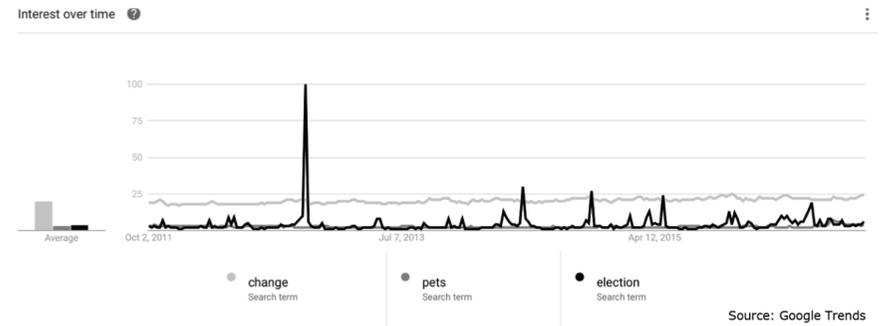
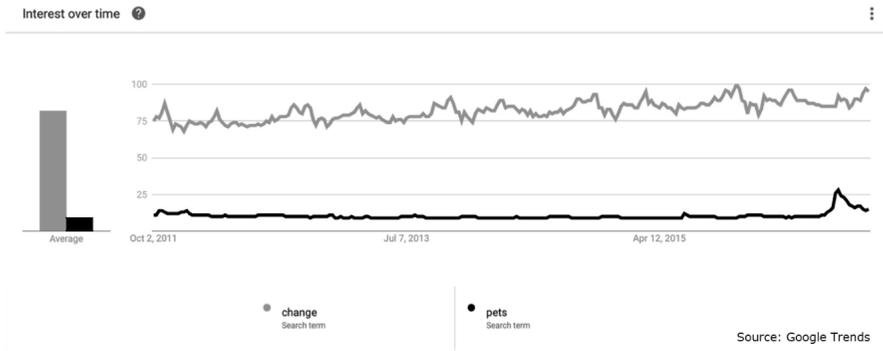
Ask people how they feel about change and, normally, you’ll get very polarizing answers: from very exciting to frightening.

“Change” can be both a noun and a verb. My hope is not to start a grammar conversation but help you understand how rethinking the way you use words can impact your behavior.

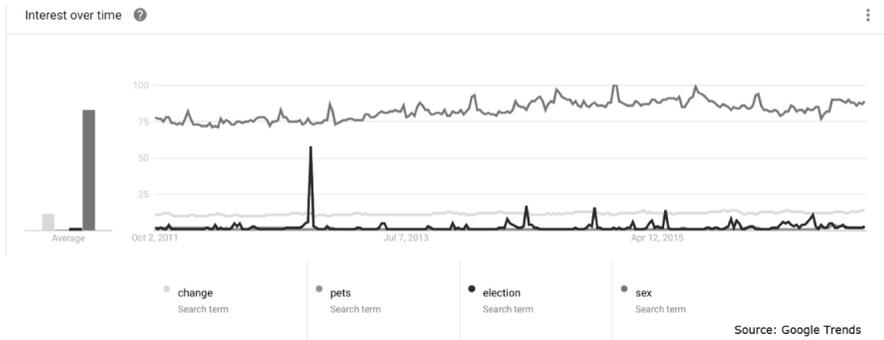
Through years of observation, I learned that **people’s relationships with change is directly linked to whether they consider “change” as a verb or as a noun.** Which is it for you?

Our Obsession with Change

Are we obsessed with change? In order to address this question, I ran some numbers on Google. We all know we have an obsession with pets: from humanizing dogs to cats playing keyboards, we have a fascination with animals on the Internet. Surprisingly enough, the amount of searches for the word “change” overshadows those for “pets.” The same thing happened with “2016 election” even though it was one of the most polemic presidential elections ever.



Clearly, it's hard to beat our obsession with change. Well, only until we add “sex” into the equation. Our obsession with change is second to none, except for sex.



Change: A Threatening Noun

As a society, we idolize changemakers. Startups, entrepreneurs, artists, and risk takers are always in the media spotlight. What intrigues me is that people love change but don't want *to change*.

When change knocks at our door, we tend to feel as threatened as a polar bear caught on a piece of melting Arctic ice. Global warming, for that same reason, scares the hell out of us. Most people think of change as something external, something that happens to them, a potential threat. *That's when we see change as a noun.*

So how do we react to this "external threat"? We try to control it or anticipate it. The weather is a perfect example. We check our apps and dress accordingly, in an anticipatory fashion. *Temperature is no longer something that we feel but something we are told.*

From election result predictions to weather forecasts or the Dow Jones, we spend millions of dollars (and hours) trying to anticipate results. And, regardless of the margin of error, many times the results are not what we expected. And I'm not concerned about the validity of predictive analytics but with our emotional reactions when "things go wrong." Instead of feeling surprised—a positive reaction—we feel betrayed by a reality that didn't please our expectations. That's because we resist change.