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The Art of Disruption

“You can never cross the ocean unless you have the courage to lose sight of the shore.”

-Christopher Columbus

When I was a boy, my dad always told me, “Never set a pattern.” While he did this to give himself an excuse as to why he would often mistakenly pull into our neighbor’s driveway instead of our own, my dad was unknowingly teaching me the concept of disruption: never set a pattern—in other words, take a different route.

In coaching terms, disruption means letting go of the comfortable patterns that are not serving us the way we need: having the same tired conversations with the same people, clinging to the same weekly routines, and going to the same life-sapping job day after day. We spend a lot of effort and time holding onto these patterns because as people, most of us crave the stability and familiarity of these structures. It taps into our ancient limbic brain and gives us a sense of safety and security.

Our ancestors may have experienced it like this: “Me see dinosaur, me run. Me see dinosaur again, me run . . .” This approach kept us from

becoming lunch. What if we disrupted *that* pattern? “Me see dinosaur, me going to say hi.” Not such a good idea. Disruption of the pattern plays into our deepest fears of survival because it means rocking a system that is proven to work. However, those innate behaviors that were once very useful may eventually become something of a handicap.

Once again, you are faced with the notion that everything has a benefit, but a cost as well. Think about some of the routines you are doing day to day, week to week. What benefits are you getting from them? What might be the cost? In other words, what are you missing by doing these things the same way over and over each time?

Disruption means being willing to let go of what you already know and the things you already do—maybe even cling to—in order to open up the space for something new and desirable to grow. In fact, when you start disrupting those patterns, you start to see new things (“I once was blind, but now I see”).

In the earlier chapters, we discussed a mental shift in perspective. In this chapter, we’re going to take a look at both the mental and physical acts of blowing up our comfortably rooted patterns and routines. We’ll also explore the concept of letting go in order to bring a new understanding to those things that are blocking our progress so we can see that while they are actually trying to help us, the cost of keeping them around is just too high.

The Art Explored

One of the most powerful tools at your disposal when creating an extraordinary life is the ability to disrupt the familiar patterns of your day-to-day.

You know how when you take the same driving route many times, pretty soon you shift into automatic pilot and you stop seeing the things around you? Everything becomes a blur as you mentally drift. You may wonder how you got where you are since you don’t even remember

the ride. When you take a new way home, you become more alert and more present, and therefore notice things again. “Look how nice the view is from here” . . . “I always wondered where this road led” . . . “I never knew there was a restaurant there.” So much lies undiscovered right in front of us.

An easy way to understand the benefits of disruption is by looking at how it applies to fitness. When exercising, there comes a point when your muscles stop growing and your fitness levels off and no longer improves. You keep working hard, doing your exercises, and trying to make health gains, but no matter how hard you try, you are stuck running in place at your current fitness level. Personal trainers call this “hitting a plateau.” According to Brian Clapp, a fitness expert based in the beautiful Berkshire Mountains of Western Massachusetts, the trick is to continuously confuse your muscles in order to keep your gains steady and to avoid hitting that plateau. This serves to disrupt your body’s efficiency with your current workout routine.

It’s not that you’re not working hard enough; it’s that doing the same thing over and over stops producing results. Look at where you may be experiencing that in your life. How about in your work? It might be time to change up the routine. See, it’s not about putting in more hours, it’s about working and/or living differently than you have been. It’s about blowing up your current routines and behaviors in order to clear room for something new: a fresh perspective, a new habit, and a new ritual. That is what leads to growth when you are stagnating and that is the principle of disruption.

In Chapter 2, I shared my experience of the storm I found myself in as a result of the economic crisis. As more and more of the conferences where I was scheduled to speak got canceled, I continued trying to generate new opportunities. Every day, faced with the specter of financial hardship, I was hitting the phones, working harder and harder to try to create something, to no avail. It came to the point where my

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wife and I finally realized that no matter how hard I was working, the opportunities just weren't there. It was time to make a change.

That was when we decided to completely disrupt our lives. We were living in a very beautiful part of Connecticut. It had everything you could dream of—a residents-only beach on the Long Island Sound with its own private island, sailing school, kayak rentals, and a golf course for residents. It had a beautiful river coursing through the middle of town, a thriving Main Street, outdoor concerts all summer, some of the best schools in the State, and on and on. It really is a premiere town.

So when we decided to leave, it was a very difficult decision. But we knew we had to disrupt our situation in order to be able to take control back of our lives. Using our knowledge of how to embrace a storm, we chose to see it as an opportunity instead of focusing on the loss it was creating. We also wanted to be sensitive to how these changes would affect our two kids, nine and six years old at the time. Knowing that we'd have to change our living situation, we redefined things as the opportunity to go on a Life Adventure as a family. And that is exactly what we did. Let the disruption begin . . .

We rented out our home and set out on our adventure. We had little stability but that also meant we had total freedom. In fact, when we were looking for the next place to move, we considered a variety of interesting places, such as Napa, Austin, the mountains and the beaches of North Carolina, Italy, Colorado . . . anything that we felt would be aligned with our core values (more on defining your core values in the next section of the book). So there we were, untethered and able to explore many possibilities.

Part of what my wife and I both feel strongly about is that a big component of our parenting responsibility is not only to keep our children safe (of course) but also to prepare them for what life throws at them. That means giving them plenty of opportunities to get out of their comfort zones and adapt to new situations. With this move, they

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were going to have to endure a storm . . . new home, new town, new school, new friends, and a new routine. We made sure that they not only felt supported, but that they got as much value from the experience as possible. We taught them, by example, that disruption makes you stronger—that when you get out of your normal routine, you grow.

So as I reflect upon the incredible growth my whole family has enjoyed in the past few years, I can attribute so much of it to our willingness to make those hard decisions and disrupt our comfortable life situation when it no longer served us. As a result, my children get to jump on the yellow bus every Tuesday after school and head to a nearby mountain for ski club. They are learning to define wealth as more than the number of zero's behind the family's bank account, to notice and appreciate when people are kind to them, to enjoy living in a natural setting that is majestic, and to know that dad will be there for most of their soccer/baseball games and school plays.

Being willing to disrupt the way things are—even though they feel safe, familiar, and comfortable—is one way to bring all that abundance and happiness into your life. Sometimes you have to get out of your life to really see your life. That's why it's important to take vacations, have down time, and slow down in order to look at the big picture.

To fully understand the concept of disruption, it helps to look at the *opposite* of disruption. The opposite of disruption can be described as:

- fear of change: doing what feels comfortable in order to avoid change
- fear of the unknown: clinging to what we know, not because we love it, but because we don't know what it will take, or what we might lose in order to change it
- inertia: doing things the way we always do them, because that's the way we always do them

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- limiting beliefs and judgment: believing that things have to be a certain way, without exploring other possibilities
- overwhelm and paralysis: not knowing how to begin and using that as an excuse to not do anything about it.

The opposite of disruption is being stuck.

For those old enough, think back to when a record used to skip. If you never had the pleasure of listening to records, think of when a CD skips. Instead of the music continuing on as it should, the same lyrical phrase or little snippet of melody plays over and over again. It's maddening! Now think about what you can do when the record or CD starts to skip.

You have a few options. First, you can turn the volume lower (which many of us do when our lives are stuck in the same groove—we deny it, ignore it, don't deal with it, and say things are "fine"). Second, we can turn the music off, get completely numb to our reality, and check out, just going through the motions. Or, third, we can move the needle on the record player (or hit the fast-forward button on the CD player). However, in order to move the needle, we need to get up from where we're sitting, physically take the needle in our hands and then carefully lift and replace it down as close to the next groove as possible. We need to make a choice and take an action.

When you think about moving the needle, so to speak, what are some of your thoughts? "Don't scratch the record," "Don't break the needle," "Is this going to skip the next time I play this," "My favorite CD is ruined," etc. Guess what—this is a perfect example of disruption. It takes intention and physical effort to "move the needle," and, in the process, many fears will surface. However, the benefits are clear: you get to listen to a new song; you become energized by a new beat; and you feel like life is moving forward, not standing still.

Now let's take the record analogy further—you don't always have to wait for the record to skip to disrupt the groove. What if you don't

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like the next song? Life is the same way. You don't have to wait to get fired, become sick, or have some other grand wakeup call to choose to move the needle—or even change the record! Disruption is about being willing to shift out of the inertia of today's routine and generate momentum toward something different and new, purely because you want to!



What Can You Disrupt?

Write down three habits, routines, or behaviors where disruption would benefit you:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

For each one, identify the key force that's kept you stuck there. Was it a fear? Inertia? Overwhelm? A belief or truth of what would happen if you did something different?

What may be the benefits of disrupting each one? What makes that important for you?

Holding on to Letting Go

At its core, the art of disruption involves letting go: letting go of fear, letting go of judgment, and letting go of control over the outcome. It involves letting go of all the blocks that are stopping you from making the changes needed in order to create the life you really want. Sounds easy right? It's not.

The first step is to develop an awareness of your fears and blocks and recognize them for what they are . . . fears and blocks. Nothing more. The next step is to begin to let go and see that on the other side is something good, rewarding, and exciting.

Just as I encouraged you in Chapter 2 to *embrace the storm*—to recognize that challenging times bring growth and to be willing to go through those challenging times rather than escape them by the shortest route—I also want you to consider the possibility of *letting go* of those blocks that are holding you back.

What is preventing you from making a change? Here's a list of some of the common things that stop people:

- “What if I fail? My family is counting on me.”
- “What if I hate the new job more than the one I already have?”
- “My boss will never let me try something new.”
- “I'm not smart or creative enough.”
- “I'm too old. I already missed that window.”
- <add yours here . . . >

Some of these blocks are related to fears, and some are related to judgments. Other blocks are related to assumed outcomes. In each case, there is a thought or belief that paralyzes you from standing up, walking over to the record player, and lifting the needle to make a change. Let's explore some of these blocks more closely.

Fear-based blocks are those things that strike terror in your heart, make your palms sweaty, or churn your stomach up full of butterflies. They focus you on the worst possible outcomes and the biggest potential losses. They shrewdly get into your head until you feel like what you fear is the absolute reality or truth of what will happen.

Blocks related to judgment are those that you create for yourself based either on how you judge yourself (“I could never do that”), how you judge others (“She is too narrow-minded to let me make a change for our family”), or how someone will judge you, which ties back to a fear (“I’ll look stupid or incompetent.”)

Another type of block may relate to your need to control an outcome. Sometimes this takes the shape of an unwillingness to let go of certainty, to make a change, and to face a result that can’t be guaranteed. For example, you would love to have a different job, but you are too worried that if you move to a new position, you might not like it after all. This block is of the variety of “better the devil you know than the devil you don’t,” and means that it is often better to deal with someone or something you are familiar with and know, even if they are not ideal, than take a risk with an unknown person, thing, or situation.

Then, there is the terrible habit we sometimes have of presuming that we know an outcome when we really don’t (“I don’t need to ask her. I already know what she’s going to say.”) We get it so set in our minds that we *know* how something will turn out (negatively, of course), that we limit ourselves from taking action.

What’s the Truth?

That last block makes me think of a client of mine, Steve, who worked as a VP for a popular sports magazine. He worked in the communications department, and he had a wonderful relationship with the CEO of the company. Steve knew he was doing well there, but at that time the

company was going through some layoffs. After reaching out to the CEO a few times to see what was going on, he still hadn't received any return emails or calls from him and he began to worry.

At our next coaching session, Steve still hadn't heard from the CEO. He expressed how odd it was that he didn't hear back from him and it had to mean he was getting canned. As a result of this "truth," Steve was angry and disheartened and had started to slack off a little at work, coming ill-prepared to a meeting and doing a shoddy job on a presentation. When I probed these behaviors, he replied, "What's the point? I'm getting fired so why should I give them my best efforts? It won't mean anything anyway."

It was then that I employed an old technique used for creating possibilities where it seemed none existed. I started by turning his belief that he was going to be fired from being the only outcome to being simply one possibility. "Okay, that's one possibility," I told him. Then I had Steve come up with about ten different creative scenarios as to why the CEO might not have returned his calls. Some of the more interesting examples he came up with were that the CEO's phone was broken, he was getting his molars removed and couldn't speak, or his dog died and he just couldn't face him. On we went, making up all kinds of reasons (funny, sad, dramatic, mean, unlikely, etc.) for why he hadn't heard back from him.

Then I asked Steve what the craziest reason in the world might have been. He chuckled sarcastically and said, "Oh, because I'm getting a promotion and a raise and he felt awkward telling me this in the middle of these layoffs."

After giving my client a minute or two to reflect on his varied responses, I asked him which one of them was the real reason. He still believed he was getting fired, but he realized that he had created that possibility just as he had made up all of those other crazy scenarios. We talked more about what he could do to ensure that his work, and

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ultimately his reputation, didn't suffer. We also prepared contingencies in the event he did get laid off. As we hung up the phone to end our coaching session, he was armed with a newly empowered perspective and an action plan.

A few days later he called me back and said, "I was right!" I waited for the punch line. Nothing. "Go on . . ." I pleaded. He said with a mix of astonishment and excitement, "I got a promotion and a raise." Really.

Sometimes we feel like we know what an outcome will be. We have an entire scene played out in our heads, and we believe without any doubt that real life is going to mirror what we've created in our minds. Sometimes it does. Sometimes our belief actually causes it to happen (i.e., self-fulfilling prophecy like if Steve was fired for his shoddy work). Sometimes none of it may be true.

Your mission is to challenge yourself to identify where you are blocked behind a belief that seems like the truth. Know that whatever scenario you're making up is just one possible outcome. Prepare for it so it stings less if it happens, but don't get stuck there. Stay empowered and make up different endings to that story, so you can stay engaged along the way. Who knows? Maybe you're going to get a promotion and a raise . . .



Kids, Please Try This at Home

Here's a short exercise so you can experience what my client did in the example above.

Identify a situation you are currently facing where you believe that you “already know” what the outcome is going to be.

- 1) Write down ten alternative outcomes. Really play here—the crazier the better.
- 2) Develop a contingency plan so you are prepared if the negative outcome occurs, but don't get stuck there.
- 3) Choose the best possible outcome as “the truth.” Really step into it as if that is the one that is destined to happen. Note any changes in your mood, your energy, your behaviors, and your levels of stress and fear.
- 4) Once the situation has resolved, revisit this exercise and write down what actually occurred. What did you learn from this experience? Where else in your life can you apply this new learning?

These Blocks Are at Your Service

Are you starting to get a sense of what those things are that are blocking your own progress in your life or business? Now that we are identifying and naming them, how do they make you feel? Angry? Stressed? Resentful? Something else?

Listen, we all have blocks. They are one of the ways we protect ourselves from getting hurt, feeling pain, or experiencing stress. Remember the earlier section in Chapter 3 on the excuse machine? One of my excuses—or blocks—was to tell myself I wasn't interested in something. In reality, I *was* interested, but I was worried that if I pursued that activity, I'd fail and be judged for it. So I protected myself from risking that outcome by throwing up a block: "I'm not interested in that!" and that's how I acted.

Noah Blumenthal, known as one of the Top 100 Minds on Personal Development by *Leadership Excellence* magazine, agrees that our behaviors are driven by the rewards they provide. "These rewards . . . encourage you to perpetuate your current behavior." For example, if you tend to become defensive, Blumenthal suggests, "You may fear that your actions will be viewed as ignorant or stupid. Your defensiveness helps you justify your actions and protects you from being wrong."²

It helps once you realize what a block really is—not a weakness or a shortcoming—but a device you use to keep yourself protected. Once you understand that concept, you can begin to get beyond the block—rather than getting stuck behind it—and see what's really making it difficult for you to make a change. With this access you can then choose to change, influence, or accept it. Once I discovered what was hiding beneath my "I'm not interested" block—which was actually, "I don't want to look foolish or incompetent"—I could create a plan for getting past it.

My friend Suzanne has a block that many people share—fear of speaking in front of a group. When we probed what lay beneath that

block, she realized that she was afraid of making a mistake and being seen as inadequate. As we continued to dig a little deeper, it became clear that her block is not really a fear of speaking, but a fear of being unprepared and looking bad, causing others to be disappointed in her.

With this access, we were able to come up with a few tactical ideas to help her get past it. (Note that we didn't delve into the psychology of the block but rather how it hindered her actions and affected her confidence.) Our plan included for her to do more preparation prior to a presentation so she was sure she knew her stuff cold before giving a talk, including creating opportunities to role-play so she could see that she could survive giving the talk. We strategized ways she could start with a smaller, less intimidating group. We even determined the value of making sure she's well rested, hydrated, and in peak physical condition before her talk. So that had the added benefit of sparking her in her commitment to exercising as well.

Once we recognize our blocks and how they are trying to protect us, we can let go of the resistance and judgment we have for certain activities, opening up all kinds of possible things we can do to minimize the block and to allow ourselves to step over it, into a new reality. That's disruption at its best.

Conclusion

What are the things you are doing every day that may need to be disrupted for you to be able to move closer to your extraordinary life? Is it time to disrupt long nights at work without having dinner with the family? Is it time to disrupt your habit of eating out several nights a week so you can instead put more money in the bank or lose the pounds that have been bugging you for years? Is it time to disrupt your routine of watching TV at night so you can get to bed earlier and wake earlier to hit the gym? If you're going to start living your extraordinary life, you have to be able to break out of the old routines and create new

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ones. You must master the art of disruption, even if it means pulling into the neighbor's driveway from time to time!

You are sure to find some blocks along the way as you try to disrupt, break out, and break through your old way of doing things. Maybe you are a mastermind at creating excuses because you are afraid, maybe you worry that your new life won't be as good as your old one, or maybe you tell yourself you aren't smart or creative or disciplined enough to create a new routine, or maybe you don't believe disrupting your routine will have any benefit at all so why bother?

That's understandable. You don't want to get hurt or become *more* unhappy than you might be now—and these blocks are trying to “protect” you from that. It's true that they may even be safeguarding you from certain pain or discomfort. But in the process, what is also happening? Are you getting boxed into a life that is only . . . fine? I already know that if you've gotten this far in this book, you are no longer willing to settle for fine. I know I'm not willing to settle for fine. I've seen fine and it isn't nearly as much fun as extraordinary.

If you are ready to join me on the path to extraordinary, take some time to familiarize yourself with your blocks. Recognize where and when and how they are helping you. Thank them for their efforts, then kindly dismantle them, put them in a box, or send them on their way. When you try to disrupt things without these blocks, you may still feel fear; you may still feel afraid. That's okay. As others have said before, courage is being afraid and doing something anyway.

Are you ready to trust and try something new? Are you ready to disrupt the old patterns and see how far you can go when you do something differently? If you are willing, your extraordinary, perfectly designed life awaits.