

## INTRODUCTION

# Starting Here

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My mind reeled. It felt like a scene in a movie where the sound blurs, and everything goes silent. The camera rolls in for a close-up of my face. A scared girl sits tensely in a cold, beige leather chair. She feels utterly alone, and a million thoughts run through her head.

*Reconstructive jaw surgery?*

The specialist made clear there wasn't any other way to determine what was happening. "We'll have to go in, take everything apart, figure out what's going on and try to address it, then put it all back together again." He paused. "Assuming everything goes well, you should regain full functioning when all is said and done. Of course, there's never an absolute guarantee."

*Assuming? Should? No guarantee?* I was a singer! Only eighteen at the time, I had just finished my first semester in college, studying voice. My whole life was ahead of me. *And if it doesn't go well?* My racing mind read between the blurry lines: I might not be able to eat or talk, let alone sing again. It felt like a bad dream.

A deafening silence filled the room, numbing my body. My mom sat on my left, listening intently as the doctor spoke. Words continued coming out of his mouth, but I didn't hear any of them. If I had one wish at that moment, it was to be plucked out of that chair and dropped somewhere—anywhere—else.

What I feared most was change. Yet, with sharp clarity, I sensed a deep knowing. Only I could make this decision. The doctor's idea about surgery was too far out of my comfort zone—for good reason. But I wasn't sure what “change” would mean for my life.

It's been over twenty years since that day, and I now recognize change isn't something to be feared. In fact, I've learned an incredible amount about embracing and creating effective change in my life.

In today's world, the health and survival of any system, organization, or person depends on their ability to change and adapt. But we (humans especially) can be surprisingly resistant to change. A crippling fear of the unknown leads people to stay in jobs and relationships where they aren't happy for far too long. We might not take that risk, try something new, or talk to a stranger in the line at the grocery store, missing opportunities for growth, shift, or connection. We stick to safe, comfortable routines, day after day, week after week, year after year—sometimes without even realizing it.

As quickly as we blink, things can change. We exist in a world where inflation is at an all-time high, and the call for social change is too loud to ignore. Technology has become an integral part of our lives and is being adopted at a dizzying pace.

Although it took approximately forty-five years for landline phones to show up in 50 percent of US households, it only took four years for smartphones to reach 40 percent of them (DeGusta 2020).

The world keeps moving. Chronic overstimulation has made it easy to become numb, leaving us unsure of how to approach change. Over time, well-worn daily routines may have created deep ruts along our path. Maybe we're not making progress in our careers or aren't happy with our personal lives. Running on autopilot, one day we wake up to realize we've started to rust because we're not changing.

Everyone thinks change is what happens to us or something we do. I think change is a choice. It's about rediscovering the optimal tools and conditions for changing, adopting them as a mindset, and living them as intentional choices.

Change is a fluid process of stretching ourselves. Establishing resources that support change helps leverage permission and perspective to optimize freedom of choice and opportunity. We hone and strengthen these skills of change by learning to identify the when, where, and what to stretch. This allows us to achieve the results we want, both now and in our lives as they unfold.

Sitting in that doctor's chair at eighteen, my life unfolded in some unexpected ways. Who would have thought a cold and sterile room, a chair that felt like it might swallow me, and a doctor wearing a long white coat would set the scene for such a significant shift? Gurus and sages throughout history have referenced the "still, small voice" inside us all. At that moment,

my inner voice was neither still nor small. I received one of the clearest messages I've ever gotten.

I didn't get the surgery.

Because of that choice, I still searched for a solution to my jaw problem. That's how I found the Alexander Technique, a holistic body reeducation method, and my teacher Stacy. Over the years, Stacy became both a mentor and friend, teaching me more about life through our weekly lessons than I could have imagined. On the surface, our work together addressed my posture, alignment, and body use (jaw issues included), but it was so much more.

She helped me learn how to harness the power of my thinking. I realized I didn't even know why I made some of the choices I did:

- Did I really need to stand on my toes, arching my back, when I sang? (It made my jaw problem worse.)
- Why was it so hard to sit down without plopping into a chair? (I didn't even know I did this!)
- What else was I doing because of habit and not by choice? (This one took a bit more time.)

I learned to let go of what I didn't need to hold on to. That paved the way for me to show up in the world differently. I had been introduced to principles for meaningful change and lasting freedom of choice. Eventually, I trained as a teacher of the Alexander Technique myself and have worked with these principles of change, applying them throughout my professional career and personal life.

Although I didn't realize it at eighteen, I was in an optimal space for change. As a college freshman, I had my first taste of autonomy in the world, stretching myself in ways I hadn't before. There was space (and permission) to make my own decisions. I was also given the gift of an entirely new perspective. The tools and resources of this space allowed me to explore my life through a new lens. I understood, even when I wasn't sure how, I *did* have a choice.

Change is, and always will be, hard. There's no sugarcoating this. I know because I've experienced change and continue to live it. At scary career transition points, it's difficult to decide which choice to make. I've walked away from opportunities that seemed perfect from the outside. I've felt gnawing nudges and followed deep inner pulls, knowing there's been more. At times, I've struggled desperately to see in the dark. Life's big decisions can take us in new directions, and that is a daunting proposition.

I haven't written this book to present myself as an authority or expert in change but as a regular person who understands from experience that change is a flow of action we can choose at any moment. I started out to solve a very different problem. I committed to discovering what I didn't know, unsure of what I might learn. Seeds of curiosity were planted, and experience moved into action. I took the first step toward embracing the unknown on an indirect pathway to change. This choice activated and catalyzed growth. I never imagined this would have led me on such a journey.

I've read countless books and worked out these ideas over years of conversations, research, and experience. Bringing together

my interests in various disciplines—including neuroscience, the Alexander Technique, and the wisdom of the natural world—resulted in me seeing the experience of change through new eyes. Returning after gathering knowledge, information, and understanding, I recognize my pathways are constantly shifting and expanding. These learnings can help others discover where they want to go or can be a support in the exploration of the pathways that lead to lasting and sustainable change.

The important tools of change are more accessible than people think. I'll share what octopuses and ants can teach us, how we can use research on habit and fear to help form new pathways forward, and how shifts in thinking can pave the way for new opportunities. As counterintuitive as it may seem, sometimes doing less—including stopping and creating space—helps eliminate barriers and allows for more intentional decision-making.

I'll provide a framework for exploring and embracing the tools for change and living in a cycle that supports our ongoing growth and emergence. In choosing our path forward, we reclaim the ability to live a life truly *aligned* with change. Embracing the unknown can lead to things that aren't bullet-pointed on our lists, and the possibility of change emerges for those who engage with these ideas.

You are the only one who can change your life. And although it might not be easy, it will be worth it.