

# CHAPTER 1

## The Wild, Wireless World

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It is not the strongest of the species that survives, nor the most intelligent. It is the one that is most adaptable to change.

—Charles Darwin

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Charles Darwin's visit to the Galapagos Islands in 1835 changed biology and natural science forever. Yet almost two centuries later, the true impact of Darwin's work has yet to be fully realized. Whether we recognize it or not, change is the only reliable constant of modern life. Change is the rule. Adaptation is survival. Being conscious is how you thrive.

Let us introduce you to the chameleon, an animal that can teach us how to adapt and survive in a disruptive and accelerating world. But first we need to rethink the chameleon and start viewing it for what it is: A powerful icon of change and a world champion of adaptation.

Evolutionary forces created an incredible paradox in the chameleon. They are one of the slowest and also one of the fastest

animals in nature. In spite of their sluggish-looking exterior, chameleons possess the world's fastest tongue. While commonly standing on a tree branch moving just a few centimeters an hour, a chameleon's tongue springs upon its prey with astonishing swiftness. If a chameleon's tongue were a race car, it would travel from zero to 60 mph in 1/100th of a second. This speed and intensity exists almost nowhere else in the terrestrial world.

Chameleons also developed fully independent eyes, giving them a 360-degree arc of visibility around their bodies. Able to see in visible and ultraviolet light, their eyes have the highest power of magnification of any vertebrate. These adaptations were all essential to the chameleon's survival and growth.<sup>1</sup>

Yet chameleons are most well-known for their ability to change color. Their base color is camouflage, enabling them to ambush their prey as they sway in the breeze. But that's just one of their colors. In fact, changing color is an adaptation that allows the chameleon to stand out and communicate with other chameleons. Brighter colors normally indicate aggression and darker colors indicate submission. They are essentially living mood rings.<sup>2</sup>

Now, most of us don't want to be called a chameleon. To us that signifies devious, manipulative, or dishonest behavior. Yet, as science reveals the truth about the chameleon, it's time we become more conscious of the chameleon's true place in the world. Comfortable in its own skin. Always showing its true colors. Seeing in all directions. The chameleon teaches us what it takes to adapt and thrive in a constantly changing world.

We humans are not easily intimidated by the chameleon. In fact, we are the most advanced species on the planet. What distinguishes us from all the other species is our amazing brain. Weighing in at three pounds and large for our size, the human brain is a complex network of billions of nerve cells with trillions of connections with our bodies and the outside world. The human mind, as we like to call it, is the seat of our complex thought, the source of our language, the originator of our personality, and the home of our emotions. Our capacity to be conscious – to be aware of ourselves and our surroundings – is what makes us the talk of the animal kingdom.

Yet, as humans, we find ourselves living at a critical inflexion point in our history. Everything is changing around us, from technology and demographics, to geopolitics and climate, to lifestyles and marriages, and the list goes on. Our challenge is that the world is changing faster than our ability to adapt.

Some of us respond to these changes like we are in a burning house, ever running to put out fires, believing we are operating in a world of scarcity. Others of us live like we are playing shuffleboard on the deck of a sinking ship, disengaged and uninterested in what's happening around us. Then there are those of us who are aware and anticipate these changes, in search of a better, more prosperous life.

Yet, many of us are unprepared for these accelerations. We act on autopilot as new challenges confront us. We are too reactive to problems and miss out on opportunities. We get hijacked by outdated ideas, misguided values, and polarizing relationships. We face uncertainty with fear and mistrust. Stress and burnout are pervasive as many of us do not perform to our highest potential. At a time when we need to think deeper, learn faster, and collaborate better, our minds, in their current form, are simply unprepared for this new reality.

Like our friend the chameleon, we must rely on our unique assets to guide us into our next phase of transformation. Only you can embrace these changes and adapt into the future. Lifting your gaze outside yourself while looking inward to remove the roots of resistance is how you become more conscious. With just enough urgency, resilience, and curiosity, you can activate your mind to adapt. This requires transforming yourself in an increasingly disruptive and accelerating world.

The path from clueless to conscious is paved with disruption. The going isn't easy; the road is littered with tiny jolts of uncertainty and occasionally buffeted by massive speed bumps of disruption. In life and business, we all are looking to move forward and contribute something of value. However, our wild, wireless world is ever changing and complex. It's far too easy to get lost and stay unaware of the disruptive forces that stand in our way. We have reached a time in history where our ability to adapt is struggling to keep pace.

## NAVIGATING THE SIX DISRUPTORS

Like a wildfire, disruption is both good and bad. Wildfires can devastate as they destroy everything in their path. They can also rejuvenate fields and forests to bring forth new life. Similarly with people, disruption can throw us into a state of chaos or help us change and adapt. Let's look at the six main disruptors we experience every day.

- **Speed:** The pace of life is escalating and it doesn't appear to be slowing down any time soon. This forces us to see, think, feel, and act faster. While speed creates excitement and many new opportunities, it can easily toss us off balance. We can become overwhelmed and exhausted. We can sabotage ourselves by insisting on perfection, setting unrealistic goals, overworking our bodies, or burning out.
- **Uncertainty:** Stability is an illusion and uncertainty is reality. We want to believe that we will find comfort in the predictable, but it doesn't exist. Brexit changed the future of Europe, the stock market alters retirements daily, jobs no longer last a year, and no segment of business is immune from the power of disruption. We need to accept change as inevitable and develop the ability to navigate in a world of impermanence. But how do you stay grounded in all that unpredictability?
- **Complexity:** Complexity is part of the DNA of the modern world. But how do you navigate through all the knowledge, choices, and diversity in our lives? Our natural response is to create clarity in the face of confusion. But with massive amounts of knowledge, we quickly oversimplify complex issues and overcomplicate simple choices, both of which activate our biases and prejudices.
- **Technology:** As a powerful disruptor, technology is both our liberator and our slayer. It allows us to learn just about anything, meet anyone, do business in any market, and communicate instantaneously around the world. The downside is it's too easy to fall into the Internet's version of a black hole, pushing people to see the world through an increasingly narrow lens.

- **Competition:** As the fuel in our free market society, competition fosters innovation, strengthens talent, and improves quality. Yet, it can also turn us into islands of self-interest. History is littered with people and companies, from Lance Armstrong to Wells Fargo, all of whom fell from grace because of an overly competitive spirit. How do we find purpose and meaning in a world of powerful competitive urges?
- **Globalization:** First there were explorers, then there were ship-ping lanes, and then business went global. Today we are a click away from anyone in the world. We are all global citizens as money, markets, people, and communities are interconnected. How do we succeed individually while thriving as one global planet and society?

These six disruptors impact countries, companies, and communities alike. What we don't talk about is the impact they have on YOU, personally. At any moment in time, these forces can have a positive or negative effect on you, and fundamentally alter the way you live and work. Like winds of change, they occur all at once, stopping, starting, swirling, and combining to take us places we've never been before.<sup>3</sup>

On the bright side, embedded in every challenge is an opportunity. How you respond to these forces can be energizing and create unlimited opportunities, or they can be demoralizing and sabotage our best efforts. How conscious you are of yourself, your relationships, and your surroundings will make all the difference.

## THE COST OF UNAWARE PEOPLE

Imagine biking down a street in Manhattan in a designated bike lane. Passing on the left is an endless procession of speedy cabs and limousines. On your right, you flash past hundreds of parked cars. Suddenly, a car door opens and you can't get around it, so you're forced to feel the true cost of unaware people.

Being unaware is a big liability. And it's happening more regularly in the face of these disruptors. It's someone who offends a colleague

with an unwitting faux pas. Or someone who ignores a customer's concern and loses the sale. It's someone who is tone-deaf to the needs of his team. Or alienates his boss with a flippant comment. It's a parent who ignores his teenager's drug problem or a government worker who takes a small bribe. The list goes on and on. The cost of unaware people is just too high to pay these days – especially when the antidote, becoming more conscious, costs little but returns exponentially.

Let's face it. There is a growing gap between those who are awake in the world and those who are asleep. The faster the world changes, the bigger the gap becomes. Most people believe they are self-aware, but research shows that only 10 to 15% of us truly have this capability.<sup>4</sup> Some of us are changing and adapting with the times. Others are falling behind. There are four reasons why we are not changing fast enough:

- **Too shallow.** We don't go deep enough into our human psyche. We spend little time self-reflecting and stay stuck in negative emotions, shackled by old baggage, resulting in little understanding of ourselves. Since we don't have a clear mirror that reflects how we show up in the world, our relationships with others are often stunted. We underestimate the potential of people and ourselves.
- **Too narrow.** We live in steel bunkers and can't see our way out. We don't challenge our outdated assumptions, which limits the power of our expansive minds. Accepting a world of biased minds and limited perspectives causes us to miss opportunities, avoid diversity, and react irrationally to world affairs.
- **Too safe.** We are afraid of change and prefer to avoid the uncertainty around us. As a result, we stay stuck, biased and reactive. We don't use our natural positive accelerators to push us forward, and we trip over our negative hijackers that undermine us. By being too safe, we atrophy and fail to evolve and transform, leaving us standing in place as the world turns.
- **Too small.** If your view of yourself and the world is too small, you won't see connections, possibilities, or solutions. Staying small and never stepping up is sure to lead to regrets and will undermine

your highest potential. It takes courage to unleash your personal power and take responsibility, both of which are central to living a productive life.

Organizations are feeling the brunt of our lack of awareness. Markets are changing faster than the ability of organizations to reinvent themselves. There's a growing gap between the leaders we have and the leaders we need. Executives are being questioned about their ability to lead change in the future. The Gallup Organization reports that 70% of employees are disengaged.<sup>5</sup> And executives are deeply worried about the talent gap in society. As a consequence, many organizations are shackled by slow execution, lack of growth, unhealthy cultures, and underperformance.

Our communities are also not working well together. Cynicism and diminishing trust are impeding our ability to solve our most complex problems. Broken families, racial tensions, and sexual harassment coupled with trade wars, national tensions, and climate change are exacerbating the situation. This is happening at a time when people across the globe must come together to solve society's most pressing challenges – human rights, discrimination, the poverty gap, and environmental sustainability.

Our world is skidding toward a new economic and social era where the cost of unaware people is too high to pay. We need to wake up. To grasp the true meaning of being conscious, you are going to have to Go Deep and discover your inner world, Think Big to see a world of possibilities, Get Real to be more honest and intentional in leadership and life, and Step Up to your highest potential.

## **AT HEALTHY COMPANIES**

We have spent over 30 years studying and advising executives, their teams, and organizations around the world. Our primary focus has been leadership and transformation. We go into organizations and meet leaders in their environment. We have interviewed over six hundred CEOs and thousands of executives in over 50 countries.

And we have published seven books on leadership, focusing on leading people, teams, change, growth, and globally.

What have we learned? The most effective people in the world today are transformational leaders at all levels—executives and managers, politicians and civil servants, parents and principals, coaches and entrepreneurs. They are all masters of personal and organizational transformation. They have honed their ability to learn faster, create smarter, and collaborate deeper, making them masters of adaptation. Now more than ever, being conscious is their antidote for disruption.

*Conscious* is our eighth book on leadership. It reveals our most important lesson yet. It is a message relevant for everyone who leads other people – which is all of us. Inside this book are ideas drawn from psychology, biology, management, leadership, neuroscience, and behavioral economics. This book is not about delving into your unconscious brain. We'll leave that to the psychoanalysts and neuroscientists. It also goes beyond emotional intelligence to examine the broader capabilities needed to survive and thrive. Mindfulness is also a hot topic today. In *Conscious*, we believe this is an important practice, but one of many required to navigate this wild, wireless world.

At Healthy Companies, we have noticed something dramatic happening. Being conscious is quickly becoming an essential tool for the best executives and managers. Organizations need everyone to adapt and transform in the changing world. Conscious people bring their best selves to the table and challenge others to redefine what it means to be successful. Choose to be the one with the headlights on, not the one driving in the dark.

## HOW TO READ THIS BOOK?

*Conscious* is written as your personal guide through change - to help you adapt, accelerate, and transform.



The book is organized into five sections: The first section is the introduction: Conscious Is the New Smart. This section lays out the overall context of the book and introduces you to a few essential ideas that will help you understand why conscious is so critical today and tomorrow. The main part of the book is designed around the four sections that follow: Go Deep, Think Big, Get Real and Step Up. Here you will find specific lessons to help you become more conscious. Along the way, you will meet individuals from all walks of life around the world who exhibit many of the qualities of being conscious. Practical tips and advice are sprinkled throughout the book.

We believe each of you will approach the book in your own way. Some of you will read from cover to cover. Others will pick out chapters that reflect your own interests. Still others will use it as a catalyst as you deal with specific problems. You might want to ask yourself a few overriding questions as you read. How prepared am I for the changing world around me? Where are my strengths, my blind spots, and areas for improvement? How well am I practicing the lessons in this book? Am I emerging as a more conscious person?

On this learning journey, we suggest you open yourself up to a fresh perspective on your life. Our hope is that on completion you will have deepened the conversation with yourself, and enhanced your life and leadership skills. You will have improved your own self-awareness, your awareness of others, and your view of the world around you.

