The Why

They always say time changes things, but you actually have to change them yourself.

—Andy Warhol

The conference room door at Omen, Inc., opened with a sudden CLACK, and 10 people in pressed designer shirts, spring dresses, and well-appointed shoes emerged. Some of them checked their phones, others joined new conference calls while standing by the windows in the hallway, and several made their way to the restrooms around the corner.

The open door to the conference room revealed a long, boardroom-style table littered with printouts, notepads, laptops, glasses of water, and soda cans. A screen at the front of the room showed a slide: "BREAK, 15 mins." Several men and women were still inside, standing next to the windows, talking in small groups, or helping themselves to the fruit salad and protein bars at the caterers' table.

Maya Rodriguez, a woman in her mid-forties with dark hair in tight ringlets held back with a silver and turquoise barrette, exited into the hallway, gesturing as she spoke to Garrett Stokes, a man who appeared to be a few years younger, his pressed orange shirt rolled up at the sleeves. Together they walked slowly away from the conference room. Maya checked her phone while talking.

"Yep. Like turning a battleship. We'll kick the project off immediately," she affirmed, scrolling through an email with one hand.

"I can't believe how long it took to get all of them in that room working together," Garrett said, still a little shocked.

"Better late than never," she answered. "Look at where we are after nine months of squinting at metrics and data, and all the research we had to do. I think the recommendation makes sense. It's just the time frame is pretty insane."

She gestured back into the room.

"Think about it, Garrett. When does this company get business managers and GMs from so many different areas in the same room? And VP level. That was all good discussion and I agree – creating the new sales roles is the right move for where the business is headed. It's kind of exciting . . . finally, we are recognizing something different."

"Sure, but it took us the better part of a year to all agree on a direction. Now we're in a big crunch to get these people ramped." He looked directly at Maya. "Which will be . . . interesting."

They stopped near a window and surveyed the courtyard. Maya's shoulders dropped in resignation as she exhaled.

"I know. Rivers said flat out – it has to be done differently."

She looked back toward the conference room.

"I think we still have about 10 minutes, right? I'm going to give Jack the heads-up – his office is in this building."

She parted ways with Garrett and walked down the hall, turned a corner, passed an office with an open door – then stopped suddenly and backed up. Walking to the open door, she knocked on the doorjamb and poked her head in without waiting for a reply. "Jack."

Jack's back was toward the door, but as soon as he heard Maya's voice he turned quickly. She continued without small talk.

"I have to go back into the meeting, but the upshot is that it's happening. I gave you the heads-up last quarter. So I hope you've thought about what your team is going to do."

Jack raised his eyebrows. "Well, we've had a lot on our plate –"

Maya interrupted him.

"I get it. Lots of people have lots of plates with lots of stuff on them. Your team needs to be ready to engage. Probably should have happened sooner. We can talk at five when the session is

over – I have to get back and chat with Garrett again about how quickly we can get going."

She headed for the door, then paused and turned back.

"Just so you know, the feedback from the room wasn't great. People like your team, Jack, but it just takes too long for the programs to come together, and the sellers aren't ramped fast enough. The business managers aren't happy with the content. They were nice about it – well, mostly nice – well, maybe some of it wasn't nice at all. But what you need to know is, Rivers himself said this program has to be different. You'll need to put your best lead on it."

"Okay, right," Jack smiled. Maya looked closely at him. *Why does it always seem like he's going to show me that car from the back of the lot, instead of the one I want in the showroom?* she wondered. "So how long do we have, Maya?"

"Two months. They plan to have the first new hires in two months. Well, technically, 10 weeks from now. So that's better than two months, right?"

Without waiting for a response, she left the office and walked briskly down the hall.

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The story that is unfolding here, and will continue to develop throughout this book, is a story about the world of work. It's our world and your world, where directives are initiated, people are engaged to do work, stuff is created. But it's also a world where expectations are built and then not lived up to. Where commitments are made, and yet no one can point to the results. And where random things happen, along with significant wasted time, energy, and money – none of which are trivial resources for any person.

The world of Maya and the executives in her meeting is one where she, her peers, and her superiors all feel as if they are trying to turn a 45,000-ton military vessel 180 degrees. And as she turned to Jack – whose remit, we'll learn, is to help with the steering – we sensed the friction that already existed, a situation in which change needed to happen, fast, but isn't happening much at all. Just what kind of change is afoot will be revealed in the following chapters.

What's really going on?

The World Has Changed, and So Must We

The world has changed. The way we communicate and connect with each other, the way we run our lives – it's all changed. Consumers and buyers today have information at their fingertips, more discerning criteria for how they spend their money, and continuously shifting expectations. Amazon CEO Jeff Bezos describes customers as "divinely discontent,"[1] a positive and nuanced celebration of the vigilance that businesses must have to keep up with customers. To keep up with customers, many business leaders have recognized that just having great products isn't enough. They must also create great experiences for their customers. And they must do it by leveraging the increasingly complex technology landscape that has become part of life. The demand for excellent customer experiences, powered by the innovative technology companies that have created them, has disrupted every business in every industry, forcing all kinds of transformation – and this holds equally true for businesses that don't serve consumers.

Consider the implications of disruption and transformation on all of the different professions, domains of expertise, and standards of practice that exist in an organization. What if that expertise doesn't work any longer, because so much has changed? For large organizations, when it doesn't work, it doesn't work at a massive scale.

For Maya and the executives in this meeting, who have made a big bet to create new sales roles, this is a scary reality. How do they figure out how to manage all the disruption? Who's going to tell them what to do to execute on the decision that took nine months to formulate? We'll learn more about how Maya faces this reality and how the challenge calls into question all familiar approaches. Her peers and mentors are intelligent people who have been successful. But something isn't right, and it's getting worse all the time. It prompts one very important, central, and potentially uncomfortable question: Why do you have a job? How can you be more instrumental in helping your people to succeed?

What Does Insanity Feel Like?

Maya's world probably sounds familiar. We've been there and can relate to what she feels: insanity. She's part of an organization where

the leaders feel like they've been doing the same thing over and over and expecting a different result. This feeling of insanity can manifest itself in different ways, depending on the altitude levels of people in the organization.

In our view, we think of the organization in three parts:

1. C-level and executives, who set the direction of the business
2. Leaders of teams who guide people toward the outcomes required for the business
3. Teams who must make those outcomes happen through interactions with customers

Each of these groups has a role to play in ensuring that a business moves forward, can adapt to change, and survive. But a business is more complex than just having three simple groups or altitude levels: there are functions and departments such as Research and Development, Engineering, Sales, Customer Service, Marketing, and Finance. These functions have a simple intention: drive the business forward. But as a business grows, things get complicated in scope and scale. The more customers buy from a business, the larger the enterprise, and the more people are needed in functions. Overlays are created. Some roles within the organization have more frequent interaction with customers than others. Some functions in the organization are there to support other functions.

With this in mind, when we think about what's happening in the workplace, we mainly think about the relationship between an *enabling function* (such as Marketing, Sales or Field Support, Learning and Development, Product Groups, vertical Business Units), the *audience* of customer-facing people that function as supports (such as customer service agents, salespeople, consultants, partner account managers), and how that impacts value to *customers* (whoever your business sells to, be it consumers, other businesses, or partners). And on top of all that is the Executive function, setting strategy and direction for the business. See the definitions in the Glossary of Terms at the end of this chapter, as we will use the terms *Executive, Enablement, Audience,* and *Customer* to mean these specific positions of purpose. Figure 1.1 shows these different groups of people and the altitude levels in an organization.
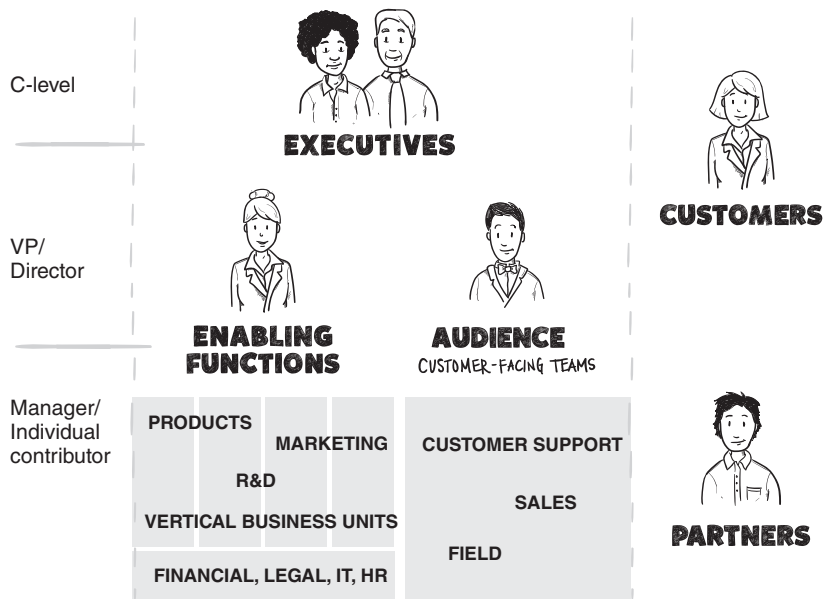
FIGURE 1.1　Organizational Groups and Altitude Levels

We believe that every person in the workplace is in one of these four categories. Even if your job is in Finance, or Human Resources, or IT, we are quite sure that if you ask yourself the question above – *why do I have a job?* – for those specific departments, you are there as part of an enabling function.

At the same time, it's worth pointing out that over the past decade, the word "Enablement" has made its way into functions and job titles, particularly as it relates to selling. The term "Sales Enablement"[2] is now associated with an entire industry of technology, consulting, conferences and practitioners, and is a profession in its own right.

Regardless of where you sit in your function – Executive, Enablement, or Audience – you probably feel the insanity. Here is what that looks like.

CEOs and Executives Feel Like Their Investments Are Going into a Black Hole

Maya, her colleague Garrett, and the general managers and vice presidents who were in that conference room, are all of the same mind: things have come to a head. After gathering information,

doing the analysis, and creating a directive for change, they now need help with that shift, but have little faith in the people they routinely call on to help. And the issue isn't personal: executives routinely make investments, but then it seems impossible to connect the dots to results. In interviews that we conducted with CEOs and other business leaders, we asked the question, "What do you think you get from the money you spend on your sales support? On the people who create learning for your employees?" We received the same answer, over and over again:

> *We have people who create stuff to keep us compliant. Beyond that, it's not clear.*

This is startling. But not unrecognizable. The investments made to help people adapt to disruptive change – such as retooling sales forces, changing product portfolios, rethinking go-to-market strategies, and going through structural re-orgs – aren't moving the needle.[3]

Why would a business leader make investments that don't have a result? We answer that question in Chapter 4, "Let Go of What You Know," when we talk about the habits we hold onto, even when they don't work.

ENABLEMENT TEAMS FEEL UNDERSTAFFED

Several clicks down below the C-suite are the people who do lots of different kinds of work. Here is where the rubber meets the road. And there is friction and frustration here as well. Enablement teams can't keep up with all of the stuff that the business says they need to accomplish. The demands never end and the results are never good enough.

While there are different areas that people are responsible for, the common theme is one of frenetic activity and an inability to keep pace with what feels like a moving target of requirements. We've heard a range of frustration from different types of managers in the middle of their organizations, struggling to keep morale high, stay well-staffed, and show productivity.

◆ **Manager of Enablement:** I'm frustrated at our pace of design and delivery, and I'm under the gun to justify our impact on the business. How can we be faster and more relevant?

- ◆ **Developers and Designers:** It never stops – all the different requests. I have no idea how to keep up or prioritize. It's so hard to know what's really needed for people to be successful!
- ◆ **Subject Matter Expert:** I love what I do, but no one seems to understand it when I tell them about it. I'm caught in between trying to just do my job, and then being asked to teach other people – it's like doing two different jobs.
- ◆ **Trainer:** I can't just show my audiences yet another PowerPoint that I have to change to make relevant. Why can't the training designers give me something more engaging?

THE AUDIENCE IS OVERWHELMED WITH THE NOISE AND LACK OF RELEVANCE

Pick up 10 annual reports for a publicly traded company or listen to 10 earnings calls. How many of them contain statements from the CEO speaking to the importance of their sales force or their customer-facing employees? Service agents, sellers, delivery personnel, baristas, flight attendants – anyone in a business who has regular interaction with a customer or a partner – has a different view than a noncustomer facing employee and is susceptible to the customer's "divine discontent" if they aren't properly prepared to engage. In our view, this group – the Audience, as we defined it earlier – is so critical in a business and yet, is astonishingly underserved. As we explore in this chapter, the people who need the most guidance on how to be successful are unfortunately flooded with so much information, there is no possible way for them to absorb it, let alone change what they know and do to help a business adapt.

There you have it: three levels of insanity, manifested in random stuff that doesn't move the needle. What's the implication?

There's Only So Much That People Can Learn at One Time

Everything we are writing about has to do with adapting our incredibly complex organizations, processes, and systems to how the world has changed. There are new technologies to navigate, new processes to engineer and adopt, and entirely new conversations that need to take place at work and with customers.

There is so much pressure to change, and seemingly so little time to do it. Under pressure, decision makers make investments that appear to assume we live in a science fiction film, where knowledge and skills can be magically uploaded *en masse.* An almost mystical belief prevails, where all you need to do is send those salespeople, managers, or engineers to a five-day training course, and all of the company's problems will be solved.

Of course, most people don't believe a five-day course will magically transform their teams. There are other things that will take place that will help those people, right? But who is thinking about what those things are? Who is deciding how much content is too much? And who is factoring in that learning a concept, skill, or piece of knowledge happens over time, not at the moment of introduction, and not even the fifth time or ninth time that a new process has been introduced? Who is thinking about the audience, and then the customer or other person the audience has to interact with?

Why is it so hard to meet someone where they're at, and help them from there?

We often encounter people who hold on to the belief that the way to help educate, inform, or equip someone for success is to make sure that all of the content is given to the person *all at once.* There is *little to no thought* applied to spacing out the material. Executives and managers spend what they think is a reasonable amount of money, time, or both. The enablement teams create stuff based on all of the content they want to get across, and then believe they've achieved their objective simply by tallying up its consumption. But in the end, the sheer volume of information that is unleashed to the audience just feels like a firehose of information and, instead of being retained, evaporates quickly.

There are studies that show how information overload, multitasking, and prolonged repetition actually impair productivity, performance, and decision making.[4] Yet, year after year, billions of dollars are spent on initiatives, programs, change efforts, revamps, classes, new technologies, and courseware. What's the result? A major increase in noise.

Herein lies the reason that Maya had to share feedback with Jack that wasn't so great.

How Do People Learn New Things?

The process of learning is a refinement of what we already know, to increase the degree of sophistication in applying new information to new scenarios and situations. The conversations that we engage in today are the result of a learning process that started as a baby's babbling. A child learns the simplest version of running a complicated pattern downfield by just toddling forward. Even the most gifted, intuitive, athlete in a given sport first learned the basics of what will become a complex, improvisational running pattern downfield – from just wobbling forward between Mommy and Daddy.

That's what learning is: taking that which we already know how to do and adding a bit of new stuff to it. Every old memory is changed when it is recalled to mind. Every time we consider something new, the old thought is stored with its new processing. This process is called *reconsolidation*. Our most impressionable times occur early in life, from birth through our early twenties. We all create a mental map of experiences, reactions, and cues that we store away. These are the building blocks for how we are going to synthesize information as an adult.

When it comes to learning something new, the majority of existing methods tend to put the onus on the individual to integrate that new content or skill into their own model. In the case of learning at work – where we pick up Maya's story – content is most often shoved at people in great quantities with random objectives, and then somehow, people are expected to assimilate it immediately into productive action . . . like magic.

But people don't actually change that quickly. It happens over time. We have to *want* to change, and before committing, we need to see how change can benefit us. Then we might slowly change over time, to the point that when we realize we have changed, it's normally a year later. When we look back, we can begin to quantify the changes.

Science tells us that the learning process is not magical. It's actually well known that the best forms of learning build from the outside in, creating the basic crude understanding and then building upon this with increasing sophistication, through experiential and iterative means.

An analogy to consider would be a stack of books. The stack represents our knowledge and skills at any given time, with each book loosely representing a domain area. The knowledge and skills are represented cohesively on many separate pages.

When we learn new things, we are constantly undergoing reconsolidation in the brain. In effect, we are adding new pages to books – actually, taking books out of the stack, opening them up, reacquainting ourselves with them, inserting pages in different places in each book, and returning them to the shelf where we have now built the overall stack.[5]

The way any learning audience is engaged today, it is as if someone is trying to pile one big new book onto the top of the stack and expecting that it will have an impact. The student is supposed to get it, apply it, and somehow start behaving "better." But in reality, that big new book just falls off the stack, its pages scattered, with only a smattering of its information staying with the stack. At best, we might be able to recall having seen the cover somewhere at some point.

Information overload tends to manifest itself in the following ways:

The amount of content that people are expected to process and digest, let alone change their behavior, is overwhelming. We did a process audit with one client and found that new-hire salespeople would routinely receive 50 emails announcing all of the "mandatory" training they were expected to complete. The result? 100% of the salespeople opted out of 100% of the training.

Content is deployed regardless of its cognitive ease. We conducted hundreds of content audits where 100% of the information that was deemed necessary to know was delivered in homogenous bulleted text, PowerPoint decks with over 50 slides, or slides with voice-over explanations. What recipient would declare themselves "trained" after this?

Content is not connected to a plausible, measurable goal. In our reviews of thousands of courses, modules, online learning classes, and instructor-led materials, only a handful of the content could be connected to a specific, measurable outcome.

If this is the case, *where* and *when* is learning actually happening? It's in that seemingly magical process, happening on the job, in front of customers, with peers and managers, during free time, online, and in whatever interests a person may have. Or, at worst, learning is not happening at all. Ask a salesperson whether they felt the formal training they received was valuable and helped with their success, and see what they say.

Relying on Magic Is Costing Crazy Amounts of Money

The uncomfortable conclusion that can be drawn from this is: decision makers are wasting their company's money. At best, they are investing in something and have no idea what the return actually is, so they write it off as the cost of doing business. And this is a lot of money – the L&D industry represents a market of $140B spent on technology, tools, and content.[6]

Could it be that Enablement teams – the people in charge of creating materials for their audiences – are not truly understanding the business outcome that they are working to fix?

No wonder Maya and her colleagues are frustrated.

Of course, there are studies showing a general correlation between learning opportunities and success of the company. We believe that general correlation isn't good enough when a company's investment – and the success of its people – is at stake. Even when something is measured, these types of metrics tend to be impossible to correlate to results. There are countless ways to conduct assessments and knowledge checks, or to survey employees to ask what they think. Do these measurements connect to whether someone achieves their quota? Or whether a customer is delighted with an interaction?

Put another way: if investment in something that is intended to contribute to someone's success (development of a program, pur-chase of a packaged course, buying a technology) isn't connected to a measurable result, then it shouldn't be created. Period.

How to Stop Wasting Your Company's Money

No one wants to be called out for wasting their company's money. Yet the same old assumptions and beliefs continue to fuel an industry

as well as working practices. If you want an alternative, then this book is for you. If you're frustrated by the obvious ways in which people are wasting their time or working at odds with each other, by the constant stops and false starts, re-dos, and re-implementations, with no discernible progress, then you'll want to hear what we have to say. No one wants to live in a world of insanity.

In the remaining chapters, we continue to tell the story of a group of people who faced what seemed like an impossible challenge. They were saddled with insanity, and they found a way through, while achieving strong and clear results.

One thing to note about our story is that although the characters are fictitious, their situation is real. They represent a composite of the many people we have teamed up with to find success on previously thought-to-be-insane projects. We met a lot of people, learned about their roles, and had amazing opportunities to understand and empathize with just how insane their world had become.

Throughout the story, though, we'll be ourselves! You'll encounter Oxygen team members, and me, in this story. My role: keep unrelenting focus on business outcomes and empathy for people. It's this focus that guided and shaped a whole new way of working that is the basis for this book. You'll get to know our design and development team, who turned on a dime and became crazy productive, along with our composite client, using every imaginable modern device that technology had to offer, crossing time zones and traffic-jammed bridges alike. You'll read about what the results were like for the thousands of people who were affected by this work. And you'll experience through our story that the radical outcomes that have practically become table stakes for the world's most successful companies are human, creative, and simple – and entirely within reach.

This is a story about stopping the random acts and wasted investment, and adopting a whole new way of working. It's a story about learning and effecting change in – let's admit it – the fairly unsexy world of business, which is nevertheless where most knowledge workers spend the majority of their day. By the time you finish this book, you'll have:

◆ A new way to think and collaborate with your team, organization, and stakeholders

◆ A new way to build outputs
◆ A new way to work using a process and suggested strategies for getting started

Before we conclude this chapter, we recommend taking a minute to familiarize yourself with a list of terms used throughout the book. One of the most important steps to take in achieving Radical Outcomes is making sure everyone working together is using common terms with the same definition in mind.

A Glossary of Terms for Radical Outcomes

Audience: The people that you support who need to be successful in their role at your company. More specifically, we think of the people who are in front of your company's customers every day. Salespeople, customer service agents, field agents, business development managers, retail clerks, bank tellers, and many, many more.

Content: When we say "content," we mean subject matter, topics, and information – not how it looks or how it's rendered. Content can be in a variety of forms, including, but not limited to: articles, videos, courses, job aids, announcements, and memos. It can also be stuff that's in the head of a subject-matter expert. Whether we gather it, create it, or both, content is the source material for our audience(s).

Customer: Your company's customer, or the person representing the entity that purchases your company's products and services. Depending on the type of business, a customer can be a consumer, a head of a department, or a partner that sells your company's products or services.

Enablement Function: Group within a business, such as Marketing, Sales Support or Field Support, Learning and Development, Product Groups, or vertical Business Units, whose purpose (in whole or in part) is to provide support, content, or knowledge to their audience of customer-facing teams, and help them acquire the skills they need to be successful in their role.

Enablement Team: The people in place for an enablement function that produce stuff for the audience, comprised of different roles and responsibilities such as designers, facilitators, online

developers, sales or field trainers. We use the term *Enablement Team* throughout this book; in lots of businesses, this team might be known as Sales or Field Enablement, Sales or Field Operations, Learning and Development, or Training.

Executive: The group within a business that steers the strategy of a business, and then provides sponsorship to the initiatives that are created to execute the strategy.

Outcome: A driver – a behavior, skill, or capability – that produces a specific, measurable business result.

Output: A tangible deliverable – a slide deck, a storyboard, an email, a video, a whiteboard drawing that supports a conversation.

Role: While we'll use the word "role" generally, we think of the role of the audience as a core building block for designing an experience. In this usage, it refers to the specific job that the audience was hired to do. Audience roles can be quite diverse, especially if you are in a large business that may have many, many types of roles that are customer-facing. Examples include Technical Seller, Solutions Architect, Account Executive, and Call Center Agent.

SME: Shorthand for subject matter expert. These are the people who have some kind of specialized knowledge that would be desirable for the audience to know and act upon in their role.

Stakeholders: The people who have an interest in the outcomes and results that are being driven by the audience.

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In the rest of this book, we'll step through a series of approaches and ways of working that combine processes, principles, and mindsets that – in our experience – have resulted in extraordinary teams that are able to produce the radical outcomes that businesses require in today's complex and connected world. We start with that process in Chapter 2, "The Process: Don't Leave Home Without It."

We then discuss extraordinary teams, and ingredients for assembling them, in Chapter 3, Create Your Ensemble. In Chapter 4, "Let Go of What You Know," we discuss the need to work in a different way, which requires, well . . . letting go of what you know.

We then get into all the process steps in detail. In Chapter 5, "It's Business Outcome Time," you can read about how the new frame

of reference – the key to effective collaboration – is the business outcome. In order to achieve Radical Outcomes, though, you'll want to read Chapter 6, "Putting Divisions Out of Business," which talks about how to work across those departments and functions that tend to operate in silos, but whose people have critical information for making your audience successful.

In Chapter 7, "The Experience Is Human," we talk about how to connect outcomes to your audience, by understanding their environment, how they work, and what can be done to measure their success specifically.

Chapter 8, "Why We Can't Live without Architecture," is all about just that: how architecture provides the structure to prevent the information overload and randomness that audiences must endure today.

Chapter 9, "Getting the Right Stuff," will share specific techniques for how to help your subject matter experts help you to help your audience. And then, in Chapter 10, "Not Your Average Design," we share ways in which design matters for your audience, and how to ensure you have the right design for the experience you are creating.

Chapter 11, "Knowing What Is Good Enough," shares a simple mindset that makes it easy to keep moving in an agile way when creating anything for anyone! And in a similar vein, Chapter 12, "Progress Is All That Matters," shares tips on how to make sure your stakeholders are aware of the hard work that makes an experience possible.

Finally, we send you on your way in the concluding Chapter 13, "Activate Radical Outcomes."

Before we do all of that, though, we need to talk about something that ties it all together: *the process*.

Are you curious?