



## **Flux**

by April Rinne

15-minute read

### ***Synopsis***

*Flux* (2021) offers a mindset to transform your relationship with change from fear to hope. Whether you're overwhelmed by the pandemic, facing the end of a relationship, or anxious about climate change, these blinks detail eight essential practices for navigating change both personally and professionally.

### ***Who is it for?***

- People whose lives have been upended by the pandemic
- Anyone who struggles with anxiety
- Professionals who want to learn flexibility

### ***About the author***

April Rinne is a speaker, investor, adventurer, and expert on navigating change. She's a Harvard Law School graduate, a Fulbright Scholar, one of the 50 leading female futurists, and a Young Global Leader at the World Economic Forum.

## ***What's in it for me? Learn to flip your script and stay afloat in a world in flux.***

The world today is in a state of flux. Although you're probably used to following some form of script for living your life, you're likely increasingly facing external changes which leave you anxious about your family, career, and well-being. So, your old script is increasingly futile.

But there's good news: you can benefit from adopting a *flux mindset*. By adopting a flux mindset you'll see change as an opportunity rather than a threat, and recognize that you can improve your intelligence and abilities rather than accepting the cards that life deals you. In these blinks, you'll learn to harness eight *Flux Superpowers* to help you write a new script – one that equips you for whatever changes you may face.

In these blinks, you'll learn

- how appreciating other cultures can widen your perspectives;
- how trusting others can lead to innovation; and
- why you should ditch a single career trajectory to build a portfolio career.

## ***Run slower to flourish in our fast-paced world.***

Your old script is telling you to run as fast as you can to keep up. It says you'll gain fulfillment by squeezing in as much as you can into your life, whether it's a final phone call before you head home from work or landing a fancy new job with a giant paycheck.

While your old script might have worked in the past, in a world in flux, you'll never be able to cross the finish line – since the finish line is always shifting. If you want to thrive in this new world, you need to learn to slow your pace.

Slowing your pace isn't about becoming lazy or stagnant. Instead, it's about focusing on your values. Slowing down can help you make wiser decisions, avoid stress, and improve your health. As a result, you end up being *more* productive than when you race toward an intangible finish line.

## ***Here's the key message: Run slower to flourish in our fast-paced world.***

In the mid-nineties, the author was in her final year studying at Oxford when she received an unexpected call from her sister. Their parents had both died in a car crash. Suddenly, her world was tossed upside down. The life she'd known just a minute before was changed forever.

At first, she felt like running as fast as she could toward the opportunities in front of her. She considered following the advice of her mentors and going straight into a graduate program or landing a job at a bank. But

deep down, she felt that she needed to forge her own path.

Losing both parents reminded her of the fragility of life. So after graduation, she decided to slow her pace and take a job as a hiking and biking tour guide in Italy. Sure, she wasn't earning a Wall Street salary. But by living more slowly and mindfully, she changed her approach to life forever.

It doesn't take quitting your job or traveling the world to learn how to slow down and be present. You can develop this superpower whenever and wherever you find yourself. One way is to practice silence. Find five minutes every day to sit in complete silence. While you're paying attention to the world around you, you might find that instead of running *toward* something, you're able to listen to what's going on internally and discover your true self.

## ***When the future feels uncertain, seek out what's invisible.***

In North America, the Haudenosaunee people, known more widely as the Iroquois, believe that animals, people, and even inanimate objects harbor an extraordinary invisible power called *orenda*. Orenda is the combined power of nature's energies. It exists in rocks, rivers, birds, storms, as well as human beings. Orenda is also integral to the Iroquois vision quest in which each member of the tribe encounters their personal guardian spirit.

The Iroquois' belief in orenda might seem far from typical. That's because your social orientation fundamentally shapes how you perceive the world. Many spend their lives unaware of what they fail to see around them. So when it comes to facing changes, the second superpower is seeing what's invisible.

## ***This is the key message: When the future feels uncertain, seek out what's invisible.***

When you face change, you can update your life script by considering a range of perspectives outside of your own social conditioning. That way you'll see ways visible *and* invisible. One way to broaden your perspective is to consider your privilege or those ways your life has benefited from things over which you have no control. Having access to education, or fresh healthy foods, or being born without physical impairments, for example. The more privilege you have, the more options you have. When you're blind to the privilege you *do* enjoy, you're less likely to understand those who live without it. You're also more likely to feel lost when it's challenged, rather than perceiving opportunities in the change.

Checking your privilege also means seeing other places where privilege should be considered. Following the rise of Black Lives Matter and the #MeToo movement,

which shed broader light on society's entrenched systemic injustices, Harvard Business School professor Laura Huang reassessed the school's first-year curriculum and reading lists. She found that these lists were almost exclusively white male authors. Huang knew that this was an inaccurate reflection of the business world. So she developed the Well-Balanced MBA Reading List, which included women and people of color. By platforming new diverse voices in the curricula, Huang contributed to writing a new script that would pave the way for a more inclusive future for business.

Privilege isn't the only thing that clouds your vision. In today's hyper focused world, many of us have fallen out of touch with our own intentions. If you work for a company, you might be focused on selling a product, or gaining clicks on your advertisements, rather than serving your customers. By reassessing your intentions, you can identify the invisible gaps and better prepare yourself – or your company – to come up with more innovative solutions.

### ***Find your way by getting lost.***

In some cultures, change is expected. According to the best-selling author Amitav Ghosh, Indians have an expectation of change since their experience of the world has been one of constant upheaval.

Westerners, on the other hand, tend to believe in stability. When it comes to dealing with change, you can guess which of these two cultures is better equipped to deal with feeling lost.

In order to succeed in a world in flux, you have to embrace getting lost instead of fearing it. Getting lost isn't a failure, it's a gift. By getting lost, you have the opportunity to find your footing again and write a new script.

### **The key message here? Find your way by getting lost.**

Are you familiar with the word *coddiwomple*? This charming verb means traveling with purpose toward an unknown destination. It's about being lost with intention and excitement.

A fulfilling way to experience getting lost is by encountering cultures with different perspectives while traveling. The author once got lost while traveling through Romania. An elderly Romanian woman took notice and invited her home for dinner. Though the author initially protested the family's inquiries about her husband's whereabouts, in the end, she let the son escort her onto her train and order her seatmate to take care of her. Getting lost ended with a new adventure that she wouldn't have had otherwise. And the same goes for our personal and professional lives.

In order to adopt a traveler's mindset, consider what you know about the space around you. This could be your neighborhood, your backyard, or even the room where you're sitting. Now consider what you *don't* know. How could you benefit from exploring something unfamiliar? You might try exploring your area without the GPS turned on to orient yourself in your environment.

In the wake of the coronavirus pandemic, many people have been left feeling lost. It may be the loss of someone who was close to you, a source of income, or even just your vacation plans being thwarted that threw your future into uncharted territory. If you find yourself there, remember that getting lost is about accepting what you don't know. You can augment your ability to get lost by noticing what emotions you feel when something unexpected changes your plans. Do you view this as an obstacle? If so, what would it look like if you flipped your script and saw the change as an opportunity?

### ***Value trustworthiness.***

Think about a time when you were asked to participate in a team brainstorm only to be told that you should "stay in your lane." This moment might seem innocuous. But it's actually a symptom of a wider crisis of trust occurring throughout the world.

The list of organizations frequently labeled as untrustworthy has grown exponentially in recent years, and includes groups like the government and politicians, both mainstream and social media, large corporations, educational systems – it goes on and on. Unfortunately, when we create systems built on mistrust, we impede curiosity and connection.

When the author's parents passed away, she encountered a few people who acted inappropriately. But by and large, she found that most were fundamentally good, trustworthy people. She began to see how having her guard up not only hindered her own growth but also the betterment of humanity.

### **This is the key message: Value trustworthiness.**

Learning to trust doesn't mean that there aren't bad players in society, or that you should be naive. You should merely shift your perspective to accept trustworthiness as the norm.

Designing from trust tends to reap new discoveries for how we can work together.

Take BlaBlaCar, a global ride-sharing platform operating in Asia, Europe, and Latin America. BlaBlaCar enables users to hitch a ride with drivers traveling in the same direction. It's a system built on trust which works. In fact, BlaBlaCar transports over four times the number of travelers than the entire

European train network. It's no surprise that the company is valued higher than \$1 billion.

Another company built on trust is Wikipedia, the free online encyclopedia that operates through the collaborative efforts of its worldwide users. By enabling people to collectively shape the online encyclopedia, Wikipedia has created innovative solutions for the future which continue to grow.

If you're not sure where your organization falls in terms of trust, try measuring it. Are there any policies defined by mistrust applied to colleagues who are trustworthy? If there is any mistrust, how did this occur?

In order to create a system based on trust, you might try keeping your books open. Employees who can view salaries, budgets, and metrics are more likely to trust your organization and do their best work. Taking it a step further, what would it look like if employees set their bonuses and salaries?

Another way to trust is learning to delegate. When employees feel that they are being trusted, they're likely to complete a job well, as well as reciprocating trust back to you.

### ***In a world of excess, know your “enough.”***

What does *enough* mean to you? Do you measure this differently for yourself than you do for other people? Consider if there's anything you have more than enough of. What about less than enough of? The trick to knowing your enough is to know what *just* enough means for you.

Modern consumerism leads us to believe that we should want to have more. Whether it's more salary, more followers on social media, or a more impressive title in a company, we're collectively racing to acquire and accomplish. Unfortunately, even the most successful people tend to envy people they perceive as more successful. And the milestones will continue to shift. In other words, the pursuit of this kind of success is futile.

### **Here's the key message: In a world of excess, know your “enough.”**

The problem with the hamster wheel is that as soon as change arrives in a world in flux, you have no flexibility to adapt. In order to flourish in a world in flux, you need to develop your own metrics for success. The author calls this knowing your “enough.” But instead of money, success, or fame, your new metrics for knowing your enough are rooted in discovery, meaning, relationships, internal satisfaction, and helping others.

Stop measuring your life by external values, and try measuring by contentment. In ancient and indigenous cultures, happiness and contentment have different meanings. While happiness caused by good news or falling in love is an external and often fleeting event,

contentment comes from within you. Unlike happiness, contentment is permanent.

Another way to know your “enough” is to manage the various things that might be weighing you down. Next time you're thinking of adding one more thing to your life, try subtracting another beforehand. You might unsubscribe from a newsletter, decline an invitation, or donate a long-unworn item of clothing.

But having enough isn't just about having enough individually. What's enough should be a question we ask at a society-wide level. Across the globe, workers are concerned that automation will replace their jobs. People are even wondering if there'll be enough work going around to earn enough income to live.

In Sweden, the national government has taken measures to address the problem of enough when it comes to automation. While the government has clarified that technologies might replace your job, it has guaranteed that if your livelihood is upended, they'll ensure your well-being through income support and retraining. This system works thanks to Swedish taxpayers.

### ***Think of your career as a portfolio rather than a single path.***

Throughout the twentieth century, career progression meant doing well in school, going to college, getting a job, excelling at your job, achieving promotions, and finally retiring. But in recent years, this linear perspective of labor has been on the brink of collapsing.

As a frequent keynote speaker on the future of work, the author has spoken about the rise of freelancers, the effects of automation, the development of remote work, and the future of education and public policy in light of these changes. In fact, since 2008, the vast majority of new US job creation hasn't included full-time roles.

Then, when the pandemic hit, ten-year forecasts for remote working became our reality in six months. At the same time, many lost their jobs and scrambled to find a path forward. The future of work is already here. If you want to excel, you need to shift your expectations that a career should follow a single path.

### **The key message here? Think of your career as a portfolio rather than a single path.**

Your portfolio career might look like a sequence of various but singular roles. Alex Cole, a friend of the author, spent a decade in marketing, a decade in entertainment, and a decade in consulting. Then, in his 50s, he opened a yoga studio with his family.

Another kind of portfolio career is taking on a number of activities or roles at the same time. Diane Mulcahy is a strategist, finance whiz, author, and lecturer depending on the season. Her diverse career also



enables her to split the year between Europe and the United States.

Wearing multiple hats might sound like a risk. But when you have a diverse range of income sources, you have more security than if you stay in one role your entire career. You can evolve your professional identity according to the world in flux – enjoying an expanded professional community, taking ownership of your career, and making yourself less likely to be replaced by automation.

So how do you develop a portfolio career? The first step is to identify what skills, expertise, and strengths you already have. Then, from this list, identify what specific job your unique set of skills qualify you for. If you're a lawyer with a passion for history and bike riding, you could offer legal advice to travel companies. Instead of being defined by a title, you can build a career based on your roots and harnessing your full potential.

### ***Prioritize your humanity when navigating technology.***

We're living in what some have coined a "heads-down society." A 2019 study found that teenagers spent more than 40 percent of their day on a tablet, mobile phone, or TV screen. E-commerce, text recognition, and virtual assistant technology are now part of our daily lives. Humans are increasingly spending time with technology and less time with each other.

While technology enables us to connect faster than ever before, it's paradoxically leaving us disconnected from one another. Studies have shown that increasing screen time causes higher levels of adult depression. It's clear that technology isn't going anywhere. So if we want to navigate the world in flux, we need to reset our relationship with technology and tap into what makes us fully human.

### **This is the key message: Prioritize your humanity when navigating technology.**

One way to tap into your humanity is to boost your digital intelligence. You're likely familiar with an IQ, or intelligence quotient, which measures raw intellect, or with emotional intelligence, which is about your ability to perceive and manage emotions. Similarly, your digital intelligence is about responsibly engaging in the digital world.

Boosting your digital intelligence means improving skills around your digital communications, digital safety, digital rights, and digital identity. It's about knowing when to trade your smartphone for a face-to-face conversation, managing how much time you spend on your devices, and being aware of risks for digital identity theft. Overall, having high digital intelligence is about understanding that technology is a tool rather than a solution to your problems. It keeps you in touch

with what makes you essentially human as you navigate the digital world.

One area in which high digital intelligence might benefit us is approaching grief in the online world. While grief was once something which was done in private, the internet has given people a platform to share their grief publicly. The ability to share your grief can help you feel connected and enable others to support you. Yet expectations for how you should respond to grief online can also give rise to feelings of worry or guilt. What's more, for those grieving, it can be difficult to perceive who is genuinely supportive.

Using your digital intelligence, you can learn to show up for others more than by sending a simple message telling a grieving person to stay strong, or saying that you're sorry. Learning to prioritize your humanity is about asking others how you can help. At the same time, you can allow yourself to ask when *you* need help, flipping the old script which tells you to hide your emotions.

### ***Let go of your expectations to enable a brighter future to surface.***

Like many people today, you might have been left feeling that you have a future without dreams. You might have lost a job that you adored. Or the project that was set to launch your career may have collapsed. Perhaps your financial situation has made it unclear whether supporting your child's dream to go to college is worth the cost.

The final flux superpower is letting go of the future. This prepares you to keep your dreams alive when change flips your world upside down.

Instead of wasting your time, resources, or energy on frustration and fears about tomorrow, letting go of the future empowers you to control what is in your power: how you can respond to the present moment.

### **The key message here is this: Let go of your expectations to enable a brighter future to surface.**

Reframing your relationship with the future to write your new scripts can be achieved through three primary shifts.

First, you need to shift your mindset from predicting the future to preparing for it. This means recognizing the impossibility of predictions. Instead of investing your time and energy in what *will* happen to you, try crafting responses to scenarios which *could* unfold.

When the author's parents passed away, she'd spend time writing down the different paths her future might take. The list included starting her own business, teaching, getting married, not getting married, living in a faraway place, or staying close to home. She then questioned whether she could find joy and peace in each

of these scenarios. Each time, she decided that she could. By letting go of predicting the future, she enabled a different, but promising, set of futures to develop.

Second, you need to shift your expectations that things will go as planned to anticipate change. Consider the last time your plans fell through. How did you respond? If you felt anger or anxiety, how do you think you'd have reacted if you'd expected the change? When you learn to anticipate change, you better equip yourself for navigating uncertainty.

Finally, you need to shift your focus from the known to the unknown. When navigating change, you probably prepare yourself for obstacles you might encounter again. This strategy falls short since it doesn't account for changes which *haven't* occurred yet. In order to let go of the future completely, you need to accept that you can never know what the future will hold. By doing so, you open yourself up to the awe of life's mysteries and lean into change with hope rather than fear.

### ***Final summary***

The key message in these blinks is that:

**In order to flourish in a world in flux, you need to slow down and reconnect with your core values. By getting lost, knowing your “enough,” and letting go of your expectations for the future, you can embrace change as an opportunity rather than leaning away from it in fear.**

And here's some Actionable Advice to

**Make a list of what's in flux in your life right now.**

Write down a list of all the things in your life that are in flux right now. This could include a shift in your daily routine to concerns about the future. Are there any common themes on your list? Notice the emotions that come up when you think about each item. As you learn to adopt a flux mindset, notice if your responses to the items on this list shift over time.