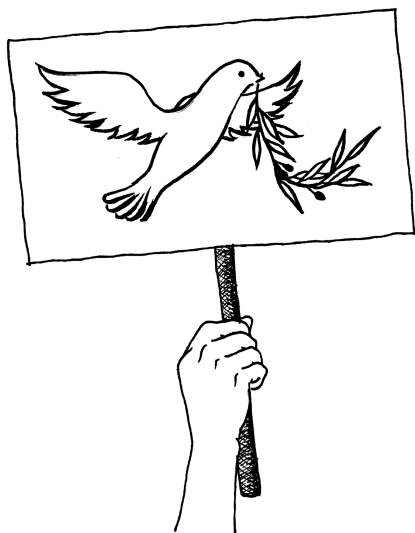


HOW TO CHANGE INSTITUTIONS

by Wyatt Roy

Illustrated by Julia Mattis



*In homage to Thich Nhat Hanh,
who showed us how a tiny book
can change someone's world*

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NOTES ON CHANGE

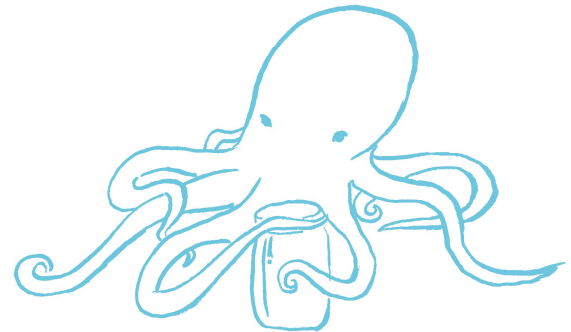
This book explains a way to change institutions. It is not the right way, or the only way. It is just one way, and the way that feels best to me. It may not feel best to you. This book may not speak to you at all, which is okay. We are different people. The world, and its institutions, may treat us differently.

The way described in this book chooses collaboration over antagonism. It may not work all the time, especially when we try to change systems that do not reciprocate our care, or do not show any concern for the wellbeing of others. These institutions may require fighting techniques to change. But many do not. Though some people are uncontrollably antagonistic, many do not want to be. Unfortunately, people often assume that fighting is the best way, or

the only way, and once these roles are defined, they are very hard to change.

I have found it easier, kinder, and more joyful to assume that everyone within an institution mutually cares for each other. Then we can invite people to be the best versions of themselves, together.

If this way seems soft and squishy, it is. It is also strong. Change is emotional, and making change requires adapting and growing one's own spirit even more than the institution's. This book explains how.



WHEN TO FIGHT, WHEN TO HEAL

There are two broad ways to change institutions: through war or care. My work as an activist once led me towards war, which left me frazzled and exhausted. This book shows a different practice based on care, curiosity, and Zen interdependence.

Some situations may require a fight. These could involve people who are excluded from institutions, or are targeted by them. They may not be allowed to enter the room, sit at the table, or speak. If this describes a situation you are in, this book may not be able to help you change those institutions.

This book is for situations where people do not *need* to fight, but do anyway, because an alternative way does not seem clear. Perhaps the institution has broken their trust, ignored their cause, or simply shown itself to be too complex and hardened. This book is an invitation to gently deconstruct

institutions into individual relationships, then use care and mindfulness to create mutual trust. It is for people with the freedom to choose caring collaboration over antagonism and opposition, who already have some access to the institution and can have conversations with those in power.

If you choose to work *with* instead of *against* institutions, seek alignment over antagonism, and trust others to reciprocate your care, you may find this a rewarding approach. Your position on the inside gives you rare power, even though you might not feel it. With mindful compassion, egoless effort, and courageous resilience, you can peacefully create lasting change for everyone – including those who are excluded by the institution. Your effort is vital and transgressive in a world where too often we fight people who actually want to help us. If you want to practice creating change through care, this book is for you.



CHANGING THE WORLD

The world is a very big place. But *your* world, the part that is around you, is cozy. You know many people and places and ideas, and they know you too.

If you want to change *the* world, you can always start by changing *your* world.

STARTING OFF

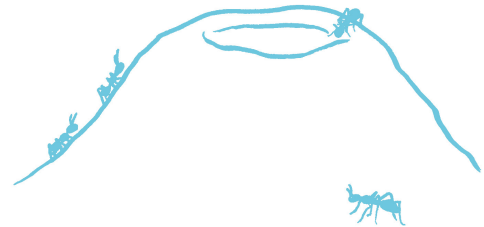
The first thing to do is to notice something that you want to change. Maybe, this thing feels like a problem. Maybe you have a solution in your mind already. Maybe the problem, and how far it is away from the solution, makes you feel a certain way. Changing the world can be very emotional.

As you notice the thing you want to change, also notice how you feel. Simply noticing your own self more deeply is the most important first step. The world has already changed.

ANTS TO INSTITUTIONS

The world is made up of many different kinds of beings, from plankton and bacteria, to fungi and trees, to humans and ants. These beings sometimes gather together into groups. We might call them colonies or forests or societies.

When human beings group into a community that shares an identity, a set of values, and a purpose beyond simply surviving, we call it an organization. As an organization gains power and structure, we call it an institution.



Working with Institutions

WONDERFUL COMPLEXITY

An institution is tricky to change because it means many different things to many different people. Sometimes, the people in it don't agree on what they want, or don't want. Sometimes, they don't agree who is in it, and who isn't — or who should be. Sometimes, they want it to stay the same, because predictability feels safe. Sometimes, they want it to change, because it is not working quite the way it might. Instead of seeing all of this diversity as scary or messy, we can notice all of the different people in an institution, and wonder, what do you care about? And how can I help you?

HEARING THE MUSIC

The world is already changing, even without you doing anything. Since you started reading this page, the wind outside blew a little, the sun and moon moved a bit along their path, and your breath moved in and out of your body, all on its own. We don't need to try to change the world. That is happening anyway. What we can do is learn how to dance with it.

WHAT DO YOU NEED

As individual beings, we have needs. We want to stay alive, and as healthy as we can be. We need a warm place to sleep, yummy food to eat, fresh air to breathe. Some animals evolved to find these mostly on their own. But humans evolved to do it together. This means that we also need people to love, and to be loved by.

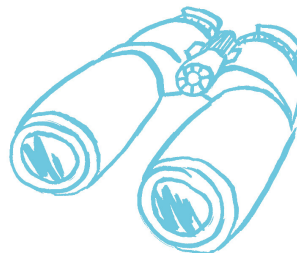
When we gather into groups of caring people, who care about enough of the same things, we call ourselves a community. If the community serves common goals, it may formalize into an organization. As the organization becomes stable, structured, and externally recognized, it becomes an institution. Some institutions started like this, as groups of people who were all helping each other make their world a little better. But sometimes, they defined "their world" very narrowly, excluding others from the benefit in order to make their lives better at

others' expense. Significant harm has been caused by institutions and their people. Our anger at an institution's historical or current actions is valid. It can also make us want to fight, instead of working with its members to change it.

If we want to change an institution, we can breathe in slowly, and remember that even people who care about very different things than us still enjoy a soft bed, tasty food, and a cool breeze. We all want to be healthy and happy. We all are scared of losing these. Can we be brave enough to find what else we share in common?

FLIPPING THE VIEW

How can looking at an institution from another perspective help you change it? If you feel relatively powerless in the institution, what might the perspective be of its administrators? Or if you are a leader, how might people outside of the institution view it? We can only view the world through one set of eyes. But when we listen — deeply, curiously, defenselessly — it is like spreading our gaze across the whole world, and our hearts with it.



Working with Resources

SAVE THE SCRAPS

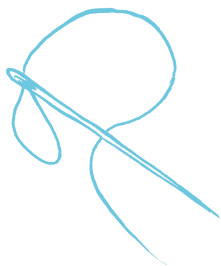
Like a hungry person finishing their dinner and licking the plate clean, institutions often use all of the resources they have access to. This means that when we try to change institutions, people can get scared and wonder, “will your change steal food from my plate?”

There is a simple way to alleviate this fear and make people excited about your change instead of wary of it: search for scraps. Just like offcuts of vegetables that might get thrown away but *could* be boiled into a tasty broth, see if you can find overlooked or unused spaces, resources, times, and people. If you use these in creative ways, your change won’t cost anyone anything — in fact, it will simply add to the food they get to eat. Everyone gets excited about a free meal.

HOW TO FIND SCRAPS

You need a needle, thread, and fabric to make a quilt. You also need space to sew it in, time to sew it during, and skill to sew it correctly. Each of these parts of the project requires resources. You may not be able to convince someone to give you these resources outright. But perhaps you can find scraps for each of them and recombine everything creatively.

The first step is to watch. See what resources the institution already has, observing when and how they are used, by whom. The second step is to listen. Notice when they are not used, and ask their users about it. See if they can help you. You may make a friend, as well as a quilt.



WHO FOR?

Are you trying to change the institution so that it works better for you? Or for others? Perhaps your change will improve it for both. Each situation is valid, yet each comes with different dynamics. If you do not have any personal stake in the outcome, people may be more willing to collaborate with you because they could perceive your efforts as selfless.

When the institution I was part of decided to change the way it let new people join, I got worried. I felt that its new practice would exclude many kinds of people for no reason. I asked all of my peers, “would you have applied if these new changes had been in place?” Most said no. I gathered data and wrote a report. Then I brought this insight to the people in power as a gift. They saw that even though their change would not affect me directly, we both cared about the diversity of our institution. They reversed the decision two days later.

If our change is primarily serving ourselves, it is important to have collaborators. We can be blinded by our personal desire to change things that benefit us. We may feel a sense of urgency. Perhaps we will want to prioritize our own perspective over others'. Or we may feel frustration and fear whenever someone disagrees with us, instead of gratitude for them sharing their perspective. In the most severe case, we may narrow our focus to push for harmful short term change over long term positive outcomes, if it will help ourselves.

By being clear with ourselves and our collaborators about who benefits from our change, we can invite others to support us whenever we get too caught up in our own desires and become less able to hold everyone in heart and mind.

TIME

Different parts of an institution change at different speeds. If you are part of the institution, you might notice yourself start to grow quite quickly. Your relationships with others in the institution might develop rapidly too. Processes may change slower. The goals and values of the institution may change the slowest.

When you want to create change, consider how you want to define “change”. How much is enough, and how quickly do you want it to happen? How will you know when you are satisfied? You may notice that the more time passes, the more things change on their own.

Working with Ourselves

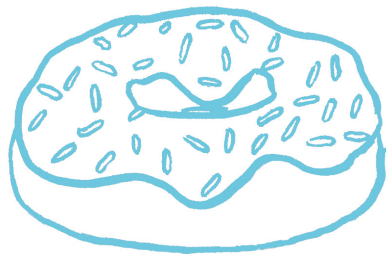
OUR GENTLE WANTS

We must care for ourselves in order to care for others. Sometimes we push ourselves to be a certain way, or to do certain things even when it may not feel exactly right. We may force ourselves to wake up earlier than we want, or work harder than feels good, or exercise in ways that hurt our bodies.

Many of us were taught that we must ignore what we want in order to get ahead, or to follow the rules, or to fit in. This casual violence that we inflict on ourselves is often rewarded and normalized so that we cannot see it. But the effects are damaging. Soon we may find ourselves pushing others the same way we push ourselves. And they may be more expressive about not wanting to be pushed around.

Instead, we can learn to listen. What do you truly want, at this moment? How can you care for that part of you? And are you brave enough to see if the world

will celebrate you for wanting that? When we begin to listen to ourselves, be curious about what we want, and try to help it, we become better at providing that same care to others.



RELISHING AGENCY

Squirrels hide acorns, beavers make dams, ants make underground cities. All beings act with agency. We enjoy the freedom to be ourselves and affect the world with our efforts. Institutions can amplify our sense of agency — or they can squeeze it out of us. When an institution takes away others' agency, those people may try to change it.

I once crawled across the grounds of my institution in a ten meter long shirt. I had handwritten on the shirt every single rule that the institution used to limit the agency of its people. I could not write these on a sign, because that was forbidden by the rules. And there were hundreds of rules, which is why my shirt was so long. This was a peaceful, but provocative act. I did not do it for collaboration. I did it to fight. I felt very excited, but also exhausted. After that, I decided to change how I advocated for change.

FEELING ZUBERY

You may want to drink tea with a friend, but they may be too busy to meet with you. In that moment, you can feel two things at once: disappointment that your wishes are not aligning with their's, and joy that the person you care about is acting on their own wishes.

There was no word for this joy, so we made one: Zubery. Zubery is the emotion we feel when we celebrate someone else acting the way they want, even when the thing they want is different from what we want.

PRACTICING ZUBERY

When every person in an institution is skilled at feeling zubery, the people in it have more agency. They are free from the fear that their actions will be coerced or judged by others. The smallest community where zubery is important is a couple. You can start practicing zubery with your friend or partner. You can say, "I want something different from what you do, and I am disappointed that we don't want the same thing, but I am also so happy for you." One day, you may notice that you feel this for someone surprising in your institution too.



SNEAKY FEAR

Fear hides in many clothes: disgust is the fear of becoming unhealthy. Anger is the fear of not getting what we need. Anxiety is fear without a direct cause.

We don't need to try to be more caring, loving, or wonderful — this is our natural way of being. All we need to do is learn to recognize, and digest, the emotion blocking us from being this way: our fear.

PUSHING THE BOULDER

Our identity is like a big round boulder that we always push around with us. When we are calm, it is as if we are on flat ground next to our boulder. We don't have to do anything to keep our boulder from rolling away. But when we are scared, we quickly push the boulder up a hill to protect it. Fear gives us the energy to push it up the hill, but we are so busy making sure our boulder doesn't roll back down the slope that we can't do or feel anything else while we're up there.

The good news is that we don't have to work to push the boulder back down to flat ground. If we just relaxed our grip, it would roll down on its own. Then once back on flat ground, we would be free to do and feel everything else we cared about. Our natural state is peace. We don't need to force it. We can simply notice when we're pushing our boulder halfway up a mountain, realize that we are safe, and just let it roll back down.

RAISING OUR HACKLES

Many actions might make us feel defensive. Someone may tell us that they were offended by something we did. They may say we were wrong. They may feel hurt by something we said. They may even be outright aggressive or angry, and this may trigger our own anger and aggression.

The most important thing to do when we feel defensive is to notice. Defensiveness is one sneaky form of fear. We can observe exactly what we feel: we can notice how it affects our breath, our muscles, and our gut. We can pay attention to our skin, the hairs on it, and our toes. We can watch our body become ready to fight or flee, and we can choose to do neither. We can honor ourselves, watch these emotions with curiosity, and let them fade all on their own. Sometimes they may fade in minutes, other times in hours. Once they are gone, then we are ready to act. How do you know that your defensiveness is

gone? It is gone if you think about the person who caused you to feel defensive, and realize that you care about them, and wonder how you might help them.

My institution thought it was doing a good job caring for the people it served. As one of those people, I knew that many of my peers felt differently. But every time we tried to tell people in power about how we felt, they didn't seem to hear us. Perhaps, I thought, our comments were making them raise their hackles.

Eventually I had an idea. As a peer, I could ask everyone about their opinions. Then I could combine them all and turn them into simple ideas, with clear solutions. I could give these to the people in power as a gift. After I gathered data, analyzed the results, and shared them with care, the institution was able, at last, to hear us.

BEHAVIORS OVER VALUES

Our identity is partly made up of our values. We may believe ourselves to be good, helpful, skillful, and kind. But when someone gives us feedback, our identity may feel threatened by their comments. We may bristle and think, “why are you attacking me?”

Perhaps they aren’t attacking us. Maybe they are coaching us, and we just can’t see it. The key is to change the basis of our identity: from values to behaviors. “I am a good person” can turn into “I am always trying to become better.” Then we can see this feedback for what it is: a caring gift that supports us, instead of threatens us.

DIFFUSING ANGER

When we face someone who believes something different from us, our bodies know it. We may react with anger, fear, pride, or certainty that we are correct. These feelings are all normal, but they are not helpful.

Next time this happens, look across at the other person and imagine them as a child. Ask yourself, were they a cute baby? Who fed them and hugged them to sleep? Then we can remember that this person, just like us, was once very vulnerable. We were not there to care for them then, but we are now. How might we help them?



USING FIRE

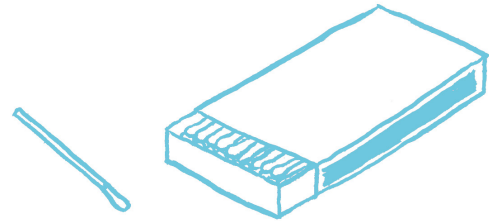
Our emotions are most useful to us when we see them as signals. They tell us what we care about. But they are not always helpful in guiding our actions. Anger is a useful signal that can help us notice when we need something that is not being provided by another person, an institution, or the world.

Anger helps us realize that we care; but feeling anger is like walking around while on fire. If we do not let the fire burn itself out before we enter a building or a conversation, we may burn everything around us.

Sometimes we may want to burn everything. Sometimes, this destruction may change an institution in ways we want it to. Anger has fueled movements that have created enormous change – both for the positive, and negative. When a forest burns, the dirt is cleared for new trees, but much

is also killed. And growing back takes time and enormous effort.

Acting from anger is not the only way, and it may not be the most effective way. We can choose, always, to listen to our anger, thank it for its gift of clarity and energy, notice how it feels, and let it subside on its own – before we take action.



FORGIVING

Anger is like a cup of boiling water that has no handle. Why do we hold onto it even when it hurts us? The person who poured us this cup may have walked away. They may not even know that it is hurting us. Yet we still choose to sit there, burning our hands. Forgiving them is putting the cup down.

Forgiveness is a gift that we give ourselves. We can forgive someone without ever telling them. There are many steps to forgiveness, but the simplest is simply deciding to forgive them. The next step is to emotionally forgive them, and to want to care for them instead of harming them in return.

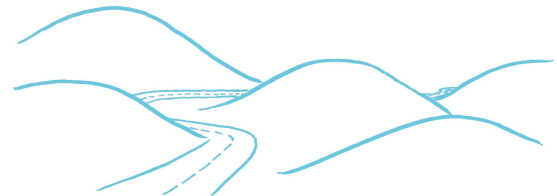
Forgiving someone does not mean that what they did was okay. It does mean that you don't want to keep burning yourself any more.



Working with Others

WRONG AND RIGHT

What is behind someone's values? What is behind yours? Where did your values come from? Perhaps you can remember a specific time when something happened to you, either pleasant or unpleasant, and you changed your behavior because of it. When someone believes something different from us, it is likely because their life has been different from ours. They are no more wrong for believing what they do than we are. We are both simply making the best guesses we can about how to move through this complex, changing world. We are together on this journey. We can greet them, "Hello, fellow traveler."



ASKING FOR ADVICE

People are experts of their own experience. We all have blind spots about everything that we have not experienced. The world is such a big place that almost everything that has ever happened, happened without us! Even if we meet one thousand people every day and travel to every country, we will have missed out on seeing the lives that everyone else was living while we were running around.

What can we learn from someone else's perspective? How can we use their stories to make our own perspectives more aware? One question you can ask is, "What do you see, that I am missing?"

EASY FAVORS

People love helping each other. As long as they don't feel worried about sacrificing their own well-being, they are likely to want to do someone a favor. Often the most difficult part is not convincing someone to do us a favor, or even the effort of doing the favor itself; it is figuring out exactly what we need.

When asking someone for a favor, they are much more likely to say yes if you do all the homework for them beforehand. Organize the logistics and plan everything that *you* can so that all they have to do is say yes, then execute.

This is not just nice, it is an act of care. The clearer you are with your favor, the more gratifying the gift you are giving someone: you are allowing them the

satisfaction of helping another person without all the headache of figuring out how.

When I wanted some people to move their workspaces to a new location so that I could use their area for change I was making in my institution, I had many concerns: where else they could go, whether the new space would satisfy their needs, who might facilitate it, and also, why they might want to help. I decided to figure out each of those things on my own. I even researched the work they did and the things they cared about, so that I could invite them into my change as collaborators. I organized everything else before asking anything so that they could simply say yes and do the favor, without having to also do logistics on top of it.

“Can you move somewhere else?” is harder to say yes to than “Would you like to participate, by moving right here?”

TANGLED HISTORIES

When we listen to the concerns of others, we invite them to teach us. We humbly acknowledge that we cannot know everything, and allow them to open our eyes more. Sometimes, the changes we propose in an institution will be opposed for reasons that make sense to us, once we hear these stories. We may see our own efforts in a lineage of actions and reactions that caused both gain and pain to different people, for decades in the past. Listen deeply to understand the source. We all want the same things, if we dig down far enough.



ANTAGONISTIC INSTITUTIONS

What if the institution you want to change is too governed by fear for its people to collaborate or receive feedback? After trying to collaborate, but being rebuffed, we may be tempted to fight. This is only natural. Fighting may even be effective, in some cases. It may cause change. But so does a wildfire.

You get to choose whether you want to plant flowers or spread fear. Change based on fear is likely to rebound and reverse. Change based on care is likely to grow, spread, and propagate itself organically. What kind of institution would you like to be a part of? You cannot change the whole thing all at once, but you can change your part of it, right now, by choosing to care. See what happens.

FRUSTRATION ANTIDOTE

Whenever you are frustrated by someone, one antidote is to find something that they have done that inspires you. Maybe they paint amazing art. Maybe they cook delicious cuisines that you want to learn. Maybe they recently behaved with grace in a tricky situation.

When we see the positive sides of people we dislike, they become more complex. We may start to understand their actions differently. We can intentionally search for the good in others whenever we feel bad towards them. The good does not counterbalance their disagreeable behavior, and it does not excuse it, but it does enrich our understanding of them. Just like us, they are people too.

CONSERVATION AS FEAR

The world is full of people who don't want things to change. Often, these people hold some kind of power in an institution. It may seem like they always get their way, and always get what they want. But maybe, they are just trying not to lose what they already have. They could be scared, like knights in a castle, trying to protect their little corner of the world, instead of venturing out.

But everyone wants something more. What if you were able to find something that you both wanted, something beyond their castle walls? How might you help them get it?

REFRAMING CHANGE

People who like things the way they are may feel scared by change. They may oppose you just because they are scared. How can you reframe your change to show how it actually supports the institution *staying the same* in ways that they value? Perhaps your change affects the day-to-day actions of people in the institution, in order to allow the core beliefs and mission to remain. If you can show how your change actually enhances deeper shared values, others' identities will not be threatened, and they are more likely to support it.

When I tried to create room that would serve a marginalized community in my institution, I found supporters who already valued increasing collaboration. I framed this room in a way that aligned with this value, and supported efforts they already were working on. They became excited and helped find the space and make it a success.

FINDING SUPPORTERS

You are not alone. If you have wanted an institution to change, it is very likely that others have wanted the same thing. They may not have had your skill, though. They may be passionate but uncertain of how to act. Or they may want to fight for change, instead of aligning and collaborating to achieve it.

When we invite supporters into our process, we open it up to a complex, beautiful array of opinions and skills. We can help people act in ways that feel good to them, and also feel good to others. We can let go of our own vision of change, to embrace a shared vision that helps even more people than we had imagined on our own.

The most important quality is flexibility. A brittle twig snaps in the wind; a supple sapling bends and sways.



MANAGING UP

Those who hold more institutional power than us are people too. They were once babies, they will one day become frail and need to be cared for again, and right now, they have their own complex lives and constraints. They could use our help.

If we find them asking unreasonable things from us, they may simply not understand what these tasks require, or perhaps they have their own pressure coming from above that we cannot see.

We can help them in two ways: we can share our perspective with open-hearted honesty, and we can listen to theirs. We may find that this conversation helps us dig for alignment in new ways. Or we may simply find that we care about each other's well-being more. In either case, we have changed our corner of the institution to be more caring.

MANAGING ACROSS

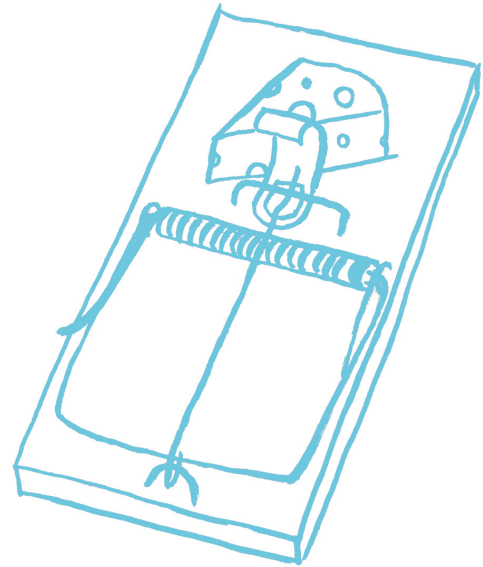
Our collaborators, also, are people. If they are failing to do what they said they would, or they are not doing it well, we may become scared that their actions will reflect badly on us. This fear might be sneaky, and hard for us to see. We may simply get tense, curt, and passive aggressive.

Remembering that our collaborators have their own lives and desires can help us become curious whenever we tighten up. We can ask, "What part of this work is most exciting to you? Which part do you dread?" Maybe they enjoy doing something that we don't like. Then we can celebrate the ways that we are not aligned, because these are how we can help each other. Difference is precious.

MANAGING DOWN

When we hold institutional power over people, we must be very careful and skillful with our actions. Their access to food and shelter depend on us. We may forget this when they act in ways that make us annoyed or scared. We may also forget this when we wish to treat them as equals. Spiritually, we may be equals, but institutionally we have the agency to take away their access to things they need.

Many leaders forget their blind spots and fall into the traps that come with institutional power. One helpful way to stay present and care for the people you manage is to ask for feedback. You can ask the people who work below you, “How can I support you better?” This question itself can heal a lot. But when you listen to their answer, your identity may flare up and try to protect you. If their feedback makes you upset, you can always respond with, “Thank you, I will try.”



ADMITTING FAULT

When we do anything, from picking a basil leaf to eat, to campaigning for new leadership in an institution, we are affecting the world beyond our body. It is a wonderful thing to feel agency to act, and to give the gift of our efforts to the world. Yet we may not always do it in the most skillful way.

Sometimes, we may cause harm. This is not ideal, and it can feel very scary when someone tells us that the thing we did hurt them or felt bad. We might feel angry, defensive, self-righteous, or dismissive. This is our own ego trying to protect us. We can thank our ego, and say to it, “I am strong, I am safe.” Then we can consider what the other person has said as a brave act of care. It takes courage to tell someone they have hurt you. Six simple words can repair the connection almost instantly, but they can be very difficult to say: “I was wrong, you are right.”

CARING OPPOSITION

You may have many supporters who feel safe and included in your change. Now how can you make the others, who may oppose your change, feel equally included and safe? Their opinions matter too. Their perspectives are valid and important.

After one of my institutional changes, many people said they loved it and were grateful. I created a way for them to share their quotes in support of the change so that everyone could celebrate. But someone pointed out that others who felt differently might not feel as welcomed to share their opinions. I created a way for them to give anonymous feedback, so all voices could be heard.

We can help everyone feel safe approaching us for a conversation, or leaving feedback. Our lives are interlinked. If our change were to ultimately harm them, how could we feel good about it?

HOW TO SAY SORRY

We don't mean to hurt others, but we cannot always predict all of the consequences of our actions. The world is too complex, and we are always learning. It is okay to make mistakes. Failure provides a helpful moment to learn. But when our mistakes hurt others, we can give them a gift: an apology.

A healing apology has three parts: owning what we did, saying sorry, and promising to change. Owning what we did means describing exactly what happened as someone else watching might have seen it. Not excusing or defending our actions, just simply acknowledging them, can be very powerful for the other person to hear. The second step, saying sorry for doing that, is the simplest part. But the third step can be challenging: a promise to change. To truly apologize, we must vow to try to change our behavior

in the future. We can always learn to be more skillful, or considerate, or caring as we dance with the world.

You may choose to write down your apology before giving it, to make sure you remember all three parts. Just like other gifts, you cannot force someone to accept it, you can simply offer it. You cannot control whether or not someone is ready to receive your apology, but you can make your gift as beautiful and sincere as it can be.



WHY ARE WE ARGUING

Usually, people are not disagreeing with you because they enjoy feeling tense discomfort. They may simply not notice the way they feel, or they may not know what to do about it. We can show them, through our own actions, what we do when we feel tension. We may first notice the tension in our bodies. Where does it move, what sensations does it cause, what does it do to our heartbeat? We can then smile at our tension, and say to it, “I see you, and I thank you for trying to protect me.” We can notice our breath, which may be shallow or fast. By noticing all these things, and letting them be exactly the way they are, without trying to change them, we are letting our coziest part of the world — our own body — know that it is safe, and we are not forcing it to do anything. This is very reassuring. And the person you are disagreeing with may also sense it: they are safe too, and we are not forcing them to do anything.

UNGROUPING

If an institution feels too big and complex to change, you can always split it into its smallest parts: individual people. Many people enjoy gathering in groups, but these can be tricky settings for getting to know anyone in depth. We can only pay attention to one thing at a time. If we want to get to know someone better, especially someone who is important in an institution, it is easier to do that one on one. Then we can pay full attention to the person in front of us, and let them know we are here, listening, and curious.

If someone is tense or disagrees with you when you are in a group, the first step is to invite them to meet with you individually. You can say, “would you like a cup of tea? I want to hear more about your perspective.”

IDENTITY THREAT

People don't change their identities easily. Especially not when others tell them to. We may see ourselves as a coffee or tea person; prefer mountains to the beach; or be a practitioner of this but not that. If someone tried to convince you that you were wrong and you should be different, most people would dig their heels in and say, "no" rather than, "you're right." This is only natural.

When trying to change institutions, look out for moments when your change causes someone to fear that their identity is being attacked. Telling someone to change who they are will rarely be effective. But we each have many identities: we may be friends, coworkers, neighbors, citizens, and members of an institution all at the same time. Instead of challenging someone's identity, how can you show that your change actually supports certain aspects of their identity, exactly as it is?

FINDING RESONANCE

Someone may tell us that they care about very different things than we do. This may make it hard for them to support our change. We may wish that they cared about the same things we did, and we may try to change their values or identity so that we could be aligned. This is like squeezing a river stone to get water out of it. If you squeeze very hard, you may get just a droplet, but it would take a lot of effort and shatter the stone.

Instead, we can be curious. What else does this person care about? Can we look beneath their goals to find something that we also care about? Then we might be able to help them with their own goals, which align with ours. These may be different from the ones we started trying to change, but they still nudge the institution in a direction that works better for everyone.

DIGGING

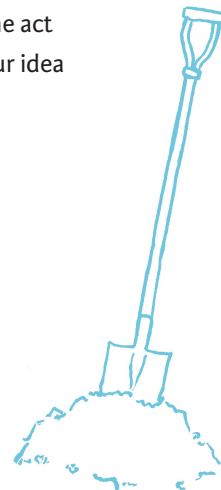
If someone in power values different things from you, there is not much you can do to change that. They value what they value because of the life they have lived, and the system that pushes on them — just as you do. But you can dig underneath their values to discover where they came from, and where *those* came from. Eventually, as you dig, you may find that there is something you both care about. After all, we are the same animal, governed by the same needs for food, shelter, and love.

You can dig for alignment alone, but it is more joyful, and faster, to dig with two shovels. This is called collaboration.

COLLABORATING COURAGEOUSLY

You may have an idea. That idea came from everything you know, plus some strange spark inside you. The idea is beautiful and pure. But it may not be the best idea for everyone. When we try to change an institution, we are looking to find an idea that makes it work better for many people.

Courageous collaboration is the act of wondering, “How might your idea be better than mine?”



PRECIOUS DISAGREEMENT

When someone strongly disagrees with us, this can be a great gift. They are showing us what they care about, and maybe also what they are scared of. Their disagreement comes from their life experience that is different from ours. What can we learn from it? How can we adjust our approach so that it better protects and supports them, instead of making them feel attacked? How would it feel to act as if we were on the same team?

FIGHTING FOR SURVIVAL

People want to help. Once we have met our own needs, most of us want to help others meet theirs. Usually, if someone seems to enjoy fighting for the sake of fighting, it is because they are scared of losing access to the things they need. This is very scary for them, because if they lose all of the things they need, they may die. And even if they were to only lose a few things, ones they didn't really need, the same existential fear is often burning inside them. Their fear is trying to protect them.

We each do this too. Try to remember the last time you argued with someone. Was part of you worried about losing something you cared about? Were your actions and words trying to protect you?

When I first tried to change the way my institution prioritized certain people over others, I felt like fighting. My opinions, and the needs of an entire

group within the institution, were not being listened to. My first attempts to point this out fell on deaf ears. I realized that I was transmitting my own anger and fear through my words and actions. I decided to find another way.

I thought, if they simply are trying to protect themselves, what if I also tried to protect them? My next conversation was one of care. Instead of fighting, I assured them that I would help them provide for their needs too. This was challenging for me to do, because I was so aware of the needs of so many others that were not being met. But by doing this, I showed how I understood the complexity of the system we worked in, and that I wanted to help them make it work better for everyone. This time, our issues were heard, and a truly generative collaboration could begin.

HOW CAN I CARE FOR YOU MORE

When someone is dismissive or angry towards us, it can make us feel angry and dismissive in return. These emotions are trying to protect us and give us the power to advocate for our needs. But they stem from a root of fear. As you sit with your emotions and let them flow through you, you may see how both of you are actually both feeling the same way. You may also notice that when you felt angry and defensive, you just wanted to be looked after. After the emotions fade, you may feel perfectly empty. In that emptiness, you may find the capacity to look at them and think, “I just want to be cared for. So how can I care for you more?”

BULLIES

The children we used to be still live inside us. People who are mean are often scared. Those who belittle us, ignore us, or condescend to us are just acting as children in adult bodies, worried and anxious about something. Their behavior may be unskillful, and we may wish that they were not being children, but our wishing cannot change the fact that inside this grownup is a child who, just like us, needs care. We are sometimes no better at tending to our inner child than they are.

Whenever anyone is angry at you, remember that before they said or did anything, they were first feeling scared themselves. We can look through their eyes to imagine the child inside. Whenever we are feeling mean towards someone else, we can apply the same care to our own inner child. We can hold these children and wonder, “how can I protect you?”

HOW OTHERS SEE US

Despite our best efforts to collaborate, others may reject our offers. They may be scared of us, jealous of us, or just not like us for reasons that we have no control over. These may have to do with our identity, the way we look, or the values we hold. It may have to do with constraints affecting them that we cannot see. Perhaps they recently lost a loved one. Or maybe they just didn’t sleep well.

We cannot control how others feel about us. We can only control how we feel about them. When interacting with people who want to harm us, we can remember that they are harming themselves first. We can wonder how their behavior towards us is supporting their goals. We can realize that it has little to do with us. And we can give our care elsewhere, to those who are receptive to it and grateful for it.

MELTING OUR ENEMIES

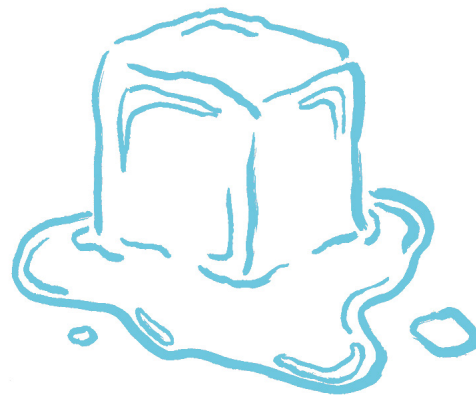
When something feels bad to us, we look for someone to blame. This is easy to do, and very normal. When we choose a person to become an enemy, we get to offload all of our fear, anger, and discontent onto them. Our ego gets to feel satisfied, self righteous, and smug. This can feel good in the short term, but it may not lead to change.

It is much harder, though more effective, to notice whenever we consider someone to be an opponent, and think, “What do we both care about?” Even better, we can ask them, “What do you care about?”

We don’t need to agree on everything, because we have lived different lives. But we can care about each other’s flourishing.

If you find yourself thinking of people as “opponents”, create ways to invite them into your efforts. You can

learn a lot from them, both about your own blind spots, and about how to care for people who hold other views and priorities. Your change may take more time to implement, but you will have a higher chance of succeeding.



ATTRACTING OPPOSITES

As children we are told stories of good against evil. We learn that we have two poles on our planet, and that every adjective has an opposite. When we grow up, this mindset of duality can make us think that all people in our institution are against us, by default. This might be true, but it might not be. I once decided to host an art exhibition in my institution without asking permission. I assumed that if I asked, I would be told no. After a few days, I realized that I may cause harm if I did not understand the impact of the show. So I told the people in power about it. To my surprise, many of them wanted to help, and we made more than an exhibition, we became friends.

Be aware of the way power affects people, but be open to them surprising and delighting you. If you treat someone as a collaborator instead of an opponent, they may treat you that way back.

WHEN TO WAGE WAR

Punching someone hurts your hand as well as your opponent. Fighting is actually hard to do, but it is easy to *want* to do. Helping is easy to do, but it can be hard to *want* to do. Especially if someone is being mean or disagreeable, it can be very difficult to relax ourselves. We may want to lash out, hurting both ourselves and them, and helping continue a disagreement that may exhaust us with chronic anger towards them. That is hard on both of us, even though it may feel justifiable right now.

If you find that you want to fight instead of help, now may be a good time to go outside, watch the sky, and talk to a friend. Sometimes fighting may be necessary, but even then, it hurts everybody. The easier and more productive path than fighting, though we may not be able to do it at this moment, is to try to see the child inside of them, and decide to protect them from whatever they are scared of.

FEELING OFFENDED

When asking for feedback, first take a breath. Think, “I am someone who grows.” Remember that this feedback is offered as a gift to you, to help you grow. And remind yourself that just like an ugly sweater, you do not have to keep the gift.

Whatever you do with the gift, it always helps to thank people for it, for it was likely given as an act of care. And before you discard it, you may want to try it on for a week. Sometimes our ego can stop us from seeing clearly at first.

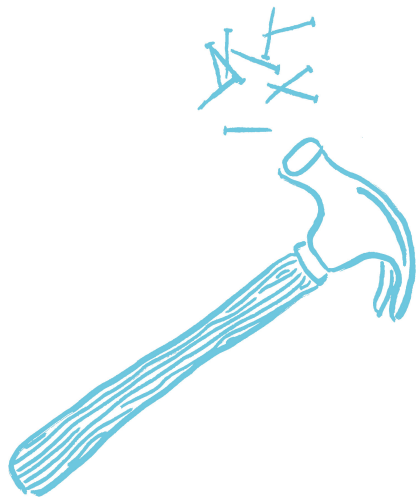


REPAIR

The most valuable skill you can practice is the ability to repair your relationships. When we change the world in ways both big and small, we exert our agency over it, and we affect other people. It is almost guaranteed that someone will not like what we are doing. When this happens and they tell us, we may feel tempted to shut down, get defensive, or cut them off.

A much more powerful strategy is to repair. We can ask them, “How did my actions harm you?” Then we can listen to their response. Deep listening means that we can believe their words to be true for them without needing them to be true for us. We can care about their perspective. And we can apologize for our role in the harm they experienced. Our actions can always be more skillful, our perspective more aware, and our state more mindful.

Changing institutions is like playing with fire: we may end up burning some bridges. Instead of leaving those chasms uncrossable, we can learn to repair them. And we may often find our new bridge to be sturdier than it started.



INACTION

No one would ever do anything if they were too worried about harming someone. Repair is important because it allows us to act without fear. We must be careful, diligent, mindful, and as skillful as we can be. We must also be deeply caring. But even with these efforts, we will often do something that feels wrong to someone. Does this mean we should do nothing? Your answer is somewhere within you. The world needs your effort to make it better. When we trust our own capacity to heal the relationships we have damaged, we can act as best we can, and know that even our mistakes are simply an opportunity to care for others.



MAKING CHANGE

Breathing in, we feel alive.

Breathing out, we feel time pass.

Breathing in, we hold ourselves.

Breathing out, we hold all others.

Breathing in, we hug our hopes.

Breathing out, we hug our fears.

Breathing in, we feel our strength.

Breathing out, we give our care.

Acknowledgments

MANY PEOPLE WROTE THIS BOOK

Someone gave me these ideas, and now they are yours. Below is an expression of gratitude to the people who impacted, inspired, and shaped each page, and a reference to specific work where applicable.

6 Notes on Change

Justin Cook helped me understand *care* as an invisible infrastructure that flows through systems. With his guidance, provocations, and teaching, my partner Julia Mattis and I created a portfolio of systemic changes for an eating disorder treatment facility. Then I started to realize that this practice of care applies to all systems – including institutions.

8 When to Fight, When to Heal

Tania Bruguera has supported my institutional change from the moment I crawled across Harvard

campus to protest free speech policies. She works both with and against institutions, depending on the circumstance, and helped me see that situations, not people, call for different methods. Before Tania, I saw some people as healers and others as fighters, which was unhelpfully oversimplified, trapped in illusions of objective identity, and didn't resonate with the parts of myself that at different times recognize the costs and benefits of both fighting and caring.

11 Changing the World

Robin Roy and Cathy Zoi, my dad and mum, gave me everything. Then they taught me that my responsibility was to effectively use those gifts to make the world a better place. And then they watched in horror as I crumpled under that significant mantle until eventually I was able to redefine *the* world as *my* world, and stand up straight again.

12 Starting Off

Mindfulness can be as simple as noticing. So many people have helped me understand mindfulness in ever simpler, truer ways, but this book would not exist without Thich Nhat Hanh, his teachings, and his books (which this one directly pays homage to in both form and tone). Thay, or teacher, as he was called by those he helped, wrote with a clarity that often made me laugh. His book *How to Walk* (Parallax Press, 2015), taught me how to be present in this very moment, his book *How to Love* (Parallax Press, 2014) taught me how to recognize and hold my own fear, and his book *How to Fight* (Parallax Press, 2017) informed many of the practices around anger that are in this book.

One core teaching: we don't need to try to force ourselves to be different than we are. This itself is a form of violence. We can simply watch the way we are, with curiosity. Everything follows from there.

13 Ants to Institutions

Martin Bechthold, my professor at Harvard Graduate School of Design (GSD), helped me understand how groups of people who gather in an institution think. His courageous class *Intangible Design: Organizations* helped me see, map, and navigate systems of influence within an institution with humility, hope, and resilience.

15 Wonderful Complexity

Sarah Whiting, Dean of the GSD, holds open office hours, where students from across the school air their grievances. I learned a lot from watching her dance amongst the complexity with compassion, and from the way she critiqued, coached, and supported one of my institutional changes that I reference in the book: an unstudio for students who didn't have an effective gathering place (unstudiogsd.org).

16 Hearing the Music

Chigan Roshi, at Dai Bosatsu Zendo in the Catskill Mountains, taught me how to relax my grip on changing reality. He showed me how to melt the ice block of insight with the warming effects of love to make it useful, drinkable water.

17 What Do You Need

Claude provided a sharp critique of my initial usage of the word "institution" in this section, allowing me to rewrite it with greater acknowledgment of the harms that institutions often inflict on others. Claude later critiqued the entire book to help me see who it might resonate with, and who it might offend, to help me better understand who I wrote it for, and why.

19 Flipping the View

Ronald Heifetz's work on adaptive leadership in *The Practice of Adaptive Leadership* (Harvard Business Press, 2009), and Bob Kegan's Constructive-

Developmental Theory from *In Over Our Heads: The Mental Demands of Modern Life* (Harvard University Press, 1994), helped me understand paradoxical perspective taking as a vital skill in organizational management.

21 Save the Scraps

Dan Borelli helped me first recognize my process of institutional change as a practice. He workshopped my original framework of “infrastructural cracks” with me, and pointed out that my decision to include him in my plans to host a covert pop-up exhibition in the GSD, another one of my institutional change projects, was also core to this practice. He helped me see how important mutual care, instead of antagonism, was in institutional change, and to see my efforts in a lineage.

22 How to Find Scraps

Kalana White and Xavaar Quaranto, my friends and colleagues, helped me find an important institutional “scrap” through observational research we conducted together. While measuring how spaces inside the GSD were used, we noticed that there was an underutilized room that could be repurposed into an unstudio to serve a disenfranchised group, scaffold their collaborative learning, and give the entire institution a different vision for design pedagogy. They taught me how to search for scraps and use data to reveal them to others.

23 Who For?

Nick Lesko helped me understand many of the dynamics associated with institutional change, including the effects of selflessness. He helped me see how my unstudio project may have been easier to support because I was advocating for change that would not affect me, as I was graduating. Whenever

I got nervous or scared that the unstudio could not happen, Nick was one of the people who helped me ground and recenter, by reminding me that this wasn't about me.

25 Time

Stewart Brand's framework of Pace Layers in *The Clock of the Long Now* (Basic Books, 1999), and Donella Meadow's *Thinking in Systems: A Primer* (Chelsea Green, 2008) informed my understanding of how time is a critical ingredient in systemic change.

27 Our Gentle Wants

Karen Brennan taught a class called *Designing for Learning by Creating* for which I designed a website called *Arena of Wants* (arenaofwants.com). Karen helped me learn how to unlearn all of the violent ways I had suppressed my own needs and desires in order to succeed in school – then she helped me create a tool that would help others figure it out for

themselves too. Her book *Start With Questions: The Classroom as Design Studio* (MIT Press, 2026) inspired the unstudio, which led to many of the relationships and learnings captured in this book.

29 Relishing Agency

Daniel Wilson taught me to see the preciousness of maintaining agency in group collaborations. His class gave me the intellectual understanding, as well as the lived experience, to value agency in groups as small as two.

30 Feeling Zubery

Luis Zanforlin and I coined the word “zubery” together in 2020 to describe our own approach to friendship and collaboration. Luis is my favorite co-designer of systems of all scales and mediums, from interpersonal dynamics to game mechanics.

31 Practicing Zubery

Julia Mattis showed me what it felt like to be in a partnership flowing with zubery. She taught me that when our own wants and needs are celebrated, alignment doesn't need to be pedestaled, and can instead be celebrated when it is found.

32 Sneaky Fear

Cheri Huber, a Buddhist monk and writer, gave words to a sensation I'd felt my whole life, in *The Fear Book* (Keep It Simple Books, 1995). Few of us can recognize when our bodies feel fear, as cortisol trickles or dumps into our bloodstream. We are taught not to be scared, or show that we are scared, and we come up with many words to hide our fear: stress is a common one. Cheri taught me to recognize fear in its many forms, and process it efficiently so that it does not govern my actions.

33 Pushing the Boulder

Lucia Henelly introduced me to Zen as a practice of seeing reality clearly and moving with it in ever more skillful, fluid ways. I first developed the metaphor while meditating at her monastery. I thought, "What if there were only one core emotion (fear), and all other emotions just come from the lack of it?" Walking around the mountain lake, I noticed that joy and awe and sadness and wonder and compassion and love were simultaneously present with me – until my mind wandered into and imagined slight from a peer, and I felt a microgram of cortisol release into my bloodstream. Then all I felt was fear, and its derivatives. Without friends to bring us into environments, situations, and ideas where our minds can expand, we are stuck.

34 Raising Our Hackles

Garrett Gunther once started a creative agency with me, and showed me how to respond to being

called out without getting defensive. One day, in an awkward situation that could have turned into an argument if he had dug in his heels, he simply said, “I’m going to walk that back, my bad.” Garrett never tried to explicitly teach me anything, he just walked the walk.

36 Behaviors Over Values

Martin Bechthold taught me to notice when identity, or ego, might be entering interpersonal dynamics. Two nuggets from Martin: You never win when you challenge someone’s identity, and you can’t change people.

37 Diffusing Anger

Thich Nhat Hanh writes so simply and kindly about how to move with, acknowledge, and listen to our anger in *How To Fight* (Parallax Press, 2017)– without letting it guide our actions. His approach is perplexing for many who don’t have a mindfulness practice,

but it hit home with me many times during my institutional change negotiations.

38 Using Fire

Rick Ramirez first helped me see and understand anger as an emotion that I had spent my lifetime suppressing and ignoring. He taught me ways to accept my anger, give it a voice, and listen to it – and the necessity of doing so, or else it would be blocked inside. He also taught me how to let it move through my body so I could act once it was diffused.

40 Forgiving

Richard Cowden does research into the science of forgiveness, and the data-backed processes that empower people to forgive others. His approach is distilled into a downloadable ebook that you can do, on your own, in a few hours and give yourself the gift of lasting relief. I tried to paraphrase the most important points from that research here, but

forgiveness as a practice requires sustained effort and care and the full workbook is wonderful (Cowden & Jackson-Meyer, Human Flourishing Program at Harvard, 2025; original REACH model: Worthington, Virginia Commonwealth University).

43 Wrong and Right

Lao Tzu, writer of *Tao Te Ching* circa 300 BC, translated by Stephen Mitchell (HarperCollins, 1988), taught me what moral subjectivity is. There can be no fast without slow, black without white, old without young. Bad and good, likewise create each other. “What is a good man but a bad man’s teacher? What is a bad man but a good man’s job?”

44 Asking for Advice

Deborah Helsing showed me the necessity of developing the skill of holding others’ perspectives. For much of my life, though, I was hesitant to include others’ perspectives in my work. The complexity

of trying to make one project that accommodated and encompassed two or more viewpoints scared me. Deb’s teaching on Constructive-Developmental Theory, both in person and in *Immunity to Change* (Kegan & Lahey, Harvard Business Press, 2009) taught me how the most advanced stages of adult development embrace paradox, and showed me what that looks like in everyday situations.

45 Easy Favors

Kristen Hunter, Erica Martinez, and Yijun Yan showed me the power of asking a clear favor when I spent hours planning how to ask them to give up their bookings of a shared classroom so I could put the unstudio there. I found alternative spaces, and researched their own design practices in order to invite them into the project as collaborators by giving up the space. All three said yes, moving their classes sometimes to other buildings. People want to help, if we clearly let them know how.

47 Tangled Histories

Maurice Cox gave a talk about his urban planning process that covered the challenges of getting diverse community stakeholders on board with a new building that would revitalize an abandoned main street. He explained how one group of residents was particularly opposed to the development, even though it would benefit them the most, purely because they were scared of one of the investors. It turned out that a decade prior, a group with a similar name had led a disastrous development in the area. By listening to their stories, and untangling their fears, and adjusting the project to compromise with their needs, he was able to bring them to an agreement.

48 Antagonistic Institutions

Oliver Wainwright helped me understand the potential limits of a care-based change practice while talking to a group of students in a conversation facilitated by the publication *Pairs*. When the

institution, and its constituents, will not listen to you or receive your care, fighting may be the only way to get a seat at the table. This perspective troubled me because it didn't fit into my practice; but it helped me define the limits of the effectiveness of this practice and think more holistically.

49 Frustration Antidote

Karen Brennan riffed with myself and a group of student tinkerers to come up with the phrase “the antidote to frustration is friends.” It was a reminder that whenever we felt stuck in a project, we were unlikely to break out of that stuckness on our own while frustrated, so it would be better to put the project down and talk to a friend. I later wondered if we could extend the idea, by turning someone into a friend in order to feel less frustrated with them. It worked.

50 Conservation as Fear

Nick Lesko shared this idea with me when we tried to figure out how to make the unstudio happen permanently. We expressed frustration that people in power always seemed to get what they want, then realized that maybe they didn't – they just protected what they already had.

51 Reframing Change

Martin Bechthold taught me the practice of reframing changes in terms that were less scary and more palatable to the affected stakeholders. This may include referencing longstanding documents that support the change, or showing the change in a broader context that reveals how minimal it is.

52 Finding Supporters

Kalana White and Xavaar Quaranto brought their full selves to an institutional change design research effort that started by simply trying to get our

community space within the GSD, and ended up redesigning the entire school to better support the learning outcomes of all its students.

54 Managing Up

Charles Waldheim showed me that every person in relative power to ourselves is responsible to others more powerful than them. After meeting with him to propose an institutional change, I later watched him in a faculty meeting proposing his own changes to others. He helped me see that no one is all powerful. A department chair is beholden to the other faculty and the Dean. Even the Dean of an institution like the GSD is still beholden to the will of others.

55 Managing Across

Haley Lehw, Alexandria Grant, Carla Gamarra Martinez, and Rowena Jimenez taught me the potential and pitfalls of collaboration during a month-long project that brought me to my breaking point. I

saw clearly my own binary tendencies to either exert control or surrender entirely, and ultimately they taught me how to find a middle path.

56 Managing Down

Margaret Lindon was the first person I ever managed, and she taught me to recognize the conflict of interest difference between being someone's coach and being their boss. Many clients and bosses of mine have taught me to recognize the dynamic from the other side – a status and power dynamic may be felt most acutely by the one whose access to their core needs is exposed.

58 Admitting fault

Dan Levy gave a seven-minute speech for a series called *Lectures that Last* where he claimed he had found the most difficult words to say. He made everyone in the audience repeat them aloud: "I was wrong, and you were right." He pointed out that

many people in the room had likely never said them before, and made the case that they were invaluable for repairing relationships of all kinds. Since watching his speech, I noticed myriad opportunities to say those words in my own institutional change practice, and have said them frequently.

59 Caring Opposition

Sarah Whiting taught me a valuable lesson about making opposition feel safe when she helped me see that my petition gathering support for the unstudio did not make it easy for people to express dissent. I realized that I was blinded by my own perspective that the unstudio was a good change that served the community, because so many people were emphatic about it. But for a change to be maximally beneficial, all opinions must feel respected and safe to express.

60 How To Say Sorry

Harriet Lerner taught Brene Brown, along with myself and all of her *Unlocking Us* podcast listeners, the ingredients to a proper apology (*I'm Sorry: How to Apologize & Why It Matters*, Vox Media, 2020). Gordon Lanza and Luis Zanforlin decided to design a digital tool with me to help people remember all of the steps, and we built iwanttosaysorry.com. We used the tool frequently during its construction to heal after our own collaboration missteps.

62 Why Are We Arguing

Thích Nhat Hanh is a fervent advocate of nonviolence, starting with nonviolence to the self. When I first started meditating, I exerted the same domineering control over my own body that I tried to exert over every aspect of my life. When I felt tension, I tried to “let it go” but this *trying* just added more tension. For years, I gave myself migraines by meditating. He helped me see what I was feeling with

curiosity, instead of a desire to change it. Then the change, paradoxically, happens all on its own.

63 Ungrouping

Martin Bechthold taught me that no decisions get made in group meetings. Alignment is dug for, and built, in one-on-one chats.

64 Identity Threat

Martin Bechthold also helped me notice when someone's resistance to change may be caused by their ego or identity flaring up. He inspired me to find another way to reframe changes so they do not trigger identity-based fears.

65 Finding Resonance

Karrah Phillips taught me that curiosity is the cure to difference-based anxiety. While living together in a 9-person co-op during COVID, she shepherded our diverse group into a community, then an

organization, and ultimately a kind of tiny institution using curiosity and care.

66 Digging

All of the GSD students enrolled in studio programs helped me see that though we wanted different things on the surface, underneath we all wanted community, collaboration, and creative workspace.

67 Collaborating Courageously

Allen Sayegh and Eric Rannestad co-designed and co-taught a seminar with me in the most collaborative way I had ever experienced. We each had such different pedagogical approaches and values, yet by combining them, iterating on each others' ideas, and egolessly letting go of the purity of our own, we created a class that was born of all of us, thus catered to a wider variety of student learning styles than either one of us may have done on our own.

68 Precious Disagreement

Zach Deocadiz took me aside one afternoon and told me all the ways he disagreed with the things I had done while I was changing our institution. Our conversation was incredibly challenging for me, yet he showed such care and such partnership in righting the wrongs that I was left feeling grateful. He acted like we were on the same team, and as a result, I felt that way too.

69 Fighting for Survival

Ollie Deatker helped me to understand conflict as the result of worries about resource access. We were on the same side in a minor conflict with someone over how they were using space in our institution. Our communication with them was not changing anything, and we were at a stalemate. Eventually, I wondered if maybe the other person may simply need help. When I asked what they needed and offered to

help with it, they accepted gratefully, and then were able to accommodate our requests.

71 How Can I Care For You More

Pranav Subramanian helped me notice how anger rises in me frequently, silently, rapidly, whenever I become worried about protecting myself and those I care about. His experience trying to give care to our institution was dismissed in a way that made me feel outraged – both out of a desire to protect him, and a desire to protect the other people in the institution who were being affected by such callous treatment. After I sat with my anger and let it diffuse, I noticed that in its place was a caring curiosity for the person who triggered this response in me, who perhaps just felt angry and scared themselves.

72 Bullies

Marissa Peifer taught me to see, befriend, and hold the child inside me. She suggested I write this child a

letter, showing it love, thanking it for its bravery, and letting it know I was here to protect and support it. This simple activity changed the way I treated myself when I was scared or ashamed, and allowed me to see this facet of others.

73 How Others See Us

An astute student of mine once told me that I was an incapable teacher and there was nothing I could do about it. Despite the fact that I felt deeply aligned with them, wanted to support them, and cared about them, I could not control the way they received my effort. Likewise, I could not control the way they saw me. I am immensely grateful to them for teaching me that care is a gift that may not be received, and for directing me to apply it elsewhere.

74 Melting Our Enemies

Jason Jay and Gabriel Grant helped me understand the ways our psychological immune system protects itself

from threats in often self-defeating ways, in their wonderful essay on locating the bait that lures us into interpersonal traps in *Breaking the Gridlock: The Power of Conversation in a Polarized World* (Berrett-Koehler Publishers, Inc. 2017).

76 **Attracting Opposites**

Cecilia Cuff advised me to be aware of power structures, but to remain open to surprise. Her urban planning work uses a combination of techniques and practices to get communities and institutional support aligned to make corners of the world more caring.

77 **When to Wage War**

Thích Nhat Hanh embodies nonviolence in a way that is so clear and aspirational that it makes me doubt whether fighting is ever the most effective means of change. It is effective at something – exerting control,

protecting oneself – but the cost seems high and personally, I choose to use it as a last resort.

78 **Feeling Offended**

Lara Ortiz-Luis taught me a process for giving and receiving feedback, taught to her by Corey Ford. People often frame feedback as a gift, but receiving it as one in practice, is more difficult, and their methodology helps. There are many ways to give and receive feedback, and my new favorite process is Liz Lerman's *Critical Response Process* (Liz Lerman Dance Exchange, 2003).

79 **Repair**

Rick Ramirez taught me that the most important quality in a relationship is mutual intention to repair. Justin Cook and Abby Spinak helped me see repair as a core infrastructural practice.

81 Inaction

Every person who has ever felt wronged by my efforts is worthy of acknowledgment here. Your grace and forgiveness have informed my perspective on change just as much as the support of people who have advocated alongside me.

83 Making Change

Thích Nhat Hanh includes simple breathing poems in his books like *How to Fight* (Parallax Press, 2017) and *How to Relax* (Parallax Press, 2015). This closing provocation is a direct homage to his practice.

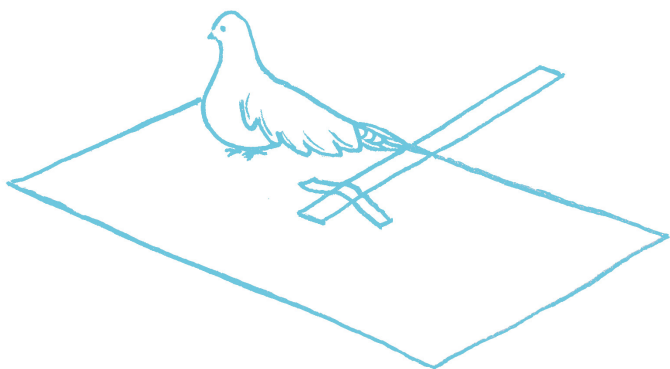
84 Acknowledgments

Abby Spinak taught me that citations are more than an obligation: they are a gift. As if knowing that I would respond better to acts of care than acts of duty, she showed me how citations can be creative, political, and grateful. They are collaborative community-building tools for interpersonal

asynchronous conversations. I would never have written this acknowledgments section without Abby's nudging, yet it has turned into the most humble, vital part of the book for me, as I reflect on both my material and all of the perspectives that led to it. In addition to the acknowledgments section, Abby taught me to see invisible infrastructure everywhere, and this book was born out of months of my design research into pedagogical infrastructures, which required me to intervene at our shared institution, Harvard GSD.

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You. I want to acknowledge you. Your care, curiosity and effort make you uniquely able to change yourself, your institutions, and your world in profoundly beautiful ways. Thank you for reading, and thank you for being you. I am so excited to see what you do next, and how you do it.



HOW TO CHANGE INSTITUTIONS

Wyatt Roy builds upon Thich Nhat Hanh's collection of tiny books with this compendium of provocations that support and empower change-makers who seek a gentler way to instigate change than by fighting. It is the distillation of practices used by different institutional change interventions he did while at Harvard Graduate School of Design. It speaks equally to students, faculty, staff, employees, managers, and public servants alike, who strive to make all organizations and institutions more caring to be in and around.

With illustrations by Julia Mattis.

Wyatt Roy is a media designer, educator, and systems design researcher. His practice spans extended reality, computational design, pedagogy, and film — unified by a commitment to designing systems that change how people think, feel, and learn.