

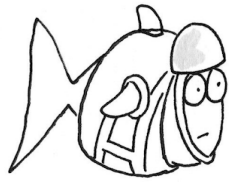
SWIM JUMP FLY

A GUIDE TO
CHANGING YOUR LIFE



Charlotte Sheridan

ORGANISATIONAL AND COACHING PSYCHOLOGIST



SWIM, JUMP, FLY

A guide to changing your life

First published in Great Britain in 2022

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www.swimjumpfly.com

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ISBN: 978-1-3999-3004-8

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All cartoons and illustrations by Simon Pearsall.

Printed and bound in Great Britain by Blissetts.



Introduction

Welcome. Bienvenue. Willkommen. Bienvenido. I'm glad you're here.

Perhaps you are uncertain thinking, "Is this book right for me?" I get it. There are a lot of books out there about improving our lives, in fact too many to choose from. How do you know whether you'll like this one? It isn't much fun dive-bombing a pool when the water is freezing. By dipping your toe into this introduction, you can test us out (the book and me).

You're probably asking: "Who are you, Charlotte? And, if I read *Swim, Jump, Fly*, what will I get? What will change for me?" You ask good questions.

I'm Charlotte Sheridan and I'm an occupational (organisational) psychologist, coach and writer. During 2019 and 2020 I interviewed 108 people who were going through shifts in their lives, be it health, career, relationship, or other types of change. You can find out more about this research in Appendix D.

“It has been cathartic just telling somebody the whole story.
— Kathryn (interviewee)

“I don't really ask that anyone listens to me, so I'm usually not
listened to. For me, it's so great to just be able to speak about this.”
— Gina (interviewee)

When I started this research, I was going through a career change myself, wondering what to do next. I was curious to find out how people made successful shifts in their work. What started as a handful of conversations about careers snowballed into a huge research project about different types of change. By the time I'd finished (after 75 hours of interviews), I had identified a number of themes about how to make positive shifts. I'll be sharing these throughout *Swim, Jump, Fly*.

Here are some examples of the stories I gathered:

Orla's lung suddenly collapsed and she had to have emergency surgery. But it went wrong and for the last twelve years she has been quite unwell. Despite life changing dramatically she doesn't want to go back. "I feel like I've evolved. I understand so much more about life, about kindness, about people. And how

being the best at something doesn't matter a jot. Like being clever, working hard. None of that matters. I didn't know that before all of this happened."

Anne is French and lives in Ireland. In the past when her partner said things she disagreed with, she kept quiet and thought, "I'm just going to pretend I haven't heard it." Whilst this went on for years, one day she just ran out of steam. She got to the point where she couldn't ignore it. "I need to stop pretending like everything is fine. I disagree with what he says. I need to stop pretending and hiding my emotions." Anne remembers the day well because it was when she decided, "I can't stay with him. It's not possible, our values are so different." So, she decided she had to go. But then it took her six months to pluck up the courage to move to action.

Jinhai works in Hong Kong, where he didn't fit in with his colleagues or the company's work culture. "I felt like I had to put on an act for them. I had to be this professional guy who's doing a good job, but at the end of the day, the work wasn't something that I cared about. I had to convince people to do certain things that I didn't really believe in myself." It wasn't helped by a micro-managing boss who got on his nerves. Over time all of this started to impact his health. "Physically I got sick quite often and I was stressed out. There was a lot of pressure and I wasn't sleeping well. That definitely took a toll on me, both physically and mentally, and at that point I felt I had to make a change."

Rob went through some dark times when he left his family home and children, then went through a separation with his partner. He was suicidal and at one point he "was really close to checking out." He says, "It's just been a voyage of discovery for the last three and a half years. My story may sound sad to some people. But I think that what I've worked out is that it's never too late." Life is better for Rob who says, "I'm single now. But, where I felt alone my whole life, I don't feel alone anymore. I'm still a work in progress. I do feel I'm finally putting all the pieces of me together. I'm reaching an interesting time in my life."

When I spoke to these people, I found interesting patterns. Things they thought, felt, or actioned that helped them work through changes in their lives. There were also activities they wouldn't do again. Over 18 months I wrote these into a weekly blog called *Spoon-by-Spoon*¹. Readers of the blog said it was useful to hear what other people were going through and they felt less alone. Now I'm turning these themes into a book to help you.



Who would benefit from reading *Swim, Jump, Fly*? If you're contemplating a change in your life, then it's for you. You might be switching roles or addressing your physical or mental health, or general wellbeing. Perhaps you want to start or finish a relationship or friendship, or you're contemplating somewhere new to live. If you don't have a clue where to begin, it'll be great for you too.

“I knew I wanted a change but didn't know what to change to. I just didn't know where to start. I was going around in circles in my head, not actually making any progress. — Maeve (interviewee)

I've based this book on two foundations: the science of change plus lived experiences of people going through shifts in their lives. My writing is underpinned by:

- Lessons I learned as a professional Change Management Consultant helping others shift, including change management models.²
- Knowledge of psychology and human behaviour – I've been a Chartered Occupational Psychologist for 25 years. This includes the science of adult learning, how we can gain skills, practice behaviours and how to make change stick.
- Experience as a Coaching Psychologist supporting individuals at crossroads in their lives, coaching them through their own personal shifts.
- Stories, quotes and themes gathered from the 75 hours of interviews. These were people from 27 countries who were going through change. I've also included some of the 77,000 words I wrote in my *Spoon-by-Spoon* blog that covered many of these themes.
- I ran the research and wrote the blogs during the 2020/21 global pandemic. For many people it was a wake-up call, an emotional and life audit, a time to face up to changes they had wanted to make for years.

Now to your other questions, which I haven't forgotten. "What will I get if I read *Swim, Jump, Fly*? What will change for me?" For starters you'll find out more about your own change, where you are now and where you want to go. I'll include ideas from business, psychology, coaching, philosophy and other thinking that will support you. There will be plenty of exercises to work through, which will help you better understand yourself and what you want. Building your self-awareness is important before you go through change. It's hard to make progress if you don't know who you are, what's important to you or where you're heading.

Once you've got that sorted, I'll guide you through simple steps to work out how to start the process, how to progress and stay motivated when the going gets tough. You'll hear stories from the people I spoke to, plus I'll share some of my experiences of shifting too. As a Management Consultant I used to fly around the world in a power suit with shoulder pads. I now run a coaching, writing and photography business. The suits are gathering dust.

“I hate the rat race. I'm 30 and my friends are getting married and having babies and I want to go and travel the world and live in a camper van. I just want to elope. It would be really cool. I spend a lot of time on Pinterest looking at camper vans. — Emily (interviewee)

I would like the book to feel like coaching, but for a fraction of the cost. A collaboration where you are the expert on you, and I offer ideas and frameworks that might help, plus some companionship along the way. I'm simply a guide with information on the different paths you might choose to reach your destination. Together we'll walk through the ups and downs that come with change and you'll hear what 108 people learned throughout the process. By the end of *Swim, Jump, Fly* you'll:

- Know where you are now and where you want to go.
- Be clear about the steps you can take to get there.
- Have tried a number of experiments to see what works best.
- Understand what may be blocking you from shifting.
- Know how you can keep on track and stay motivated.
- Be clear you're not alone, mad or misguided.
- Understand you can make this change, whatever you need it to be.
- Have the tools to successfully change in other parts of your life.

Some additional thoughts before we get going. Our lives aren't perfect and we all want to shift a few things around. If we make the effort to go through change then it's likely we will want it to stick. In short, we want sustainable change. A word to the impatient (that's also me by the way): sustainable change takes a bit of time and energy. It won't happen overnight. Despite knowing there are no free lunches, we are still drawn to these types of claims: *Get Rich in Four Weeks! Develop Amazing Abs in Three Days! Lose 100 pounds in an Afternoon!*



We know they don't work, but we're ever hopeful. The problem is that fast change is like elastic: unless you hold it tight, it will ping right back to where it came from. Forcing things to shift too quickly means it won't be sustainable in the long term. So, if you think changing won't take any effort, please stop reading *Swim, Jump, Fly* right now. Say, "No thanks" to sustainable change and slide this book back onto the shelf.

“Real change, enduring change, happens one step at a time. — Ruth Bader Ginsburg (Lawyer and US Supreme Court Associate Justice)

You might be wondering what tips I have for reading *Swim, Jump, Fly*. Firstly, throw yourself in. There are exercises to help you learn more about yourself and the actions you might take. Do them wholeheartedly and you'll get more bang for your buck (pound, euro, dollar, rupee). There is also scientific evidence that working with a bit of pace means your change will be more successful. I'll explain this later, but for now try to read the book (and do the exercises) in less than three months.

Taking in information in multiple ways helps us learn more easily, as does pacing the learning, by taking breaks. I will offer different ways to engage

with the content, along with time to reflect. Making meaningful and personal connections between the material and your own life will be key.

“I realised one day that I didn’t recognise myself. I started to not see anything of the person I used to be and who people were drawn to. I just didn’t feel that person existed anymore. — Jacqui (interviewee)

If you’re someone who loves to munch on detail, there is more at the back of the book in the appendices, plus on the *Swim, Jump, Fly* website (swimjumpfly.com). There are also references in each chapter to books, websites, articles, and some of the 70,000+ words of my coaching blog. If you prefer to start with a more top-down/big picture approach, then you can read the end of chapter summaries first. There will also be opportunities to apply all of this to your own change, through exercises, quizzes, surveys, reflections and actions.

Brené Brown is a well-known academic, writer and researcher. She suggests building on your learning by indexing ideas that resonate or stand out for you. She calls it *integration work*.³ Highlight the word/phrase, note down the page number and write this in a relevant index category that you’ve created. She uses categories like *I don’t get it*, *I want to work on this*, *read more* or *quotes*. You can create your own category titles, they could be named after your pets, if you like. It’s up to you.

In terms of other tips, I’d say hold all this information lightly, since this book will have limitations. People might say I place too much emphasis on some areas and that I miss other information out. I’m not suggesting my approach is a golden set of rules you have to follow. It’s not a theory of everything that will transform your life overnight. It will take time and effort. I prefer to see *Swim, Jump, Fly* as a library full of information, exercises and ideas. Some will resonate, others you’ll dislike. Whilst I’d suggest following each step in the 5-Step Process, whether you use all the other material is up to you. Pick and choose from the menu, eat the things that sound tasty, ignore the ones that don’t. Only you will be able to work that out.

It’s also useful to remember you already have many skills, experiences, and resources that you need to make this change. John Whitmore⁴ was a British leadership/organisational change thinker and writer who said we are “like an acorn, which contains within it all the potential to be a magnificent oak tree. We need nourishment, encouragement, and the light to reach toward, but the oaktreeness is already within.”

What’s holding you back may not be a lack of skills or opportunities. It may be a lack of confidence or a negative voice in your head that repeats on a loop. Or you might need reminding of successful change you’ve made in the past. Maybe you’re not making full use of the resources you already have around you. Or perhaps you don’t feel in control or have permission to change; you often have more agency than you believe you do, and other people (generally) want you to be happy.

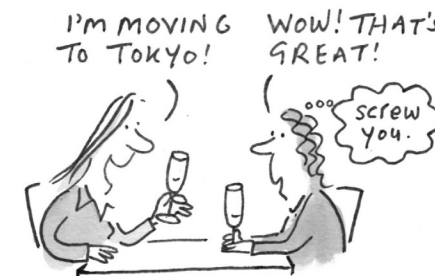
Right, that’s enough of that. It’s time to face the changes in your life. Are you ready to dive in?



Chapter 1

Change is a funny thing. We want it and we don't want it, all at the same time. We would like some things to stay the same, whilst preferring others to shift. We want the world to stop spinning when we're happy and to speed up when we're not.

Take a friendship that's going well. We enjoy our friend's company and we like how they make us feel. But one evening over a drink they tell us they are moving to Tokyo. We feel sad, since neither of us lives in Tokyo right now. As the conversation continues, we start to realise this is making us feel a bit annoyed. Our friend is shifting the dynamics and we're losing control. More than ever, we want to press pause so that things can stay the same.



Or what if our work is going well? It's close to home. We like the people and it makes us feel stretched and fulfilled. But then on one morning we get an email: "Good news, we want you to run the Argentina project." But we don't want a bigger workload, we were just fine as we were THANK YOU VERY MUCH.

Perhaps we're on a holiday with friends or family. We're having a lovely time. The weather is great, the food is delicious, we're relaxed at last. But tomorrow is our last day. Out here, in this amazing place, we don't want this trip to end.

There is the opposite of course when we aren't so fine and dandy. When we wish life would hurry up. Perhaps we're on a walk and we look up at the sky. The clouds are dark and foreboding. It starts to rain. Soon it becomes a downpour and we don't have a coat. In our mind we fast-forward, seeing ourselves back home in the warm and dry.

Or perhaps we've been feeling down for a day, or a week, or, if we're unfortunate, much longer. We wish our lives were different, somewhere in the future, feeling better. When our mood eventually lifts, or the rain finally stops, our hand is hovering over the pause button again. We're back where we started, wishing the world would stay the same.

Don't worry if this is you. This is what it's like to be human. We all feel like this from time to time – hoping things would stay the same whilst wishing other things would change. *Swim, Jump, Fly* will help you to work out what is in your gift to change and what is not. British philosopher and Buddhist, Alan Watts,⁵ was teaching in the 1950s and 60s, and said that the more resistance we have to change, the more pain it will bring us. We need to stop craving permanence for particular situations in our lives and just get on with living.

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I mentioned that during 2019/2020 I talked to 108 people in 27 countries. One week I chatted with Dhaval from Gujarat, Ruby in San Diego, Jinhai from Hong Kong and Kira in Toronto. The next week I had virtual stopovers in Norway, Greece, Brazil, France and Australia. I enjoyed leaping from the west of the globe to the east. It was exciting talking to people around the world.

What they had in common was change. These folks were moving between cities or countries, getting divorced, shifting their career, or dealing with unexpected changes in their physical or mental health. The youngest was 28 and the oldest was 68, yet whoever I spoke to, or wherever they were from, they all talked about the same sorts of topics. You can read more about this research in Appendix D at the back of *Swim, Jump, Fly*.

I'll be using stories throughout the book. This is because we feel less alone when we hear stories about others going through similar shifts. Equally, finding out about other people's successes can be motivating and help us work through our own change projects.

Here are some more of their stories to get us going: Bill worked for a large international organisation but was unhappy. He went through many changes in just a few years, including moving to another country and planning a transformation in his career. Looking back, he says, "Don't be afraid of change. Don't feel that you have to stay with something you don't enjoy because sometimes making change is a lot of fun." Whilst it can be challenging and difficult, "You learn a lot about yourself and what you're capable of. You can

end up in a much better situation... somewhere you're more comfortable a lot sooner."



Misha found her life wasn't going the way she'd hoped. "I was stressed and working long hours and my health was so bad. My mental health wasn't great either." She found herself searching for quick fixes and remedies to stop her thinking about the stresses in her life. "To get comfort I'd go shopping and buy jewellery or drink alcohol." But she got through to the other side and now she says, "I have found a completely different definition for my life, a humble, simple way of looking at things."

Mary wanted to change a lot of things. Her relationship, where she lived and her work... all at once. She didn't want to do things by halves! The challenge for her was that she kept it all to herself. "I was really good at playing the part. I didn't tell anyone else." So, she had to work through many changes on her own. We'll cover how to help ourselves by sharing plans with friends or family and having the right resources to support us through our shift.

Others have had change thrust on them, they had to ride the wave when it crashed over their heads. Jitesh went through significant and sudden change. "We've got to do it very quickly, otherwise you'll lose the use of your right leg." Urgent advice from his surgeon and a momentous event that had small beginnings, picking up a box. You can find out more about what he went through later.

Change happens all the time, whether we like it or not. So, where we put our energy is important. The trick is to work out what's in our control and what is not. However, we often focus on the things we can't influence, which doesn't leave much time or energy for the things we can control.



“ The only constant is change. — Heraclitus (Greek philosopher 500 BC)

In broad terms, the driver at the heart of our desire to change is a yearning for happiness. The social psychologist and Harvard Professor, Daniel Gilbert, wrote a whole book about this topic, called *Stumbling on Happiness*⁶. He says we want to be happy and much of what we do is a means to that end. Whether we're running away from sadness, or regret, or sprinting towards pleasure or joy. In fact, happiness was the number one theme in all my interviews. During the research, I ran a *Thematic Analysis*. This is just a fancy name for identifying the themes. From the top 18 themes, happiness came in at number one, showing up 248 times. And don't forget there were only 108 interviewees! Find out more about the research in Appendix D.

Happiness showed up in a number of themes that I identified. These included 'finding pleasure in small things', 'being grateful', 'having fun' and 'in a sense of belonging' (plus its reverse, 'not belonging'). It appeared in these topics too: 'challenging ourselves', 'enjoying work', 'having passion, meaning and purpose', 'being fulfilled' or 'making a difference', 'recognition and appreciation', 'empathy and respect' and through 'collaborating and helping others'.

We are all constantly shifting in our lives, often going through life transitions. This could be leaving our family home for the first time, becoming a parent, hitting a significant birthday, buying a house, becoming unwell, or many other changes. These can all give us increased levels of uncertainty and anxiety, unsure how we can move forward, where we are in the process or even who we are anymore.

In addition, we might have a number of selves we could be, or might be, or may never be. Social Psychologists Hazel Rose Markus and Paula Nurius⁷ say that we have *possible selves*, a set of ideal selves we would like to be. They talk about the successful version of ourselves, the rich one, the thin self, the admired self or the loved self. However, we also have selves that we are afraid of becoming, the alone self, the incompetent one, the depressed self, the unemployed version of ourselves or even the bag lady self.

I also like this distinction from Existential Psychologists. They talk about *necessity*, things that are unavoidable in our lives, the things we do not choose, that we just have to live with. This is different to *possibility*, which is our freedom to choose how we define ourselves, relate to our lives, and the way we see the world. You can work out which are your own possibilities shortly. So, let's get back to you.

Do you want to make some changes in your life? I'm presuming that's a "yes" if you're reading *Swim, Jump, Fly!* Are you unhappy with things as they are? You can start making sense of what to change by trying this next exercise. You'll discover if you're hitting your head against a wall or not. I'm a psychologist and I'm qualified to tell you that bashing your head generally hurts. Instead of wasting time on the wrong things, try this exercise instead. People find it an eye-opener.

Exercise 1: Spans of control (or circles of influence)

1) Get three pieces of papers and label them **one**, **two** and **three**. If you're tempted to do this on a computer, I suggest you don't. There's benefit from physically working on this, crossing things out, starting again, creating something yourself. Plus, it gets you away from your tech for a bit.

Think about all the things that you want to change in your life. Write a list of them on **page one**. Write as much as you can, include all the little things that annoy you. Find another piece of paper if you need to. Keep going until you run out of irritations.

2) On **page two** draw three columns. Label the first one *In my control* i.e. you can resolve it without needing anyone else's help. Label the second one *I can influence* i.e. you have some control over it, but will need others to help you. Or it might be that some of it is outside of your gift. For the third one, write: *Outside my control/influence*.

Now review your list on **page one**. Take each item you identified and fit them into one of the columns on **page two**. If you change your mind about the column, just cross it out and move it to another column.

IN MY CONTROL	I CAN INFLUENCE	OUTSIDE MY CONTROL/ INFLUENCE

Diagram 1: Review of spans of control

3) On **page three** draw a large circle, then draw a smaller circle inside this larger one. Inside the smaller circle write these words: *In my control*. Inside the bigger circle write: *I can influence*. Outside the bigger circle write: *Outside my control/influence*.

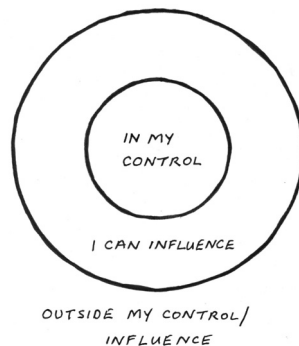


Diagram 2: Spans of control

4) Now take each item on **page two** and place it on its corresponding circle on **page three** – the circles *In my control*, *I can influence* or *Outside my control/influence*.

5) Spend a bit of time reviewing **page three**. Then ask yourself some of these questions:

- What do I notice?
- Are there any items in the *Outside my control/influence* space?
- How much time do I spend worrying about these things? What effort do I expend trying to change them?
- What actions do I need to stop because I have no control? How can I accept things that are not in my control?
- What about the *I can influence* space? Am I clear that I don't have full control on these?
- Who do I need to help me with the items in the *I can influence* space? These might be behaviours, actions, attitudes, outlook, or decisions, for example.
- Now look at the *In my control circle*. What do I have influence or control over? What actions can I start?
- Ultimately, much of our life is really just about this – working out what is in our gift and what is not.

Why not share what you've discovered with a trusted friend, partner, or family member? Talking about change with others can really help kick-start the process. We often get caught up in mind loops, thinking too much and going round and round inside our heads. Why not get your friend, partner or family member to try this exercise too? They might find it enlightening.

“ If you don't like something, change it. If you can't change it, change your attitude. — Maya Angelou (American writer and civil rights activist)

Clients who have tried this exercise often keep their lists close at hand. For example, on a board in the kitchen or on their phone. They find it useful to review the list every few weeks as it reminds them what to stop, start or continue.

Life is short and we have too much to do. So, an important part of making successful change is to focus on where we will see the most difference. Are you a bit clearer now about where you can put your effort? Will you stop head-butting the wall? It will hurt less if you do. Plus, you'll have more energy and time for the important (and fun) things in life.

Now we need to look at two more aspects: why we want to make the change in the first place and the character of the change we want to make. Being clear about the nature of the shift, and the distance we need to travel to get there, will

increase how successful our change will be.

As my coaching clients and readers of the *Spoon-by-Spoon* blog will know, I'm fond of saying, "Why cook up a feast when we all we need is a sandwich?" Knowing why we want to change and how much of a shift we want to go through is key. There's no point putting in more effort than is needed if we only need to adjust a bit. This is where the idea of *Swim, Jump, Fly* comes in. Using this concept will help you focus your efforts on the right things, whether that's small iterations or going for radical change in your life.

One thought to share. If you're seeking a hopeless change project, then pick one that requires you to change somebody else. We have very little control in this space and will be disappointed by the lack of results. The only thing we can truly work on is our own life, so it's better to work on changing ourselves, rather than trying to change others.

Let's go back to the research participants for a moment, as they can bring some of these ideas to life. I'll start with the career changers. Many wanted a radical shift, something utterly different. Accountants who wanted to be actors, marketeers who wanted to be mid-wives, teachers who wanted to walk the tightrope. OK, I made that last one up.

There was a second group who liked parts of their work but really disliked the rest. Some aspects of their roles were like comfortable jeans, others like wearing someone else's shoes: not so nice. There was a third group who quite liked their work but needed a few tweaks. Perhaps they were bored and needed a change. Or maybe the WHAT of their work was fine, but the HOW was a bad fit. Introverts who had to talk most of the day, forestry consultants who were chained to their laptops and would rather be outside. Mavericks and entrepreneurs who were tied to rule-bound institutions.

One day I was coaching a client who was working on her career change. She needed to shift but didn't know where to start. I asked: "Do you need to shimmy a little, or would you prefer to jump into a different role? Or maybe it's bigger; a launch into a totally new career?" She paused and sighed. I asked it in a different way: "Do you need to Swim, Jump, Fly?" This unlocked a whole new conversation, and we were on our way.



The point is not to throw the baby out with the bathwater. We don't need to toss out skills that we've acquired over the years, as they might come in handy. Knowing the character of the change and the distance we need to travel: can save us time. Why go down wildly different paths if a few small adjustments here and there might work? Or why prance about on the side lines, if only radical change is what you need?

I tried this approach with a number of other clients. For example, one was having problems with her relationship, another was unhappy with his health and weight. I found that this idea worked very well across different types of change. Whether to Swim, Jump, or Fly? It seemed to be a useful question that helped my clients to focus, avoid overwhelm and concentrate effort in the right place. From this I created a 5-Step Process which gets great results.

Now let's turn to you and focus on your own change. The first step is to ask yourself WHY. If you don't know the purpose of your change then it's unlikely you'll maintain it. Sometimes we know our motivations, but we just don't follow them because we are sociable. We hate feeling left out, so try to fit in and mirror how others behave. This means we end up walking down unexpected paths. Not following our WHY can make us very uncomfortable.

I watched an interesting TED Talk by neuroscientist Dr Alan Watkins⁸ in which he discusses the *disease of meaning*. He says many of us stay stuck in the state of a nine-year-old. We're basically adhering to rules around education, society and work and it takes a crisis, or an intense event, for us to start questioning our meaning, purpose and the role we play in the world.

I ran a podcast called *Tyranny of the Shoulds* where I interviewed guests about different *shoulds* in their lives. It was based on a concept by Karen Horney, a German/American psychotherapist who said there were two types of self; a real self, and an ideal self. The ideal self is one that we will never reach, because

perfection is not realistic. What other people want for us is much harder to sustain. All these *shoulds* that we carry around can often make us unhappy. If you'd like to listen to the podcast, you can find it on the website: swimjumpfly.com.

“I need to stop comparing myself and doing what other people think is the right thing. Just do what I think is the right thing. — Gina (interviewee)”

Kira is originally from Russia but now lives in Canada, and she agrees. “I was brought up not to think about myself, to think about what others think. So, there are always requirements. Then also I was the only child in the family.” What her parents wanted drove many of her choices. “So, with the university it was ‘take the safer path and get accepted somewhere instead of not being accepted where you want to be. What are you going to do for a year now?’”

There were other choices she made that everyone agreed with. “Moving to Israel on the other hand, I’m Jewish and they felt passionate about Israel. The economic situation was very bad in Russia at that time, and it was easy to move on to Israel.” She’s not alone. Many of us are driven by the expectations of others. So, getting clear about WHY you want to change in the first place is key. Is this shift something you want to do? Or are you doing it for others?



A second part of my approach focuses on the distance you’ll need to go to create a successful shift in your life. This is where the idea of *Swim, Jump, Fly* comes in. How far will you want to travel? A short distance to something similar? Or do you need to jump in order to make a change, or to fly far away to another place? To bring these types of movement alive, I’ve attached an animal to each one. The fish swims, the grasshopper jumps and the bird... well you get the picture. I’m a simple soul at heart.

To start with, we’ll get a sense of which might fit the shift you need to make. Over time you can change your mind and move to a different distance/animal,

since we all swim, jump and fly at different periods in our lives. Later I’ll tell you about how I shifted from a bird to a fish and then a grasshopper, all in a short period of time.

Exercise 2: Dipping your toe into the 5-Step Process

First pick a change you want to make. It’s better to focus on one, as it’ll be easier to manage. Change can be hard if we try to do too many things at once, especially when we’re starting out. We become confused and overwhelmed and give up. Select a change you’d like to work on and ask yourself this:

1) How far do I need to travel? How big does the change need to be? Think about whether you are a fish that needs to swim somewhere close by, such as starting a new hobby. Or do you need to increase the degree of change? Do you want to jump further away, like starting a new relationship? If this is the case, then you currently might be a grasshopper. Perhaps you want to shift dramatically and fly somewhere far away, like the other side of the world. This could be physically or metaphorically. Do you need to go through radical change in your life? In which case (at the moment) you’re probably a bird. Don’t worry if you’re not sure about this yet. We’ll spend a lot more time working it out over the next few chapters.



2) The next step is the type of change. Ask yourself: Do I need to focus on WHAT I’m doing or HOW I’m doing it? In terms of WHAT, is this a significant relationship that’s not going well? Perhaps it’s where you live, you want to be in a different part of the country. Or perhaps your WHAT is your mental health, which needs some work.

When it comes to HOW, this is the way in which you’re doing those things. For example, perhaps you sit at a desk but you’d rather be doing something physical



Chapter 2

for work. Or is it the people you work with? Perhaps you have to have to run meetings with large groups, but you'd rather just be on your own. Or is it the way you are losing weight? Eating fewer calories but also doing less exercise? If this is the case, then exercise would be the area to build on.

Let's focus on the getting fit scenario for a moment. Perhaps you are exercising well enough, but dislike going to a gym, preferring to be in nature. It will be hard exercising below street level, in a room with no windows. Your senses are full of other people's sweat and grunts and you'd rather be out walking through fields with the wind in your hair. In his book *Atomic Habits*⁹, James Clear writes that many people going through change think it's hard because they lack motivation but what they're actually missing is clarity. They don't know when and where to take action. This is what much of *Swim, Jump, Fly* is about.

If you're not clear on this yet, that's totally fine as there are quite a few chapters devoted to exercises so you can work this out. This is just a quick summary to share some ideas.

Right, that's it, the end of the chapter. Just before we wrap up, here is what we covered:

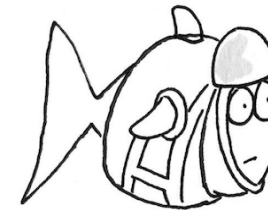
- Change is all around us, whether we like it or not.
- Being clear about what is in your control and what is not, so that you focus on areas of your life where things are more likely to change.
- Sharing what you've learned with someone else can help you see things more clearly.
- Stories of change from my interviewees, which were quite different and varied, showing how you, too, can make changes in many areas of your life.
- Plus, the number one topic in my interviews, which was 'happiness'.
- A quick summary of some of the steps in the 5-Step Process – which we'll cover in much more detail soon.
- The central theme of swim, jump and fly – that the size of your change is key.

Next, we'll spend time with some of the people we met earlier. We'll find out more about how they have changed. But first, why not take a break?

In this chapter we'll meet some of the participants and their stories. This will help you understand the central themes of the book, that successful change has two things at its heart. In the last chapter I eased you into talking about the first area, the size of the change you need to make/the distance you need to travel, whether it's a tweak or iteration (fish), a bigger jump to something else (grasshopper) or a need to fly much further away in our change (bird).

Now I'm going to add in another piece to this puzzle. The second part of which animal you are, your appetite for change. Let's say you know you need to make a large shift, but you're a little risk averse. Your experience tells you that you're better off taking small steps. The way you tend to go through change is a bit like the accelerator pedal in the car. Some people like to take their foot off the gas and go slower ('fish' types). Others prefer to press all the way down ('birds').

We've got plenty of time to get our heads around which animal you are. So, for now, sit back, relax, eat some popcorn and enjoy the show. Right, let's jump in.



1) The Fish:

A fish way of changing is slow and in increments. A sideways shimmy, a flick of the fin here, a sweep of the tail there. When people swim like fish, they make small changes over time, not radical shifts. It's not the kind of 'give up your job, sell all the contents of your house and move to a small island in the middle of nowhere' kind of change. But people in this group still want to move their life on a bit.

Anupa's family is from Kenya and she is an example of a fish. Some years ago she had pains in her feet, but was busy with her life and didn't think much about them. Anupa's mother became very unwell and then unfortunately died. Anupa's pains got worse, possibly down to the stress of caring for her mother

whilst she was ill. Anupa says, “I guess I wasn’t really paying attention to myself. I didn’t realise that my health was suffering. I thought I was OK.”

The doctors said it was early onset arthritis and suggested “aggressive treatment which had a lot of side effects.” Anupa wanted something less harsh and identified an alternative treatment plan, following Ayurvedic principles. She saw an Ayurvedic¹⁰ doctor who gave her herbal medicines and a diet to follow, plus she went on an Ayurvedic retreat and came back “feeling very healthy and detoxed.”

When we spoke, Anupa said she was still following this way of eating. “It makes my body light and balanced and I feel a lot of energy. I used to feel a lot of fatigue, pain and stiffness in the morning. I don’t have that anymore. I feel great and since then the last few years have been pretty good. I feel that this is the path for me.” For her, making slow and incremental changes suited the change she wanted to make and her personality.

Gunther is 50. He’s British, but with a German mother. He’s a music manager and in the past his work has included a lot of tour management. Three things happened to Gunther in quick succession. First, he had terrible back pain which took a very long time to diagnose, followed by a hip operation. Then, his father died. “That was horrific. He had a heart operation and I wasn’t expecting it. I thought he was going for a routine stent replacement, but he died in the operation. Then that was that.” A year later his mother was diagnosed with bipolar disorder. “She went into a mental institution. Men in white coats locked her in there for three months.” Each one of these would have been difficult, but the three together were more challenging.

Gunther decided to speak to his boss about taking time off to re-group and have “a bit more time for me.” He had started writing a book about his German grandfather, which he wanted to finish, and also to do more “motorcycling which fuels my mental health, my physical health. It was about having more time to do those things.” He organised a day off every other week which suits him really well. This is not a dramatic change in his life, but this small shift is making a big difference, giving him time to relax and do the things he loves.

Fish can make bigger shifts. They just need to take it step by step. Gunther and his partner wanted to spend more time outdoors. So, after the work changes had

bedded in, they moved closer to the countryside. I asked how it was going. “It is incredible. I feel rejuvenated, re-spiritualised, just reconnected with the earth. I love being out in nature. We’ve got a bit of civilisation and a community and it’s a lovely sort of bohemian vibe to the town. And in two minutes I’m in fields, so it just couldn’t be more idyllic for me.” Gunther ended up in a different place mentally, physically and geographically. But it took some time as he didn’t want to make all those changes at once.

Mel is in her 40s and works for a large organisation in the Human Resources team. She likes it because the work is interesting, and she gets on with the people. But then she was asked to take on a new role that wasn’t such a good fit. It didn’t take long before she knew it wasn’t right for her. “I wasn’t doing the kind of stuff that was adding any value at all. I was just mopping up after everyone and putting little things right all the time.” Mel says, “I was just basically being the fixer for lots of things.”

So, what did she do? She knew she didn’t want to leave the company. She wanted to make some changes, but not throw everything up in the air. Instead, she found a way to swim a bit further, but without leaving the waters she was in. She organised a conversation with her boss and was honest, saying, “This is not very fulfilling. This role is not what I wanted it to be and it’s really going off in a very funny direction.” No drama, just a grown-up conversation about how she was feeling.

The conversation was well timed since “they were already thinking about the way they structured the team.” In the ensuing discussions Mel got to talk about what she wanted, and her boss shared some different roles that might be a good fit. When we spoke, she’d only been in this new role for a few months. “I’m loving it so far, I’ve got to be honest. It has been really interesting.” Why? Because she knew she was making a difference.

“*De grão em grão enche a galinha o papo.*” These are the first words Madelana said to me before we’d started our conversation. “It roughly means ‘grain by grain the chicken fills its gizzard, or stomach.’ So, it says every step goes forward towards something bigger.” That sums up her way of making change, step by step. Madelana is Portuguese but grew up in South Africa. “I always

had a sense of not belonging because even though I'm Portuguese I was born in South Africa. When I moved to Portugal, I didn't speak the language. So, I always felt like an outsider even after picking up the language and integrating."

More recently Madelana has been unhappy again. "I think it's because I turned 40 and found my life was stuck. I had nowhere to go. I thought, 'This is not what I dreamt when I was a kid.' I just wanted to be able to have the courage that I've lost many, many, many decades ago, to just find myself." She has nearly burned out a few times over the past few years. "I never listened to advice to look after myself." She felt stressed much of the time and wanted things to change.

As a 'fish', Madelana has now made small sideways moves to address her unhappiness and stress. She has tried Social Tango, worked with a personal trainer and also runs because she feels "so relaxed afterwards. Whatever is pesky in my mind, it just melts away." She has therapy too, "I think that, in conjunction with exercise, has helped."

I asked Madelana if she could go back in time, what advice she'd give herself. "Don't be so scared. Just try out things." Fear had stopped her from making changes. "I think being scared of failing stopped me from trying." Being honest has also helped. "You have to open up. You have to be vulnerable. And in way to move on is to be vulnerable. Trust people more." She feels her life is much better, from taking small steps, changing bit by bit.



2) The Grasshoppers:

Now we'll focus on the grasshoppers. They make bolder moves than the fish, bounding into new areas, travelling far enough that it feels different. Grasshoppers take more risks, jumping as they do in quick succession, taking on more in a shorter period of time. However, they do still take calculated risks, depending on the context.

Tim has been acting like a grasshopper. He has recently made a number of

changes. Career, health, relationship and more. He went through a messy break-up, lost his job and then comfort-eat to deal with his unhappiness. "Those two years were mega unhappy. I can see this now. But at the time I didn't know that I was self-medicating by eating. It was pizza, chocolate and God knows what." He said he "was just eating a lot of terrible food. By January I was not in good shape."

So, Tim decided to make quite a few changes. His background was accounting, but he had never enjoyed it. In fact, he'd studied psychology at university and wanted to develop people instead. So, Tim booked himself onto an introduction to coaching programme in Switzerland, where he was living. One of the other participants, a German woman, became a good friend. He enjoyed the course so much that over many months he went on to train to be certified as a coach. And what of his friend? "Long story short, we made a great connection, spent thousands of hours on the phone through lockdown and now we're a couple. I'm talking to you from her apartment in Basel right now."

Tim then spent a year building "self-awareness and looking inward, learning about myself. This has very much continued" and he is now managing a successful coaching practice supporting other people going through change. He put time into working on his relationship, which was "unexpected and wonderful and a fast start."

But what does Tim mean by a fast start? "We became expectant parents three months after we met. And then moved in together during the pandemic and did all that get to know you stuff during a lockdown. That was really tough." Of parenthood he says their "entry was early. It was planned, it was just about two years earlier than we thought it would be." Tim made quite a few changes in a short period of time, moving faster and taking more risks than a fish would. This is an example whereby change happened to Tim, rather than him being fully in control. We talk about this in chapter three. We'll cover plans, planning and how we often need to pivot when things turn out differently than expected.

Yasmeen wanted to be creative when she was growing up in Kuwait. "I started doing plays in high school, but my dad had a huge problem with it. In that part of the world, they don't really celebrate women being on stage. He said, 'I prefer my daughter to be somebody who is valued for how she thinks, what she can say and her intelligence.'" So, Yasmeen took a Bachelor's degree, then

a Masters in Library Sciences. “I don’t think my dad understood that creativity is a form of intelligence. He wanted me to be a lawyer.”

Yasmeen moved to Canada and then for years she worked in education. “The people were great, but they were very different from me.” What stopped her from moving into something more creative? “I think I just kind of forgot myself.” She chased opportunities she could do “not necessarily what I wanted to do” and lost track of her purpose and direction. But one day she woke up and realised she’d been living “the same life for 10 years at the same job. How the heck did I end up here?”

Whilst others thought Yasmeen was doing well at work, she “felt like a failure internally because I knew that what I wanted for myself was very different from what people expected of me.” Over time she became very stressed and eventually “went nuclear and lost it at work. I yelled at an assistant about something that was not her fault.” Yasmeen packed her things, left the office and drove to the mountains to think.

Soon afterwards she quit her work and since then she’s been trying to be more creative. “I went travelling, I engaged in travel memoirs and talked to different people. I met drag queens, just sort of experimenting in what I wanted to do creatively.” She took classes in writing and acting. “I found the theatre tribe. It was just a mind-blowing revelation because they are so much like me.” She kept telling herself, “If it’s creative and it’s scary, it’s something I should do.” This is more of a grasshopper approach, hopping here and there, trying things out.

Walter trained and then worked as a butcher, but his wife’s family were successful business people and he felt he couldn’t keep up with them. He worried his wife would think, “I’ve married a duff one here. The rest have got these big flash houses. I’m not going to get that.” One day Walter’s brother-in-law rang him up with a job offer. His brother-in-law was very persuasive. He said, “Jack your job in, we’ll give you a company car, laptop. Drive around the country, meet all the project managers, find out what they do. Bosh, you’re done. We’ll give you £30,000 a year.”

Walter knew it wouldn’t be a good fit, “I didn’t know what to do, because I knew how it would make me feel. But then what an opportunity? And I ummed and ahhhed, and then just said, ‘Yeah.’” He worked as a project manager for a

decade but really disliked it. “I always felt a bit of a charlatan in the role. Like I was going to get found out. I’ve never felt like I fitted in with the people, really.” He got more and more anxious as the years went by. “Pressure, pressure, pressure. Being in a job where the workload is so much that it’s impossible to succeed. You had to be able to handle continual small failures. Let fires burn and just deal with the biggest one. You’re dealing with fallout all the time.”

Eventually Walter was signed off with stress. He took some time to find his feet again. But now he has set up on his own and it’s working out really well, since he has turned two of his hobbies into successful businesses – dog walking and pet portraiture photography. The photography business is growing so quickly that he needs to close the other one down. Despite his earlier fears, his wife is really proud of him.

Grasshoppers jump from place to place, but it’s not radical change. Walter hopped sideways, a career shift that uses his project management skills but also means he can plough his own furrow. He really enjoys the work and it fits him much better. Success also means something different for him now. “You don’t have to follow this expectation of what you should do through life. It could be in a very different form. And it’s better if it’s something that fits you.” In a later chapter we’ll talk about success, about other people’s expectations and how it can make us very unhappy.



3) The Birds:

Going through change like a bird means travelling a greater distance, landing over here, flying off there, travelling further. At times it can even be a long-distance route that transforms a person in the process. Cecilia is in her 30s and has worked as a corporate lawyer for 13 years. “It wasn’t a job I ever wanted to do. It was the path I ended up on due to my parents thinking it was a good idea. A lot of people go into a job, love it but then fall out of love. I never loved what

I did. I was never doing what I wanted.”

If she'd been a fish Cecilia would have tried small changes. But as a bird she flew away... literally, to Amsterdam, then Singapore. She tried to make it work by “moving countries, moving companies, moving industry, going from private practice to in-house. Hoping that something would click so I could say, ‘now I'm doing what I love.’” Instead, for years she resigned herself to being unhappy. “I came to accept it and just thought, well that's life. You know, it's work. You don't have to love it.” She was always surprised when she met people who enjoyed their work. She assumed “they were lying because how can anyone enjoy what they do?”

Cecilia wondered if she was the problem. “For years I thought I was a bit broken, that there was some stuff that was a bit wrong with me. I think I always assumed that was the case.” The final straw was a promotion to the top role of General Counsel. “It was the pinnacle of my career, but the idea of taking it made me feel physically sick. Ironically, it was what led me to resign.” Now she understands she “wasn't really living an authentic life. I was having to battle against this, every single day. No wonder I was exhausted.” It is obvious why she burnt out. “That's a very emotionally, mentally and physically draining environment to be in. Now I realise there is nothing really fundamentally wrong or broken with me.”

After resigning, everything else in her life started to unwind too. “My relationship started to struggle and ended. And all my belongings were in storage because I'd been living in my partner's apartment. They all burnt in a fire.” It sounds like the plot of a film, but Cecilia is quite philosophical. “The universe is saying you need to change what you're doing because you're not living the life you're meant to be living.”

So where is Cecilia now? When we last spoke, she had packed up her life and was about to fly to Indonesia for dive master training, followed by yoga teacher training. She says this won't be her final destination since birds don't sit still in one place for long. Her plan is to “focus on doing things that give me pleasure and enjoyment. Seeing if that could lead into a career. Or it might just be a way to meet people who can open my eyes to different ways of life, different ways of living, different priorities.”

Remember Jitesh, from chapter one? His surgeon said, “We've got to do it very quickly, otherwise you'll lose the use of your right leg.” But what led up to such urgent advice? Jitesh was working for a consulting firm in Qatar, in the Middle East and “the client had sent a huge box of files and things. It was a Saturday and we were working late. I foolishly picked up the box.” Then his back gave way.

After a few weeks the pain subsided so he carried on as before. Then it happened again. “Things just broke and I had to take time out. I had a spinal blister. The spinal fluid leaked and was pressing my sciatic nerve. They had to operate to remove the blister and stabilise my back.” Then a third time, but by then things had reached a critical point. “That's when I paid attention, but it was too late to do anything without surgery. The nerve had pretty much died.”

The problem was that Jitesh's work was so stressful. He worked very long hours, was trying to get promoted to partner, ate all the wrong things at the wrong times of day and didn't exercise. He says with “hindsight, I could have prevented it getting to that level, but I didn't really do anything. I didn't pay much attention.” I heard this often in other conversations. We fail to notice soon enough. Catch it in time and we get to decide the outcome. Leave it too late and it's not ours to choose anymore. “It got to a point where I had no choice. I ended up with a fusion of the lower vertebrae.”

So how is Jitesh now? He's doing well, having made many different shifts in his life, all at once. He has flown far from where he started. He does stretches and exercises at home, regularly goes hiking and does yoga. He cooks himself proper meals, is eating healthily and keeping his weight under control. He also decided to change his work and career. “I'd had enough. I was no longer interested in partnership.”

Jitesh is enjoying this role. “I'm no longer in the rat race. I don't have to prove myself to anyone.” He says that, “Frankly I have no regrets leaving. On the day, I felt a big lead weight lifted off my shoulders. I suddenly felt a great sense of freedom. I would never go back to that environment again.” His thoughts on reflecting back? “Work was the focus at that time and that drove everything. That needed changing.” His advice to us is to “Get a balance between work, health and other things. Get your priorities set out clearly... re-focus and re-prioritise other things in life.” Birds sometimes change many things at once, so they end up further away.

Mary is a food process engineer and wanted to change a lot of things. Her work, her relationship and where she lived. If she had been a fish, she would have taken these one at a time, over many years. But that wasn't her way. The problem was that her partner was keen to get married, but she was "hemming and hawing, I didn't want to do that, we were like friends."

Her social life was based around her partner and they were known in many of the same pubs and restaurants. "It was a smallish town. It wasn't like I could live the other side of it and not bump into people." Work was a big factor too because Mary was the first female engineer at her organisation. "Every second person in town I'd meet would be someone I knew from work. I just couldn't really extricate myself from any of it without leaving."

Mary handed in her notice at work, sold her house and moved, all at once. She didn't tell her parents until it was all done because she was concerned about how they would react. "They would have been worried I was giving up a permanent pensionable job. Having come through the 80s and the early 90s, knowing how hard things were and that jobs were so valued."

Happily, Mary was surprised by her parents' reaction. "I ended up going to visit them for a week between handing in my notice and the time I finished the job. My mum told me much, much later 'I knew you'd made the right decision. You never stopped singing all the time you were here!' I didn't realise I was singing. But I knew I felt lighter." We'll go on to cover how living a life that fits our purpose, values and skills can make us truly happy.

That's the end of this chapter and the stories of participants who are fish, grasshoppers and birds. Here's a short summary before we head off to the next chapter:

- We covered four stories in the fish group. Anupa worked on her physical health, Gunther wanted more balance in life, changed his work and later on he moved to the countryside.
- We also met Mel who wanted to shift her role a little, but not leave her organisation, plus Madelana, who was stressed and needed to find ways to work on her mental health.
- In the grasshopper group we heard from Tim who was making more changes at once, his health, relationship and career. We met Yasmeen

- who changed her role and thoroughly explored her creative side.
- We also heard from Walter who made a large shift around his mental health and wellbeing, and changed his career from project management to setting up and running two successful businesses.
- Then, in the bird group, we heard about Cecilia, who gave up 13 years of high-flying law career, to explore becoming a diving and yoga instructor, whilst leaving a long-term relationship, losing all her possessions and changing country.
- We also found out how Jitesh turned his life around from health, to cooking, to exercise and a change in career.
- Finally, we heard from Mary who changed her work, relationship and home, all at once.

The next chapter is all about our purpose and our direction.