



# HOW TO BE A DISRUPTIVE HERO

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The old way of networking involved climbing a ladder while pushing others down or to the side for individual benefit. In today's world, what's important is no longer about power plays but more about what you value and how—and with who—you want to get there.

**Let's Change the Crazy...**

Let's make it easier for you to do great work when everything around you goes kablooey—to be a **DISRUPTIVE MASTER**.

And let's make it easier for you to help others do the same—a **DISRUPTIVE HERO**.

When was the last time you were able to even complete a To-Do list, let alone finish checking things off? Exactly. That's why I've written what follows.

Rapid-fire changes in technology and communication now form a bit-torrent of constant churn and change for you and all your teammates. But it's not just change. **It's disruption.**

Disruptions are anything that imposes major changes on the direction of your life or your daily routine. They can be wonderfully good (a new baby, a technology that unleashes your creativity), or horribly bad (personal, family or global crises), or anywhere in between.

Disruptive heroes go beyond surviving the daily turbulence. They know how to thrive on it. They figure out how to benefit from, or take advantage of, continuous disarray, disorder and disruption. They see constant disruption not as a threat, but as an opportunity.

Let's help you develop that skill. Because, for better or worse, those disruptions will not stop coming. And they are only going to get more intense.

*“Disruptive heroes go beyond surviving the daily turbulence. They know how to thrive on it.”*

# Packing for Your Journey

You don't need to decide these things now—(actually, you'd be better off if you let them bubble up inside you as you read further)—but there are three ingredients to being a disruptive hero that only you can provide...

**1. Dissatisfaction** | Are you dissatisfied with the way things work? Good! Pack that for your journey. Mastering disruptions always begin with somebody insisting, "[It doesn't have to be this way.](#)" And, if channeled properly, being pissed off will get you to act faster.

**2. Vision** | No Wendy Whiners allowed on this trip. Complaining is not enough. [What's your vision for how amazing things could be?](#) The more passion you have for that vision, the harder you'll work to make it happen.

**3. You** | [There's something special about you—your skills, your point of view, your clarity, your connections—something that makes you uniquely qualified to be a disruptive hero in this area.](#) Be sure to bring that confidence and determination with you! You'll need it when crossing the Badlands of Naysayers.

↔ **Leveraging the ChangeThis community** | Some of the best minds in the world have already created awesome ChangeThis content. For more details and how-tos, I will be linking to their manifestos and other helpful materials throughout this piece.

# Your Mission

**Disruptive heroes are the people who either completely change the rules or teach us that the status quo needs to be pushed, challenged, or broken.**

**They have a major impact on what we believe is possible, what we do and who we become.**

If that sounds daunting for you to take on... don't freak out! You get to [pick the scale and scope of your efforts](#). Focus on something that's mostly within your control and becoming a hero will be easier than you first thought.

But if you would like to change the world as a disruptive hero, could you? Yep. Most of the biggest names in arts, government, business, social movements, and more got there by being disruptive. Go for it!

*“Take in what you've already experienced from the heroes in your life and you will find that their heroic deeds are already inside you—making it easier even before you begin!”*

## Who's Your Hero?

For London-based management consultant John Caswell, founder of Group Partners, it's Steve Jobs. "Because he was not afraid to piss people off by sticking to his vision. All of my work is influenced by Apple's products because of that vision. He did what I'm still hoping to do—change the way people think and work."

For Jackie Huba, customer evangelist and author of *Monster Loyalty*, it's Lady Gaga. "She pushes boundaries and is trying to change the world in so many ways. I've now tried to take my work to a new level, inspired by what she's doing."

For Rajeev Peshawaria, author of *Too Many Bosses, Too Few Leaders*, it was his father: "At his funeral, so many people showed up that it became clear that he was a disruptive hero. He was a tax consultant in a small town in India. Most everyone involved in taxes there is corrupt. Not my dad. Everyone so respected him for his integrity and taking a stand against corruption that the government even declared a public holiday in his name."

As you can see, disruptive heroes can change how we think, work and play, or take a stand that can change the course of many lives. And it doesn't matter if you're a rock star or a tax consultant.

**Take a moment:** Before you think about what you will do and how you will make a difference, think about the impact disruptive heroes in your life have had on you:

- Who was your first disruptive hero?
- Which hero had the biggest impact?
- How did those heroes change what you believe or what you do?

Take in what you've already experienced from the heroes in your life and you will find that their heroic deeds are already inside you—making it easier even before you begin!

## Uncovering What Heroes Do and How They Do It

To learn more about what disruptors do to become heroes, I went right to the source. I spent a couple years with 100 Great Disruptive Heroes: CEOs, inventors and scientists, entrepreneurs and freedom fighters, firefighters and doctors, lots of geeks and a couple of freaks—all of whom refused to accept the status quo, and many of whom created completely new ways to work and play. They shared their secrets with me so I could share them with you. (Portions of what each one shared can be viewed [here](#).)

# The Simplified Six

There's so much I learned from those heroes! Enough to fill two books. But you're here because you want the crème de la crème Cliff Notes: So let's get to it...

**Three Critical States of Being:** The very nature of disruption is to constantly change how things get done. So your foundation for dealing with disruptions needs to go beyond how and needs to be anchored in your state of being.

1. Choose Your Parents Wisely
2. Be Insanely Curious
3. Practice Failure as an Extreme Sport

**Three Critical Dos:** Heroes get things done. Bold things. Big things. Here are three of the top ways to go bold as a disruptive hero...

1. Kill What You Cherish Most
2. Do Epic Shit
3. Be a Triage Master



## Three Critical States of Being

# 1. Choose Your Parents Wisely

What the what...?!? Of course we can't choose our parents, wisely or not. So, what's up here?

Most every disruptive hero can point to someone who, early in their life, supported their craziness, creativity, and rule breaking.

For example: **“My teachers were really concerned about my mental health. They called my mother in. Could you ask him to come to school dressed like a normal kid? He’s disrupting the class.”** That’s Aaron Dignan, co-founder of Undercurrent, a digital strategy firm that helps companies like GE and PepsiCo disrupt their industries with digital tools.

It was the first grade. Dignan wore a Batman costume to school every day for six months. And he ties everything he does today—helping companies create disruptive changes—back to how his mom took a stand for creativity and individuality.

### **Who Nurtures You and How They Do That is Crucial**

The lesson from Dignan and most of the 100 great heroes is that the nurturing of your adventurous, disruptive spirit is crucial. Not just during your early development. Always.

Throughout our lives we must seek out and form family-like bonds with people who will teach us, guide us, love us—even tough-love us—toward adventure, exploration, and risk-taking. That’s where the idea of choosing wisely comes in when it comes to those who will direct or influence your life long after you leave the nest. Bosses, mentors and others don’t just pick you. You pick them.

You need to seek out the people who will push, prod and influence you beyond your comfort zone—where everyday choices somehow become a call to adventure.

If you are lucky enough to have bosses and mentors and friends like that, great. You’re well on your way to being a disruptive hero. If not, seek out souls who are more adventurous than you to guide you. Mastering disruptions and then becoming a disruptive hero is not just about To Dos, it’s a call to adventure!

**Takeaway:** Make sure your mentor is already leading the life of a disruptive hero.

*“ You need to seek out the people who will push, prod and influence you beyond your comfort zone—where everyday choices somehow become a call to adventure.*

## 2. Be Insanely Curious

Not just a good or faster learner. Crazy curious. Insatiably curious. [Intensely curious.](#)

**“As a teenager in Mexico City, I would hide in the basement to read stories about mathematicians and physicists, and I would sometimes cry! I know that sounds weird, but I felt I had this calling. There was this burning passion inside of me to do physics, even though my environment my mom, my counselors, my friends—were not very accepting of me pursuing physics.”**

That’s Debbie Berebichez, the first Mexican woman to complete a Ph.D. in physics from Stanford University. She went on to conduct further research at Columbia University and currently works on Wall Street as a quant—one of those geeks who helps investors and black box software programs figure out when and where to invest. After that work is done she slips into her role as Science Babe, reinventing science education.

### **The Call of the Unknown**

Disruption, by its nature, is a storm of ambiguity. Nothing is certain. Nothing is black and white. There is no perfect decision to be made.

If you're merely a good learner, you'll always be slammed by many more disruptions than you can manage. You need to get ahead of them. Get out of reactive mode and into proactive actions.

The only way to do that is to live by the call of the unknown—be crazy curious, about everything. Ask a lot more questions than most others do and [ask the questions no one else is asking](#).

*“Once upon a time, you were insatiably curious about everything. (“Why, why, why?”) Channel your inner child. That is key to mastering disruption.*

### **Find Your Core Set of Questions**

Great heroes will tell you (in confidence, so few others know this) that their insatiable curiosity is anchored in a core set of just a few questions. They use a reliable set of starter questions that usually lead them in the right direction. You need to find your core ol' reliable questions.

Here are some examples...

- Why? (Yep, just one word, nothing more.) Journalists are taught to ask variations of this same one word question up to five times until they get to the real truth
- If our company, team, store, etc. didn't exist, how would we approach this?
- What if there were no rules for this? What would we do if we could do anything?
- What would we do if we wanted to build the ultimate solution?
- What really matters in this situation?
- What would “wow” everyone?
- What's impossible? Let's try to do that!

**Takeaway:** Be a two-year-old again! Once upon a time, you were insatiably curious about everything. (“Why, why, why?”) Channel your inner child. That is key to mastering disruption.

## 2. Practice Failure as an Extreme Sport

Most everyone who works today knows how the game is played. Most bosses know the script—encourage innovation, risk-taking, and learning from one’s mistakes.

### **Real World vs. the Script**

Yet how many business plans or managers or cultures truly endorse this approach? When it comes to encouraging you to fail forward, most organizations opt for overly managed incremental progress in which even the tiniest failures are shunned. Which leaves you high and dry when it comes to character building and learning through failure.

Disruptive heroes don’t wait for permission to fail. They practice it as an extreme sport—as well as learning the hard lessons from past failures, as well as building their tolerance for risk.

**“You have to be accepting of failure. For every initiative and technology that really changes the way IBMers work, we have tons of them that don’t. We put a lot of stuff out there. We try, fail, and then adapt. Nobody is smart enough to say whether something new is going to work or not. We have to watch for what takes off and then adjust accordingly.”**

That’s Françoise Legoues, who heads up Innovation Initiatives for the CIO’s office at IBM—focusing on bringing disruptive changes inside one of the world’s largest tech giants.

Legoues understands why so many managers fear failure and find it hard to embrace disruptive change. **“I listen to their concerns,” she shares, “and when they say ‘No, this is too scary,’ my job is to find a safe way to pilot the change to see if it will stick.”**

## **Your Goal**

The most powerful character-building experience is not success. It's failure. The best lessons learned do not come from winning. They come from overcoming adversity and initial failures.

If you are going to master the onslaught of disruptions that come at you every day, you are going to have to embrace failure. A lot more failures than you experience today. It's the only way to learn fast enough to get ahead of disruptions.

## **Assign Yourself Failure Projects**

Hopefully, you are blessed and lucky to have a manager who gets the need to learn through failure. If not, you are going to have to assign yourself Failure Projects.

These projects are not about accepting lower standards or doing poor work. Instead, they are about giving yourself permission to take yourself out of your comfort zone: Speaking up or pushing back, hard, when that's normally shunned; making decisions where you might look

bad if your decision doesn't pay off; taking on the role of disruptive champion and selling a bold move to others.

Failure Projects are practice projects: Safe places where it's OK—(more OK than normal)—if screw-ups occur.

### **Getting Started**

- Take on one project per quarter (or for the more risk-averse... one project per year) in which you intentionally push yourself or the project beyond a safe and predictable zone.
- If it goes well, realize that your fears of failure were unwarranted, and push further on the next Failure Project.
- If it doesn't go well, your response should be “So, I got dinged. I'm still a great employee. Life did not end. I'll try again later.”

**Takeaway:** Better to ask forgiveness than seek permission to fail. Start failing more! Fail faster, learn more, fail some more. That's failing forward.



## Three Critical Dos

### 1. Kill What You Cherish Most

**“You have to embrace how much things are changing. You have to learn to kill your baby. That’s very hard because you’re emotionally attached to this thing that you’ve built. You may have built your livelihood on it. You may have defined yourself through what you’ve been able to build. It’s hard, but you have to personally embrace disruption.”**

That’s Bettina Hein, who, as a serial tech entrepreneur, knows a thing or two about disruption. Her last company contributed to how billions of mobile phones function. Her latest firm is Pixability, which helps businesses increase sales through video.

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## Get Over Yourself

To you, the most precious project ever is yours. But disruption doesn't care. It will make your latest project obsolete in a heartbeat. To be a master of disruption you have to let go of it faster. You have to disrupt your own projects before someone else does it for you.

The hardest part of this is the emotional connection you have to your project. You need to stop trying to protect your baby. You need to start trying to outdo it as soon as it's launched.

## Follow a Two-Track Approach

**1. CREATE AN ONGOING ITERATION LOOP.** As soon as you launch your project, you will need to start seeking feedback that will help you [keep designing new iterations](#).

- Hackathons are a great model to follow. They keep the feedback loop intense and keep the iterations coming. [Here](#), [here](#), and [here](#) are some 411s on hackathons.
- Great feedback is useless unless somebody does something with it. Contract with your bosses, up front, for fast response times for feedback. The best models are similar to Zappos and Ritz-Carlton where everybody knows that they are empowered to make changes without going through the chain of command.

- If you are stuck with a more traditional managerial structure (my condolences), then contract with your bosses on the one or two key metrics where they will empower your team to make changes without going up the chain of command.

**2. DAY ONE OF YOUR NEW PROJECT:** Start Killing It. The moment you launch your latest project, someone out there is already working on making all your efforts obsolete. Don't wait for that. Start killing it yourself.

Start...

- Researching what technologies or approaches might surpass what you just accomplished.
- Brainstorming with teammates on Version 2.0 of what you just accomplished.

Don't wait for approval. Don't wait for permission.

**Takeaway:** Your latest creation will be disrupted! [Do it yourself, rather than waiting to be victimized by someone else.](#)

## 2. Do Epic Shit

**Epic**, *adjective*: Of heroic or impressive proportions; surpassing the usual or ordinary in scope or size. Not to be diminished by applying it flippantly to just about anything.

Disruptive times call for [epic dreams, goals and actions](#). Incrementalism and following the status quo will result only in career or business extinction.

### Think Big AND Small

Epic efforts are usually considered [BIG](#). Like... “My goal is to build the greatest place in the world to work—to bring the best and the brightest here. Not one of the greatest. The world’s greatest place to work. Better than Google, Facebook, Zappos, better than any other company out there.”

That’s Vishen Lakhiani, founder of Mindvalley, a groundbreaking company comprised of innovators, artists, technologists and dreamers from over 30 countries. Mindvalley’s mission is to help spread enlightened ideas through 21st-century publishing, media and education.

Lakhiani’s dream of bigness is wonderful... for him and his teammates. But your act of surpassing the status quo does not need to be that large.

It can be the best customer service within your store, or the best outreach program within your community, or the happiest exchanges ever from your call center cubicle.

You can change the world or you can simply change the next two minutes of someone else's life through the greatest mini-experience ever. Scale and scope is up to you.

But note: During disruptive times, all of us have to think epic, be epic. Fail to do that and the next disruptive change will simply drown you out.

## **Getting Started**

### **1. PRE-WORK: Watch Some Commencement Speeches**

- [Steve Jobs](#)
- [Jacqueline Novogratz](#)
- [JK Rowling](#)
- [Meryl Streep](#)
- [Jeff Bezos](#)
- [Neil Gaiman](#)

You will be reminded of timeless truths, and of the epicness already within you.

## 2. BE YOU

Epic doesn't occur "out there." It comes from your passions, your desires, your frustrations with how things are, and your dreams about what could be. For example: Cirque du Soleil is certainly considered epic entertainment. But its founder, Guy Laliberté, didn't begin with a vision of world domination. He was just super-passionate about forming a powerful and unique bond between fire-breathers, jugglers, acrobats, stilt-walkers and their audience. He was just being Guy, in the same way that you should just be you.

## 3. DEFINE MARKET NEEDS YOU CAN OWN

Little Mary's desire to sell the best darn lemonade in the neighborhood is not much different than Steve Jobs's desire to "put a dent in the universe." Both are based on owning their own market.

Big or small: Define a set of market needs where you can be the *absolute best*—within whatever scope you choose. And then deliver! Great execution will always matter.

*“You can change the world or you can simply change the next two minutes of someone else's life through the greatest mini-experience ever. Scale and scope is up to you.”*

#### 4. DEFINE TRUE SUCCESS

Some who do epic shit achieve wealth or fame. Yet most are simply striving to be the best version of themselves. Define true success in terms of how much fun you have, or how comfortable and natural it is to be that way, or what you've learned and experienced, or who you've met and spent time with. Being the best you can be is never measured by market size or revenues. If those happen to come your way, great. But true success is an awesome journey!

**Takeaway:** Be awesome. Do amazing work. Be the best within your own niche. Because anything less will be wiped out by the next disruptive wave.

*“ Be awesome. Do amazing work. Be the best within your own niche. Because anything less will be wiped out by the next disruptive wave.*

## 3. Be a Triage Master

*Triage: The ability to assess any situation; rapidly figure out and prioritize what needs to be done and who needs to be involved; and effectively communicate what matters in that situation—many times a day.*

The term triage comes from the medical field where battlefield surgeons had to make instant life and death decisions, and then move on to the next patient—with no time to second-guess that decision.

This is the one thing you need to do very well, multiple times a day. Superior triaging is the main skill that will keep you from getting overwhelmed every second of every day.

### **Getting Started**

#### **1. COMMIT TO YIN YANG THINKING**

Educators call this Lower-Level Thinking and Higher-Level Thinking—two dimensions of critical thinking. Triage requires you to develop the ability to bounce back and forth between the two before you make decisions.

- Example of Lower-Level Thinking: Who needs this, by when?
- Examples of Higher-Level Thinking: Is this important? Why is this important? Are any of my To Do's more important than this?



Master triagers learn (through practice, practice, practice) to quickly weigh both of these before they act. You need to get good at thinking about how to both get stuff done quickly, and do what really matters—doing both super-fast, at the same time.

## 2. BUILD YIN YANG DAILY ROUTINES

- Start small: With any decision that takes almost no time—like how to answer just one email. Before responding: Weigh both Lower-Level needs (getting the task off your plate) and Higher-Level needs (should the sender be thinking differently about the problem?).
- **Build a routine:** Start applying what you practiced in one email to all your emails; to all meetings; to all presentations. Focus on daily, recurring routines so you can easily practice, practice, practice.

## 3. BE A RUTHLESS PRIORITIZER

After Steps 1 and 2, you're ready for the big leap: Incorporating yin yang thinking into how you make more important Go/No Go, Yes/No, Do/Don't decisions. All great triagers, all great leaders are ruthless prioritizers.

**Takeaway:** Triaging is your primary sort and filter mechanism for daily activities. Master it and you'll stay ahead of most disruptions most of the time.

Follow the Simplified Six and...

You will be a disruptive master.

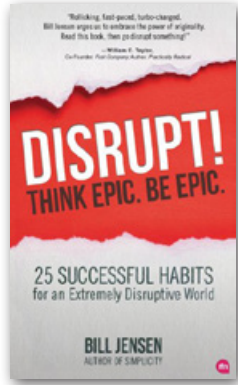
It will be a lot easier for you to do great work when everything around you goes kaflooeey. To your teammates and loved ones, you'll be a disruptive hero. Your efforts will make it easier for them to be great, regardless of how much disarray, disorder and disruption gets dumped on them.

One Last Thing

**Take time to be silly and laugh so hard it hurts!**

**Take your responsibilities seriously, but never yourself. 🙄**

# Info



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**ABOUT THE AUTHOR** | Mr. Simplicity, Bill Jensen, makes it easier to do great work. Bill is today's foremost expert on work complexity and cutting through clutter to what really matters. He has spent the past two decades studying how work gets done. (Much of what he's found horrifies him.) He is CEO of The Jensen Group, a change consulting firm he founded in 1985.

His personal life fantasy: To bicycle around the globe via breweries.

His website and blog: [www.simplerwork.com](http://www.simplerwork.com).

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