

# JOHN - PAUL FLINTOFF

## How To Change The World / transcript

If you had the chance, would you change the world?

(Audience) *Yes*

Thank you. There is a little delay!

Of course you would.

Because I didn't say, **SAVE** the world,

I said *change* the world, improve it.

Make it better than we found it.

And we all want to do that, don't we?

Great! Because I'm here with the happy news

that you can, and you do, and you *will* change the world.

But all too often, partly the reason for your hesitation just now

we think, "Gosh changing the world, that's going to be really hard work,

perhaps impossible, probably not much fun."

And we leave it to someone else, Someone Really Important.

*They'll* do it.

And that's a real shame,

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because we are all capable of changing the world

and I am trying to explain how it's going to work for you individually.

I am not going to tell you what to do.

So one of the reasons why we tend to hold back that way

has to do with the way that we've been taught history.

Essentially we are told that it is about

the kind of the things that certain big individuals,

usually men, have done over the time.

The great British historian, Carlyle,

once said that "History is but the biography of great men."

And if you don't happen to think of yourself

as a great man already

that may leave you feeling a little bit left out.

But luckily, happily, Leo Tolstoy, the novelist, came along.

This is him in his glory.

And Tolstoy came along and said that history

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is more accurately considered to be an infinitely large number  
of infinitesimally small things  
that we all do and don't do everyday.

What does that mean?

It's easy to understand what he means  
if you think about an election.

You vote for this party, or you vote for that party  
or you hate them all so you don't vote for any of them.

But we all know that whatever you do,  
has an affect on the outcome.

It helps to determine the final result, we all know that.

But what Tolstoy is saying, is that *everything* you do  
and everything you *don't do*, has an affect on how things are.

It shapes the way the world is.

It's really useful and healthy  
and satisfying to take some responsibility  
for yourself in that sense.

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So what can we do about it?

We want to recognize

that we all make history all the time.

And if you don't recognize that,

if you don't realize what I've just tried to say

you may be one of those people

who complains a lot about the "status quo".

And the Status quo is a horrible abstract noun.

Nobody likes it, it feels really oppressive,

but if you notice that you have some responsibility

then that's good.

So I'm going to offer you another way

to think about the status quo.

I want you to think instead of a powerful king on the stage.

If you like, you can shut your eyes

and imagine what a powerful king on the stage looked like.

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It might be a really big crown,  
it might be a golden throne,  
and I would say, "No! Those only tell you that he is the king."

What makes him powerful?

What makes him powerful are all that other people  
on the stage flat on their faces before him.

And if all of those people sat up,  
turned their backs on him, went to sleep,  
told jokes, smoked cigarettes, played the trumpet,  
it would have an enormous effect, wouldn't it?

He would no longer be a powerful king  
even without him doing anything differently.

So all of the power comes from those over whom it is exercised.

And you can imagine, if you imagine that stage,  
imagine just one of those people getting up, turning their back,  
and playing the trumpet,  
it would have an amazing sensational effect, wouldn't it?

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It's a kind of extraordinary thing.

It's like a human version of the butterfly effect  
that physicists talk of.

One flap of the wings  
and you have a really distinct change in the weather.

And so it's really rather wonderful.

We can see it when I talk about the stage

but what about in real life?

What about your life? Your everyday life?

If you don't like the status quo,

how can you get up

and turn your back and do something better instead?

Well, there are lots of ways

but I want to have a little experiment in this room.

I want to see what the human butterfly effect can look like,

and what I'm going to ask you to do,

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is one of the most beautiful things you can do,

to be a human butterfly.

Don't do anything yet, okay?

Turn to your neighbour,

and it's going to be someone you don't already know,

so its someone behind you or in front of you.

And I want you just to smile,

and say what your name is and introduce yourself

because you don't get to choose your neighbours.

The people who are sitting near you are your neighbours

Now I've explained it and given to you a little bit of extra time,

because I know that some people are listening on translation.

I don't want them to be shocked by you turning around

and introducing yourself before they understand.

So now if anyone is listening on translation

can you put your hand up

to tell me that you've already understood this?

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OK. Thank you.

So now please just quickly introduce yourself to each other.

Now. Off you go!

(Chatter)

Hello, I'm John-Paul. Nice to meet you!

Thank you. Thank you. That's great!

What a lovely sight!

(Applause)

Congratulations to all of you. Thank you.

It's really important to recognize that these neighbours around you are not the ones you chose but they're the ones you've got.

And it's really lovely to introduce yourself

in a friendly way to your neighbours,

but it's easy at TED because everyone here is obviously really lovely.

But I want you to promise, that when you go home,

you will introduce yourself to another neighbour,

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who is not someone who you chose,

and just see if you can spread a little bit of the love that way.

So that's a little thing you can do.

Meanwhile, I want to move on

and I want to talk about certain types of political action we can do,

other than saying hello to our neighbours

The great American political scientist Gene Sharp,

has spent a lifetime collecting

forms of non-violent political action, an amazing variety.

He wants to encourage people to use

some of the things that have been used before.

So he has put all of these forms

into basically three groups.

The first one is:

**highlighting an issue**

That can be drawing attention to an issue

that nobody knows about,

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or it could be drawing attention to an issue that everyone knows about but they do not take it seriously.

So highlighting an issue is very important and we can all do that.

I'm sure lots of people in this room have already posted things on Facebook or tweeted about them.

And that's very light-weight and easy, but valuable.

But sometimes highlighting an issue can be really dangerous.

You're putting yourself at some risk.

So I'm going to tell you about the White Rose group.

That's this group in this picture who are now national heroes in Germany because they stood up to fascism.

And they didn't want to be a part of what the Nazi regime were doing, so they sent letters to their fellow citizens.

They wrote letters, they printed them on a machine and they sent them at random, to people throughout the country

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whose names and addresses they got from the phone book.

Can you imagine the effect when you get one of those letters?

In order to give themselves the appearance

of being a great nation-wide network,

they also, at great risk, travelled across the country

with their printing press and with their letters,

so they could send them from Dusseldorf to Cologne

and Dresden to Berlin and Munich, and you get the picture.

So that's what they did.

So sometimes just highlighting an issue

can be incredibly dangerous stuff.

It can be easy, it can be dangerous.

The second category is:

**withdrawing your consent**

from something you disapprove of.

So I could tell you about Moses and the Israelites

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who didn't like the way the Pharaoh

was carrying on, so they got out of Egypt.

It's quite simple withdrawal of consent.

But I want to tell you about Rosa Parks,

a seamstress who, one day, in the s,

decided on the bus in Montgomery, Alabama,

that she was not going to give up her seat

to a white person as the rules required.

And one reason why I like her story, is that she said

she was too tired to go along with the system any longer.

So you don't have to be full of energy and enthusiasm

to change things. You can just be quite tired.

Another reason why I like Rosa Parks' story

is that she didn't actually run everything that happened afterwards.

That was her thing, she was a spark

that led lots of other people in the black community to do amazing stuff,

But she didn't run everything.

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So don't worry, you can start something and if it's any good,  
people will follow and they will take it on.

That's ok, you can relax.

And the third thing I like about her thing,  
is that she started with something very small.

It's very hard to believe, with hindsight,

that lots of people at the time

thought that what they were doing was campaigning

to change the rules about where black people

were allowed to sit on buses in Montgomery, Alabama.

But actually of course their success and their ambition

increased over time, so within a very remarkably short period,

they had desegregation across the whole of the U.S.,

which is a previously unthinkable achievement.

So you can start with something small

and you will become more ambitious as a result of it.

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So that's withdrawing your consent.

The third broad category is

**building a better alternative**

to what is currently available.

So I could tell you about Charles De Gaulle

who set up the French government in exile in the Second World War,

because he didn't like the ones that was in Vichy France,

but I want to tell you instead about my friend Richard Reynolds,

who lives in a tower block in South London,

in a rather unattractive part of London,

he wouldn't mind me saying that.

He lives in a high floor so he doesn't have a garden.

So one day he started to go downstairs,

and look around in the area where he lived,

and he found bits of earth, and he would put plants down.

He wasn't a very good gardener, so some of the plants died

but he got better and some of the plants survived.

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And then some of his friends joined in,

and then complete strangers joined in

and then the local authority said,

"You can't do that, it's not your land."

But they carried on anyway,

because they are Guerilla Gardeners.

You see, and Richard is the leader

of the worldwide Guerilla Gardening Movement,

and if you look him up online, he is Richard\_.

But the thing is, the reason why I mentioned this story,

is that anything you do, can be an inspirational example to someone else.

And Richard is an inspirational example, he is a leader.

One other little thing I'd like to point out about Richard,

is [that] his great blessing is he doesn't have a garden.

If he'd had a garden he wouldn't be a Guerilla gardener, would he?

The thing that you see is a lack or a short coming

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could be the thing that's really the making of you.

So that's quite an encouraging thought, isn't it?

So, all of these people can be an inspiring example.

I've taken great care to tell you about things

like desegregation or fighting fascism

which is sort of terribly important

but also to tell you about someone

who just wants to do some gardening.

Because when you're changing the world

it doesn't have to be changing the whole world.

And something that you perceive to be very important to you,

it could be just changing your world in a way to make it better

and gardening is fine.

So what are you going to do? I'm not going to tell you.

Often we feel like we're impaled on a kind of a paradox

**We really want to do something,  
but we have no idea what it is going to be.**

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And one way to resolve that

is to think about the things that you enjoy.

And so I want you to think about that.

The positive psychologists are people who got fed up

with being negative psychologists

and saying what's wrong with people.

They wanted to find out what's great about people

and share that knowledge.

So they did a test.

One of the things they did,

they sent out two groups of people to find out what gives people pleasure.

The first was sent to do hedonism,

if you like having a foot massage while eating chocolate.

And the second group was sent out to do something meaningful.

Meaningful to them, I'll come back to that.

The results came in and the people

who'd done something meaningful,

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had a much deeper and longer lasting sense of satisfaction than the ones who'd done the hedonism.

That something about them had changed inside, they felt, I'm the sort of person who does that thing, which is nice.

So, changing the world is actually nicer than having a foot massage and eating chocolate.

But the thing is, what is something meaningful?

You impose the meaning on what you do, not me.

I can't tell you what is meaningful.

I can give you an example

You could walk your neighbour's dog, and really feel resentful and really hate the whole thing and just not really be happy about it.

Or you could walk your neighbours' dog,

because your neighbour's unwell,

and you know that they'd feel really happy

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for you having done it.

As you would feel all puffed up with joy,

you'd feel like a really great person.

So the same thing, can be either good or bad.

*You* impose meaning, not me.

So you need to think what actually is something meaningful to you,

and one way to do that is to ask yourself

what have you done in the past to make a difference,

that made you feel good.

And what are the dreams that you've had.

But if you really want to cut to the absolute nub of issue,

you must ask yourself this question

**What would you do if you knew you couldn't fail?**

As if success was magically guaranteed.

It's important to ask the question in that way.

So you get rid of the boring answers

that are sort of achievable,

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and you don't really want to do them.

Go for the one that is absolutely sensational,

and you are really passionate about,

because then you will persist with it.

So you do that. Ask yourself that question,

keep that question from now to the rest of your lives.

And then once you've come up with an answer,

I'll hope it would be something so magnificent,

you're almost embarrassed to tell anybody because it's so great.

And then there is a danger

What might happen then,

is you put it on a shrine and it will be like an icon.

Or it will be like a beautiful painting

that's been beautifully painted, has got a beautiful frame

and you know just where it's going to go in the whole way at home.

But nobody is painting it, so it's not going to happen.

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And you are using static thinking.

We might want to move away from static thinking to process thinking.

Instead of thinking about the end result,

start thinking about it as a process.

One person who can help us with that,

is the german philosopher Nietzsche, who said

"Not every end is a goal. The end of a melody is not a goal."

He's got a point but what does he mean?

Well if you go to a concert, you don't say,

"I wish this music would finish and then I can really enjoy it."

You enjoy it as it goes along.

So start thinking about your mission instead as a piece of music.

It's already started. Can you hear it? I think it sounds great.

So that's what you want to do.

What is great about noticing that,

it is a process instead of an end result that you are after,

is you then liberate yourself to stop being freaked out

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by the sheer monumental scale of what you want to do,  
and you enjoy every step, because no one did anything  
in all of human kind except in small steps.

And Neil Armstrong didn't wake up one morning,  
and said, "I'm going to the moon now."

Lots of people had to go to the office and do stuff.

So we can all do that.

We have to notice the small steps

and the great thing about small steps is they give you courage.

There are mini victories, they move you onto the next small step,  
that's not quite so small,

and so you can use those as a way to encourage yourself.

So you've got your mission,

you've got the need to find small steps,

but if you really want to pin down the small steps,

ask yourself this question

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### What can you do in the next 24 hours?

Because if you can't do anything in the next 24 hours,  
what makes you think you will ever start?

Ok, so you've got the mission, you've got the small steps,  
and now you're going to need to find some allies.

You're not going to do much all on your own.

So one way you can do that,  
is to try and draw a map of your support network,  
the people you already know.

Do it like this, put yourself in the middle,  
put the names of people around the edge  
who give you support and to whom you give support.

So on this one you can see I'm giving a lot of support to William.

He is giving me nothing back.

What do I do about that? I'll have to work it out.

But the relationships that are most useful,  
and psychologists use this with addicts and alcoholics,

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are the ones that are reciprocal.

So you can see Sonya and Ben, both are reciprocal relationships.

So you might want to draw this map, it is quite interesting.

And then go and ask those people for help.

**You must actually ask them to help you.**

You might think, "I can't ask, that's awful, a real imposition."

But people like to be asked, because it means

that they are wise and kind and generous and sensitive.

But the only reason people don't like to be asked,

is when they can't see a way to say no.

So you say to them, "Would you help?"

And by the way if you can't,

either now or at any time in the future, I really don't mind."

And you have to mean it.

And once you've asked them in that way,

why would they say no?

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And what you have done then is liberate them  
to be an active part of your mission.

They will want to do things, to really be part of it.

And they'll phone you and say,  
they've seen something in the newspapers.

So that's great.

You may also find that there are other people,  
sort of activists all over the country.

This is my country, the U.K.

You may find people spread all over the place,  
and you can go and find some of those.

And I want to end, by giving you some account of my own experience.

Because I'd feel a bit dishonest,  
standing in front of you and saying  
anyone can change the world,

if I didn't try to say something about how I've tried to do that.

So some years ago,

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I got very seriously freaked out,  
very depressed about climate change,  
and peak oil, result shortages, that are coming.

And I didn't know what to do,

I thought we had to change the whole way that everyone lives,  
we had to get much more self-sufficient, more resourceful,  
stop flying things around the world.

Everyone has got to start growing food.

They've got to start making their own clothes,  
doing all sorts of things like that.

So I joined all the campaign groups you can imagine

and there were wonderful

and we did some great stuff joining these networks nationwide.

After about a year,

I realized we were doing some amazing stuff

but I was seeing all the same faces.

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Lovely faces, but all the same faces.

And I wanted *everybody* to change,

not just the seasoned campaigners.

And I happened around then to read

a book by Alistair Mackintosh

which talks about how

it's no good being a campaigner,  
if you're not a good neighbour

And it kind of hit me in the head right there,

so you know why I've now asked you

to think of each other as neighbours

I felt like, what can I do with it,

so I can resign from these campaigners,

and I went to work on my street,

and I had an allotment where I was growing my own food.

And so I went to the allotment, filled a sack full of apples

and I went home.

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And I have a wonderful beautiful wife and daughter,  
little daughter at the time, Nancy, and so I grabbed Nancy's hand,  
I didn't need to take Nancy, but she gave me courage basically.  
And so I took the sack and the apples,  
and I carried Nancy along with me.  
We knocked on every door, and people opened the door  
and I said I'm taking the risk.  
Yeah, a man with apples and a lovely daughter isn't a big threat.  
And they opened the door and I took the apples,  
and so that was nice to get to know people a bit better.  
Then, the sneaky bit was six months later  
but forgive me, because it came from the right place.  
I deliberately grew too many tomato seedlings,  
and I put them all in a box,  
and I grabbed Nancy's lovely hand again,  
and we walked on the street, and knocked on the doors.

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We'd said, "Hello", then Nancy again said, "Hello"  
and I said "Oh dear, I've got too many tomato seedlings"  
and I gave it to them, and they took them.

And I know for a fact that many people in my street  
that year for the first time started growing food.

So I hadn't had to freak them out about  
climate change or resort shortages.

I just got them growing a plant,  
that was kind of the solution.

So I was very lucky, it was possible in that way,  
to find the happy solution that way.

Nancy drew a picture, this is a reenactment for you.

So I had been lucky  
and by chance I discovered something that's really important  
which is Try to emphasize the positive.

Because as the late philosopher Reynold Williams once said,

**"The key is not to make despair convincing,**

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but to make hope possible."

You are on a journey, it starts now.

You might as well make it fun.

Thank you.



John-Paul

For specific help changing YOUR world:

<https://join.flintoff.org/>

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