

SHIFT!

HOW TO LET GO OF FEAR AND GET YOUR LIFE IN GEAR

By

Jeffrey W. Hull, Ph.D.

January 19, 2009

Overview

Frank, a thirty-five year old investment adviser, climbed the corporate ladder with agility and speed for fifteen years when he suddenly hit a wall. Promoted to Vice President, he was warned by HR that he would be reporting to a "tough guy"—a business euphemism for an abusive, autocratic boss. Within six months, Frank was in a deep rut, hating his job, hating coming to work, at a loss for what to do and fearful of doing anything that might result in losing his job. Using the Life-Shifting techniques, Frank was able to shift his fear—which was not really about his boss, but about deep-seated fear of authority figures stemming from his relationship with his father—and get back on track. Three years later, waving good-bye to abusive bosses forever, Frank runs his own investment advisory firm. And, as you might imagine, he is a great boss to his growing staff.

Colette, forty-five year old mother of three, went through a divorce and lost her job within a short space of time. In the midst of an (understandable) emotional meltdown, Colette used the tools in the Life-Shifting method to retreat, re-group and rediscover her own innate sense of power and strength, allowing her to move successfully through this nightmarish scenario. Today, with three blossoming teenagers, a new man in her life, and an even higher-powered job, she returns to the Life-Shifting techniques over and over again—to shift out of fear and into the flow of her life.

At sixty, Marion should have been excited to see retirement on the horizon. But she was terrified. Having been a successful professional, mother, and wife for thirty years, the prospects of an empty nest, no job, and playing Bingo with girlfriends for the next twenty years left her feeling lost and, frankly, old. Life-Shifting helped Marion realize that it was actually her deep-seated fear of being a beginner again that was holding her back. She refocused her energy on beginning instead of ending, realigned with her heart and replaced the dread of aging with delight in her strength and wisdom. That realization gave her the courage to seek out new experiences. Today, retirement is far from Marion's mind as she pursues her new career as high school guidance counselor, yoga teacher, and Reiki healer.

All of the above illustrate one point: Shift happens. Change is a basic part of life. Jobs change, lovers change, ideas change, people change. No matter how much money we've stashed away for a rainy day, or how well thought out our "life-plan" might be or how many yoga classes we take, life inevitably throws us a curve now and then. But too often, we become overwhelmed by fear and anxiety when faced with choices or a new direction. We become stuck in a rut. And as if that weren't enough to keep our anxiety levels at a fever pitch, the media and the politicians would have us believe that disaster lurks around every corner. The truth is we all need to learn how to stay grounded and centered in the midst of this so-called "age of anxiety".

Shift! How to Let Go of Fear and Get Your Life in Gear changes the way we cope with change. The author has developed a unique approach to managing life change, called the "Life-Shifting" method, which demonstrates that most changes, no matter how

big or small, occur in six sequential stages, each accompanied by their own particular brand of fears and anxieties. The Life-Shifting Method is a six-step program that combines Western psychological theory and Eastern ideas with the practicality of life coaching to learn how to shift out of the fearful thinking that inevitably accompanies each stage of change. The book is designed in the easily accessible format of a “driver’s manual” for navigating life’s inevitable ups and downs.

Readers will explore their own response to life changes with the help of quizzes and diagnostics. They will also find tried-and-true suggestions and steps – practical, thought-provoking, doable and results-yielding – for upping confidence, balance, energy, calm, satisfaction, fulfillment and joy. Some steps require action, others contemplation. None call for special shoes, a note from your doctor or a new haircut.

Experiencing fear when life throws us a curve ball is inevitable. Being stuck, robbed of life energy, or debilitated by fear is not. With the six simple, yet profound steps of the Life-Shifting Method, *Shift!* shows us how to move through fear, release our anxieties, and get back in full throttle on the freeway of life.

Introduction

My Story. Holding the faded, green book in my hands today, 42 years later, I can instantly recall the day I received it. I was seven and about to have my first major *life shift*. My parents called me into the “family room,” which we had just painted this garish, glowing orange color that mom loved and dad hated. I remember that just the night before they had fought about whether to paint the piano the same color. No, really. It was the sixties.

They brought me to the sofa, a rough, corduroy beige affair, and I remember squirming with anticipation. It was not my birthday, but they had said they had a “present” for me. Presents, for a seven year old, are usually a good thing. They handed me a book. I remember thinking that it wasn’t wrapped, which wasn’t a good sign (good presents came wrapped!).

It was called, “The Chosen Baby” by Valentina Wasson, and it tells the story of a happily married couple who have just one thing missing from their lives: a baby. So they go to “Mrs. White” who helps people find “lost babies” and they bring home a baby boy, whom they name Peter. They are now a happy family, with love and joy and a baby they can call their own.

I can’t say that I really understood what this little green book was trying to tell me back then. I do remember that mom and dad “wanted me to know” that I was adopted, but that I was loved and “chosen”...and that I never had to mention the story ever again if

I didn't want to (and I feel fairly sure that they didn't want me to). As a good, compliant seven year old, I got the message.

I didn't speak about it again, for twenty-eight years. Yet, I also know, deep in my heart, that what tiny burgeoning sense of identity that I had amassed to that point—the seven year old “me”—was shattered completely that day. Who was I? Who were these people that called themselves “mom” and “dad?” Were they just “borrowing” me from my real parents? Why didn't THEY (my real parents) come for me? Was I a pure blood “Hull” from the New England Hulls? Or was I a store bought phony whose real parents had ditched him? Maybe a little bit of both.

The Changing Self. Many years later, I would start to see a pattern in my clients, my patients, even my friends and family: they all struggle with issues of identity. It seems that just when we get comfortable with some semblance of “self,” there comes a shift in the landscape—the “wife” becomes a “divorcé,” the “student” becomes the “unemployed,” the “professional” becomes the “laid-off,” the “playboy” becomes “the dad”—and who we know ourselves to be gets torn right out from under us.

I sometime wonder why it took me twenty-eight years before I “came out” to a close friend, and soon thereafter, a therapist, about being adopted. Now I think it was because it took me that many years to grieve, let go and release the loss—the death—of the “Jeff” that I thought I was. At thirty-five, four seven-year cycles later, it was time for the “real” Jeff to be born anew. No wonder I've dedicated my life to helping people move through issues of identity, to slough off outdated labels, to re-invent themselves with a deeper, more grounded sense of self.

Life is a series of cycles of birth, growth, death, and re-birth. And I'd even go so far as to claim, rather unscientifically I admit, that most of our "cycles of identity" seem to occur in five to eight year patterns. Somewhere around the 7th, 14th, 21st, 28th years, and so on, most of my clients—and it is certainly true in my own life—have undergone a major "life shift:" a shift that involves the dissolution of a role, a identifying marker of who we thought our "self" to be.

Carl Jung, who famously wrote about a process of individual development that he called, "Individuation," believed that human development is a process by which the first sense of "self" that we develop, what he called the "ego," is constructed mostly through our environmental influences—parents, siblings, community—and that by age thirty-five or forty, our developmental evolution is focused entirely on shunting this ego aside, making room for a deeper, more personal and ultimately, transpersonal self or soul to emerge. It is Jung's contention that all of life's evolutionary thrust is towards the individual and collective birth of the soul/self, and that our attachment to "ego identities" along the way, although necessary to build our capacity to function in the world, ultimately must be shed, dissolved and transcended. Only then may the true self, what he calls the Self with a capital "S," shine through.

The goal of this book is to make this change and evolutionary process—the birth and death and re-birth of identity—easier, more accessible, and less daunting. We are all changing constantly. In fact, psychologists' (e.g. Dr. Phil and others) admonition that there is an "authentic self" notwithstanding, I believe that key to our progress as humans in this time of global ecological and political peril, is to wake up to the fact that what we

consider “solid” or “authentic” or “real” in terms of ourselves—and our labels, identities, and roles—is all constructed.

We are all made up. And this is GOOD NEWS. If we are all constantly “under-construction,” then we can be less terrified of change, less attached to our over-wrought sense of self, and open to the possibilities that lay before us: there is always a new self waiting just over the horizon. But, all along the way, we need to learn to let go of outworn and outdated attachments to *who we think ourselves to be*.

The Pattern of Change. Although the birth of this book can be traced all the way back to that fateful day when I was seven, when my *life shifted* in a seismic way, it more practically emerged from watching hundreds of my clients going through their own life shifts—divorce, career change, family loss, illness, and so on—and my recognition, about fourteen years ago, of a pattern in these processes of change. The content was different, each case unique, yet the cycle—the stages, the fears, the movement—was always similar. In fact, it was startlingly similar.

We all know about books on change and transition that describe a three stage process—a beginning, middle, and end—to most major change events. But if we look closer—and over the years I’ve started to look much closer—we notice that there is more going on towards the beginning—a couple of key “shifts” occur BEFORE we really get to the “middle.” Likewise, if we look deeper at what I sometimes call, “the mess in the middle,” we see that there are a couple of fairly major “shifts” that occur there too. And, even toward the culmination of a cycle—in the movement towards a pinnacle moment, or full realization of professional success, or a period of happiness and contentment, that even here, too, there are two clearly identifiable “stages” that occur, in shifts.

In this book, you will learn about these six inevitable stages or steps that we all go through in the process of change. It is my contention that many of our classic symptoms of malaise—*anxiety, stress, depression, anger*—are a result of our resistance to and lack of awareness of *how things change*. My goal with this book is to make it easier for us to navigate these shifts, by becoming aware of the process and by learning to utilize specific practices that can keep us moving, even flowing, through the change instead of getting stuck. Shifts are inevitable, yes, but stalling, becoming mired interminably in mud along the road, resisting future curves and sticking rigidly to tried and true pathways—these break downs, the all too common side effects of change, are not.

And there is more. What about our fear? Fear is the great partner in change. Nothing new in hearing this perhaps, yet if we look at most of the books on change, they don't include a whole lot on fear. And if we look at the books on fear—and there are many, on how to conquer, overcome, embrace and do all matter of other stuff with our fears,—they usually don't talk about change. Yet, again I say: they go together.

The Foundation. With this in mind, we can outline the three basic premises upon which this book stands:

1. There is no such thing as an “authentic self.” The “self” is being constructed and de-constructed throughout all of life. “Life shifts” are points along the way in which the identity of self is broken apart or just naturally, dies off, and is replaced with something fresh, something new.
2. The cycles of major life change are more complex than the typical three-stage process; there are more stops along the way than just a beginning, middle and end—to every change in life. For our purposes, life shifts occur in a six-stage

cycle; stages I call the rut, the release, the retreat, the revival, the rehearsal and the realization.

3. Fear is not just a catch-all word for every form of anxiety, worry, and stress. It is specific, recognizable and natural. It shows up in a wide variety of symptoms that are unique to each individual, but its emergence at each stage in the life cycle of change can be clearly demarcated and explained. Fear is not something that can be ignored, denied or banished. It must be included in the process, and once understood, it becomes, not perhaps a friend, but a partner, in some sense, a trainer, a coach, a motivator.

Twenty-eight years after being told that I wasn't really, at least genetically, a "Hull," I began the process of re-discovering my true identity. I started working with a wonderful therapist, who understood intuitively that deep interconnection between my fear—and desire—of knowing the truth, and my shame at being abandoned. Judy Fox, the therapist and woman to whom this book is dedicated, was my first true "life-shifting" coach, and the person without whom this book would not exist. She was the first to use the "life-shifting" method (although she didn't call it that) and I was the first patient to go "through the program." To say that the program works is the ultimate understatement.

Seven years later, after moving, sometimes quite painfully, through each of the six stages of change—and vanquishing my associated fears and anxieties along the way, I sought and found my birth mother, and was fortunate to be "welcomed home" by my genetic family. It has been an amazing journey, one that has afforded me the opportunity to access a deeper version of my self identity (I won't use the word "true" because that

would imply that some sort of final self emerged in discovering my roots, which is far from the case. It is, in fact, just another plateau moment in the on-going evolution of the self.). Yet, even now, as I face the loss of my adopted mother and deepen the connection to my birth family, I am aware of how the cycles of change remain alive and active. We are never finished.

Thanks to the codification of methods that I have used with hundreds of clients for over fifteen years, and the resulting program provided in this book, you and I may no longer always need seven painful and drawn out years to release outdated self-perceptions. By joining me on this adventure in “life-shifting,” you will learn how to move faster and more effortlessly through whatever disruptions occur, allowing newer and deeper veins of gold—the gifts of soul—to emerge and take hold. And given the speed with which the economic and political shifts are occurring during this time of global upheaval, this is good news. We all need to become more facile, more schooled, and more effective at *moving through change*. The survival of our species, and our home—the earth—may depend upon it.

A Learning Space. As a driver’s manual for handling life’s inevitable shifts, this book is designed to be more than just a good read. It is structured to create a “learning space” for the reader, by interweaving the following: 1. a clear and accessible guide that can be read in ‘chunks’ or as one continuous thread, including – theoretical foundations; self-tests for diagnosis; working the program; and, further reflections and support; 2. an interactive experience with on-going exercises and practices that engage the mind, the heart, and the body. My intention is simple but key: to encourage the reader to move

beyond the purely mental activity of reading, to literally bring heart—and skin—into the game.

Current research into brain chemistry and physical evolution demonstrates that real change—truly breaking bad habits, learning new skills, developing an expanded sense of self—can happen at any time in life (I have a seventy year old client becoming a yoga instructor!), but it requires the engagement of *the whole person*. Throughout this book, the reader will find exercises and ways to utilize the tools offered to engage the heart (working with feelings and intuition) and the body, as well as the mind. To accelerate and move more seamlessly through any life shift, learning must be embodied.

One very large evolutionary shift that is occurring in scientific and psychological circles is the shift away from the false Cartesian split between the mind, heart and body. They are all one, integrated mechanism; and to become a master of self-renewal (see part three of the book), we must all take up the mantle of what my teacher, Tom Lutes, a spiritual fitness instructor if there ever was one, calls “embodied wisdom.”

There are three major sections in the book, each of which may be read and re-read in standalone format. The first section is a “primer” for the program that follows, with a detailed overview of the major themes, as previewed above. Right from the start, however, the reader will find side-bar exercises that are designed to shift one’s perspective from observer to participant. You may simply read through each of the three sections of the book, but if you happen to have chosen, or been given, this book as a tool for helping you through some major (or minor) transition that is occurring in your life, I recommend that you “jump in” and start doing the accompanying exercises right away.

Shifting from observer to player, you will feel the impact of the book immediately as you make the first major leap on the road to mastery: self-awareness.

Just as I didn't even know—with all my psychology training—that my deep fear around my birth identity was shame-based until someone gently pointed it out to me, you may very well be unaware of how fear is stalling you on the road to self-renewal and making your life shift a living hell. Doing the exercises as you read section one in the book, will help you begin to “wake up”—to reflect deeply on where you are on the trajectory of change. You may begin to explore what stops you from breaking free of what may be outworn or outdated forms of identity.

Chapter three of part one offers a series of three diagnostic exams that you can use over and over again throughout your life. Each diagnostic is designed to help you get clearer—at least for the current moment—about three fundamental building blocks necessary for your success at life-shifting: 1. where you are in the cycle of change; 2. what kind of learner you are pre-disposed to be when in action; 3. who is supporting you along the way.

These diagnostic “exams” are not meant to be definitive or static. Take the first exam today and you may find that in your career you are in the “Rut” stage but in your love life you are in “Realization.” Take the second exam and find that you are body-focused: someone who listens to the symptoms of fear through the body, who practices physical wellness and attends to the body before responding to the intellect or intuitions or feelings. Two years from now, after a raging romance or a huge shift in work responsibility, you may find that your “learning style” has shifted away from the body-focus to the heady side of things. You may gain weight, spend all your free time resting

and reading, and wonder what ever happened to that yoga practice. It will be time to swing back towards the body.

Likewise, by taking the third exam, you will learn who your support team is—and is not—and like the other tests, I can guarantee about the outcome of this exam only one thing: it will change. Friends come and go. Partners, lovers, and even our own children tend to move in and out of support roles in our lives on an endlessly moving continuum. What matters most is that we “check-in” with ourselves at various junctures—as we move through cycles of change—and be sure that we are getting the support that we need—even if it means paying for it (more on that subject later).

Part two of *Shift!* details the program for moving through your current life shift. In this section, I will introduce you to your companions for the journey: six clients of mine who, although they come from very different backgrounds and are facing different shifts in their own lives, have each moved through the six stages themselves, re-inventing, re-discovering and re-claiming new aspects of their ever evolving sense of self. Each of the six individuals is a real person, although I have modified some specifics about their backgrounds and pre-dispositions in order to protect their identities.

Two of your life-shifting companions are “thinkers”—that is they tend to utilize their intellect and capacities for rational and deductive reasoning in order to move through change. Two others are body-focused and two others are “feelers”—individuals who lean on their intuitive, felt sense of the world around them. Each of these six individuals has used the life-shifting method and the tools provided to become more balanced in their use of all three of their learning capacities: the thinkers learned to attend to their physical vitality and listen to their bodies, feelers learned to balance their

intuition with intellectual rigor and insight, body-types learn to slow down, reflect and listen to their inner voice of wisdom. There is no “right” way to learn. Each of us has a pre-disposition towards one of the three modes of learning, yet each of us also needs to tend to those parts of our essential self that we might choose to ignore or dismiss.

As you move through the six stages of the cycle, starting where ever your current life shift is occurring, the book will provide exercises and ways to utilize the tool set outlined in chapter two of part one within each domain of learning: thinking, feeling and sensing/physical. The key to accelerating your change process, and mitigating the stalling effects of fear, is to choose practices that reinforce your natural tendencies, but also push your edge into the less comfortable domains.

I encourage you to watch yourself closely as you arrive at a new stage in the cycle: what exercises do you find appealing? Which do you ignore, dismiss, or avoid? If you tend towards the cerebral mode of learning—and many of us in the Western culture are acculturated to “think our way out of problems”—take up the gauntlet and jump into the yoga practice or try taking a ‘leap of faith’ and doing a creative exploration using art or music—something you might initially dismiss as “irrational” or even “kooky.” You’ll be glad you did. The goal here is to finely tune the instrument called “self”—to move through our resistance and our fears by bringing to bear all the fruits of our uniquely human capacity for learning, by doing, by thinking, by moving, and by creating. It is all in there...in all of us.

Mastery. In the final section of the book, I share with you some closing thoughts on my own journey through life’s endless shifts, and discuss the theme of mastery. In the context of our broader cultural, political and economic upheavals—change is clearly

accelerating on every level—we each need to take steps to become masters at handling change at a local level. By local, I mean only this: we must learn first to successfully navigate the road towards opening and manifesting our own soul's desires, to heal and integrate the wounds of our fragmented ego-self, before we can take up the banner to change the world.

Only then, as role models for others along the bumpy, pot-holed highway of self-realization, may we step up and offer our service to the broader need, of our communities, our cities, and our planet. As the Native American adage reminds us, “We are the ones we have been waiting for.” BUT, we need to become capable of cruising down the road that moves us in the direction of full manifestation of our own innate potential—the capital S “Self”—if we are to be part of the solution to the plight of the planet and not part of the regressive, destructive—read: fear-based—rut that so many of our fellow citizens are caught in.

It is my fondest hope that this book serves as a tool for shifting readers into a more loving, fluid, flexible and permeable operating mode; that we learn to understand the roots of our fear and work to unearth and embrace the gifts of soul—compassion, creativity, empathy, tolerance, and understanding: the essence of our humanity—all of which are constantly pushing to break through to the light of day.

That said; there is much work to do. So get ready, get in gear, and let's go!