

A Christian Guide to Today's Culture

Your guide to understanding the changes in today's culture of disruptive media

I don't have to convince you that the world is changing. The media have changed our perceptions. Culture has changed our values. Technology has changed everything. We live in the instant world of mobile phones, text messaging and hugely popular social networking sites such as Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn and YouTube. In the digital universe, word travels fast and change is overwhelming—often happening without warning. For better or worse, *disruption* is the word that best describes 21st century living. But as the world around us changes, have we changed? How have we adapted to the turmoil that surrounds our lives? Perhaps the more important question is, in a world where the very foundations you've believed in all your life seem to be crumbling, how do you know what changes are helpful and which ones distract you from your calling and purpose?

In so many ways, media and technology have overtaken our lives. They have brought us great benefits, but they've also brought great frustration. E-mail, for example, which has made communication quick, easy and cheap, has its downside, as author John Freeman points out in his book *The Tyranny of E-mail*:

» E-mail is addictive in the same way slot machines have been shown to be addictive

» In 2009 it was estimated that the average corporate worker spent more than 40 percent of his or her day sending or receiving e-mail messages

» 77 percent of workers report that e-mail downtime causes major stress at work, and 10 percent report actually having assaulted their computers.

The statistics about how social media and social networking have changed our culture are even more mind-boggling. Erik Qualman lists some in his blog at [http://erikqualman.com](#) and notes that:

» In 2010, Generation Y (born, roughly, from 1980 to 2000) outnumbered Baby Boomers and 96 percent were members of an online social network

» One in eight couples married in the U.S. in the last year met online

» If Facebook were a country it would be the world's third largest

» Celebrities Ashton Kutcher and Ellen DeGeneres (combined) have more Twitter followers than the population of Ireland, Norway or Panama.

Some forecasters are calling the next 10 years the decade of "change and frustration." In fact, researchers indicate we're being exposed to the phenomenal number of 5,000 media messages per person, per day. That barrage is affecting our behavior.

For example, recently when my wife, Kathleen, and I attended a wedding, a member of the audience refused to take off his wireless Bluetooth earpiece. As the church lights dimmed for the wedding procession, he sat there with the little blue light blinking away in his ear like some cheap disco ball. I wondered what phone call could be so important that he couldn't even take off his earpiece for the bride's entrance.

Our close friend Fred Applegate told us of an even ruder example. Fred is a respected musical-theater performer in major roles on Broadway. One night during a performance, the cast was interrupted by a cell phone ringing in the audience.

To the astonishment of everyone in the theater, the patron actually took the call! The actors paused onstage to hear the audience member say in a loud voice: "Hello? No, I can't talk. I'm at a Broadway show."

Disruption has become the new normal.

I'm a writer, filmmaker and media consultant who works with some of the largest churches and ministries in the world. I focus on helping Christian and nonprofit organizations use the media more effectively. So I'm not a doomsayer. I'm an enthusiastic media user, and probably value my iPhone, iPad and laptop as much as anyone.

But we're currently living in the midst of the greatest shift in our culture since the invention of the printing press. Due to the combined effects in America of one of the most serious recessions in our history and changes in technology disrupting our lives, we're losing the cultural, religious and family frameworks that stabilized and supported earlier generations.

That's why it's so critically important for all of us to master the principles that will allow us to survive *and thrive* in the culture of disruption that is rapidly becoming our future.

How to Navigate Change

Particularly as Christians, how do we deal with these radical changes in our culture? Do we follow the Luddites, who in 19th century Britain rebelled against mechanizing the textile industry by destroying the looms they believed were taking away their work and changing their entire way of life? Or do we just let go and allow technology to overtake us in a wave and wash us away like a boat with no rudder?

I suggest neither. I believe there's a third way. I believe it's possible to navigate the cultural shift without losing your soul. The secret is *understanding* the power of change.

In writing my new book, *Jolt! Get the Jump on a World That's Constantly Changing*, I discovered the secrets to weathering a culture of disruption and making change work for you.

A *jolt* is a “shock,” a “disturbance,” an “abrupt change.” It shakes things up and realigns our thinking. Like the reset button on a computer, it cleans out the clutter that was slowing us down and allows us to restart fresh.

In today's world of overwhelming disruption, if we can understand the power of change and how to make it work for us, it will allow us to take back the control of our lives. We can make the right choices, rather than having choices forced on us. So, if the disruption in your life seems to be overwhelming, here are a few ideas that might help you weather the storm:

1. Jolt your failure. During periods of change and disruption, our failures mount because we're forced to try new things. Rather than allowing yourself to be frustrated by failure, start learning from it. In fact, if you've tried everything else and failed, this could be your moment.

When I was 36 years old, I was fired from my job at a major ministry. Kathleen and I had two small children at that time. After telling her what happened, we sat on the bed, cried a little and realized we'd hit a wall.

Looking back today, I can see the jolt of that job loss was the best thing that could have happened. Shortly afterward, we began the greatest journey of change we had ever experienced. I had no other choice, and there was only one answer to my dilemma—change or die.

Perhaps you've hit your wall. Maybe you've been fired, divorced, financially ruined, hit bottom from substance abuse, been humiliated, experienced failure or had a close call with death. If your life has been completely turned upside down, and you're at the end of your rope, then you actually have it

easy—because your decision is made.

2. *Jolt your past.* Far too many people live in bondage to their past. If you're going to be responsive to change, you can't be held back by past hurts, bad memories or disappointment.

My own father was a pastor who was fired from a mainline church when he started preaching on the power of the Holy Spirit. An elder who didn't like his message engineered his ouster the week after I left home for college.

The problem was, my father never got over it. Until his death more than 40 years later, anytime I called my dad, that's what he wanted to talk about. He carried that hurt to his grave, and his ministry never moved on. In a rapidly changing world, those who dwell on old offenses will only live in the past, never the future.

3. *Jolt your priorities.* During periods of radical change, priorities become more important than ever. The problem is, most people never really decide what's important in their lives. Take an inventory of what matters to you today. Is it your career? Your family? Your relationship with God? Personal growth? Getting out of debt? Whatever it is, now is the time to decide. Under stress, people tend to forget about priorities, and that's when things get out of control. But those who understand what's really important never seem to lose their way.

4. *Jolt your focus.* A great number of people fail in life, not because they aren't talented, called or qualified, but because they simply get distracted. Christians are often the worst at this. We get distracted by the latest flavor-of-the-month ministry leader or the newest popular church, or we split up lifelong relationships over petty doctrinal issues. I'm convinced that real prophets have more than just vision—they know how to ignore the distractions the rest of us can't. They

never let go of their calling. They know how to focus.

5. *Jolt* your legacy. What are you leaving behind? At your funeral, they won't be talking about your bank account, your fame or the size of your house. They'll be talking about the legacy you left in the lives of others.

I've learned it's never too late to start building a legacy—and I'm not talking about money. Teach a class, mentor a troubled teen, help the lady next door, volunteer at church—there are a million ways you can make your mark on the world so you leave a lasting change for generations to come. When you start seeing life from a higher perspective, those daily disruptions will look a lot less important.

Whatever your situation, stop focusing on the *problem* and start focusing on the *change*. Because when you start doing that, it can happen with everyone around you.

It can't be denied—*change is hard*. It's difficult to do well, and it's even harder to develop a *lifestyle* of change. But the truth is, change is happening whether you like it or not, and whether you're ready for it or not. But in at least 18 places in the Bible, God says, "I am with you"—so remember that you're not in this alone.

Why did I use the term *jolt* to describe these changes? Because real change is big. It's a commitment. To initiate lasting, powerful change in our lives we need to shake up our complacent thinking. It's about facing the subjects we refuse to discuss and challenging our preconceived notions about the world around us.

It's not about *knowing* the future; it's about *being ready* for the future. It's not about having the right *answers*; it's about asking the right *questions*. And it's not about things that seem *urgent*; it's about the things that *matter*. God has placed enormous potential in each of us. But if we're ever going to achieve that potential, we need to jolt our thinking,

understand the power of change, and discover how to achieve long-lasting, revolutionary transformation in every area of our lives.

Phil Cooke is co-founder with his wife, Kathleen, of Cooke Pictures in Burbank, Calif. He's also a founding partner in the commercial production company *TWC Films*, which was selected to unveil the new electric *Chevrolet Volt* automobile. He has produced media programming in more than 40 countries. This article was adapted from his new book, *Jolt! Get the Jump on a World that's Constantly Changing*.
