



Episode 2

Building a Flux Mindset: Author April Rinne on Thriving in a World of Change—with April Rinne

Polly Carpenter:

Hello and welcome to Change Makers and Their Stories. I'm your host, Polly Carpenter, the founder of Carpenter Group, a New York City based creative agency. I'm thrilled to introduce today's guest, April Rinne.

April:

Hi, Polly. Delighted to be here.

Polly Carpenter:

April, it's great to be speaking with you. And just because the story of how we met has stuck with me all these years, I wanted to give our listeners a bit of background. I first met you in Cinque Terre, Italy when you were only 23 years old. I was there with a group hiking through the Five Towns and you were our guide. I remember being instantly taken by your energy and knew immediately that you were a dynamic, intelligent, and very interesting young woman with a very bright future.

Besides speaking fluent Italian, I remember your collection of Buon Ricordo plates. Happy memories from dining across Italy. You had collected a stack of them. Besides collecting plates, you were collecting people. I remember you kept a record of every single person you had guided on hiking trips across Europe, and then you kept in touch, the yearly letter and other interesting articles I receive to this day. You were only 23 years old, had the energy of someone ready to take on the world and connect with these people.

It's been amazing to follow your career and see the way you tackle change head on and use it as an opportunity.

April:

Well, thank you, Polly, for having me here today, for hosting this conversation. And I love how long we have known each other. In fact, like a non-trivial portion of my entire life, I have known you. So today to get to connect with your audience, but also reconnect with you, it's a real joy. So this book, *Flux: 8 Superpowers for Thriving in Constant Change*, I like to say that I've been writing it for the past three years approximately. So it's not a book about the pandemic. It's not a book about 2020, but I would say 2020 and the pandemic have certainly validated and accelerated my thinking. The book itself though, it actually is the better part of nearly three decades in the making.

And so in terms of the book itself, I think we'll dig into this more in a little bit, it really is about better understanding our relationship to change and how to improve it to be what I like to call fit for a world in flux. And as part of that, there's this concept of a flux mindset, we can come back to that, and then these eight flux superpowers, which are the how to thrive in constant change. But in terms of why I wrote it and the motivation I had, I often like to think of it in terms of three different layers to change or perspectives on change that I bring. And the one that's most I think recent, if you will, is that of a futurist. So for the last several years, I've been known as a futurist where I'm trying to help people and organizations better understand like where is the future heading and how do I and my organization fit into it?

And so there we can think about future forecasting, we can think about change management, strategy, and all of that. And in my role as a futurist, I just started seeing how like every single organization on the planet struggles with change. Not always in the same way, but like no one has figured it out and everyone's having just a really rough time. And I don't think I need to go into too much detail about just how hard it is, whether it's culture, whether it's structure, whether it's back to the office, reopening, future of work. There's just so much flux and we really don't navigate a lot of it well.

The second piece or the second lens on change that I bring, which you've already alluded to, is very much global. So my entire career has been international. And as a result of that, what I've discovered is that every single culture on the planet also struggles with change, but also has developed interesting ways of seeing it and talking about it and rituals and traditions we create around change and belief structures and all of that. And even though no one's figured it out, like there's so much we can learn from one another, but oftentimes we haven't really connected those dots. So in my book, I have no fewer than 34 different cultures highlighted around like how different people see change, right?

And then the third and final piece, which is the one that goes way, way, way back actually shortly before I met you in fact, it's the very human relationship to change perspective on change. And what I mean by that is when I was in college, so I met you shortly after I'd graduated from college, but while I was in college, both of my parents died in a car accident at the age of 20. And that was the moment that like my entire life just flipped upside down. And what do you do when you don't know what to do? Like my whole life, my future was in flux. And I realized now, I mean, back then I wouldn't have said that I was going to write a book about flux however many years later, but I look at that now and I say that was really my entry into this concept. It was sort of my baptism, if you will, into flux. And ever since then, I've been really interested in peeling back the layers of our very complicated, very messy, but very human relationships to change.

Polly Carpenter:

So do you think the death of your parents was a catalyst almost freed you or allowed you to just go for it just to be completely free and go out into the world without any challenges?

April:

Oh, I wish. No, not at all actually. And not to say ultimately that's not where I would like to get and where I've made lots of progress in the year since then. No, my parents died and I was racked with anxiety. I was just... It was true that yes, I can come back to this in terms of, well, I no longer had parents to tell me what I could or couldn't do so to speak, but I lost my sounding board. I lost the home that I was used to going back to if things got rough. I lost the people that I kind of assumed would be in my life, not forever, but certainly for a lot longer than they were. And so I went through quite a period of anxiety, uncertainty, just candidly having to walk through the fire of having absolutely no idea what was going to happen, but knowing that the best I could do was show up every day and put one-

April:

What was going to happen, but knowing that the best I could do was show up every day and put one foot in front of the other. Right.

Polly Carpenter:

That you did beautifully.

April:

I experienced at the age of 20 and not willingly, not expectedly, but I experienced the equivalent of a midlife crisis. And I say this because the questions I started asking myself... So in that period right after we're in fairness, there was a sense of freeing of like, what am I going to make of my life? Right. But it's also really scary because the rug has just been pulled from underneath you.

But the questions I started asking at the age of 20, what really matters? What am I going to make of my one short, precious life? If I were to die tomorrow, what would the world need me to do today? Right. These are the questions that I see much later in life people who are going through some kind of midlife crisis or transition asking. And so to your earlier question about was this freeing, ultimately being able to ask those questions at such a young age was actually very freeing, but it took time to get to that point of inner stability and self worth awareness.

Polly Carpenter:

Maybe this is a good transition. What does it mean to embrace the Flux Mindset?.

April:

This concept of a Flux Mindset is something I've developed over the years as I've been peeling back the many layers of our relationship to change. And the quick definition is a Flux Mindset is the ability to see all change. So whether you love it or hate it, whether you welcome it, or it was unexpected, whether it's big or small to see all change as not just an opportunity rather than a threat, but to harness its silver linings, to see every single change that happens to you as an opportunity to improve and do things better. And so I think of mindset, think of it as a mental muscle. It's something we have to strengthen something we have to practice every day.

And when we think about humans relationships to change, I mean, anyone listening to us right now I can guarantee you, we all have certain changes we love and other changes we hate, certain changes we embrace and other changes that they hijack our brains. And it's that latter category that we all need to get much, much better dealing with because in a world in flux,

Polly Carpenter:

As parents, we hear so much about focusing our kids or specializing in something. You have almost done the opposite and yet here we are talking about you as an expert on how to approach change. How do you explain that path?

April:

Yeah. So gosh, there are 10 different directions I can take this question and it's probably less about my career. Although many people would say I've had a very atypical unconventional career. The irony is that I focus on the future of work. And I can tell you right now that the future of work is not a straight line. It is not the steady work, retire, pursue the path kind of thing that in fairness we've been taught for a long time.

And I'm not saying that's good or bad, or I'm not judging it. I'm just saying the future of work is actually not linear at all. It is curvy. It is messy. It is unique to you. We can now earn income in more ways than ever before. There are a lot of people who actually don't want to climb a corporate ladder or whatnot.

So for example, one thing that I talk about is rather than seeing your career as a linear path to pursue, we need to actually get much better at creating what I call a portfolio career. So seeing your career as a portfolio, as an artist or an investor would do right in which it's not one job and one straight line, it's a diversified collection of skills and roles and experiences and capabilities that you then need to curate as an investor might do to diversify and mitigate risk or as an artist might do to highlight the best things that they're capable of doing and the things that they enjoy most.

Polly Carpenter:

That's great advice. My husband always says to my kids build your toolkit because the world's changing and the more skills you have, the more able you're going to be able to adapt to the change.

April:

Yep, absolutely. And a tool kit is a great analogy. It's fun. I've heard people talk about so in terms of like the corporate ladder, rather than a ladder, it's a lattice that you can kind of climb across and over, or it's a jungle gym, or it's a Bento Box of skills and whatnot. But just real briefly I mean, I want to go back. I do want to give a quick call-out to kids and parents and all this stuff. What's fascinating to me is that I find that kids so often they're really wise. There's a lot of wisdom children have about how the world works and how they want to show up fully, which society does a really good job of stamping out over time. And kids aren't born thinking they have to climb a career path or that it's a career ladder or that it's a straight path they're born sort of like I enjoy doing activity X, Y, Z. I want to help other people. I want to be curious, right.

And the challenge we face right now is that a lot of these narratives and scripts they're really not fit for today's world influx. And so you have a lot of young people who are growing up and going, "Wait a minute, the stories I've been told about the world I should expect to live in, do not align at all with the world that I see, the world that I experience, and like, what is that new narrative?" So I bring all of this up because parents, children like everyone's struggling with flux, albeit in different ways.

Polly Carpenter:

Yes, we work with clients often. Spend a lot of time about market segmentation, audience segmentation. We do a lot of generational research to inform our thinking across audience groups and millennials we're kind of the first generation to really explore and hop from one job to the next. Sometimes getting a lot of criticism about their work ethic. Do you find that millennials are better at harnessing the Flux Mindset? Do you see a broader generational differences in how people adapt to change?

April:

Yeah. This is such a great question and it's hard to make an answer concise, but let me sort of cast this in broad strokes. If we zoom out there is definitely a theme that I'm fascinated to investigate and I've done some, but there's a lot more out there in terms of how does our relationship to change, change or evolve as we age? There's something very intimately human about that question because a child's relationship to change versus someone who's nearing death, that's going to be quite different. A parent with young children they're relationship...

April:

That's going to be quite different. A parent with young children, their relationship to change is going to be different than an empty nester whose kids have left and they're able to relax a bit more. So yes, there's absolutely differences when it comes to how our relationship to change evolves. What's interesting about, and here we could say Millennials. I'm looking also though at Gen Z, at digital natives. There's something really interesting. If you've been born, and again, broad brush, broad strokes, in this millennium, you're 21 or younger, I don't know. But you were born in this century. You've never known life without smartphones. You've never known life without the internet, but you've also never known the world without quite a bit of macro flux.

Polly Carpenter:

Distraction.

April:

Distraction and your relationship to technology versus your relationship to humans, absolutely. But you've also never actually known life without a war somewhere in the world. You've never known it without the message that the climate is melting and we may destroy the very environment that keeps us alive. I bring this up because on the one hand, younger people have a clearer connection, I would say, to flux, to this world in flux. They're like, "Yeah, it's the world I've been inhabiting." It doesn't necessarily make them better equipped to deal with it, largely because, as was saying before, we're still filtering our world and making decisions according to a very old and outdated set of norms and principles.

So I think it's going to get really interesting as people born in this millennium start to get of the age that they are launching their careers, they are entering managerial or leadership roles, they are building companies that have the ability to do things quite differently because their view of change is different. And I would say, on average, it is true that the older we get, the more set in our ways we tend to be. That makes some kind of changes harder when we're set in our ways. But also as we age, we start to realize more and more, I think what really matters, and you're able to opt into other kinds of change that we might have thought of was foolish or-

Polly Carpenter:

Not of real value to our lives.

April:

And there's a whole conversation we could have here, Polly, about value. This actually relates to a couple of the flux superpowers, full stop. So one of the super powers is see what's invisible. Another one is to know you're enough. Seeing what's invisible is fascinating because it does focus on, we value what we see, we value what we can measure in dollars and cents. We are trained to see some things and to not see other things. Sometimes that's unintentionally and other times it's very clearly in our script, what we should see and not see. It's fascinating because I think just take the example of trust. We're in a trust crisis, a trust deficit. We know that trust matters, but we don't value it because how do you put dollars and cents on trust? And yet it's the most valuable resource that your organization has.

So how do we learn? And I'm not talking about monetizing trust. I'm talking about how do we actually reset our metrics and our measures of value to count for that stuff that we would think of as "invisible value", and yet it's far more valuable at the end of the day, not just to keeping your organization humming and thriving, but to actually navigating change well.

Polly Carpenter:

So what is the one thing you want people to take away from the book to deal with all of these stressors?

April:

Well, I mean, the easy answer for me is when everything is in flux, everything can benefit from a flux mindset. So that's kind of a tagline. I would also say, though—

Polly Carpenter:

I love it.

April:

Yeah. No, it's quite universal. And I say this individually, organizationally, societally. It's this concept that has resonance and utility and benefit and value at every single level. But I would cast that against the backdrop of moving forward. The future is not more certain, it's not more predictable, it's not more stable. The future is more uncertainty, more change, more flux. So I look at this, the message of the book is very uplifting because in fact, if you're not up for a future that is more uncertain, more unstable, more change, more flux, it could be pretty tough. It could not be necessarily a fun experience. But if we see what we're going through right now as this opening and inflection point and opportunity to do things better and to do things more human, then I look at flux and the flux superpowers and I'm like, let's get started.

Polly Carpenter:

So I know as a founder of a business and running a business for almost 40 years, we've had extremely stressful times, four market downturns, 9/11, 2008 and other market crashes. I was told early on in my career that the best thing to do when you're in stress and you don't know what to do is to do something. Take action, move forward, call more prospects, do a podcast, do something that moves you along, so you don't get stuck in this stressful situation of grinding your teeth.

April:

It's interesting because this speaks directly to one of the eight flux superpowers, the last one actually, which is let go of the future. A lot of people say to me, they're like, "You're a futurist. You can't say that. What are you talking about?" And what they don't understand, each of the eight flux superpowers is counterintuitive in some way, even contrarian, if you will. And when I say let go of the future, I do not mean give up. I do not mean throw in the white towel. I do not mean failure. It's actually quite the opposite. And it speaks to what you're talking about here, Polly, because what I often say, part of why we're in such a mess, the mess that we're in today, is because we're so, if I may—

April:

... mess that we're in today is because we're so, if I may say, hell bent on predicting the future, controlling the future, engineering the future. And yet the fact is that neither you nor I nor anyone has ever been able to predict or to the control of future. We just like to believe we can. We have this illusion of control. And when change hits, that's when it becomes really clear how little we actually control. And so all of this I go into more in that chapter, in that superpower, but the way that I like to frame it is, no one can control the future that's going to play out, but each and every one of us can control whether and how we contribute to a future we'd like to see.

Polly Carpenter:

Fantastic. One last question. How do you take a break?.

April:

Oh, well, you mean—

Polly Carpenter:

Isn't that a superpower?

April:

Yes. Running slower is a superpower.

Polly Carpenter:

I was discussing this with some people the other night and they were all intrigued by that. Tell me about that.

April:

Yeah. So run slower, and it's not just taking a break. Although I would say, it's about how we live our lives, and so runs slower. Again, people are like, "What do you mean? That's not what I'm told by society." I'm like, "Precisely. That's part of why we're in the mess," particularly around overwork, burnout, exhaustion, anxiety, et cetera. Think about what society tells us. When the pace of change increases or when change hits, what do you do? You run faster. You have to keep up. Just keep up, keep up. Run faster, run faster. Well, I'm here looking at this again as a futurist and I'm going, "Wait a minute." The pace of change has never been as fast as it is today and yet it is likely to never again be this slow. So pause for a minute and just let that sink in. It's exciting and it's terrifying, because play out what society is telling us.

It's saying, "You're going to be running faster and faster and faster and faster the rest of your life." And if you already feel like you're tired, don't have enough time in the day for everything you want to do, also though if you just feel like there's a delusion of information and you don't know what to focus on and what really matters and all that, imagine that tomorrow you're going to be running even faster and the next day even faster and years like this is it for the rest of your life.

Polly Carpenter:

Wow.

April:

I look at this and I go, "No. This is not the way, people." At best, this is massive burnout. But at worse, more likely, I look at this as a train wreck for all of humanity in terms of anyone reaching their full potential. So learning how to run slower. The superpower is that, in an ever faster paced world, the way we thrive is to learn to slow our own pace so that it is sustainable. That includes lots of breaks and whatnot. It also includes candidly slowing down on a daily basis so that the notion that I have to take a break because I'm so exhausted doesn't actually need to exist. So there are lots of ways we talk about doing this and it's little things in your daily life as well as more broadly, how do you think about the arc of your life? But the run slower, I will admit, most people when I first say it, they're like, "Uh-uh. Nope. Doesn't align." And by the time we've had a conversation like this, they're like, "Oh my God, yeah, you've totally nailed what we need."

Polly Carpenter:

I think everybody's looking for that. It's just, how do you do it? I guess you pick and choose and you set priorities and you take part of the day that you're not going 100 miles an hour.

April :

Well, there are all kinds of ways we can do it, but it does require resetting and realigning what really matters. Because I think, and that relates, not to go down another rabbit hole, but another of the superpowers, which is, know you're enough. And that includes knowing that you are enough. But this is Y-O-U-R. And this superpower, this theme, has to do with our obsession with more, that we are constantly after more. More, more, more, more, more, more power, more money, more likes, more love, more followers, more prestige, more cars, more houses, more whatever. And it's making us crazy and it's making us sick. And so we have to actually readjust. More is not necessarily better. More meetings in a day does not necessarily make you more productive and being more productive does not necessarily make you happier.

Polly Carpenter:

And having more things certainly doesn't make you happy.

April:

Correct. And when change hits, all of this becomes really, not automatically clear, but it's when change hits like we've seen in the last 18 months that people look around and they go, "Wow, I was following values and pursuing things that, why?" And so this is why this concept of flux is also really timely, but back to running slower, there's a lot of reverse engineering and a lot of self-awareness that needs to be done to get to the point of what running slower needs to look like for you. And it's not the same for all people kind of thing. I mean, this notion of I'll keep doing some things at full throttle and then I'll just get rid of some other things.

Subtracting what you're doing overall is helpful, but it's a more holistic look at, how do we relate to velocity and the pace of our life? There's a lot of different cultures actually here and different philosophies and so forth that get put into this chapter. But at a deeper level, not just scheduling and calendaring, what does it look like to slow the pace of your life to a point that you can observe, appreciate, and be present in all of it? Because I actually think the biggest risk we run of running ever faster is we actually run right past life.

Polly Carpenter:

Oh, I completely agree with you. So April, thank you again for joining us to discuss the flux mindset and thank you to our listeners for tuning in. Please order April's new book, *Flux: Eight Superpowers For Thriving In Constant Change*.

April:

Thank you so much. And if you want to know more about Flux, head to fluxmindset.com. And not just the book, but there's a lot of stuff I've tried to make just publicly available and accessible to learn more about the superpowers and everything else. Thank you so much, Polly.

Polly Carpenter:

Fantastic. Thanks April. See you soon..

Polly Carpenter:

This podcast is produced by Carpenter Group, a full service creative agency based in New York City. Our clients include leading global financial firms, professional services, and FinTech companies to build a strategic advantage for their brands in a competitive and constantly evolving world.