This book is a reminder to us all that we can embrace exciting advances in technology, and at the same time celebrate our humanity, in small and large ways, every day. There's no doubt that we are living in an age of disruption. Every day, we see breathtaking advancements in how we live, work and communicate, but if we are not careful, the irresistible pull of innovation could make us lose what it really means to be human. As we enter this disruptive future, we need to rediscover what we're most certain of – the uniquely human gifts of understanding ourselves, each other, and making a positive difference.

We'll guide you through the Five Foundations of Rediscovering Humanity and show you how to lead a life of purpose and hope, even in this age of disconnection. It's time to choose to live as the REAL you – not the curated version of yourself, but the whole-hearted, unabashed you. It's time to rediscover your humanity.

REDISCOVERING HUMAN

Life, work, and connection in an age of disruption

By Jo Eismont
With Spencer Gillman and Doug Upchurch
Introduction

Choosing humanity in a disruptive and digital world

Think back to your last birthday. Did you get a lot of cards? Maybe not. Birthday cards seem to peak at around age 11, then every year after that, the pile on the doormat diminishes that little bit more. But you probably got a handful from the people you’re really close to. Did you go somewhere nice for dinner? We bet your friends on Instagram thought your meal looked amazing (#foodie #happybirthday #blessed). And when you got home, you were probably too zonked/hopped up on sugar to reply to each of your Facebook friends wishing you a happy birthday (party hat/whimsical balloon emoji), so you just posted something like, ‘Thanks for all the birthday wishes guys, I’ve had a lovely day.’

Ah, the closing moment of any adult 21st-century birthday – the ‘I won’t bother replying to you all individually, mainly because I can’t remember who a lot of you are’ Facebook post.

And yet we all accept that this is how birthdays are now – your oh-so-special day is punctuated by notifications on your phone, telling you that your friend’s boyfriend’s brother has posted ‘Happy bday’ on your wall, just because his own phone told him to. You only like his post, because you don’t know him quite well enough to get into a proper conversation.

Forgive us, but that seems a mildly dispiriting way to celebrate what should be a memorable and special day. Liking a generic message from someone you haven’t seen in person for 14 years just doesn’t feel quite as … human as did those piles of cards, handpicked and handwritten with a message inside just for you, which we all used to get back before the age of social media. Instead of the pleasure of a friend’s beautiful calligraphy or the hoot of laughter at an inappropriately cheeky verse, you get 53 identical posts on your wall from semi-acquaintances and 11 likes of your birthday cake photo on Instagram.

Then again, if it wasn’t for Facebook, barely anyone outside your closest circle of family and friends would have known it was your birthday at all. By reminding your network that it’s your special day, tech also offers opportunities for connection that don’t often come along outside of the virtual world. So you might get a message from a cousin on the other side of the world, and make plans for a visit later in the year. Or you might hear from an old colleague who moved companies, and realise that it’s way past time for a cocktail and a catch-up. Yes, the upsides of social media are overwhelmingly clear, and we see it bringing people together in new and different ways time and time again.
But this constantly available connection to, well, everything and everyone, through a tiny screen, has also induced a certain blandness in people the world over. Thanks to social media it’s not only our birthdays that have become ubiquitous. We take selfies at flattering angles, we use the appropriate hashtags whether it’s a watershed cultural moment such as #MeToo or a way to get your genius #InsertAFruitIntoAMovie idea seen, liked and retweeted. We put the perfect filter on the perfect picture of our beautiful children absorbed in only the most wholesome of activities.

In so many areas of our lives now there is a tension between the disruptive nature of the 21st century, and the humanity that exists in each of us – but this is more nuanced and complex than a simple good versus evil situation. After all, in many ways we’re privileged to live in an age of such speedy and slick technological innovation, and even luckier that access to it is so ubiquitous that we already take it for granted. More than that, society has evolved in any number of ways that makes us damn lucky to be part of the 21st century: in this decade close to 87% of children worldwide complete their primary education, which is still not good enough (after all it isn’t 100%) but it’s the best we’ve seen yet. Most of us have access to clean water and nutritional fresh food. Healthcare has seen great progress so that we’re living longer, and it’s claimed by some that the first 150 (or even 200, but we’re not convinced) year-old person has already been born. Our workplaces are generally safe and clean, and many of us are encouraged to find work that gives our lives direction and purpose.

Like we said above, it’s not our belief that tech is bad and humanity is good, on every occasion and in every way. What we want to do with this book is ask the questions that haven’t yet been answered as we evolve through this age of disruption. To remind ourselves that we have choices to make, big and small, every single day, that will impact the balance of our lives; that we can keep humanity at the forefront of how we live, even while revelling in the most exciting innovations of our age.

Sometimes you need human, sometimes you need digital

Recently, a colleague complained that, when her teenage kid’s friends come to stay with her family over the holidays, they just aren’t interested in hearing advice from local people about fun things going on in the city. Exasperated, she explained through gritted teeth how irritating it is when her recommendations of amazing places to eat or the best beaches to hang out on, are spurned with a dismissive, ‘it’s ok, I’ll just Google it.’

Now, this automatic trust that is often placed in the World Wide Web does – sometimes – make perfect sense. After all, if you’re looking for some pretty general factual information about a place – opening times, what’s on the menu, what the next showing of the latest movie is – yes, you can’t beat the internet for that stuff.
There’s no quicker way to do it. In fact, these days there’s often no other way to do it at all. You can’t call up the local movie theatre and talk to the person sitting right there – what is this, 1986? To get the information you need, you’d have to find the country-wide hotline number – how, if not online? – then spend a long time pressing 1 for this, 2 for that and listening to some hokey old tune. Who would do that, when the information they needed was in the palm of their hand all along?

On the other hand, there’s some stuff that only a human-to-human conversation can give you. Like a vivid description of how beautiful the view is if you go to that seafood place by the lake instead of the one downtown; how you should totally make the trip to the further-away ice-cream place because the server will sometimes sneak customers an extra scoop. Sure, it’s possible to get a little bit of that more personal take online. Anyone can review any business they like and post it online. But again, this is where the internet works for big data and not for that irreplaceable human element. If a restaurant has been given 4 out of 5 stars by over 1000 reviewers, you’re probably going to feel like it’s a fairly safe bet. But if you want to find out how much Tabasco they put in a Bloody Mary or if it’s just – you know – your kind of place, well that’s the kind of personal take on life that only an actual human you know and trust, and who knows you and your preferences, can give you.

The conundrum is – the information that we carry around in our pockets on a daily basis is mind-blowing. It’s every birthday present you ever wanted, rolled into one. It’s always available, it’s a constant stream of brand new information, and crucially, everyone you’ve ever met – and millions of people you don’t know IRL – are in there, just waiting to hear what you think about almost anything. But – and this is what’s becoming so difficult to remember – it isn’t everything. It isn’t human.

When we spurn human interaction for the wisdom of what’s locked inside our smartphone, it’s just another example that illustrates our inarguable addiction to tech. The very act of unlocking our phones gives us a shot of dopamine, a neurotransmitter which sends signals between the neurons in our brains. Dopamine is in charge of pleasure and reward in our brains, so the fact that there’s a shot of it released as we access our smartphones shows that we’re being intrinsically rewarded for doing so. We’ve become people who engage – daily – in socially acceptable obsessive-compulsive behaviours. If someone wants to tell us about a great sushi place, that’s nice of them; but if we look it up online, we get the information, AND we also reward the part of us that was strung out and waiting for dopamine to scratch the itch in our brains.

In the first wave of internet growth, tech companies developed products and games that happened to spawn obsessive-compulsive
behaviours pretty much on the side. But on realising just how easily they could keep people coming back for more, apps, games, social platforms and so on are now developed as compulsion loops that nudge, nudge, nudge us into these habit-forming behaviours. This was both a fantastically successful business strategy, and, as it turns out, a lever for changing the world as we know it. And as we know, the success of the biggest social media platforms is predicated not just on how many people use the sites daily, but on how long they spend on there too – so much so that the tech giants themselves are starting to develop tools which let us easily monitor our phone usage, make changes where we can, or even set our own daily time limits. Apple calls their initiative ‘Digital Health’ which really illustrates that tech is an indispensable part of a balanced human life. No one is suggesting a digital break here, simply that each of us finds our own balance.

On the other hand, think of even the simplest platform game you’ve got on your phone. For every level you complete you get a reward of some kind, so you keep playing. It’s a simple loop, but even some extra coins or diamonds – or the chance to kick your friend off the top of the leader board – is enough to keep you coming back. By creating compulsion loops which compel us to get – and stay – engaged, tech companies have become an essential, and brilliantly irresistible, part of the fabric of our lives. But is this level of screen-time also potentially harmful for humanity? By continually rewarding us for interacting with technology rather than with people, we could say that the tech industry is at least partly responsible for some pretty serious unintended consequences. For instance, this disruptive, disconnected age has seen a rise in rates of loneliness to epidemic proportions and an explosion in mental health problems, especially among the young. It can surely be no coincidence that the most connected generation in human history – the iGeneration as it’s sometimes known – is also the loneliest on record.

**Community is coded into our humanity**

This level of being – and feeling – alone, represents a seismic shift for humanity. A long, long time ago we started out living in communities. We hunted together, cooked together, ate together and bedded down at night together for warmth and protection. So the idea of community-as-life is coded right into our humanity. It’s part of our innate human nature to have shared plans, projects and goals, which in turn create a sense of the collective, a shared mythology, and the blueprint for an ongoing community. But look to the digital revolution, and you’ll see that how we work and live now is very far from traditional ideas about what makes a society.

At work, we’re often matrixed in a number of (at least partly) virtual teams, so we’ll never meet some of our colleagues in person. Instead, we have ‘colleagues in a box’ who we can dial
up on demand but who we’ll never see outside the confines of a laptop screen. Yes, we work in open plan offices, which were once thought to be the resolution to infrequent collaboration, siloed working and unproductive, ineffective teamwork. But most of us face a screen all day, keep our headphones on so we can listen to the latest crime podcast while we work, and generally jump right into our own little silo every morning and stay there. We’re also fast reaching what was once considered the future-state – by 2020, it’s possible that up to 75% of workers will be remote in some organisations. There’s that shift towards loneliness, again.

And when we go home, are we out and about in our communities, rubbing up against those who we live cheek by jowl with? Often, we’re not. Instead, we’re alone, watching the same boxset as our friends are watching alone, and tweeting our thoughts about it out into the ether. We like our friends’ pictures of their newborn baby on Facebook instead of turning up on their doorstep with a hot meal and a hug. We’re in our own spaces, doing our own things, with the door to the outside world closed. It’s easier, it’s warmer, it’s safer and there’s nothing to come between us and our phones.

Loneliness doesn’t just make life long and dull. Living without a community around you isn’t a petty irritation or the punchline to a joke about growing old with only 27 cats for company. Loneliness has a significant detrimental effect on people, communities, even the economy, and there are massive implications for healthcare, too. A recent study shows that most adults who describe themselves as ‘not lonely’ also say they are in excellent health, whereas less than a quarter of lonely people can say the same. And while we’re not laying the blame for human loneliness at Mark Zuckerberg’s feet, it would be crazy to suggest that the rise of tech isn’t somehow linked to the fraying of the edges of our communities that we see taking place.

In fact, Facebook’s own research discovered that HOW you interact with social media impacts your sense of self. They found that people who ‘passively consumed’ content, i.e. didn’t engage or interact with posts, found themselves feeling worse afterwards. In a world where 92 out of 100 teens spend around nine hours a day on their phones it’s not hard to envision a generation of young people spending their youth alone, unhappily scrolling, and searching for something which will raise up their humanity, but feels forever locked away behind a screen. These kids are the future of our world, so it seems likely that as the decades roll by, we’ll only see these feelings of depression and loneliness increase throughout society.

The technology we have access to right now represents the biggest, most exciting and entertaining leap forward that humanity has ever seen. It constantly offers up new and various ways in which we can live, learn and work, and it continually connects us with people we’d never have had the opportunity to meet at another
time in history. And while these advances are amazing, exciting, and boundary-pushing, they also bring potential challenges for us as a species. In the face of such quickly evolving technologies, as in so many areas of life, we’re going to have to draw some lines in the sand. Becoming intentional about the choices we make, whether that’s calling your brother instead of saving it all up for that one big birthday text, or going into a store instead of ordering clothes online again. The balance in our lives, and the nature of our humanity, resides in these everyday choices, which may seem small and discrete, but actually add up to who you are and what you’re here on earth for.

Reaching critical mass

It feels very much like we’re reaching a tipping point in time, a critical mass. In the world of work, we could be about to invent ourselves out of a great many jobs. According to the World Bank President, Jim Yong Kim, some countries could lose as much as 85% of their jobs to automation in the coming decades. Our workforces are spread around the world, meaning we offer a 24-hour service, but may never cross paths (or even time zones!) with people in our own teams. This critical mass isn’t reserved to the workplace though. Each new generation conducts more and more of its communication through screens. How (and from whom) we get our news is becoming a stark ideological choice, so that our worldviews become more and more polarised as time passes. Loneliness and mental health issues are matching pace with the rise of technology. Entire industries are disrupted by the creation of an app that changes the playing field, both for employees and employers. These things combine to feel less like the next steps in the natural evolution of our world, and more like a cliff edge: a moment in time which demands that we make some real choices about who we are and who we want to become, both as individuals and as a society. And yet, given all of this change – incremental, epochal or somewhere in between – this can be a time of choice, of hope, and of opportunity, if we keep humanity at the centre of our society.

Maybe you know all this already. Perhaps you’ve been feeling the stress of disruption, and have already decided to dial up your humanity in response to it. Maybe you’re living a self-aware life, building amazing relationships, and are completely focused on achieving your purpose. If you are, that’s fantastic, and we hope this book can take you a little further on your journey. But if these ideas are unfamiliar, but you just know that something has got to give, and you’re beginning to feel like making some tough choices, then we’re going to help you get there.

This book is for anyone who’s wondering what kind of workforce their kids will join once AI becomes an everyday office presence. It’s for anyone who gets their breaking news from Twitter, but
also misses the days when we didn’t have to condense our complex thoughts into a tweet for the consumption of the waiting public. It’s for all of us humans who have a stake in the future, and are still waiting to see the full potential of humanity realised in all of its wonderful, flawed, crazy, ambitious, intelligent glory. We make no apologies for what this book is: intensely pro-human. We’re just as connected as you are. We’re dedicated to harnessing technology that will encourage people to truly understand themselves and others in order to live a more authentic life. And we’re amazed, most days, by the power of humanity and what can be achieved when we come together as communities. What we decide to do next, as a species, will be all about making good on what we’ve lost and being aware of what we could potentially lose if we don’t rediscover our true humanity.

There are going to be choices to make as we move even further into this age of disruption. Do we want it to be sheer economics or the needs of people that shape our workplaces? Are we happy to retreat from our public spaces, and if we do, what does that mean for our parks, libraries, shops, schools – in short, what happens to our communities? Do we all have to live at digital speed now? Many of us like to fire off a couple of emails and a quick tweet before we even get out of bed, but if you don’t live a digital life, is it inevitable that you will become disconnected from the world around you? So many questions to ask, so many choices to make, each with a common theme: in this disrupted, disconnected age, what are the opportunities for humanity?

But before we make our way into learning how to rediscover our humanity, let’s get to the task at hand and look at where this book is going to take you.

### Disruption, choice and rediscovery

First we’re going to dig into these ideas of disconnection, change and disruption, which have radically altered how we are as humans in the 21st century. For example, we’ll look at how education has changed over time and what that means for us as learners. We’ll explore how the dominance of social media as a news source shapes our world view in a way that’s new and different. Then we’ll get into some of the technology-based changes that are making our workplaces tricky to navigate, such as remote working, the impact of artificial intelligence, and how the gig economy can impact your sense of community at work.

We’ll acknowledge that change is inevitable: it happens to all of us, all of the time, and never more so than in this, the Fourth Industrial Revolution. It’s disruptive and exciting, wild and worrying, sometimes an adventure and sometimes an advantage, but the truth is this: we all have a choice. When faced with any situation that threatens our precious human connections, we can choose to let the connection falter, or we can raise our humanity up above the din of everyday life and reaffirm the connection that’s at stake. In these disrupted times, this stuff comes up a
lot. Should I call Dad or text him? Should I go into the office for that meeting or work from home? Should I go self-service at the store or have a quick chat at the checkout? You’ll experience these moments of choice every day – we know that we do. And we don’t always choose human! We’re as in love with and addicted to tech as you are, and with a dozen devices between three of us, it would be silly to argue otherwise. What we have learned though, is that the key to rediscovering the power of humanity, and human connection, is choice; and remembering that you can, and should, make conscious choices every day about how you want to navigate this age of disruption.

Then we’ll get into the heart of rediscovering human, by looking at how you can make it happen in your life, in the lives of those around you, and in your community. We’ll take you through the Five Foundations of Rediscovering Humanity, and show you that the key to living a fully human life means fully understanding yourself, seeking to understand the humanity in others, and choosing to make a positive difference in your community.

Disruption

In the 21st century disruption is to be admired. Disrupters display their rebellious nature like a badge of cool and trade on their reputation to shake up existing industries. Disruptive innovations grab the media’s attention and encourage investment. Disruptive companies are marketed as the hip little brother of the mainstream industry leaders. But disruption is in the eye of the beholder, in that it’s often only really cool to the disrupter. If you’re the Uber of your own particular industry, disruption is the key to your business success; not so much if you’re a decades-old organisation with a more traditional set-up and shareholders who like things just the way they are.

Disruption doesn’t only exist in industry either; many (or even most) of us are living in a constant state of flux, of change and instability. How children learn is vastly different to how their parents learned at school; our world view is shaped by the views of others in a more insidious way than before the advent of social media; how we communicate with our friends and family has shifted inexorably, too, as new methods of keeping in constant touch with those closest to us, and those on the other side of the world, have been forged through the Smartphone. There are few facets of human life left that haven’t been disrupted in some way; learning, communicating, workplace relationships, swiping right for love (or something less permanent), getting a coffee, buying groceries, have all changed dramatically in the last ten years. But we believe that disruption, for all its inevitability, also brings with it choice.
Choice

In this age of technology, we’ve already seen some truly amazing advancements: nanoparticles, nanorobots and nanodrills are being used to attack cancerous tumours; there’s an app that tells you the best time to run to the cinema bathroom so you don’t miss any big moments in the movie; you can order a hoverboard online today, and spend tomorrow pretending to be Marty McFly. And there are a million more innovations in the pipeline, making this a truly exciting, revolutionary time to be alive.

But what about our humanity? What about all of the great gifts that humans have, like curiosity, empathy, listening with our whole self, dreaming, asking tough questions? What place do these traits have in a digital world – and in a wider sense, what place does our humanity have in this digital world?

We do have a choice about the balance of our lives, even if it doesn’t always feel that way. In fact, we believe that it’s going to be the responsibility of every single one of us to take the very best of the tech that comes our way, and use it to do better, more audacious, more human things than we’ve ever done before. As we move deeper into this disruptive age, the real magic will be found in the creative tension between the two, and we want to explore what that’s going to look like - for you, for us, for everyone.

Because it’s undeniable that the way in which humans live, work and exist together is being disrupted to a huge extent. And that’s sort of been the way of things since the industrial revolution, skipping on through globalisation and then right up to today – change has forever been a constant, and always will be. Every change brings new complexities to how we live our lives, both positive and negative. But the disruption we’re experiencing today feels so much like rampant disconnection that we feel’s it’s time for everyone to wake up to the choices in front of them.

Rediscovery

AI and nanotechnology applied in the workplace are soon going to rearrange what our jobs and lives look like. The way we learn has certainly changed irrevocably, and today’s learners demand online interaction, gamification and to have their iPads on hand at all times if they’re going to stay engaged. Our curated, digital lives are being offered up for the judgement of others every day; indeed, one of the expectations of social media is that we all lay ourselves bare for the approval and judgement of others. But how are we supposed to navigate this age which demands authenticity, but also that we present a cultivated and curated face to the world? This is just a tiny microcosm of what has been evolving in our societies, but these things are all indicative of what feels like a hollowing out that has taken place – of our organisations, our communities, and of our humanity.
There’s so much beautifully, weirdly, wonderfully human potential in our workplaces, our schools, our communities, our societies and across our nations. We can’t stand by and watch as we subsume our human individuality into something that fits into the boxes that we, somehow, seem to have built for ourselves. What we’re calling for is that each of us wakes up to the choices that are ours to make, and decide to rediscover our humanity, in a time where it is often considered old hat and uncool to do so.

If you choose to rediscover your humanity, we’re going to lead you through what it takes. There are Five Foundations to rediscovering your humanity, and they are:

- Rediscovering yourself
- Rediscovering your voice
- Rediscovering your pace
- Rediscovering your relationships
- Rediscovering your community

You’ll see there’s a process here – you start with yourself, then move on to your relationships with others, and finally, you choose to commit to your wider community.

By rediscovering yourself, you can live a more self-aware life and become a model for rediscovered humanity in a digital age.

By rediscovering the relationships that really matter, you can make people the central feature of your life again.

By rediscovering your community you can make a real and positive difference in your own world, in your own way.

We know personally that these three stages provide a pathway for life that gives purpose and meaning – and that’s because it’s also the guiding purpose for Insights as a people development organisation. Our company-wide aim is to create a world where people truly understand themselves, understand others, and are inspired to make a positive difference in everything they do. And that’s also the purpose of this book. Let’s get started.