



Book Reality Hacking

Unusual Ideas and Provocations for Reinventing Your Work

Nicola Phillips
Capstone, 1999

Recommendation

New Age meets the New Economy in this book by British author Nicola Phillips, who shows her cyber-stripes with catchy Internet lingo, and graphics - including underlining, arrows and buttons - that give the book pages the look of Web pages. Whether you find this faux-functionality refreshing or distracting, it truly is original and unique. It's more difficult to say the same about the book's content, which is somewhat unfocused, a bit repetitive and often familiar. Nevertheless, *BooksInShort* found it interesting to read this very British approach to the Yankee-dominated self-help genre, spiced up with a jazzy high-tech angle on the most low-tech of all subjects: personal growth.

Take-Aways

- To deal with today's realities, be like a hacker who scours reality instead of the Internet
- Use a fluid, flexible approach to respond to reality and invent your future.
- To hack reality, recognize everyone's boundaries and gateways, including yours.
- As you deal with change, you start in the contentment room, comfortable with familiar people and situations.
- Then you move into the denial room where you resist change.
- After you stop denying, you move into the confusion room where you experience uncertainty but can open up to creativity.
- The last stage is the growth and renewal room.
- Look at your roots to help you create your future routes.
- Your filters and frames are the lenses you use to see the world; they come from your past experiences and expectations.
- In the sowing and growing phase, think about your future and what steps you need to take to get there.

Summary

Surfing the Waves

The first step in dealing with today's realities is viewing the process as "hacking reality." Instead of the old approach of thinking that you can be in control, decide instead to move ahead by "surfing the waves." Your goal is to maximize your personal potency or power, to get the best from yourself and others.

“We need to seek resilience rather than control, and to greet the new routes, rather than see them as a challenge to our old roots.”

Recognize that old-style structures, titles and boundary lines are no longer reliable. Instead, you need a more fluid, flexible approach for "hacking the reality of the future," including the ability to work well with others across cultures, functions and differing personalities. Be ready to embrace chaos, innovation and risk so you can successfully navigate this shifting reality and invent your own future. As you invent your future, consider these six areas, which don't have to be dealt with in any particular order:

- The changing rooms - Where you think about the various phases of the change process.
- Roots and routes - Where you look at where you come from and where you are going.
- Sowing and growing - Where you look at how you grow and who or what you need to stimulate and sustain your growth.
- Filters and lenses - Where you examine your biases and the way you use language to shape your reality, so you can turn knowledge into understanding you can use.
- Fakin' it - Where you recognize how you respond in given situations and understand your intentions as a key to managing the truth and building your confidence.
- Courage, faith, bananas and yogurt - Where you learn to trust the unknown and irrational, and make that "soul connection" so you can move ahead.

The Changing Rooms

To successfully hack reality, recognize your own "boundaries and gateways" and other people's. These are neither bad nor good. Rather they are the limits and openings that exist as you move through life. Like everyone else, you need boundaries that establish your limits or the limits of a particular situation. Imagine that these boundaries are like rubber, so you can bounce off them without hurting yourself.

“Home is composed of realities and fantasies, values and beliefs, rituals and habits. Understanding them and the effect they have is key to creating a route to our futures.”

Going through change creates different boundaries and gateways. Every change means experiencing some kind of loss of what you have had before, from physical objects to everyday experiences.

To deal with change and the losses that accompany it, try to understand the process that occurs when this happens. Expert Claes Jensen suggests the model, or metaphor, of a four-room apartment. As you change, you move through these rooms: contentment, denial, confusion, and growth and renewal. Then, you move back to contentment before you change again. You can develop and expand this model so it applies to making changes in your own life to reinvent your future. More specifically, the process occurs like this:

- The contentment room - You feel comfortable with the familiar people and situations in your life. Everything feels safe and cozy, because you know what is expected of you; you know the norms and customs of your organization.
- The denial room - Once you leave or are pushed out of the contentment room, you will move into the denial room, because the normal reaction is to resist change. You want to think that nothing has changed, so you don't have to experience the pain of loss. By denying and pretending that nothing happened, you don't have to change. The big fear is of the unfamiliar and unknown. You have to acknowledge change, not hide from it, to grow. You don't make progress by staying in denial.
- The confusion room - After you push through denial, you move into the confusion room, site of anxiety and uncertainty. Give yourself permission to be confused so you can open yourself up to creativity. Don't think you have to be "whole and fully functional" right after any change. If you try to get out of this room prematurely, you will move right back into denial. The only way you can move on and stay in control is to let go. In this room, you will experience the most exciting discoveries about yourself and others, so allow that experience to happen. To move through this room successfully, learn to give and accept

support from others, which sometimes may require a leap of faith. You also need to learn to trust yourself, another a leap of faith.

- The growth and renewal room - Finally, after some time in the confusion room, you are ready to move to growth and renewal. After you experience this new burst of growth and renewal, you can't go back, but you can quickly move into the contentment room again, as the new becomes familiar. Then, the process begins again.

“We develop filters and frames as a kind of shorthand for us to be able to manage and know what to expect in our worlds. The filters and frames come from experiences and expectations, and clearly inventing a future will depend on what we see through our own lenses.”

Accepting uncertainty and mistakes is key to knowing what room you are in and moving through the boundaries of these rooms successfully.

Roots and Routes

To invent your future and create the routes that will take you there, start by looking at your past or your roots. Understanding this base includes looking at your personal characteristics, the way your experiences have shaped you and how these qualities affect your ability to invent your future. You must know your home, because where you come from determines how you will move forward in your work and your life.

“Dealing with loss and change requires an understanding of the processes we go through every time we experience them.”

The qualities associated with your home base include your realities, fantasies, values, beliefs, rituals and habits. In effect, you are analyzing your culture and personality, and you need to recognize who you are and where you come from so you don't meet the same obstacles again on the path ahead. Some of the baseline characteristics to think about include your inborn individual or genetic forces, your family culture, your religious roots and your national and society characteristics. Examine your unquestioned beliefs about the purposes of life, because those beliefs form the underlying myths of your culture.

“Most of the time it is the unknown that we fear most; the unfamiliar. That fear will never be disposed of. We need to be able to acknowledge it, not hide from it.”

With this picture from the past in mind, seek resilience rather than control as you move ahead to look for new roots. Don't view them as a challenge to your old roots, but as an opportunity to move ahead. Likewise, don't feel you are in bondage to old systems, but give yourself the permission to let go so you can something different. Define the routes you will take from one home to another, realizing you will have many homes as you grow.

Filters and Lenses

Moving ahead also requires examining the filters and frames you use to look at the world. These filters and frames from your past experiences and expectations provide a shorthand that helps you see your world, manage it and know what to expect. They influence how you will invent your future and what you see, feel and hear. Thus, you need to discern when these filters and frames are distorting your reality, so you can change them.

“In order to deal with, or hack, today's realities, we need to be more aware of how we can surf the waves, not control, which has been our time honored habit.”

Commonly, you won't be consciously aware of your filters, since they developed from years of conditioning and judgments. For instance, when you meet a person, you associate visual clues about them with other people you have known and may prejudge them accordingly. You don't necessarily have to get rid of your biases and filters. You may not even be able to, because they are so much a part of you. But be aware that they exist, so you can take them into account. Your filters affect whether you frame things positively or negatively. Filters affect your response to information and whether you accept it as true or false.

“Whenever you start a new anything, expect denial and confusion.”

One key to successful reality hacking is being able to look at life like a photographer, which means you can change your filters or frames. Learn when to use which filters, when to take them off, to be able to change lens as needed or shoot from different angles. You also need to recognize the way language shapes your understanding of the world. You need language to point your way to the truth, though language can lie, too. Pay attention to other peoples' responses to make sure you have gotten your message across.

Sowing and Growing

In this phase, think about what your future might look like and what you need to get there. The sowing and growing process involves understanding where growth comes from, what it looks like and what you need to do to achieve it.

“Moving yourself into a position where you can see and feel the creativity, is dependent on being able to express the fears and anxieties about the confusion room. It means having permission to be confused.”

However, growth doesn't necessarily mean enlarging your status or position or moving onward and upward. Learning - that is, becoming more aware, not necessarily moving - is one critical aspect of growth. For instance, when trees and plants grow, they don't only reach upward to the light, they send down roots too. Growth doesn't necessarily mean newness. It may simply mean becoming more aware and accepting, a key aspect of maturation.

“The journey through the confusion room is likely to be uncomfortable, but premature closure or conclusions will send us right back into the denial room.”

Learning also includes recognizing and using the difference between what you expect and what happens. To grow, recognize what the self needs and what it wants to help you grow. Don't expect instant explanations, which may cause you to leap to irrational conclusions. Check your assumptions so they don't interfere with an accurate perception of reality.

“Most of our exciting discoveries about self and others will come while we are in the confusion room. That cannot happen in any other room.”

Although you can make many changes in your life by changing your environment, the most significant change occurs when you effectively change your inner landscape, the environment that is always with you. If you can become more aware of what you are looking for in the future, you can use that information to help draw your route map. As you do, keep your mind open, seize excitement and opportunity whenever you can to experience the "joy of the reality hacker," and be more open and receptive to others.

Fakin' It

As you invent your future, you may need to "fake it" at times, such as when you present yourself to others, so you can convince them of your purpose and get approval. Although faking it sounds like a negative judgment, at times - to keep yourself safe - you must knowingly or unknowingly dissemble to influence a situation or person. Often this is something you may need to do when you are still in the confusion room and not sure where you are going. Faking it can help you seem more certain and directed, although you are not.

“Reality hacking does not mean leaving 'home' forever, it just means acknowledging the place we have come from, but not necessarily a place we have to stay.”

To hack reality, you have to let go - that is the only way you can really stay in control. When you acknowledge uncertainty, you have to acknowledge that you are unsure about what the different outcomes and effects will be, and that you can't control the situation or solve the problem. Letting go helps you recognize that your power as a reality hacker comes from being able to influence, but not control. Your source of influence comes from different kinds of power (such as expert, reward, coercive, referent, legitimate and charismatic). Use the power available to you to help you influence others.

Taking the Leap of Faith

To hack reality successfully, you need to be able to have faith, especially when you take the difficult first step and move into darkness and unknown. You need bravery and commitment. You need to get in touch with the "Captain" in yourself and have the courage to make mistakes. You need to make the leap of faith based on trusting yourself and giving yourself permission to make creative changes

for your future.

About the Author

Nicola Phillips wrote this book on the Internet in San Francisco, California and Derbyshire, England. She travels extensively.
