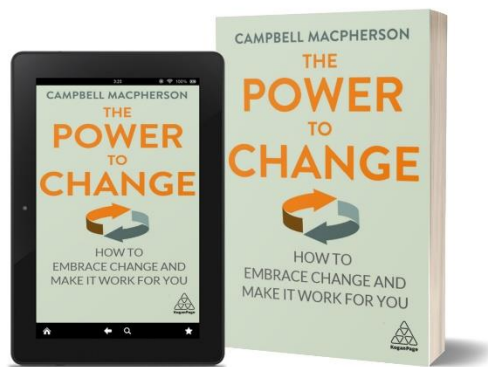


# *'The pandemic that changed our world'*

The preface to:



## The Power to Change

by

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## **Preface: The pandemic that changed our world**

On an unknown day in 2019, in a bustling “wet market” in Wuhan where caged wildlife co-existed with a slew of slaughtered and soon-to-be-slaughtered animals of all varieties, a flu-like virus seems to have leapt from a pangolin to a human. Most likely, the pangolin was infected by a bat – a species that previously gave us SARS, MERS and Ebola.

We humans have zero natural immunity to this new coronavirus and as we now know, it is highly contagious and potentially fatal for our elderly and those of us with underlying health conditions.

The economic, social and personal impact of Covid-19 has been profound and, given the extent of the global reaction, its effects are likely to be felt for some time to come. It changed our world in ways that we are yet to grasp fully.

It has wreaked havoc with our economies, pushing countless businesses to the brink and beyond. Many of us lost our jobs or our incomes dried up. Governments around the world implemented desperate support measures, unheard of in peacetime. Government and corporate debt have skyrocketed. Health systems have been overwhelmed. Police and emergency services have been overstretched.

Airports have been transformed into desolate wastelands. Train carriages, offices, restaurants and bars emptied.

We quickly learnt how to work from home and, through trial and error, discovered the tips and tricks on how to use video conferencing effectively. Necessity being the mother of invention and all that.

We fought one another over toilet rolls and rallied to help elderly neighbours.

We were encouraged and even forced to self-isolate – with the very alien absence of the face-to-face social interaction that we humans crave. We have self-isolated with our partners and families - enduring a prolonged form of close contact that was previously only reserved for Christmas.

Covid-19 pushed our national and personal anxiety levels through the roof, inflamed by a 24/7 news industry that lurches from providing a much-needed social service to displaying an almost palpable delight in catastrophizing every new and uncertain development.

We are uncertain about who to trust, who to believe or what to believe. We loathe uncertainty; it makes us fear the worst. The added problem with this pandemic is that we also don't know how long it will last. Uncertainty topped with more uncertainty.

It is the most perfect example of 'Burning Platform' change that we may ever witness; a common phenomenon that we discuss in detail in Chapters 10 and 11 - big change that has been done to us. And through this crisis we have we have all rode the emotional roller coaster that is the 'Burning Platform Change Curve'. We have experienced shock, denial, anger, fear and even depression. Several times.

The good news is: these emotions are normal. It is how we react to change. The trick is to acknowledge them, understand them and start to use them to our own advantage; to assess our situation, embrace the new reality and look for the opportunities. Because opportunities exist even in times of boundless uncertainty and massive disruption.

This virus has also given us a gift if we wish to receive it; a gift that is relevant for nations, corporations and individuals alike. It has given us a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to reflect on what is important; to reflect on what it is we need to change.

It has forced us to question some of the key premises that, as a society, we seem to have taken for granted. The most important duty of any government is to keep their people safe. But safe from what? For millennia, governments have assumed that the greatest threat to its citizens was a physical attack from another nation and globally they have ploughed trillions into weapons and military might, arguably at the expense of far more important aspects of our national and personal security.

While no health system could have been completely prepared for the speed and extent of this pandemic, some public health systems entered this crisis with a massive shortage of equipment, nurses, doctors and hospital beds. Privatized health systems have also been found wanting - and morally questionable. Aged care services, too, have been neglected. Too many people have died untested and untreated at home.

It has forced us to rethink how businesses work. Too many business models operate on the thinnest of margins and therefore were thrown into this crisis without a financial buffer. They had no choice but to cut staff to survive. Not all will survive.

Have our governments and our systems of commerce been prioritizing the wrong things? This time it isn't just the banks that are asking for bailouts. Airlines (public and private), railways,

retailers, coffee shops, restaurants, pubs, manufacturers, big businesses, small businesses, sole traders and service providers of all persuasions have been in dire need of government cash.

And yet amid all this gloom, the air quality in the world's cities has improved dramatically. Globally, 4 million people have been dying from the effect of air pollution every year, according to the World Health Organization. The US's National Academy of Sciences thinks the number could be twice that figure. The pause in manufacturing and the reduction in the numbers of cars on the roads due to coronavirus may have saved tens of thousands of lives. How ironic.

Instinctively, we hope that change has an end date; that we can soon get back to the way things were. But what if it we can't? What if we shouldn't?

This virus forced massive change upon us all. We are all its victims. None of us asked for it. None of us asked for its consequences either. Like any big change that is forced upon us, we feel powerless in the face of such dramatic disruption. But we aren't powerless. We have the power to pause, reflect, reassess our priorities and identify what is truly important in our lives.

And then we can change.

This book is designed to help us do precisely that.

**About the author:**

**Campbell Macpherson** is an international business adviser on leadership, strategy and change via his consultancy Change & Strategy International ([www.changeandstrategy.com](http://www.changeandstrategy.com)).

He is a keynote speaker, Executive Fellow of Henley Business School and author. His first book, *The Change Catalyst* (Wiley 2017), was the 2018 Business Book of the Year. It was about leading change. *The Power to Change* (Kogan Page 2020) is about embracing personal change and making it work for you.



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