

WHILE IT STILL  
BLOSSOMS ON  
THE OUTSIDE

*The exact moment when the soul asks for  
change*

# PROLOGUE

It's like walking out of a concert in the middle of the applause.

Everyone stands, claps, declares your performance flawless—and yet, you walk toward the exit in silence. Not out of disrespect, but because, in that moment, you realize you no longer want to be there. The courage to leave what is working doesn't come from failure. It comes from lucidity. And from honesty with oneself, a rare virtue in times when performance matters more than truth.

This is what Charles Handy [9] taught us with the metaphor of the second curve. The sigmoid curve, as he explains, represents the rise and decline of a trajectory, personal, professional, or organizational. For Handy, wisdom lies in starting a new curve before the old one reaches its peak. Because once success

reaches the top, decline has already begun, and choosing to begin a new journey at the height of comfort is one of the greatest acts of autonomy we can live.

In a society that prizes accumulation and consistency as signs of progress, anticipating a rupture feels like heresy, but this is precisely where life management meets business management. Just as an organization must pivot before market saturation, an individual must change before the soul is depleted, this is the bridge between personal life and business: both require courage, timing, and vision to reinvent themselves.

The answer might lie in the work of Byung-Chul Han [7], who reflects that the performance society promised us freedom but delivered exhaustion. Success, when disconnected from meaning, becomes a disguised prison, and stability, as existentialist philosopher Simone de Beauvoir [2] reminds us, can be the greatest enemy of transformation cause we change the world by changing the way we see the world.

This essay is a crossing, a real narrative, marked by a choice: to leave behind a career, an ongoing degree, awards earned to follow a silent intuition. A decision not rational in the conventional sense, but profoundly coherent. Because, as Handy taught us, true wisdom is not reacting to collapse, but foreseeing the need for change.

# *I*

## THE APPLAUSE

I was 21 and a known name in the hallways of my school in Brazil, as a member of a research lab focused on production technologies, i had already won two academic awards, presented at conferences, and received public praise from professors and coordinators. A promising future lay ahead, neatly mapped out. Invitations to join new research groups were frequent; i felt everything was steering toward a direct master's program or even a solid academic career.

My routine was intense, i woke up early, spent my days between classes and the lab, slept four hours a night, and still found time to write papers and proposals. Recognition came, but there was an inner

dissonance i couldn't yet name.

To others, i was the embodiment of youthful academic success, but inside me, a troubling question grew louder: "Is this really it?", when someone praised my work, i smiled on the outside, but deep down, i wondered if that was truly the life i wanted to sustain for the next eight years through to a PhD. There were many prizes to compete for, but the meaning was slipping away.

Handy[9] warned us that the trap of success is its ability to blind us to change, and in truth, i was blind. i couldn't see that the external shine was dulling my inner listening. It was as if i were living out a script written by others, parents, teachers, institutions, in which i performed my role well, but hadn't written a single line.

This is what modern management is also about. Peter Drucker [5] believed that it's not just about doing things right, but doing the right things. In business, clinging to a product that has lost its purpose out of attachment to profit can cost the company its survival. In life, staying on a path out of fear of disappointing others can cost your mental health. The new curve must begin before the crisis and sometimes, only silence allows us to hear it emerge.

The restlessness grew, but as the french philosopher Simone Weil [12] once wrote, "Attention is the rarest and purest form of generosity," and i needed to learn to listen to myself attentively, to be gener-

ous with myself, to pause and ask not what others expected of me, but what made sense to me.

More than that, i began to understand that success without meaning is a sophisticated form of imprisonment. The academic system, like many business models, rewards productivity not authenticity. I was efficient, but for whom? Who was i really serving with all my effort?

That first act was my first curve, rising, celebrated, full of promise, but deaf.

## *II*

### THE RUPTURE

The invitation to volunteer in France came as a detour. I was to spend eight months working in schools in the French countryside, speaking about Brazilian culture and assisting in ecology and sustainable development classes. It seemed like just another intercultural experience a break with a defined end, but like all meaningful ruptures, it began small and quietly.

I remember the first time I entered a French classroom: there was noise, excitement, life. A little boy asked me what the rain in the Amazon was like. I smiled. Spoke calmly, but something shifted inside me, it had been a long time since I had spoken about the natural world with such light in my eyes. That

child reawakened a dormant curiosity within me.

The students there weren't expecting formulas or scientific articles. They wanted stories, exchanges, eye contact, questions that didn't fit into academic frameworks, and in that space between knowing and feeling, i began to doubt my first curve. The question was no longer, "What can i do with this technical knowledge?" but "What transformation can I bring about with what i know?"

It was there that i understood a hard truth: knowledge without responsibility is just vanity, i didn't want to be vain, i wanted to be useful in a way that made sense, and there was no room for that in the place i had come from in Brazil. At least, not in the way i envisioned.

As Michel Foucault [6] reminds us, where there is power, there is resistance, and the greatest power we face today is silent normativity the one that dictates what success looks like, what future we should want, what is desirable. Rupture, as Foucault would argue, is also political resistance. Breaking with social expectations is not merely a personal act, it's an ethical stance: the refusal to betray who you are.

This tension between the expected and the authentic was powerfully captured in a familiar character: Elsa, from the film *Frozen*. While everyone expected her to stay controlled and conceal her powers, Elsa chose the opposite to set herself free, even if it meant stepping outside what the kingdom called

normal. The song "Let it Go" isn't just a song to me, it's an anthem of the second curve. It's about walking away from a role that works but confines. It's about choosing inner coherence, even when it looks like madness to the outside world.

Like Elsa, in that small french village, i realized that the first curve offered to me, safe, efficient, praised no longer fit who i was becoming. The change wasn't planned, it was vital, i saw that the curve was shifting, and i knew i would have to leap even without guarantees.

# *III*

## THE MADNESS OF LEAVING

Returning to Brazil felt like slipping into old shoes, they still fit, but they hurt. The same hallways, the same meeting agendas, the same academic productivity goals, but i was no longer the same, and no one seemed to notice.

I tried to pick up my projects, reintegrate into research groups, but each attempt felt like pushing against a door locked from the inside. The automatic enthusiasm i once had was gone, i was no longer driven by prestige or publication but by purpose.

I began talking with professors and peers about

the possibility of changing paths, reactions ranged from confusion to disappointment. One professor kindly said, “You’d be crazy to leave now, you have everything to shine here.” And he was right, i had everything except the will.

Nietzsche [11], in his lucid radicality, wrote “Becoming who you are requires the courage to disappoint others,” and there is no courage more unpopular than the one that questions success. Leaving a socially validated path is often seen as failure, when in truth, it may be the birth of true autonomy.

So i applied to a French university. I chose a program in biology focused on ecology and life sciences, a new lens, less technical, more attentive to the relationship between humans and nature. When i received the acceptance letter, i cried, partly from joy, but also from mourning all that i was leaving behind.

The transition was not romantic. I suspended my degree in Brazil, cut ties, and faced family incomprehension. I started working remotely, in silence, with discipline. The world that once echoed with applause was now reduced to a computer screen and long task lists, but it was mine. For the first time, entirely mine.

# *IV*

## THE SILENT RECONSTRUCTION

The transition to the new curve wasn't marked by fanfare, but by silence. A silence that was dense, fertile, necessary. Without the hectic routine of my former university life, my days unfolded in new rhythms: time to read attentively, to walk without urgency, to eat with presence. For the first time in years, i slept eight hours a night—and that alone was revolutionary.

I began to study for understanding, not for assessment. I reconnected with writing as a form of expression, not obligation, and something within

me, slowly, began to settle. The noise of achievement was replaced by the murmur of coherence, it was no longer about being right in the eyes of others. It was about feeling aligned—internally.

Charles Handy [9] speaks of the “valley” between curves as a time of uncertainty and loss. It is a transition zone where nothing feels solid, and old metrics no longer apply. Indeed, i felt suspended, but that valley became my listening ground.

Byung-Chul Han [7] warns us about the risks of modern hyperactivity, how the society of exhaustion drowns out inner listening, and it was in that forced deceleration that i began to hear, more clearly, what noise had once silenced: my thirst for meaning.

In the business world, this moment is comparable to the silent redesign of a brand, to the investment in innovation that doesn't yet yield profits but lays the foundation for longevity. Silent reconstruction does not attract spotlights, but it has vision, and without vision, neither an organization nor a human being survives the obsolescence of their own success.

The Roman emperor Marcus Aurelius[?], in his stoic meditations, gave a simple but profound directive: “Don't waste time arguing about what a good person should be. Be one.” I read that as an ethical call: instead of seeking external validation, cultivate internal integrity.

And that's what i began to build. A version of myself more aligned with what i think, feel, and desire. A

self that no longer needed constant approval to know  
i was on the right path.

*V*

## THE CURVE OF COHERENCE

Today, on the eve of my permanent move to France, I look back and barely recognize the student who once confused herself with her performance. What used to be urgency is now intention. What used to be anxiety is now a plan.

The new curve is less visible. There are no awards or rankings, but there is lightness, clarity, presence.

Peter Drucker [4] once warned that there is nothing more useless than doing with excellence something that shouldn't be done at all. That kind of clarity is rare and, therefore, revolutionary.

Brazilian singer Cazuza [3], with his poetic boldness in the song 'O Tempo no Para' ("Time Does Not Stop"), voiced a similar discomfort with a world that insists on repeating the past and calling it progress: "I see the future repeating the past / I see a museum of great novelties." What looks like advancement is often just a sophisticated form of stagnation.

When we follow a path simply because it works, we may be contributing to the very museum of novelties Cazuza denounced where everything changes so that nothing actually does. Changing before the fall, as Charles Handy proposes, is rejecting this toxic loop. It is interrupting what works in order to pursue what is true.

My new definition of success is no longer about outcomes alone, it includes health, quality time, and the ability to contemplate. I call it "qualitative growth", and it applies to both life and business: a company that grows financially while making its people sick is not growing in any real sense. Today, growth means growing with coherence.

In practice, that means rejecting the logic of hyper-productivity, choosing more sustainable processes, aligning values and actions. The second curve, when applied to organizations, forces us to rethink what counts as success and what must be abandoned before it collapses.

The courage it takes to change your life at its peak is no less than the courage needed to redesign a prof-

itable but unsustainable business. In both cases, it's about letting go of the illusion of stability in order to choose integrity.

And that's what this curve teaches me: living well does not mean living without risks. It means living without masks.

## EPILOGUE

The first curve gave me a name. The second gave me a face. In the first, i was the ideal student, dedicated, recognized, awarded. In the second, i am simply someone searching for meaning. The transition wasn't a dramatic break, but a slow, inevitable shedding of skin. Because the worst kind of stagnation is the one disguised as progress.

Charles Handy taught us that life, like business, requires reinvention before decline. Peter Drucker challenged us to imagine the future, not merely react to it. And life, this life is only truly worth it when we have the courage to begin again, even when everything still seems to be going well.

There comes a moment when possibility begins to wilt, even as everything still blooms on the outside. It's the moment when the soul demands coherence,

and the world demands continuity. The choice, then, is this: to silence your intuition, or to listen to it even without proof.

“Freedom is too little. What i desire still has no name,” wrote Clarice Lispector [10]. The second curve might be just that: a name yet to be invented. A model yet to be drawn. A future yet to be built.

May this text not be just an essay, but an invitation. A breath of wind for those who, like me, sense there is something beyond the current curve and perhaps, it's time to leap.

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