



# NAVIGATING TRANSITION WITH ROLAND HARWOOD

8TH MAY 2023

**CLAIRE** [00:00:00] Nothing in this podcast is financial advice, and when investing, your capital is at risk.

(Upbeat music begins)

**SARAH** [00:00:10] Welcome to the Obu podcast, a place for people who are changing what it means to be an angel investor. We'll be talking to business owners who have taken investment and angel investors who have put in their capital, their wisdom and their networks to work to grow, diverse-founded businesses. The world of investment is changing, and we're inviting you to learn how. Welcome to the Obu podcast.

(Music gets louder then ends)

**SARAH** [00:00:42] In today's episode of the Obu podcast, I got to sit down with Roland Harwood. I've known Roland for a number of years now, and I was really excited to talk to him about his new book 'On the Edge'. This book provides us with a beautiful narrative on how we're all navigating transitions all of the time and provides suggestions as to how we might make these journeys with more ease. Roland describes himself as a compulsive connector of people and of ideas. He's an entrepreneur, an author, podcast host, proud dad, a self-proclaimed failed astronaut, a musician, and as a result, has so much to share with us in this conversation. We explore what it means to transition towards something new and how the actions that we take today can help us to move forward more confidently. Because how the future looks is in our gift to design today. As we reflect on the conversations we're a part of and the transitions we see entrepreneurs and angels make in into the world of investment. We felt this was a really valuable conversation to share with you. We really hope that this conversation resonates with you and provides you with some inspiration and practical tools, not only as you work alongside us to create a more equitable investment landscape, but for transitions that you might be making in your own work and personal context.

(Segment change music)

**SARAH** [00:01:57] Roland, it's brilliant to have you here today. We've been doing the kind of LinkedIn stalker thing for a little while and seeing lots of your posts about your new book 'On the Edge'. And as I was, I guess seeing some of those posts and engaging with some of those posts, the content of the book just felt really relevant for the work that we're leading at Obu, which is why we wanted to invite you to be a guest on the podcast. But before we dive into the book, you describe yourself as a compulsive connector of people and ideas. You also describe



yourself as an entrepreneur, an author, a podcast host, the Proud Dad, a failed astronaut and a failed musician. You've packed a lot in and you seem to be hugely motivated by having a positive impact. Kind of that's where your time and energy goes. Where do you think that came from in terms of motivation for you and why is it so important to you?

**ROLAND** [00:02:51] The sort of jokey answer to why I've done all those things is because I have a short attention span and a sort of endless curiosity. But I've been reflecting in the last few years in particular on the fact that I'm a TCK. Are you familiar with that third culture kid? So my Dad's American, my Mum's German, but I grew up in the UK and I don't think I realised really until the last few years how much that kind of shaped kind of my identity, sort of bridging different cultures and connecting with different kind of backgrounds. But mostly grew up in Manchester in the eighties, which was a city at the time undergoing huge transformation through music and kind of creativity and entrepreneurship, which I think massively shaped me. And then in the late eighties, we moved to West Germany. West Berlin, in fact. Just a year before the wall came down, just 12 months before the wall came down, it seemed still kind of impossible that change might happen. And yet it did happen at a very impressionable age for me. I was nearly 16 at the time, and I think that's just gone on to sort of inform my interest in, well, many, many different things, different cultures, bringing those together, the impossibility of change and how you can drive that forward. And yeah, I guess I've had the curse of being quite good at lots of different things, but definitely a jack of all trades and a master of none. So that's taken me in lots of different directions. But I guess the kind of unifying thread is innovation, change, transformation, often with a sort of technology component. I, once upon a time did a PHD in physics and have a kind of scientific background, but these days I'm deeply shallow.

**SARAH** [00:04:18] It's really interesting to hear you describe your upbringing and those different experiences that you've had. And empathy obviously plays a really important role around creativity and building communities and creating change. Do you think those different experiences have fuelled your ability to have empathy for different people? And I guess empathy combined with curiosity? Hmm.

**ROLAND** [00:04:41] I think absolutely. I've been looking into this a bit recently about third culture kids like myself, which are, you know, increasingly common because you're not of the culture that you're around. Everything feels a little bit strange. And so you maybe have to concentrate a little bit harder about what some of the norms or patterns are in the communities that you're within and maybe not jump to conclusions too quickly. Yeah, hopefully develop some empathy. Of course, that's not universally true. Yeah, I think that has had a big impact on the way I live my life and progress my career.

**SARAH** [00:05:14] So you pour a lot of your time and energy through Liminal into creating a habitable planet for everyone. And the insights within the book are obviously very related to this, but it felt as though you'd kind of zoomed out on as though you really wanted for this book to be helpful for anyone who was navigates in some form of transition, whether small or large, in whatever context. Why was it important for you to kind of zoom out and to make the book feel accessible for so many people.



**ROLAND** [00:05:46] It's a lovely question. Liminal. Just for those that don't know, it's a community of climate connectors that I founded four and a half years ago and I created at a time I was in a very liminal stage of my own life, liminal, meaning to be in transition or in the sort of in-between space between more certain states of life and being, etc.. I was in a privileged position having exited a previous company to take some time to think about what I was going to do next. And what I chose to do was have about 600 coffees with people over a period of time. This is pre-pandemic, so mostly in person. The obvious question people are asking me is, so, you know, why did you leave your last company and what are you going to do next? Those sorts of questions. And I, I had some answers for the first question, and I had few answers for the second question. Didn't know what I was going to do next...

**SARAH** [00:06:35] Yeah.

**ROLAND** [00:06:35] Really? And there was something in the quality of those conversations. Maybe it was my openness and relaxed-ness to that uncertainty that I was facing at the time. And I would say I'm naturally probably a sort of slightly anxious person. But for various reasons, it was I was just embracing this uncertainty in a very open way. And anyway, I realised that many of the people I was talking to and I would say in fact most not all, but most were in some transition in some aspect of their life or their work as well, and they were volunteering elements of that to me and some people I knew very well and other people I knew less well. But I guess I came to the conclusion that we're all in transition in some aspect of our lives almost all of the time. And I don't think there's very much kind of guidance or help or support for us when we go through that. So Liminal became the name of the community that I founded, and there's now 120 others. And our sort of day job is sort of doing climate innovation related consulting actually, where it's sort of a learning and support community for people sort of fascinated in the sort of grey areas in our lives, but also in people, places and organisations. So there's an amazing book that was written in the 1970s and it's quite sort of outdated in terms of its cultural reference points, but it's called 'Transitions' by William and Susan Bridges, and I read that had a profound impact on me and it's informed a three phase structure that I use to structure the book, but it's also quite outdated in terms of its, you know, cultural reference, reference points, quite old fashioned in lots of different ways. And I felt not to update that book. The book stands alone in its own right. I wanted to do something that I thought would maybe help people when they're facing an uncertain future, perhaps navigating a transition in their personal life or their professional life, but also bringing in some of the themes from my more professional life around innovation and about how do you connect people and ideas to sort of develop new opportunities and innovations?

**SARAH** [00:08:24] Yeah, I think your point around kind of how often we experience transitions is really valid and true early years and the education system is almost this idea of, you know, you go through school, you might then go to uni, you then get a job, you might transition a couple of times. But it's almost suggested that it's a very linear path and very clean and straightforward. And actually I think most adults, they realise, Oh, hang on a minute (chuckles), actually it's not like that. And I agree with you. I just think that there isn't enough resource around that conversation of, you know, navigating transitions, you know, planning and preparing for transitions or actually those transitions that come along that are completely unexpected. Like how do you respond to those curveballs? The level of quotes, education or conversation around that seems fairly limited given how likely it is that as children and as adults, we're likely to go through multiple transitions. And so it feels like a maybe it's kind of



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We're all in transition in some aspect of our lives almost all of the time. And I don't think there's very much kind of guidance or help or support for us when we go through that.

after the pandemic, I don't know. But certainly for me, when I was seeing you on LinkedIn starting to talk about the book, it just felt like a really pertinent moment for this book to come into existence.

**ROLAND** [00:09:40] Thank you. Well, I mean, I agree with all of that. I would say I think once upon a time, maybe this is a myth. I'm not sure. But those periods of transition were quite short. And then there would be these long periods of stability in between, you know, your secondary school education or in some cases going back generations. You'd have a job for life. You know, that doesn't exist anymore for most people. So I think the periods of transition are getting longer and more frequent and more complex. Those periods of stability in between are getting shorter and shorter and so much so that, as I said earlier, I think on an individual level, we're all trying to navigate in some shape or form transitions personally or professionally, sometimes very small, sometimes really kind of huge. But I also think economically, socially, planetarily, we're going through kind of major transitions as well. So really the themes of the book, a huge impact individually and kind of societally. I just think we're going through kind of huge transitions at every level and it's not talked about nearly as much as it needs to. And I have some thoughts and sharing some wisdom from people I've interviewed for my podcast as well. But I just think it's a fascinating topic to me. And actually I think transitions can be really wonderful and fruitful and joyful if you embrace them in the right way, but they can also be anxiety provoking and fearful and yeah, you know, fraught with danger as well. So there's the real kind of yin and yang that comes with them as well.

**SARAH** [00:10:58] And I guess in a more connected world where it is easier to access inspiration or insights or ideas, just that connectedness is almost a spark for there to be more transition because I guess with the right mindset it sparks opportunity, doesn't it, and exploration. So just that very connectedness that can be an enabler for accelerating change and transitions, actually it's also the spark of why maybe we see more transitions and more opportunity today.

**ROLAND** [00:11:30] Well, I guess that I'm you know, I talked about it already, but my kind of German-American UK kind of background, you seek to find commonalities between different cultures. And naturally, I have been growing up in that way. Likewise, the very first person I interviewed for my podcast, which has gone on to inform the content of the book. Quite an old gentleman called James Burke, which some people of a certain generation know him very well. He was very famous in the 1960s and seventies in America, in the UK, but he's still alive and still unbelievably kind of bright and switched on. He had this incredible TV series in the 1980s that was huge in America, less so over the UK. I didn't discover it until sort of 20 years after that. It's called Connections, And it tells the story of the history of society and particular kind of science and technology through basically the butterfly effect. You know, the idea that, you know, a butterfly flapping its wings on one side of the planet can create a tornado, you know, on the other side of the world. So he tells all of these stories of unintended consequences. So one that I recall is Mozart helped through many unintended consequences to invent the helicopter.

**SARAH** [00:12:35] Oh wow.

**ROLAND** [00:12:35] Through about 12 degrees of separation. Mozart influenced somebody else influenced somebody up and down the chain out pops the helicopter of course it's not something.

**SARAH** [00:12:42] Yeah, right.

**ROLAND** [00:12:43] But I just think when it comes to the world of innovation, which is my day job, great ideas come from often where we least expect. And I think I think that's always been true. But in an increasingly connected world, it's possible to sort of see those opportunities. And especially when we're in transition. I think part of the challenge is to kind of sit with some of the uncertainty for a while, the messy middle make connections between people and ideas, and good ideas will emerge. Maybe not straightaway. It can take time, but that's kind of part of the art of navigating transitions.

**SARAH** [00:13:13] Yeah. So let's start to dive into the book in a bit more detail then. So one of the things that I personally loved was a comment on the back of your book, which says the future is built on the actions that you take today. And I think quite often the future can feel very ambiguous and as though it's out of our control. You know, there are lots of things happening in the world and what can I possibly do to have an impact on them? But this statement really says, no, actually, the future is ours to design today. If we're intentional and if we commit to take an action. Can you say some more about this around kind of why is it important for you that we ignite this sense of we can shape, we can inform, we can take action, and therefore we can build a future that is a positive thing.

**ROLAND** [00:14:01] Because I think we have to because I think there's huge challenges in the world, not least climate change, but there's many others as well, that requires the creativity and effort and imagination of of all of society, not just the privileged few. And so I think there's a sort of pressing need for that, but also because I think we can we've perhaps unlearned through the 20th century, you know, I'm 49 years old, so that kind of I grew up in the late 20th century, still coming to terms with the 21st. We've become very passive, you know, the mass market, consumerism and advertising. You know, in many certainly Western cultures, we become very kind of passive recipients of the products and services and advertising messages of multinational corporations. I don't think fundamentally that's making the world better if we want to make a change. At one level, we've all got enough to be getting on with and we can't be tackling the climate crisis and whatever it might be each and every day. We all need to make our choices about where we focus our attention. But I think it is possible to, you know, make small changes. One of the things that people have asked me previously, if I'm sort of advocating sort of positive thinking, if you think everything would be great, then somehow that will manifest. And I'm definitely not advocating that. But we talked about this before we started briefly before we started recording about the difference between hope and optimism.

**SARAH** [00:15:18] Yes.

**ROLAND** [00:15:19] Which for me I learnt through an amazing woman called Rebecca Solnit. And then there's somebody else called Margaret Heffernan, who I interviewed for my podcast who really went on to just teach me a lot about the difference between the two. So Hope is very active. Yes, optimism is very passive pessimism too, actually.

**SARAH** [00:15:35] Right?

**ROLAND** [00:15:36] So if you're optimistic or pessimistic about the future, you're unlikely to do

And then I think also just on the kind of community building side as well, like kind of saying anything about it. You think it's somehow just a done deal? Yeah. And you sit back and await this wonderful or terrible future, right? Whereas if you're hopeful about the future, then you're more likely to try and act on that, hope to realise it. So I think for me that was a really important but subtle shift. I always used to think of myself as an optimistic person, but actually I think I'm more of a hopeful, purposeful.

**SARAH** [00:16:00] Person.

**ROLAND** [00:16:01] And I want to get stuck in into certain challenges that I care about. And I think in reading my book, I'd love it if other people did too, in their own way.

**SARAH** [00:16:10] I love that distinction between optimism and then hopefulness. And I think, you know, for Claire and I, we will often talk about feeling hopeful for the future and hopeful that things will be different within that statement. Acknowledging we have a role to play within that is not just going to happen as a result of, you know, optimistically believing that things can be different. Actually, there is a role for us to play and there is a role for us to play in igniting others to feel that they can play a role, whether that's engaging with a LinkedIn post or listening to a podcast or having a conversation in a different way. Actually, as you've said, those small steps really, really add up.

**ROLAND** [00:16:56] Yeah

**SARAH** [00:16:57] And I think certainly when we were leading the Over Being Underfunded campaign and that resulted in legislation change, when we started out the thought that two women based in the Midlands could end up in government having conversations around change in legislation. It was some people certainly told us, 'Well, that's ridiculous, don't think you can do that', but you have to remain hopeful. And within that, continue to have the courage to take the actions that could result in the change that you're seeking.

**ROLAND** [00:17:26] You've done an amazing job with what you've been doing. I've been following it with sort of close interest as well over the last few years. It's hard work as well as that. So maintaining that hope and some days that hope is easy to find if you're surrounded by inspiring people. But probably, if we're honest, more days when it's harder going.

**SARAH** [00:17:44] Yeah.

**ROLAND** [00:17:45] And it's hard to, you know, keep going. Be resilient. And when faced with another rejection or, you know, some kind of unexpected situation that you have to kind of deal with that you weren't perhaps expecting, but so yeah, it's not an easy ride, it's not an easy life. But yeah, no, it's really inspiring to see what you've done. And of course two women in the Midlands can change the world, you know, and we all can as well, in our own ways. Some in smaller ways, others in bigger ways. I think we've lost that art as a society become very passive. Very receptive to kind of being consumers rather than sort of active citizens. There's a guy called John Alexander who wrote a book on that, who I also interviewed for the podcast reference in the book, who talks about that big shift from sort of consumer society to a citizen society. And I think that's that's had a big influence on my thinking.

**SARAH** [00:18:31] Yeah, yeah. It's kind of grabbing the things that you feel passionate about from that until your point earlier, being comfortable with not really knowing how it's going to play out or not really knowing exactly what the answer is, but kind of committing to, well, let's give it a go.

**ROLAND** [00:18:48] Yeah.

**SARAH** [00:18:48] And I completely agree with you. Choosing hope isn't an easy path. There are plenty of days where it feels hugely challenging and overwhelming and not possible, but I think that comes back to one of your other points around connection and community. I feel really fortunate that Obu is a co-founded of business because I have a co-founder to lean on and support. You were kind enough to introduce us to Shelly, co-founder of the 51 in Canada, and that has been a conversation that we've learnt on in terms of Shelly is in Canada doing something very similar. So that connection, that community just feels hugely important not only for the sharing of ideas and inspiration, but actually for that kind of support system and that support mechanism in the days when it is feeling overwhelming and and hugely challenging.

**ROLAND** [00:19:40] No, I love that. I love Shelly as well. I'm really delighted that you've connected with her. But I was sharing this story with somebody last week in my very first sort of proper job. I did a day I had a sort of extended education. But when I finally got into the world of work, I had a probationary period six months where, you know, they could have fired me. And I was a little bit anxious. You know, I might have passed my probationary period. I had the sort of the meeting with my boss at the time and she said to me, you're going to pass your probationary period. You know, she said lots of positive things. Her one bit of feedback to me in terms of something to work on is I'm not very good when I don't know the answer to a question. I just kind of bluffing, right? She used a different term, which I wouldn't use, and that was something within the context of that organisation that she was encouraging me to work on.

**SARAH** [00:20:25] Right.

**ROLAND** [00:20:25] And actually I was thinking about that recently and it's something I've really come to realise in the last decade or so. If you don't know the answer to a question, you can say, I don't know from a position of strength, in a position of weakness. I think there's so much bluff and bluster in the world.

**SARAH** [00:20:40] Yeah, yeah.

**ROLAND** [00:21:21] Hmm. Somebody I interviewed for the book, Rutger Bregman, who is quite well-known Dutch writer who wrote a book called Utopia for Realists, and more recently, Humankind, where he's challenging the narrative that, if I recall correctly, that kind of William Golding, Lord of the Flies, you know, you put children on an island and they all fight to the death, basically. Actually, that's not the way we are as a species.

**SARAH** [00:21:43] Right.



**ROLAND** [00:21:44] There's real life examples of, you know, children going missing on a shipwrecked island and actually creating this really kind of amazing, supportive community. Anyway, so he makes the argument in that book, and I want to believe it, and I'm kind of conscious of my own naivety around some of this stuff, but people want to help each other. If you ask for help in the right way, if you highlight an issue as you're doing around the underfunding of female led businesses and what have you, that's something that I think drives people's passion. Perhaps anger is appropriate as well. People will want to come on board and help and support, you know, for the right reasons. And so I think learning how to maybe identify some of those issues, share them in the right way. People want to help each other with that. Yeah. Yeah. I think that's really important.

**SARAH** [00:22:28] Yeah. So let's discuss a bit further. And as I said to you before the podcast, it's quite a selfish act inviting you to be a guest because we want other people to learn from the content that is within your book and be inspired by it. But for us, for Claire and I as co-founders, for our team, actually, there are so many insights within the book around the transition that we're leading and that we're hoping to create in terms of equality within entrepreneurship and investment. So within this context, I'd love to dive into some of the themes within the book. I'm one of the ones that really jumped out at me was this idea of creating vivid alternatives. And when I got to that section, the idea of a vivid alternative just felt really tantalising, like it was something that that almost feels magnetic, like there's almost a force that kind of draws you towards it. I just wondered if you could share some examples of kind of, What do you mean? Because that's what it meant to me. But what did it mean to you when you describe a vivid alternative? And are there any examples that you can share with us around how we might create vivid alternatives?

**ROLAND** [00:23:39] I think that those two words, vivid alternatives, was perhaps me quoting a woman called Gemma Mortenson. Who urged you and others listening to check out. She's the chair of something called More in Common, which is an amazing kind of think tank that's about healing our kind of divided society. But she also runs a project called New Constellations, which is absolutely about kind of driving. There's another phrase that she uses the fertile void in which we can imagine new possible futures anyway, saying, okay, sort of language, which I find quite I want to use the word floral. I don't really mean care, but it's more colourful than the language I would normally choose to use myself.

**SARAH** [00:24:16] Yeah.

**ROLAND** [00:24:16] But I do love that idea of vivid alternatives. You know, there's that old saying you can't be what you can't see. So yes, unless you can see yourself or the world in a kind of better future, this is where you know, the role of science fiction writers or some of that kind of imagination is really, really important. Again, Cassie Robinson, who spoke to you early on and I've known for many years, she's doing some really fascinating stuff in this space at the moment, which I haven't followed that closely, but it's around creating imagination architecture.

**SARAH** [00:24:47] Okay.

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People won't remember what you said, but how you made them feel. And I think if you can give people that hope or ... have the passion and the drive and the knowledge and the data, of course, as well. Then that will attract, you know, investment.

**ROLAND** [00:24:48] I don't quite know what that means. I guess the idea is imagining a better, more hopeful, more equitable future as an active way of making it come about. You know, if you can't imagine it, it's very, very hard to create it. But yeah, alternatively, if you can tell that story of what you want the world to look like, then it's much, much easier for other people to come on board and help realise it. So yeah, I think there's very practical reason for imagination and I think in this kind of increasingly attention starved world where we're all, myself included, kind of endlessly distracted by our smartphones and in boxes and just everyday kind of interruptions, I think it traps us in a sort of perpetual now and we slightly lose touch with both the past and the future. And I think we need to create space, whether it's physical space or just time in our lives to imagine hope, dream, read books, read novels. It's I haven't read novels for many years. I've always been quite sort of data driven and, factually driven. In the last kind of five or ten years, I started reading novels again. Not very often, yeah, but I absolutely love this kind of losing myself in another world film as well.

**SARAH** [00:25:55] Yeah. Yeah.

**ROLAND** [00:25:56] So it's a common technique in kind of innovation scenario planning for one called Anab Jane, who does this really beautifully. Again, I spoke to you for the book. This is a very small example, but a really powerful one. So she did some work with her organisation, Super Flux in the Middle East, I think it was in the United Arab Emirates about five years ago, and it was all about the future of transport in Dubai and Abu Dhabi and the major conurbations there. And they created these different scenarios or these different futures, and they tried to bring them to life using all the senses. So not just describing.

**SARAH** [00:26:33] Right.

**ROLAND** [00:26:34] And one of the futures was basically just continue as we are with gas guzzling cars. And they created a little test tube of what the air would be like in ten, 20 years time. I can't remember the time horizon and basically got their sponsors, the Minister for Transport in Abu Dhabi, to kind of sniff this test tube of foul polluted air. I'm sure there was much more to it than this. But, you know, you can tell people what the future is going to be like. It won't necessarily resonate, whereas if you sniff what the air will be like.

**SARAH** [00:27:04] Yeah.

**ROLAND** [00:27:04] It really brings it to life in a way that no amount of pictures or words can convey. And so it's just a very small example and there's lots of different ways of doing that. But I think that's the really important, practical way of creating a better future.

**SARAH** [00:27:17] And I really like that from the perspective of a vivid alternative. It's not just about presenting data is not just present in a written story. It's not just about, you know, some pictures in a slide deck actually it's. I guess it comes back to that word that I used earlier. It's tantalising, like you're really bringing it to life. And I love that example in terms of you're tapping into those different senses.

**ROLAND** [00:27:42] Yeah.

**SARAH** [00:27:43] And again, I just think it it then makes it tangible. It's kind of oh okay, this is something I can really understand or really recognise, and therefore I feel that I can impact it.

**ROLAND** [00:27:54] Mm hmm.

**SARAH** [00:27:54] I think that's why I just love that. Love that idea.

**ROLAND** [00:27:57] Especially in your world now of investment. It's often said that, you know, investors will back a quality team over the idea or what have you that that team might have at the moment. So, you know, you back the team over the product. And that kind of reminds me of that phrase. I can't remember who said it, [00:28:15]but people won't remember what you said, how you made them feel. And I think if you can give people that hope or that that you have the passion and the drive and the knowledge and the data, of course, as well.

**SARAH** [00:28:25] Yeah.

**ROLAND** [00:28:26] Then that will attract, you know, investment. Yeah. And contributions in different ways as well.

**SARAH** [00:28:32] Okay. So we've got this idea of describing a future, bringing a future to life in the form of a vivid alternative. I'm going to keep coming back to that because I love it so much.

**ROLAND** [00:28:42] I need to find out who said.

**SARAH** [00:28:43] Yeah, I know we will. We will. But you also then in the book, go on to talk about the idea of shared ownership. So, you know, maybe there are visionaries who describe this future state, but then actually it's about increasing the number of players, the people who are involved, the community who will play a role in realising that. So making that happen and again, kind of tying that back to Obu and we'll use the SEIS legislation change, we were only able to effect that change because we described a possible future state and then welcomed other people to play a role within that. We wouldn't have achieved that legislation change without a whole host of people being involved within that. And in the book you describe the importance of shared goals and shared values. And you also talk about the idea of rituals and the role that ritual can play. Can you just describe that some more in terms of what do you mean by a ritual and why can ritual be so powerful when we think about creating change?

**ROLAND** [00:29:48] So there's a lot in that question. Yeah, I'm fascinated by the idea of rituals at a very simple level, a lot of it. For me, at least rotate around food and music? Food is inherently a communal activity, making and sharing a food. Not always, of course. I've always had a deep passion around music and making music with others, listening to music with others. The whole kind of the shared experience, the shared language, the non-verbal language that music and food provide and bringing people together. And I think if you do want to mobilise, as I think you are to community to make change happen, you need to mark at times the daily, the monthly, the weekly drumbeat of activities, but also, you know, celebrating when appropriate achievements or indeed setbacks. So creating space for your community to connect.

**SARAH** [00:30:37] Yeah.

**ROLAND** [00:30:38] Maybe at a non-verbal level through food and music. Or maybe it's, you know, an off site or .... You know, there can be all sorts of different ways of doing that. But yeah, how you infuse that kind of shared ownership with something we're trying to do right now through an experiment at Liminal we're basically trying to give away co-ownership of the community through a partnership with a really interesting organisation called Owned CO who, if you're interested, worth checking out a Berlin based Start-Up. Who are creating gyms owned by their members and supermarkets by their customers. And so this kind of principle of essentially kind of cooperatives, I think that's kind of at a more mass kind of digitally and level. But also the final example I'll just gave from a completely different world. But you mentioned Shelley, who's now running this amazing organisation in Canada called the 51, but she and I first connected many years ago. It wasn't the first project we did, but the kind of most impactful project we did together was with working with Lego on the Lego Ideas community, which is now apparently the biggest, most successful kind of crowdsourcing community in the world. And the way that works is anyone can post an idea for a Lego product. And then you have to get 10,000 people in the community to support your idea.

**SARAH** [00:31:48] Yes, I've seen this! Yeah!

**ROLAND** [00:31:50] And if you if you reach that threshold, then it goes into a kind of review process. And then Lego produces four products from the community every year.

**SARAH** [00:31:58] Yeah.

**ROLAND** [00:31:58] And they share, crucially, 1% of the revenue of that product with the person who created it. And interestingly, every single one of those products they've produced that way, as far as I'm aware, has sold out. So it's in terms of innovation for a big company where there's a lot of risk in terms of producing a new product, it de-risks that process. And I think the reason why is because the community, the idea is attributed back to an individual, but often that individual will share the 1% and the recognition with other people who've helped create the idea and make it better. And I think if people feel ownership, even in just a small way, credited, thanked, acknowledged, they're much more likely to buy your Lego product. Invest in your company, get involved and help tackle the climate crisis in the case of liminal. So I think there's something really, really needed and necessary. And yeah rituals are just the way to build community, I think.

**SARAH** [00:32:50] Yeah, it's a really interesting topic for us at the moment. Obu both in terms of, you know, we're preparing to launch our platform and thinking about what does that community design look like within the platform because, you know, it's not just about getting an investment round done. Actually, it's about building community in that community than then being a place where people can learn together and can share together and ultimately can grow businesses that have a positive impact on the world, but also at the same time as us developing that community, We're growing our team. And Claire and I over the last four years of built up and rituals. So we have two yellow chairs within the office and we hit the yellow chairs. And when we hit the yellow chairs, that means I really need to have a chat with you right now. So, you know, maybe there's this problem I'm tackling or I just need some creative inspiration or I'm having a really tough day. But if one of us says, Should we hit the yellow chairs, that's a signal for, yeah, I'll drop everything. Let's go and have a chat.

**ROLAND** [00:33:52] I love that.

**SARAH** [00:33:52] And we recently introduced the idea of the golden Sharpie. So Claire and I are both very driven, so will be very kind of head down. Let's do this thing right. What's the next thing? What's the next thing? And you mentioned kind of pausing for celebration. And that's something that we're not very good at, not because we don't recognise the importance, but just because we're so driven to get to where what's the next thing on this journey of change? But we got called on it and particularly it's really important as we are starting to grow our team. And so we write on Post-it. So we now have a wall that's covered in Post-its about the things that we're celebrating, the idea of a golden Sharpie. So, you know, the really significant things are where the golden Sharpie is. (chuckles)

**ROLAND** [00:34:35] I love it. It's a wonderful ritual.

**SARAH** [00:34:37] It's just simple. It's really simple. It's not complicated to engage with. There's no fear around it, but it's something that becomes a real marker for this is who we are, this is what we're about. And I guess that's the whole purpose of ritual, isn't it?

**ROLAND** [00:34:53] Yeah absolutely. And I think as we live in a society which at least in this country, you know, people don't have ritual as much in their lives because religion is on the wane. I think people I know I do. I don't consider myself religious. I do sort of crave ritual.

**SARAH** [00:35:09] Yes.

**ROLAND** [00:35:09] And, you know, create it in different ways. So, yeah, I love that. The golden Sharpie that so, that's brilliant.

**SARAH** [00:35:15] That's. Firmly a thing for us.

**ROLAND** [00:35:18] Yeah. And the yellow chairs.

**SARAH** [00:35:19] The yellow chairs I know we can never get rid of them. Honestly. (chuckles)

**ROLAND** [00:35:22] What happens if someone else sits in them?

**SARAH** [00:35:24] Well, anyone now is allowed to sit in them. We have to kind of almost make it part of our on boarding that people recognise the significance of the yellow chair. If someone's sat there, we kind of think what's happened? Do you need a chat? No, I'm just having my lunch. (laughs) Another thing that you talk about in the book is this idea of leverage points and, you know, creating positive systemic change can feel like a huge challenge even when you are a very hopeful person. But you talk in the book about our ability to kind of break that down and to take small steps and to be able to recognise leverage points that actually the outcome of that leverage point is significant. Can you just describe what you think some of the key ingredients are for meaningful leverage points or leverage points that might result in significant change?

leverage points that actually the outcome of that leverage point is significant. Can you just describe what you think some of the key ingredients are for meaningful leverage points or leverage points that might result in significant change?

**ROLAND** [00:36:20] Yeah. The final chapter of the book is called Everything Big Start Small. And again, that's something I heard somebody else say many years ago. But I think especially when you're trying to make change happen and I face this on a daily basis myself, but it's easy to get overwhelmed by the magnitude of the task, so you just won't even start. The main question of the book, I think it's on the back cover. It's like, what's the one step you can take in a new or interesting direction where you might learn something and you know, if you learn something positive, maybe you'll take a second step or a third step. But the thing is not to try and figure out necessarily what the destination is, you know, five, ten, 15 years hence. From now, though, obviously, you want to think about that, too, in terms of the imagination conversation. You know as well. It's about having the courage to try. To be vulnerable, to do something new and listen and learn to what happens. And, you know, sometimes that'll be a step in the right direction and other times it won't. And you'll have to sort of retrace your steps.

**SARAH** [00:37:15] Yeah.

**ROLAND** [00:37:16] And start again in a different direction. There's a different way of describing leverage points is a term I heard somebody use called social acupuncture. So the idea of acupuncture where you put a, you know, a few needles in different parts of the body and unlocks, you know, I don't quite know how it works (chuckles) the energy system in the body. I had a damaged my shoulder a few years ago. I'd never had acupuncture before. And then a sports therapist stuck some pins in me. Sort me right out.

**SARAH** [00:37:45] Yeah. Yeah.

**ROLAND** [00:37:45] And I became a sort of overnight convert to that practice. But I think the idea of acupuncture is helpful because just one small step. One small pin can actually unlock a much bigger impact if it's put in the right place, of course. So you need to know what you're doing as an acupuncturist, woman who's on the front cover of the book, Jesse Britton, who's created this amazing organisation called the Participatory Cities Foundation that I'm on the board of, have been for a few years. She runs this project called Everyone Every Day about regenerating places through an in highly kind of participatory approach. And it started in East London and it's now moved on to Canada and Scotland and other places. And it's really about doing kind of one small thing really well and then growing from there. So as I said at the beginning, everything big, start small. So don't be overwhelmed by the magnitude of the task. Just begin and then, you know, follow in your footsteps and those of others.

**SARAH** [00:38:40] And it's interesting. Then I think you kind of almost suddenly realise that you're at a tipping point. So kind of things move really slowly until they don't. And it's (chuckles) and again, kind of coming back to the over being underfunded campaign, we kind of found that experience of this is our message in and we'll repeat that message and and we'll repeat that message in a different forums and we'll talk to different people. And I remember the day when I received an email from someone in my network saying the government are making the change.

**ROLAND** [00:39:10] Mm hmm.

**SARAH** [00:39:11] And Claire and I happened to be together that morning and just going, Well, where the hell did that come from? (laughs) Kind of which of those multiple steps or multiple conversations or multiple pens, to use your analogy, resulted in that change. And the truth is, it's the accumulation of all of those. And you can't always connect those dots or connect those pins, but you just have to trust and believe that it's the collection of those actions and those efforts that have resulted in you getting to that more positive place.

**ROLAND** [00:39:43] Yeah, no, absolutely. I hope the golden Sharpie came out on that. (Sarah laughs) But I think that, yeah, there's a sort of triangulation, especially with kind of systemic change where it won't just be a single.

**SARAH** [00:39:54] Yeah.

**ROLAND** [00:39:55] Acupuncture pin that will sort out the broken shoulder. You need multiple pins in multiple places, and if you can figure out the right points, then you can unlock, you know, that that change. And I think it sounds like that what you did through your campaign and it won't be just any you can never attribute that to any single event. Or a single conversation. And you probably won't even know the majority of reasons maybe even why that happened. But anyway, congratulations to you both on an amazing campaign, something that is just in my mind in this discussion. I've just on a course on systems change. Very good through something called the Acumen Academy. And one of their principles for systems change is to lead with humility and audacity, which I really like that.

**SARAH** [00:40:43] Love that, yeah.

**ROLAND** [00:40:43] So Humility is, you know, willing to try anything, really. But Audacity is just dreaming really big and bold. And there's something about the marrying of those two, which I think I see in you,

**SARAH** [00:40:53] Thank you

**ROLAND** [00:40:54] And what you're doing, and I think that's really needed.

**SARAH** [00:40:57] Yeah, I agree. And it's the most rewarding to now have conversations with the entrepreneurs for whom that change has had an impact and a meaningful impact in terms of the innovations that they're bringing into the world and what that means for our society, our economy, but actually what it means for them personally as individuals and as daughters or mothers and kind of seeing that impact is just the most humbling outcome. Mm hmm. And it's always a complete joy for Claire and I when we have the opportunity to have a conversation like that and quite often will talk to people and they will talk about the SEIS change and not realise that we had an impact, that we had a role to play. And I love those conversations the most. (chuckles)

**ROLAND** [00:41:44] I bet you do. Yeah.



**SARAH** [00:41:46] So as we think about wrapping up and I guess this ties to something I was just describing, but how does it feel for you knowing that this book is now out there in the world, that people are reading it and that it will inspire action, it will inspire discussion, it will inspire hope? Kind of. How does that feel for you?

**ROLAND** [00:42:09] Feels bloody lovely.

**SARAH** [00:42:10] Yeah.

**ROLAND** [00:42:11] It's a real joy. I mean, at one level I've been doing podcast and blogging and various things over the years and I do share them because, you know, I do like it if people engage with it. At one level, I do it for myself as a way to think and figure out what I think about the world. And even if nobody read the book, it's still a helpful process for me to write it, because that's almost how I learn and make sense of ideas. But the book's been out for about a month now, and I mean, it's not going to be on the Times bestseller list. You know, I'm having this conversation with you, and I've had I had a conversation with someone on Friday who said, a lot of people have said the book is really helpful for what they're going through right now without necessarily telling me what they're going through.

**SARAH** [00:42:50] Yeah.

**ROLAND** [00:42:51] And so it feels like it's touching on something that is useful, which which is obviously it's very nice to be to feel useful. But also as a few people who I haven't seen in a long time, such as yourself, who who sort of got back in touch as a result of this, it's just nice to have a physical artefact now, this book, to have a conversation around and a few people have said some very touching things about the impact that I've had or the book has had on their life and their work. And so yeah, that feels wonderful. Yeah, really, really nice.

**SARAH** [00:43:18] Well, it is a great book for anyone listening, and I'd really encourage you to have a read because it does make change and transitions feel more accessible and like we have got a role to play in the future world that we're going to live in. And I just think that possibility, that opportunity is hugely inspiring. I know for us as a team at Obu it's going to be a book that we dive into that we'll take lessons from. I'm just really excited to see selfishly what comes about for us as a result of taking the lessons from this book. So thank you for joining us today. Where can people find out more? Where can they get a copy?

**ROLAND** [00:43:57] Thank you for inviting me. It's really lovely to talk to you about the book. All of my work is done through Liminal. The website is [We Are Liminal.co](http://WeAreLiminal.co). On social media I'm normally @RolandHoward on Twitter, LinkedIn and Instagram or @weareliminal. Yeah, get in touch. The book is available on all major online retailers and if anyone is interested to find out more, then I'm a compulsive connector. So I'd love to follow up.

**SARAH** [00:44:23] Brilliant. And we will put links in podnotes and pod descriptions for this episode so that everyone can find the copy for themselves. But Roland, thank you for your time. It's been great to talk to you.

**ROLAND** [00:44:33] Thank you.

(Upbeat music builds again)

**SARAH** [00:44:38] For more on how we're reimagining investment and entrepreneurship across the UK, visit [ObuInvest.com](https://ObuInvest.com), more real conversations with entrepreneurs and angel investors who, with their capital and their businesses are changing the world for the better.

(Music gets louder then ends)