

# The Hero's Sherpa: Your Guide Through Life's Challenges



Part 4: Take the Journey

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# TAKE THE JOURNEY

## Overview

Sometimes, “Just do it” is good advice. It may even work with smaller, incremental change. But when faced with a really large change, it is a recipe for disaster. Here are a few key lessons as you think about, prepare and plan for, and move through your change journey.

## Grant Permission

All too often, what stands between us and success is that we don't grant ourselves permission: permission to make mistakes, permission to take risks, permission to try something new, permission to experiment, permission to let go, permission to think and/or act in ways we have not in the past. Yet all of these things are key elements to successfully executing major change.

By definition, you are stepping into uncharted territory. Neither you nor anyone accompanying you has all the answers. Neither you nor anyone accompanying you will get through this mistake-free. Neither you nor anyone accompanying you will get through this “the way we've always done it.” Grant yourself permission, and grant permission to those accompanying you, or you will never find your way to success on the other side.

## Begin With the End In Mind; Keep the End In Mind

Remember, you begin by creating the change story for a reason. A clearly articulated end state that everyone can work toward is critical to success. But, we are all human, after all. “Bright, shiny objects” do catch our attention. Your closest friend may ask you to start doing “Y” with him. Maybe it's an article in a journal, or a documentary you just saw that drives a shift in focus. “Crises of the moment” also have the ability to easily distract us.

Every day, ask “What am I doing today to move this change forward?” Every day, ask those who are supporting you in the change, “What are you doing today to move this change forward?”

When those bright shiny things appear, ask yourself, “How will this help us move forward with the change?” If it won't, why pursue it?

When those crises arise, ask yourself, “How will this affect progress toward the goal?” All too often, supposed crises appear urgent, and yet they are unimportant in the context of your change. I remember one time being at breakfast with a client before he held a town hall to launch a new initiative. The stock market opened, and began to plunge. As we sat there in the

restaurant, some of his direct reports urged him to delay the town hall, and to rush back to the office. "What am I going to do there," he replied. "I can't drive the market back up. Markets fall; markets rise; that's what they do. But I know that if we don't successfully move this change forward, what happens in the market won't matter at all to us. Moving us ahead of the competition is the best thing I can do for our the organization, and today we start to do that."

## Monitor Adaptation Capacity

Put too much change on the plate, and it will all come up short of its goals. Don't keep enough on the plate, and you fall short of your potential. Think of it as training for the Olympics; you need to keep stretching...giving yourself enough time for rest and recovery, and then stretching again.

One of the most effective ways to do this monitoring is to learn the changes in individual behavior that signal the onset of overload. These can get very idiosyncratic. I once had a person working for me who was extremely sharp. Frank could keep all of my clients straight in his mind: their names, the organizations that they worked for, the work I was doing with them, etc. I quickly learned that when he began to talk about clients and confusing their organizations or the work we were doing with them, it meant that Frank was in overload. First, I made it okay for him to acknowledge that; we all have a limit to our capacity. Then, whenever he crossed that threshold, I would ask him to help me figure out what to "take off his plate" (literally stop doing, or postpone, or extend a deadline for) so that he could again move forward successfully.

## Don't Forget the World Is Changing Too

I live in a former slide rule factory; if you are not familiar with slide rules, they were the mechanical precursor to any form of electronic calculator. I learned how to program a computer on punch cards. When I entered the workforce, the expectation was that you would get a job out of college, stay with that employer, advance (or not), and ultimately retire from the same employer.

The point here is, the world keeps changing. In a recent study, 91% of millennials reported that they expect to stay in their current job less than three years. The slide rule was replaced by the electronic calculator was replaced by the app on the smart phone. 88% of the Fortune 500 companies of 1955 are gone.

Keep your eye on the destination of your change journey. But also keep your eye on the changes going on around you. Any one of them could signal the need for a change in the route you are taking, *or the need to stop and rethink the destination itself.*

## Maintain Balance

Whether I am coaching, mentoring, or consulting, one of the more difficult challenges for those I am working with is maintaining a “work/life balance.” At the end of the day, all change is personal…individuals either deliver the end result, or they don’t. Maintaining balance is a way of contributing to maintaining capacity…the more stressed we are, the more tired we are, the less capacity we have to invest in a change. Maintain your own work/life balance; work with those who are on the change journey with you to ensure that they do the same.

## Monitor Progress

Monitor progress toward your milestones. As was discussed earlier, don’t just monitor “installation;” ensure that you are tracking progress toward the actual outcomes you want to achieve (“realization”).

Monitor risks. Watch for early warning signs. The sooner you see a risk, the greater the opportunity to do something about it before it grows and does significant damage to your progress. (One client I work with says it this way. “Red is good. Red is good when risks are surfaced early and actions are taken to mitigate those risks.”)

## Celebrate

Don’t just celebrate the beginning of the change (“Yeah, I got into the MBA program I wanted!”) and the end. There is plenty to celebrate along the way. Not every celebration has to be huge. And, not every celebration needs to be about success. Celebrate effort. Celebrate mistakes. Don’t get carried away with it, but the fact that you gave yourself permission that you have never given yourself before is cause for celebration. The fact that you experimented with something you never permitted yourself to experiment with before is cause for celebration, even if you made mistakes along the way. Celebrate progress in whatever form it takes.

## I Like This Change! It Will Easily Succeed!

Hopefully you will not be surprised to find out that liking a change and the ease of achieving success are not at all related!

First, let’s clear up some mis-perceptions. There are very few if any changes that are inherently positive. Whether or not a change is positive is—in fact—in the eye of the beholder.

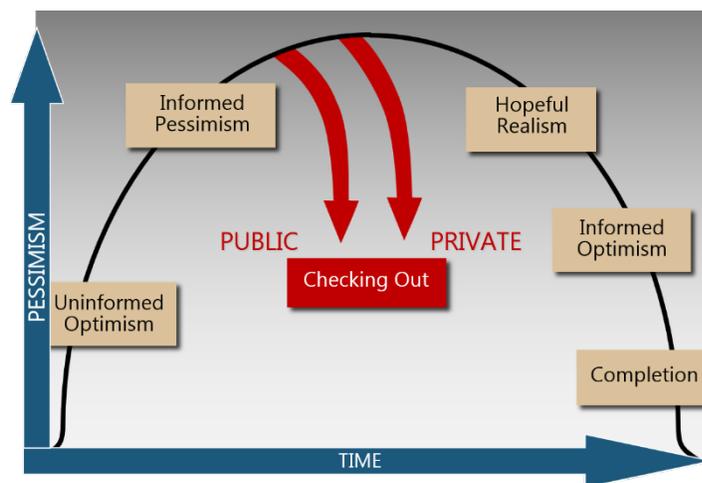
You may see the move to Office 365 as positive; it helps you access your files from multiple devices at any time and in any place. At the same time, I may see it as negative; now I need to subscribe to Office, instead of just paying a one-time licensing fee. If you won a multi-million dollar lottery, you may see it as negative because of all the major disruptions it will cause in your life and your relationships. If I won, I might perceive it as positive because of all the new possibilities it might offer for the work that I want to do in the world.

In truth, this discussion is not about *positive change*, it is about *positively perceived change*.

Next, let me credit the source of the graphic on the next page, as well as my understanding of what I am presenting here. I was first introduced to the concept of positively perceived and negatively perceived change when I trained with Conner Partners back in the late 1980's; what I learned then remains a solid set of principles today.

If the change is big, and you perceive it as positive, *beware!* Every day, whether at work or in our personal lives, tens of thousands of us—perhaps millions—start on changes of this nature. And, every day, tens of thousands of us—perhaps millions—check out of the very changes we enthusiastically embraced days, weeks, months, or even years ago. So what goes wrong?

Perhaps, in specific cases, one could identify “what went wrong.” But, most of the time, the problem is not that anything specific went wrong other than that those going through the change did not understand the pattern underlying it. So, let me let you in on that pattern.



*The Human Response to Positively Perceived Change<sup>1</sup>*

When we begin a really big change in our life that we perceive as positive, we are beginning it in a state of “uninformed optimism.” In marriage, and often in a new job, this is referred to as “the honeymoon.” We see everything in a positive light.

*It's a honeymoon because we don't*

*know what we don't know.*

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Uninformed optimism is general. "This is great! I have a new job. I am earning significantly more money. I have a great title. I like the people that I report to, and the ones that report to me. I have a much shorter commute to the office than I did in my old job."

BUT... Uninformed optimism is followed by informed pessimism! In big changes—whether they be personal, organizational, or even societal—*this is the inevitable reality*. We are optimistic because we are going into the change with a significant level of naivete.

As reality hits home, pessimism increases, and it gets pretty specific. "I have a new job...and instead of working 40 hours a week I am working ten hours a day, seven days a week." "I may be earning significantly more money, but I am paying an incredible price for doing so." "What's in a title?" "I liked the people that I report to...until I discovered that they don't want to hear anything that I have to say." "The people that report to me smile, and shake their heads yes, and then go and do whatever they want anyway." "I am closer to the office in distance...but the traffic makes my commute twice as long."

What happens as pessimism increases? Enthusiasm wanes. Resistance increases. Doubts arise. The very change that you were so excitedly driving forward (or had eagerly jumped on-board to support) becomes questionable. Do you really want to do this? Are you really able to succeed at it? Is it worth the cost?

The most important thing to keep in mind at this point in the cycle is that informed pessimism is not a signal that something is wrong. Rather, it is an inevitable part of the cycle. When you find yourself here you know that you are making forward progress!

When people reach this point, checking out is not uncommon; they only real question is whether they will check out publicly or privately. Examples of checking out publicly include such things as filing for divorce, or submitting your resignation. Checking out privately might be entering marriage counseling while carrying on an affair, or closing the office door and spending hours on end surfing the web.

If we haven't checked out, as circumstances become clearer, pessimism tends to begin to decline. We enter a period of hopeful realism. There are fewer surprises. We can see the obstacles to successfully achieving the desired outcomes of the change, and can see our way around, over, and through them. We know that there is still a lot of hard work ahead of us, but are also increasingly confident that the hard work will pay off.

Following Hopeful Realism comes Informed Optimism. At this point we are experiencing real, measurable successes. We still need to work to sustain them. Sometimes—especially if stressed or tired—we might find ourselves slipping back into old ways of thinking or old habits. But when we do, we see it (or others point it out to us), and we bring ourselves back into alignment with the desired end results.

Completion is achieved when you are living in what was once your desired future... It is no longer a dream, or a hope. It is the way things are.

## Change Isn't an Intellectual Exercise

Well of course not! Who would think that? After all, falling in love, or falling out of love... The loss of a loved one. Moving to a new home, whether across the city or around the world. A new job. A termination. All have an emotional component to them. They may touch the heart, the gut, the head, or any combination of the three.

Of course change isn't an intellectual exercise. Who would think that?

Too often, we all do. We fail to recognize and honor the cathartic nature of the changes we are facing, or the changes we are driving into our organizations. If we do acknowledge that there is more than an intellectual component, it is generally about "the others going through the change." Rarely (especially for men), are we honest about our own emotional roller coaster ride.

Yet, acknowledging and allowing catharsis—for ourselves as well as others—is so important.

Let's go back for a moment to the definition of change that underlies all of my work and my writing. *Change: a disruption in expectations*. If change is a disruption in expectations, the bigger the disruption, the more challenging the change will be to successfully execute.

If I come to work in the morning and the coffee maker isn't working, it may drive a change in my routine. I expected to have coffee when I sat down at my desk; now I need to run back out, or place an order to have some coffee delivered, or settle for water. Chances are, the disruption is not going to last long; I may grumble about it at the water cooler, but that's about it.

On the other hand, what if I arrive back from vacation to find someone else's name on what was *my office door*, someone else sitting in what was *my Executive High-Back Pneumatic Leather Chair*? Unless I've been promoted, the disruption is profound, and the reaction most likely visceral.

Why is it so important to—appropriately—address all aspects of that reaction? It doesn't matter the catalyst of the change...work or personal, or even societal; it doesn't matter if you see the change as positive or negative. This is one of the incredible, fascinating things about change. It just matters how big the disruption is. The bigger the change, the more critical addressing the cathartic component of it will be.

For some people, the following is useful to help understand this.

Imagine that what you are letting go of is in a room. Now walk out of that room, and close the door behind you, but don't let go of the doorknob. Are you able to move forward? It doesn't matter how many new doors are open in front of you. It doesn't matter what they offer. If you are unable or unwilling to let go—to experience catharsis—you have no chance of moving forward to those new possibilities.

Why is catharsis necessary in order to let go?

Whether in a healthy or dysfunctional environment, over time we settle into a set of expectations. We establish a relationship with the elements of the environment: the people; the behaviors; perhaps the sounds, the temperature, the smells. We may deeply engage with it, or find a way of being disconnected even when in its midst. We know the patterns, the pace, the rhythm.

Perhaps it is an environment of our own making. A relationship with a significant other, maybe a family. Or an organization that we have "grown up in," advancing into a position of authority where we have spent decades shaping it into what it is today. We "know the drill;" it has our best insights, experiences, mistakes, and successes embedded in it.

And now it is going to change. Dramatically.

Letting go of any relationship that has these kinds of roots in us is not an intellectual exercise. Is there an intellectual component? Of course. But there is so much more.

The paradox that makes this so hard you are being called on to destroy that which they have created so that it can survive and thrive. "The old paradigm is dead. Long live the new paradigm." Those who cannot make this transition—truly change the way in which they relate to the past so that they can fully invest themselves in creating the new—will not succeed. Nor will the change they are trying to drive. Often in working with clients who are going through a highly disruptive personal change, we will work to create a ritual of letting go. (I have also done this with a few organizational clients.) They find that they need to mourn the past—even if it contains a long and dysfunctional history—in order to embrace the journey into the future.

Often, the bright promise of the future offers a compelling pull. But we can only move so far toward it without letting go of what is behind us. And, at the end of the day, that letting go is never easy. If we are to truly let it go, there may be a physical component to what we have to release. It may or may not include a spiritual element. And, in that letting go there will always be catharsis.

## "C" Is for Courage

Change is hard. Big change is really hard.

And it is scary. If you have done your homework, your intent is clear; but, no matter how well you plan or prepare, the path forward is littered with uncertainties.

It takes courage to step into change. It takes letting go of what is familiar.

Think about it. How often, for how long, have you stayed in less-than-comfortable situations because the thought of what it would take to change them, what you might have to let go of, the risk involved...whatever...held you back?

Sometimes change means stepping "out of the frying pan and into the fire," even though you are not sure that the suit you are wearing is fireproof. It is not doing so foolishly, but doing so with forethought, commitment, and courage.

Change takes the courage to let go of your ego. You will make mistakes. There will be times that you will look and feel foolish. People will call you everything under the sun—behind your back and/or to your face—for even considering the change.

Change takes the courage to fail, and the courage to succeed. Any big change is going to present you with a whole new set of challenges, some of which you will be prepared for and some of which may seem overwhelming.

Change takes the courage to risk, to explore, to make really tough decisions without the information that you would like to have. It takes the courage to say no to some really important things in life so that you have the ability and the resources required to remain focused on the change.

Change takes courage. There will be times when your courage waivers. When mine does I remind myself, *I would rather look back and know that my best wasn't good enough, than look back and know I didn't try as hard as I could.*

Change takes courage.

## “D” Is for Discipline

For the past ten years I have assisted at a workshop for men. Over the course of two days, the participants develop a deeper connection to themselves as they explore a number of aspects of their lives. For me, these weekends are meaningful both for the service I am able to provide to others, and for the reflection they foster in me.

Many of the topics we address draw different responses from me at different workshops. One consistently draws the same answer. The instruction is to discuss the gifts you received from your father. While there are many, the one that is always at the fore for me: Self-Discipline.

Both of my parents worked. By the time I was in junior high school, I worked after school as a bicycle delivery boy; while I kept my tips, my earnings (\$0.35 for in-town deliveries, \$0.50 for out-of-town) went directly into a college fund. I began working at Boy Scout camp in the summers when I was 14 or 15. My siblings and I shared chores at home: dishes, garbage, walking the dog, housecleaning, taking care of the yard. There was homework, Boy Scouts, church and acolyte service on Sundays.

This isn't to say I didn't have time to play, or to have fun, when growing up. I certainly did. But it underscores the important lesson that I learned. You need to work in order to achieve your goals. And, doing the work that needs to be done requires a great deal of self-discipline. It is a lesson that I carry with me to this day.

Big changes are tough. They take courage. They also take a great deal of self-discipline. They don't happen overnight. Other important things come up, calling for your time and attention. They require physical, mental, and emotional energy...sometimes every ounce that you can muster. They require the discipline to say “No” to some things so that you can say “Yes” to this one. They require the discipline to make hard choices, difficult decisions. They require the discipline (along with the courage) to take difficult action. They require the discipline to get up each time you fall down, to draw the lesson from each mistake and continue to forge forward.

They also require the discipline of self-care, of setting boundaries, of avoiding burn-out. They require the discipline of celebrating progress along the way, of sharing successes. They require the discipline of reflection. They require the discipline of making time to have fun. And, they require the discipline of getting “back to the task at hand.”

## Discipline 2.0

We have talked about some of the key elements of succeeding when faced with a major life change: start with what's in your heart; whether or not you initiated the change, take charge of

how you respond to it; know your anchors, and your relationship to them; focus on what is important, not what is urgent; maintain your equanimity.

Now I want to address another key to success: *Discipline 2.0*.

Working with my clients, I find that some have very little discipline when it comes to actually taking action. Often—though not always—these are the more creative types. They are great at generating ideas, conceiving of new things, envisioning exciting and different futures. However, they never quite get started on the change journey. They come to me with some sense of the change they want to make, though they may be struggling to articulate it. They may know some of the steps they have to take, though they have done little to prepare for—or actually take—them.

This situation surfaces one of the two aspects of discipline I want to address today. It is the part of discipline that we tend to think of most often... *He (or she) just doesn't have the discipline to do what needs to get done.*

The second aspect of discipline that I want to discuss is no less common, but it is much less often recognized. It is the discipline of honoring our boundaries, maintaining a focus on ensuring that we keep a balance in our lives.

I see this lack of discipline in many ways. I have one client who for years thought she had to be available to her employer 24/7. Another came to me complaining about the lack of support provided by loved ones who were, in turn, complaining about the fact that he worked day and night, seven days a week. There are those who take pride in “burning the midnight oil,” or in having “not taken a vacation in years.”

If your change is a significant one, neither of these approaches will lead to a successful result. In the first instance, you will find yourself in a constant launch, re-launch, re-launch cycle. In the second, you will end up losing your passion, then disliking, then perhaps even hating the very intent that drove you to initiate the change in the first place.

In both circumstances, the most effective approach is to find and work with an “accountability buddy.” In my experience, this role is best filled by someone who is far enough removed to be objective, and someone whom you trust to be direct and honest with you. You want someone who can be supportive of you; who can guide you through the planning process so that you define real action steps if that is what is needed; a person who can work with you to clarify the boundaries if your challenge relates to not honoring them; someone who can help you set realistic goals (whether around moving forward or honoring boundaries); and someone who will—on an agreed-upon cycle—check back in and hold you accountable.

When faced with any important change in your life, Discipline 2.0 is vital: discipline to take the steps necessary to succeed, and discipline to ensure that you maintain the equanimity required to keep you from burning out over the long haul.

## Balance Is More Than Not Falling Down

Be open to action, and to reflection.

Be open to holding on, and to letting go.

Be open to knowing, and to not knowing.

Be open to doing, and to not doing.

In 2007 I took a Himalayan pilgrimage. Over the eight months before I left, I invested in preparing myself for the experience. While those preparations began in the gym, I soon realized that this journey would require more than physical training; it would require mental and spiritual preparation as well.

One day early in my preparations I met a friend for dinner at a Chinese restaurant. When the check came, I opened my fortune cookie. It read,

*Balance is more than not falling down.*

Wherever you are on your change journey, there is an important lesson here. It is a lesson that applies in so many ways that one could probably write books on it. (As my son says, "No worries." I am just going to highlight a few of them, and move on to other topics. I trust you to draw from your own experiences to add to the lessons that I am offering here.)

Just as my pilgrimage required me to call on my physical, spiritual, and mental energy, each change journey makes its own unique energetic demands on us. It may challenge long-held beliefs and practices. It may require us to re-frame our relationship to others, or to work, or to religious or spiritual or political beliefs. Whatever the change, it is likely that successfully completing the journey will not be possible with one shift; rather, multiple shifts will be required.

Perhaps you are still committed to that New Year's resolution that resulted in a new gym membership. While the gym may be an important element in losing weight and developing the body that you want, it cannot be the only one if you are to succeed. Doing so may also require you to change your relationship to your body: how you see it, what you expect of it, and/or how

you treat it. That's why I have never understood those people who walk out of the gym and light up a cigarette, or the ones who spend their entire workout telling their buddies about how much they drank over the weekend. It's not just about the workout.

*Balance is more than not falling down.*

"Play to your strengths." There is one theory of change that suggests this is exactly the way to go; build on strengths rather than focus on weaknesses. Another suggests that you should focus on your vulnerabilities, or they will undermine your success; manage them as risks, or risk failing.

Who is right?

In my experience, both are. When the going gets tough, we each tend to play to our strong suit. Perhaps you're known for making decisions, or taking action, or planning, or anticipating problems, or... And, sometimes your strong suit is exactly what is needed at that point in time.

But sometimes, what is needed is the opposite; sometimes what is needed is your weakness. Perhaps you are strong on reflecting, on finding the solution through a long and deep contemplative process; but circumstances warrant quick decisions and action. Maybe you are known for holding on to things that have had meaning in the past, sustaining traditions or heirlooms, or beliefs; but circumstances call for letting go of these things before the door closes on the opportunity to complete the change.

*Balance is more than not falling down.*

Do you know your strengths, and your vulnerabilities? Do you consciously choose when to call on each?

Are you at the action gym, or the reflection gym, or the decision gym, becoming the ever-more-masterful exerciser of your strengths? Or, are you at the action gym, or the reflection gym, or the decision gym, working on your vulnerabilities to bring them more into balance with your strengths?

*Balance is more than not falling down.*

Balance is *both* leveraging your strengths, *and* strengthening your weaknesses. It is knowing the full range of resources that you have available to you, and calling on each when appropriate.

Balance is being open to action, and to reflection. Balance is being open to holding on, and to letting go. Balance is being open to knowing, and to not knowing. Balance is being open to doing, and to not doing.

*Balance is more than not falling down.*

## Don't Get Dizzy When you Are in the Loop of a Crisis

Is it good to be "in the loop" during a crisis?

- a) Yes
- b) No
- c) It depends

The correct answer is c, "It depends." Certainly if you are talking about awareness loops, or focused loops, or communications loops, it is a good thing. But when we are involved in change, there is another loop that we have to be careful to avoid: the urgency loop.

There is nothing that spurs us into action like an immediate crisis. Unfortunately, cortisol sets off the alarm, and our actions tend to be "fight, flight, freeze, or appease." We've all witnessed, heard about (and maybe even perpetrated) a few or more such responses along the way... frenetic flurries of disconnected and incomplete activity; rants, whether at the person or situation we see as the cause of the crisis or those who are trying to be supportive of us; "jags," "benders," or "binges" (depending on your generation and substance of choice). When the first set of actions doesn't seem to be taking root, another spins out, and another. It can be dizzying at best!

The kinds of crises that drive substantive changes in our lives aren't addressed in minutes, days, or weeks. It can often take months, or even years, to move through and reach the outcome we have been working toward. So, for me, knowing this—and being conscious of it—is my first step in addressing a crisis, whether caused by me or driven from the outside.

*Don't let yourself step into the urgent action loop!*

Many years ago I learned a simple and effective tool; if my memory serves me, it was offered by Stephen Covey. Draw a simple four-cell matrix, two boxes high by two wide. I label the horizontal axis "Urgency" and the vertical axis "Importance." Along each axis there are only two measures, "low" and "high." As I begin to jot down "what I need to do," I put each item into one of the four cells ranging from low urgency and low importance to high urgency and high importance.

*The secret sauce: focus on importance, not urgency!*

After all, if it is urgent, but has no importance, why attend to it when there are important things to be done? That is why reminding myself that a crisis isn't resolved in a moment is so important; it helps me to avoid the impulse to "fight or flight." I have found this technique effective for myself and others, whether it is the "crisis" of getting out a term paper, or the crisis of first receiving devastating personal news. And, it is something that doesn't take training, or practice, or years of experience to apply.

PS: The matrix works great on any change, not just crises; it also can bring value to your day-to-day activities.

## How Are You Showing Up?

How did you show up today? What about yesterday? Is there any reason to expect that you will show up any differently tomorrow?

During change, how you show up makes a difference for the journey, and for the outcome. It makes a difference for you. And, it makes a difference for those who are influenced by you—whether formally or informally—along the way.

## Super Hero

The super-hero is often a Type-A. He arrives with all of the answers, with the strength to do whatever it takes, and with no time to waste. If there is any emotion, it is generally anger: anger at mistakes others make (he doesn't make mistakes); anger at things not going according to plan; anger at counsel he doesn't want to hear.

Super-Heroes may make good protagonists in film and pulp fiction. They do not make good change leaders or facilitators. If you are engaged in a big change, you are not going to be able to anticipate everything; you won't have all the answers. Others will make mistakes. So will you. Time is well spent in reflection, thoughtful consideration, and serious dialogue, not constantly racing forward. Sometimes the best advice you can get is absolutely what you wish you weren't hearing. Real change can generate anger. But it also generates laughter, tears, joy, sorrow—the full gamut of emotions comes into play along the way.

## Preacher

The preacher sees the change as affecting others. "You have to change," she extols every chance she gets. "This isn't going to work unless you get on board." People listen to preachers. Then, sometimes, they ask questions. They ask, "Don't you have to change too, Preacher?" They ask, "Is

this, 'Do as I say, not as I do?'" They ask, "Why does all the change roll downhill?" Big change isn't just about everyone else. If it's your change, it has to start with you.

## Teammate

He wants everyone to feel like they are part of the decisions, not just part of the execution. He huddles for hours, listening, exploring, questioning, waiting for a decision to emerge. When it doesn't, he schedules the next huddle. There is a role for the team in the change. And, there is a role for the leader. As a change leader, you need to listen, explore, and question. You need to seek out the counsel of the best and the brightest. And, you need to lead. You need to make tough decisions. You need to move the change forward.

## Charismatic

People will follow her to the ends of the earth. She has that undefinable characteristic about her that draws people in and holds them there. She can lead them to a spectacular success, or to a devastating failure; they'll follow her anywhere. Unfortunately, that's not what you need. Yes, you want people to follow your lead. But you don't want them to do so blindly. You want them to question, to challenge, to voice their concerns so that you can address them. You want them to point out when you are about to make (or have made) a wrong turn. You want them committed first and foremost to the future, to the successful execution of the change, not to you.

Clearly, there are other ways to show up during change. Some will contribute to a successful journey; some will not. Here are some ways you might consider as you think about how you show up.

- Courageous
- Disciplined
- Focused
- Committed
- Reflective
- Engaged
- Empathetic
- In touch
- Decisive
- Positive
- Equanimous
- Passionate

What other ways might you consider showing up?

## How Is Your (Change) Hearing?

Most of the time when people talk about change communication, they focus on what you are or should be saying. A good change coach, mentor, or change practitioner will also talk about the importance of having open communications channels, and about fostering dialogue. What is generally missing in discussions about change communication, however, is a focus on listening.

If you are responsible for the execution of a change, no matter what the setting or your role in it, you cannot succeed without listening, and hearing. While the listening and hearing I will describe in a moment are always important, they take on oversized importance during change.

There are three things that you should always be listening for.

### 1. Listen for what is putting your change at risk.

Previously we have talked about the importance of taking counsel from people that tell you what you need to know, not what you want to hear. This is not about being paranoid; it is about being sure that you have every bit of information that you can get to inform your decisions. You need to not only empower people to tell you the bad news, you need to encourage them to tell you early. As I described earlier, one of my mentors refers to this as a “red is good” culture; it is good when risks are raised early, and leaders act to mitigate them. Hearing the bad news early gives you the best opportunity to mitigate it without jeopardizing your change.

### 2. Listen for what is not being said.

During major change, resistance is inevitable. If you don't see it, one of two things is taking place. Either it is underground, or you are going through the illusion of change rather than actually making progress.

Resistance happens. Hear it. Hear what it has to say. It is the voice of resistance that will surface many of your risks, and offer many of the solutions to mitigating them...if you hear it.

In order to both listen for and hear resistance, you need to slow down the conversation. All too often, when we listen we are in the process of formulating our response as the other person is speaking. We are hearing our answer take shape before we hear—or fully grasp—what they are saying.

Listen, and ask clarifying questions. *What do you mean when you say that? Can you help me understand why? What are you seeing or hearing that leads you to that conclusion? What are you not telling me?* Etc.

### 3. Listen for the seeds of success.

There is a wonderful line in the song *Anthem* by Leonard Cohen. "There is a crack in everything. That's how the light gets in."

A lot of your focus during change is on the struggle, on the risks, on the challenges. It has to be; those are all part of big changes; you ignore them or give them short shrift at your own risk.

But don't let that be your only focus. Also listen for the seeds of success. Where are those cracks? Where is the light getting in? Where are the seeds of success being planted?

You need to listen to them, because at first they may seem very small. Too often we tout the milestones: we're on budget, we've run the training programs, we have launched the new benefits package. But we don't see the real seeds of light that say we are on the way to realizing the full results of the change.

Maybe it's a halt in the decline of your bank balance. Or it's a small increase in the number of positive responses to job inquiries. Maybe it's overhearing someone who had been an early voice of resistance now talking up the change. Or, it's knowing for the first time that you have the courage to carry the change through to closure.

Listen for the seeds of success. And when you hear them, shine a light on them. Applaud them. Herald them. Help them to germinate, and to spread.

### What's Self-Care Got to Do With It?

It's amazing how often our misconceptions take us down the wrong path.

- We think that the way to get ahead is to work harder than anyone else.
- The path to professional success is personal sacrifice.
- Sleeping less will give us more time for productive work.
- Daydreaming is a waste of time.
- We can just "push through it," whatever it is.
- Work is work, and our personal lives are our personal lives.

Wrong!

The truth is, we know that getting ahead isn't about working harder than anyone else. Personal sacrifice can be taken to extremes, damaging or destroying our relationships and our support networks. Sleeping less not only leaves us tired; it can leave us with the same functional ability as if we were intoxicated. Allowing ourselves to daydream can open the door to creative, innovative solutions to problems that hours of holding our heads in our hands while staring at a blank page (or screen) failed to yield. Pushing through may work sometimes; it is far from a strategy for success. And, as much as some of us would like it to be the case, we are not separate people at work and at home. What happens at work doesn't stay at work any more than what happens in Las Vegas stays in Las Vegas, and vice versa.

All of this is to say that, whether you are engaged in a change in your personal life or at work, self-care is critical to your success. Quite simply, when properly practiced, self-care allows our bodies and our minds to perform at their peak. It doesn't mean we won't make mistakes, won't get tired, won't ever be angered, or disappointed, or feeling down. It does mean that we will experience these things less often, and recover from them more quickly.

There is no "one size fits all" guide book for self-care, though many authors have become rich promoting their own versions of it. What I can offer you is guidance on things to consider as possible elements of your self-care regimen.

### Find—and Maintain—Your Balance

As I said at the start of this section, "balance is more than not falling down." There are many aspects of balance to work on: personal and professional; alone time and time with others; working and relaxing; sleep and awake; physical vs. mental activity; etc. Maintaining balance is a dynamic process. Not every workday is eight hours; not every weekend is entirely under your control. For this reason, it is important to be mindful of when you are in, and out of, balance. It's all too easy to slide more and more out of balance until all aspects of your balance are askew.

### Know Your Stressors, and How to Counteract Them

Some of the things that cause me tremendous stress might be invisible to you, and vice versa. Being aware of what causes you stress, and acting to reduce it, are critical components of self-care.

## Eat, Sleep, and Exercise

While these elements of daily living also fall into the “find your balance” description above, it is worth calling them out on their own. Healthy eating, proper sleep patterns, and judicious exercise all contribute to developing and maintaining your well-being.

## Develop a Routine

Routines are important contributors to self-care in numerous ways. They free up mental energy; they allow you to ensure that critical elements of care (e.g. eating, sleeping, and exercise) are taken care of; overall, they allow the day-to-day to be less demanding and stressing. Contrary to what some people think, a routine doesn't have to make life boring; I have one client who sets aside time regularly by holding it on her calendar as “WFIFL” (Whatever Fun I Feel Like). One time it may be a movie, another a nap with a book or a walk in the park; once it was a trapeze lesson!

## “Take a Break”

Big changes are tough. No matter how much self-care you put into it, they still wear us down. Just like athletes allow themselves time for recovery, we need to take a break from time to time to re-energize ourselves. This can be a good time to reflect on where we have been and the journey we've traveled; to laugh at some of what has happened along the way; to celebrate our achievements; and to prepare for the next part of the journey.

## Don't Walk Alone

Too many of us pass judgment on ourselves, fostering the unrealistic belief that we should be able to handle anything and everything ourselves. Men tend to do this more than women; think getting lost and stopping to ask for directions, or not. We see asking for help, or sharing our challenges with others, as a sign of weakness or incompetence. I, for one, see it as a sign of strength, of maturity, and of honesty. Even the gods of ancient Greece had flaws and weaknesses. None of us is super-human. If your change journey is big, find someone to walk it with you. Look for someone who is objectively invested in your success; who will speak clearly, directly, and truthfully to you; and whom you respect.

## Have a Sanctuary

Each of us needs a sanctuary for our self-care. For some people, this is a place of religious worship: a temple, a mosque, or a church. Others find it in nature. Mine is on my yoga mat and

prayer bench; my son's is at the gym. Finding and staying connected to the spiritual side of yourself is an important element of self-care.

## Laugh

Really laugh. Belly laugh. Startle the people down the hall laugh. If you don't believe that "laughter is the best medicine," read *Anatomy of an Illness* by Norman Cousins. Laughter is healing. Don't be afraid to laugh. Don't hold in the laughter. Laugh.

## Lesson from a Landslide

Earlier I made reference to the Himalayan pilgrimage that I took in 2007. I thought that I would take this opportunity to share one of the lessons that remains deeply ingrained in who I am, and how I attempt to show up every day. Below is the original blog entry, written in real time.

*Traffic. Flooded roads. Travel delays. I am sure you have experienced them, as have I. However, never have I experienced them in the same way as in India.*

*Shortly after leaving for Gangotri, we find that the road ahead is blocked by a landslide. We turn around, and head back a few minutes to the last village we had passed. There is time for breakfast. As we enter the small eatery (I am not sure that I have ever seen an American equivalent), our guide and drivers have already started assisting the proprietor at the stove. Soon we are being served chai, freshly prepared bread, and butter. There is a school located up the hill behind us, and as we eat several boys come in to buy new pens. I am sitting at the front table, closest to the cash register, and observe these transactions. For most, it is a quick exchange, pen for rupees. Then one young boy, perhaps eight or nine years of age, comes in. He must try the pen, then another, and yet another. The clear plastic barrels, the colored caps, the ink are all the same yet he tests each one, comparing the results, before finally settling on one of them. I wonder whether this is a habit that will follow him through life, and how it will serve him.*

*Breakfast is leisurely. We know that when we get back on the road, it will be open, or it will still be blocked. There is no need to rush to find out.*

*In fact, we discover that the landslide that allowed us breakfast has been cleared. However, not many kilometers ahead there is another. This one is much more substantial. As we drive toward it we pass a huge bulldozer starting to warm up. It will be a few hours before we see it again. When we travel as far as we can, we pull to the side of the road and park. The parking is a bit random, some vehicles on one side of the road, some vehicles on the other. There are buses of pilgrims, taxis, motor scooters, cars, and*

*trucks. Everyone knows that we will be here for hours. I confirm that for myself firsthand when I walk down the road and see the massive rocks blocking our way.*

*Imagine this. You have a travel itinerary, a destination. The plan is to drive to Gangotri, drop some gear at a guesthouse, and begin the next trek. Instead, you and hundreds of others will be waiting for a significant period of time on a mountain road, a national highway no less. For us, the experience was very Indian, amazing, and thought-provoking.*

*Some took the opportunity to nap, either in their vehicles or along the rocks on the side of the road. Others read. People walked up and down, stopping to meet others and to talk. We had passed a waterfall shortly before we stopped. The sun was out, so it became a place for people to do their laundry. Some (myself included) set shoes and clothes out in the sun to dry. There was dancing and singing. There were processions of pilgrims. What was missing was the anger, the vitriol, the impatience, the honking of horns, the expressions of rage that such a circumstance would have elicited anywhere I had ever been before.*

*Eventually, the road is opened. It took a bulldozer, dynamite, and a large road crew. It is 3:10 in the afternoon; we have been here over six hours. People move back to their vehicles and, slowly, our pilgrimages resume. We reach our destination three hours later. Tonight we will spend at a guesthouse in Gangotri. Landslides happen, itineraries change. It is about the journey.*

Whether dealing with a major change, or just experiencing day-to-day life, the unanticipated happens. Plans and expectations are disrupted. It is amazing how much emotional (and sometimes physical) energy gets consumed when this happens. So many of us continue to be surprised by the surprises; indignant at the flight delay (or, as I witnessed once, indignant because travelers were delayed getting to the airport by snowy roads and their flight took off on time without them); frozen by disbelief when the promotion doesn't come...or the divorce papers do. We allow ourselves to be victimized by things we cannot control.

What if, instead, we were able to begin from a point of acceptance for what is? There are surprises; flights are delayed, even in the best of weather, and do depart on time even during storms; sometimes we don't get the job; sometimes relationships end.

I learned to play pinochle from my grandparents. My grandfather taught me, *You can't control the hand you are dealt; you can control how you play it.* Spending six hours on a national highway in India waiting for a landslide to be cleared brought that lesson home to me more deeply than it had ever touched me before. And, while it isn't always easy, it remains a lesson I attempt to apply every day. With the energy that is conserved, I can then look at how—given the circumstances—forward momentum can be restored.

## No Timeouts, No Substitutions

If you know Daryl Conner, you've heard this before. Daryl was my first true change mentor; I am 99.9% sure I heard "No time outs, no substitutions" in my first class with him in 1988. I still "hear" it in his writings and hear it in his speeches and conversations with clients on a regular basis.

*No time outs, no substitutions.*

It's a great sound bite. it conveys at least two important messages in five simple words. But, when it comes to change, what does it really mean? And, is it true?

### No Time Outs

I interpret this part of the statement in two different, and complementary, ways.

First, you can't take a time out from change...Many changes that affect you will continue to move forward, whether you engage with them or not. Social change—while it often feels like it is crawling for those engaged with it—is ongoing. Change in our organizations is a constant; this means for most of us who are other than self-employed, unemployed, or retired, we need to change to align with what our organizations are expecting of us, or we need to change the organization we are aligned with. Likewise, we experience some level of change in our personal lives, if only to keep up with those social and organizational changes that are shifting the world in which we live.

Then there are changes in our personal lives that we drive, or that others are driving but which affect us. Our children grow up, go away to school, move home again after graduation (or not) and start their own families. Divorce. Remarriage. New leisure activities, and/or major changes in the ones that we have engaged in for decades due to new technologies, new tools, and/or the demise of the old. A new home, or remodeling and renovation of the old one. The changes that pervade our personal lives are endless, leaving virtually every one of us, at some time or another, wishing we could just "close the door and hide from the world."

This leads to my second interpretation of "No time outs." We all know someone who has, at least to a significant degree, "closed the door and hid from the world." The problem with doing so for any period of time is that you end up causing yourself major change and stress in a totally unanticipated way...as you remain relatively static, the world around you continues to change. Inevitably, you become more and more isolated from that world as it becomes more and more distant to you.

*It's true. When it comes to change, there are no time outs.*

## No Substitutions

If you are touched by a change, you have one or more roles in it. Your role, or roles, are determined by the change and your relationship to it. While different change methodologies use different labels (and sometimes different definitions), there are two broadly defined change roles—"target" and "sponsor"—that I will briefly address here; the role labels and definitions come from the Conner Partners change methodology, but are found in many other approaches as well. As you will see, these roles are independent of the scope of the change (personal, organization, or societal).

The role that you will have, regardless of any other, is that of "target." Every change requires shifts in thinking and/or behavior for one or more individuals, the "targets" of the change. Whether you are initiating the change, advocating for it, or supporting its execution, it is likely that you will have to make changes in your own thinking and/or behavior for the change to be successful. There is no substitution; if you step away from the change—refuse to be a target—we are back to the second part of the "no time outs" conversation above; you are becoming the target of a different change.

"Sponsors" of change are those responsible for communicating the change, and for holding people accountable—through consequences—for its execution. Parents are often sponsors of change in their children's lives; you can't delegate parenting. Sometimes you are the target to yourself as a sponsor. For example, when you make the decision to change careers and return to school, others can cheer you on, or support you by taking over household chores and not disrupting you while you study...but you are the one that holds yourself accountable for whether or not you do study. No one can substitute for you in this sponsor role.

We often talk about change advocates and agents, along with targets and sponsors. To the degree that these individuals are outside of the change, they are replaceable. However, to the degree that they are themselves targets and/or sponsors of the change, there are no substitutions.

*It's true. When it comes to change, there are no substitutions.*

## Plateaus During Change: Both Asset and Liability

In *Mastery: The Keys to Success and Long-Term Fulfillment*, George Leonard writes, "If our life is good, a life of mastery, most of it will be spent on the plateau. If not, a large part of it may well be spent in restless, distracted, ultimately self-destructive attempts to escape the plateau."

But plateaus are not restricted to the mastery journey. Plateaus are inherent in the change journey as well. They can be exactly what we need. And, they can undermine our journey to success.

Plateaus allow us to stabilize, to strengthen our commitment. They prepare us to go deeper, further, higher than we have been able to go before. They are a place to rest in our weariness, and to launch our ascent to the next level.

Too often, however, a plateau can become the final destination. It can be the place where we plant the flag of victory, even though we haven't reached our intended destination. (We make the decision okay, proclaiming *I never thought I would make it this far.*) It can be the place where we stop until we answer all of the "what ifs" that lie ahead. (Of course, they will never all be answered.) It can be the place where our self-doubt takes hold, tying us to less than fully realizing our change objectives (while simultaneously proving itself as justified).

When you are planning your change journey, include your plateaus. Plan them as places to stabilize, to strengthen your commitment. Plan them as places where you prepare to go deeper, further, higher than you have been able to go before. Plan them as places to rest in your weariness, and to launch your ascent to the next level. Then, use them in the way that they are intended... Don't take up residence on the plateau. It is not the destination.

## Speaking of Communicating...

At the outset we talked about how to create and tell your change story. While this is a critical element of communicating your change, it is not the only one. There are also one-way communication; two-way communication; enlisting; and aligning words and actions. Each has its place when used effectively, and when used in balance. There are blogs, books, videos, guides, and research articles on all of these topics, so we aren't going into any of them in depth... I am, however, going to provide a few key points on each one that can make a significant difference in the success of your change journey.

### One-Way Communication

One-way communication can be—and very often is—used way too much.

There is a time and a place for the "rally to the cause speech." For a personal change, you may do your telling at the dinner table, or gathered together in the living room. And, whether telling the story in a small gathering or large, it is important that you be fully present with your audience, that you interact with them, respond to them and the ways in which they are responding to you, even as you communicate to them.

Most often, one-way communication takes the form of directives. Sometimes they are straightforward (*Get everything on the refrigerator to-do list completed this week*), and sometimes they are cloaked in more polite terms (*I would really appreciate it if you would get everything on the refrigerator to-do list completed this week*). In either case, there is no uncertainty about the expectation: complete the work on the list. Directives will often get you compliance; they don't generally do much in terms of building commitment.

However, there is one critically important time when one-way communication—as a precursor to two-way communication—is essential. Ultimately, you are the person accountable for the success (or failure) of the change. You have listened to others, reflected on what is in your heart, and have made the decision to move forward. That decision has to be communicated clearly and unequivocally. This isn't the time for *I've been thinking about...* or *I was wondering, what if...* It is time for, *I have decided...*

You may want to keep the door open for discussion on how to execute the change; in fact, this is something I would recommend. But, once the decision has been made, you don't want to open it up to question and challenge.

## Communication Goes Both Ways

It seems so obvious...but it's not. Why are you having the conversation? All too often, the people engaged in a discussion go into it with different assumptions about the roles each are playing and what that means to the outcome.

The most common misunderstanding has to do with decision-making. *Why does she ask our opinion? She never listens to us when it really matters!* Chatter like this takes place thousands of times a day. It fosters resentment, raises resistance, and eats at credibility. It is also easily addressed on the front end. Be explicit about why you are engaging people in conversation.

*I want your advice on a change that I am considering making. I will listen, and will weigh your input carefully...but it is my decision to make.*

*I have decided that we are moving forward with this change. I know that you have concerns, and it is important that we get them out on the table. I will work with you to figure out how we address them.*

*Right now it seems that each of us has our own priorities. The result is that we are working against one another, instead of supporting one another. We need to agree on what our priorities are as a couple.*

In each of these examples, the purpose of the conversation is made clear. It may be to inform a decision, to help make a decision, or to explore what will get in the way of successfully executing a decision that has already been made. At the end of the day, there is no question, though. Participants understand the roles they are to play in the discussion.

People resist change, whether they perceive it as negative or positive. If you don't see resistance, either the change is being executed at a superficial level, or the resistance is underground.

Two-way communication—when done in an open and trusting environment—is a means of both surfacing and addressing resistance. Again, you have to be explicit about the purpose of the conversation, e.g. *There is no question that the change is being made. What I am seeking is your input on the best way to move it forward.*

There are a few keys to successfully engaging people in this type of conversation. First, you need to be open to hearing what others have to say. If you do it for appearance-sake, you are undermining yourself and the change. Second, people need to be able to trust you if they are to be truthful with you; recognize and value—don't shoot—the messenger. Third, you need to respond to what you hear, and the sooner, the better; when you respond, be as explicit as possible.

*I hear your concern about the fact that you were not consulted on this decision. It was a highly personal one, and one that I had to make on my own. Now that it is made, I am open to working with you on how to carry it out.*

*I don't yet know which job offer I am going to take. That decision will be made within the next 5 days; as soon as it is, I will let you know.*

If you are going to successfully move through a change, maintain two-way communication with those who will be making the journey with you. It will help make the navigation a lot more sure.

## Enlist People in Your Change

Sometimes, communication isn't enough. Sometimes you need to enlist people to support your change.

Let's take a look at what it takes to enlist people.

The first step is to identify those you need to enlist; it isn't everyone. Because enlisting is time (and resource) intensive, you want to be selective.

At the personal change level, your focus may be exclusively on identifying the influencers. Begin with these questions: 1) Whose support do I need to make this change successful? 2) To whom will these people turn for guidance and direction related to this change? The people you identify in response to the second question are the people you need to enlist.

There are three principles that are critical to enlistment<sup>2</sup>.

First, it is a dialogue. Begin by laying out the intent of the change. Here you may want to reference, or even tell, your change story. Allow, and encourage, clarifying questions. The more deeply people understand your change – where you are going and why – the more fully they will be able to commit to supporting you as you take the journey.

Second, it is face-to-face, eye-to-eye, heart-to-heart. This is not something that can be done long distance, through emails, on the phone.

Third, your focus is on building their understanding of, and commitment to, your change.

Once you have laid out the change, there are three questions that you want to ask. Their sequence is important, because it helps frame how people will respond to what you have told them.

First, ask *What do you like most about what I have told you?*

Second, ask *What do you want to challenge?* Note that this is not “What don’t you like?” or “What would you change?” The question “What do you want to challenge?” makes clear that while you are open to hearing their voice, you are the decision-maker.

Third, ask *What else should I (we) consider as the change moves forward?*

Listen.

If you are not clear about what is being said, ask clarifying questions.

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<sup>2</sup> The enlistment process as I describe it here is based on Conner Partners’ enrollment process; while I have tailored it to address individuals, the fundamental principles and questions are the same.

Listen.

Don't judge. Don't reject what is being offered.

Listen.

My recommendation is to give people time to reflect on what they have heard before you take the next step...which is enlisting them to take action in support of your change. Best is overnight...“Think about it over lunch” doesn't give them enough time; “Let's get back together next week” is more time than is needed. When you get back together, be open to any questions they might have, answer them, and then ask for their commitment to support you. Be specific about what you want them to do, how you want them to express/demonstrate their commitment.

If you are applying this to a personal change, most of your enlistment sessions will be one-on-one. Different people will bring different perspectives to the change; you want to be able to tailor your responses to their individual frames of reference. (There may be times when a couple, or a group of friends, or members of a team you are on are enlisted together. Don't rule it out...though it is usually not the norm.)

## Stuck?

Stuck happens!

If your change is big, it is only a matter of time before you'll be stuck. It may be early on. Or, things may seem to be on track and moving along when suddenly they start going awry. Or, you may be moving toward the finish line when progress slows to a crawl, just stops, or even begins a backslide.

Stuck happens.

So, if stuck happens, what do you do to get unstuck?

What you shouldn't do is:

- Shoot the messenger
- Panic
- Start pointing fingers and finding blame

Begin by finding a quiet place...seriously. When stuck happens, don't jump into action. At best, you may fix some symptoms.

Start with some thoughtful reflection. What is it that is telling you that the change is stuck? Is it a feeling? Are there symptoms that you can call out, put your finger on? Are there actual metrics?

You may want to write the symptoms down, white board them, put them on stickies... But don't jump up and try to fix them. Remember, what you are seeing are symptoms, not the "thing" or "things" that are actually threatening change success.

What you need to uncover is the root cause. This may require you to look at the symptoms through a variety of lenses. Is it that the intent of the change isn't clear, and different people that you are counting on to support you are—in fact—working on different versions of the same change? Is it that people are shaking their heads *Yes* while waiting for the change to go away...they are not truly committed to it? Is it that the change is a really, really good idea, but you and/or others don't see it as imperative? Is it that people you need to take this journey with you just don't have the capacity for yet one more change? Is it that they have put all of the things that are needed in place, but haven't planned for—or worked on—the needed changes in thinking and acting that will actually deliver the benefits of the change?

Ask questions. Dig deeper. If it will help, find someone who is not invested in the success of the change to help you explore the reasons you are stuck.

*What you are really digging for are not the behaviors that have brought the change to the point of "stuck," but the mindsets that are driving those behaviors.* Stuck is the result of how you and/or others are thinking about the change, and what is being done (or not) as a result of that thinking! If you only work to change the behaviors, you will find yourself stuck again...perhaps even more deeply than you are now.

Once you understand why the change has become stuck, you can figure out a path to getting it back on track. You may need to go back to the beginning, starting with developing greater clarity about the change. It may mean that you need to let go of things, or people, that you have been holding onto for many years. It may mean that you need to strengthen the consequences: positive for those who are actively supporting the change, and negative for those who are not. It may mean any number of changes in thinking and action required of you for the change to become unstuck.

*Whatever it means, plan it. Then do it.*

If the change is really that important, then as difficult as it may be to get unstuck, you are going to have to take the necessary action. Even though the cost of doing so may be high, the cost of not doing so will be even higher.

Stuck happens. Becoming unstuck is up to you.

## Work Your Plan One Week at a Time

Undertaking a big change is daunting; it can seem overwhelming. In general, my recommendation is to work your plan one week at a time. (Here I am focusing on change at the individual level...if you are leading your organization through change, much of what I am offering here can be applied—with some translation—as well.)

Momentum is important during change. Move too fast and you may get all of the pieces in place, but never achieve the actual outcomes that you are seeking. Move too slow, and your change is likely to grind to a halt.

Taking a week-by-week approach, with your installation (what you are putting in place) and realization (what you are actually setting out to achieve) milestones in mind helps to maintain momentum. Think about it. *In the next month I am going to update my resume* doesn't quite drive action the same way as *This week I am going to make 15 networking calls*.

You may or may not have any realization milestones that you plan to meet each week; you should definitely have installation milestones for yourself. Quoting from Wikipedia, "A milestone is one of a series of numbered markers placed along a road or boundary...Milestones are constructed to provide reference points along the road. This can be used to reassure travelers that the proper path is being followed, and to indicate either distance traveled or the remaining distance to a destination."

Using milestones on a weekly basis allows you to know not only that you are actively doing things, but that you are on "the proper path."

So why not create milestones for every day? Generally, unless you are in a position to control virtually every aspect of your day, daily milestones become burdensome; they are too easy to not achieve as other day-to-day things come up; and, the discouragement of not achieving them can drain energy and actually get in the way of forward momentum.

That being said, I will sometimes work with a client to create "buckets of activity," with the goal of accomplishing something out of each bucket on a daily basis. For example, someone who is looking to build a brand presence using social media might have one bucket for Twitter, one for

LinkedIn, one for their business's Facebook page, etc. Rather than spending every spare minute for a week strengthening their LinkedIn presence—and losing connection with their followers on the other media—my recommendation is to ensure that they do at least one thing out of each of the other buckets every day as well.

Your weekly milestones allow you flexibility over when you undertake your change-related tasks. If today is lost to unexpected overtime at work, or unanticipated disruptions at home (or both), you still have the remainder of the week to complete the work that you have set out for yourself.

What happens if, week after week, you are not meeting your milestones? If you find yourself in this situation, it is likely that one of two things is going on.

1. You are setting your weekly expectations too aggressively relative to what you are able to deliver. You either need to re-calibrate your expectations of what you can get done in a week, or you need to look at what you can take off the plate so that you can meet your targets. Then, you need to actually take things off the plate!
2. Your change is a good idea, but not imperative. The other things in your life that are taking your time, energy, focus, etc. away from this change outweigh the importance of the change you are working on. It is time to either lower your expectations for this change, or to put it aside.

If, on the other hand, you are completing everything you have set out to achieve mid-week each week, you should be accelerating your plan. You are not setting your weekly goals high enough. They should be both challenging and achievable.

There is another reason to work your plan one week at a time...things don't always go as planned. I am currently working with a client whose "buckets" include addressing certain aspects of his health. When he encountered an unanticipated delay in his surgery he had two choices...push his entire plan back by months, or accelerate other aspects of the plan to fill in the intervening weeks. My encouragement is, always, to maintain the forward momentum.

Finally, working your plan one week at a time helps you maintain your boundaries. It tells you when to take a break and rest for the next week; it helps you to avoid burn-out. When the only thing that we have in mind is the desired end state, the urge to be constantly working can drive you in unhealthy ways. Being able to say, *I have accomplished what I set out to do this week. I am proud of myself, and can see the progress. Now I deserve a break*, is a much healthier approach.

## Your Change Leadership Through Their Eyes...

How important is the change to you? How invested are you in its success? What price are you willing to pay? If you are leading change in your personal life), ask yourself this question. *How do others see me in relation to this change?*

What you communicate and how you communicate it are critical to change success. And as is so often the case, "actions speak louder than words." Perception is reality.

Take a look at yourself through their eyes...

*Where are you investing your time?*

Carefully review your calendar, the conversations you have, how you are spending your time. How much of your time is invested in this imperative change? How much of your time are you spending on less important things?

If it is a truly critical change, the answer better be, "It is getting a substantial amount of my time." There is no formula for how much time that should be. But if you are not visibly investing your time and attention in the change, you are signaling others it isn't really as important as you say it is.

*What is being celebrated?*

If you are celebrating what was important, rather than what will be important in the success of the change, you are undermining what the change is intended to achieve. If this is your change, you need to be celebrating progress toward the success of the change, not anchors from the past. (If those anchors warrant celebration at all – which they might – then celebrate letting them go.)

*What is being measured?*

If you aren't measuring results, you won't get them for very long, if at all. As we have already addressed, installation is necessary, but not sufficient, to yield realization of the change benefits. You need to plan for both, track both, and hold yourself (and others if appropriate) accountable to both.

*How much real listening is going on?*

It is vital that you regularly check in to see how your messages are being received. Your messaging has to continue to adjust to what people are hearing and believing.

*What questions are you asking?*

The questions you ask reflect your priorities. If all (or most) of your questions are about insignificant things, how much priority will people perceive the change has for you?

*What stories are you listening to, and what stories are you telling?*

Stories are powerful. Are your stories about “the good old days,” or are they about the future that you are building? Are you content to sit and listen to stories about the way things used to be? Or, are you asking others to tell you stories about the journey into the future?

## Additional learning that supports you as you *Take the Journey*

- *...And Then the Hard Drive Failed (Plan the Journey)*
- *A Few Reminders: Key Change Principles (Create Your Change Story)*
- *Are You Talking With the Right People? (Create Your Change Story)*
- *Change: What's Poetry Got to Do With It? (Prepare for the Journey)*
- *Character and Presence: Guest Post (Prepare for the Journey)*
- *Cultivate Presence: The Body (Prepare for the Journey)*
- *Don't Focus on Breaking Old Habits (Prepare for the Journey)*
- *Every Big Change Needs a Roadmap (Create Your Change Story)*
- *How Often Are You Present With Yourself? (Create Your Change Story)*
- *Is Your Change at Risk of Falling into a Black Hole? (Plan the Journey)*
- *Rembrandt Didn't Paint By Numbers (Plan the Journey)*
- *Resistance Is! (Plan the Journey)*
- *The Future Ain't What It Used to Be (Create Your Change Story)*
- *Track Your Path to Success (Organizational Change) (Plan the Journey)*
- *Track Your Path to Success (Personal Change) (Plan the Journey)*
- *What Does Mary Think? (Prepare for the Journey)*
- *What Would Steve Do? (Prepare for the Journey)*
- *Where Are Your Boundaries? (Plan the Journey)*
- *Who Do You Listen To? (Plan the Journey)*