



The Most Powerful Means To Effect Change

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Table of Contents

<i>Introduction</i>	1
<i>Dream Fade</i>	1
<i>Doing v. Valuing</i>	2
<i>Belief Inspired Values</i>	3
<i>The Power of Beliefs</i>	4
<i>Worldview Creating Belief</i>	5
<i>Breaking With Past Understanding</i>	6
<i>Coaching Directives</i>	8
<i>References</i>	13



1

The Most Powerful Means to Effect Change

In 1966 the Torrance® Tests of Creative Thinking were designed to test the creative or divergent thinking of children between kindergarten and 12th grade. Over a quarter of a million children have been tested across five decades including numerous adaptions to the original test.

What has been continuously apparent is creativity tends to decrease as education increases. There were marked declines between kindergarten and 3rd grade and after 6th grade.

Dream Fade

Many have noted a similar reality as it relates to idealism or dreams. As people progress through adulthood, life experience has a way of sucking the vibrancy from once lofty goals. But for those who remain undaunted by the obstacles, the challenge becomes how to maintain creativity and dreams in the face of a tidal wave of inertia. Whether it is establishing a new business, reinvigorating an old one, or more personally doing the same thing with relationships, how do I accomplish change?

What needs to change of course depends on where the problem lies. Initially, our thought is to question our circumstances. Yes, there are real threats and obstacles that relate to our circumstances. But then again, we are not the only business to face these circumstances, and some of them have been successful even with less than conducive settings.

So our thoughts shift toward staffing. Clearly, getting the right people around you is essential. But how do we get there? Is that merely a product of the right abilities, the right strengths, and the right personalities being in the right places? Jim Collins is renowned for his word picture of good to great businesses being about getting the right people on the bus – about getting the who before the what. But who determines who or what is right?

When you get down to it, Harry S. Truman had it right with the sign he placed on his desk in the Oval Office. "The buck stops here." Ultimately, we discover the most essential change we must effect is our own.



2

Where do I start? And after dealing with simpler changes that one would describe as the low hanging fruit, how do I impact the more core level actions that need to adjust if I am to be effective?

What is your answer?

What follows could be one of the most powerful developments in the way you approach change.

Insanity has been defined as doing the same thing over and over again and expecting different results. While who penned those words is in question, the challenge is fitting.

Both business and personal development can be measured by the ability to achieve improved results. If you accept the insanity definition, growth requires a personal change in our actions. That belief is atleast more effective than wishing for different circumstances. Taking responsibility for results based on my own actions is a powerful step, but how do I change the actions that created those results?

Doing v. Valuing

Aside from your heart beating or breathing while you are sleeping, every action you take reflects that you value something. At the core, we are not actors; we are valuers. We value things and that is why we act the way we do.

The president of one organization told me they had experienced significant growth early on but had but had been followed by an extended bout of stagnation. While there are always external obstacles and threats to point to, central to their struggles was staffing and management issues.

Initially they had been able to fill leadership positions from within, but over time the necessary leadership professionalism outstripped the available talent pool. Opening up their hiring to outside the organization gave them a drastically greater opportunity for talent. The competence and apparent capacity of the new hires was invigorating.



But as they began stepping outside of the people developed from within the organization, they also began stepping outside of a value base that had defined who they were.

They had hired talent but had failed to understand the value systems that drove the talent. As a result, their issue moved from insufficient ability, to incompatible values. And value conflict was creating action conflict. The outcome was repeated leadership turnover and internal leadership conflict.

No matter what your competency, you cannot consistently act in contradiction to your values – even if you realize your values are distorted or even if at some level you understand the counterproductive nature of your values. Unless you experience value shift, you will not experience permanent action shift.

Our failure to move actions regularly stems from attempting to adjust behavior while understanding little of the values that inspired the behavior. This is true whether the action involves a boss trying to guide an employee or a personal attempt at change.

Belief Inspired Values

Yet, the process does not end with your values.

Just as your actions are value statements, so your values are belief statements.

As you begin to see the connection between values and actions, the next step is understanding that every value you have is the result of something you believe to be true. Just as your actions are value statements, so your values are belief statements. Your values are no more apparitions that appear out of the mist without underlying beliefs than your actions are surprises that occur without underlying values.

It is a powerful revelation to understand that your actions are value inspired. But real value shift only happens as beliefs shift.

Back in the early 60's Thomas Kuhn coined the phrase "paradigm shift" in his book, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*,¹ but it wasn't until the 80's that its use came into vogue. Soon everyone was talking about paradigm shift.



4

Paradigm shift is a radical change in underlying beliefs or theory.² It occurs when the underlying assumptions change producing a fundamental change in approach. In order to succeed, businesses realized they had to question their answers. They could not just change what they were doing; they had to change what they believed or assumed to be true. Put simply, paradigm shift is belief shift.

To experience paradigm shift felt romantic - especially to a new generation wishing to look at business differently. Companies began taking a look at things like core values, and core values spoke to belief. They looked at corporate culture, and their corporate culture was a reflection of belief. They did not necessarily see the complete connection. They just understood when paradigms shift, when core values become internalized, when corporate culture changes – the actions and success of the company changes.

The Power of Beliefs

How powerful are beliefs?

A man knows that he needs to lose weight. For years he talks about the importance of it, plans for it, gets gym memberships, and starts diets. And while his weight may fluctuate, he always ends up about where he started or maybe a little worse.

One day, having recently heard his daughter and son-in-law were going to be giving him his first granddaughter, he has a heart attack. The doctor gives him a clear ultimatum, either lose weight or die. His ability to lose weight is transformed in a moment. The belief in the value of being a grandparent alters his belief in the value of eating what he wants when he wants.

This scenario happens all the time, though not always as traumatically. Belief changes produce action changes.

Raghu Krishnamoorthy wrote in the *Harvard Business Review* about GE's culture challenge after the successful tenures of Welch and Immelt,



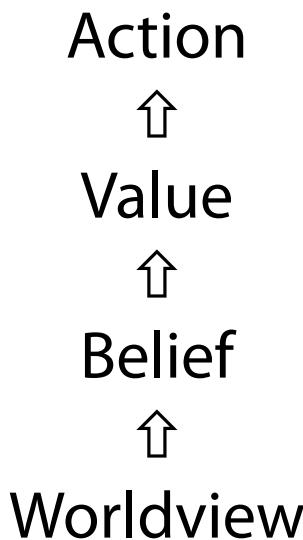
How do long-established companies make this transformation? How do they understand the need to change and create the energy and urgency around it? How do they match a shift in strategy (which is called for in times of change) with a shift in culture? I suspect that many organizations get into trouble not because of a failed strategy but because of a frozen culture.³

Raghu makes a clear distinction between structure [defining actions] and culture [defining belief] and indicates the prime issue is culture not structure. He goes on to describe how they are approaching change,

To facilitate this new operating model, we have had to create a new cultural template that demands new ways of behaving. We even called our new cultural orientation "the GE Beliefs" to ensure that people changed their frame of thinking to the new way.⁴

Action Food Chain

Adjust your focus for effecting change from actions to values to beliefs.



Worldview Creating Belief

The farther you go down the action food chain, the more powerful and the more permanent the change you can create.

Effect actions – create obvious but habitually fickle change.

Effect values – create extended but culturally fluctuating change.

Effect beliefs – create deep lasting change.

The problem is how do you really know beliefs? It is one thing to discern our own beliefs; quite another to understand someone else's.

According to sociologists, there is yet a deeper level. You believe what you do because of what sociologists call worldview. We might call it soul. It is the "why" behind how you see the world the way you do. It is the core, the heart level of you.

Have you ever wondered how someone can be so absolutely convinced of something you know is absolutely wrong? Take politics: Democrat,



Republican, Libertarian, Socialist, Tea Party, and on it goes - so many people, so completely convinced of things that disagree. How can that be? We all live in the same world.

Why do you see the world the way you do? What if your worldview or those of your employees have been distorted by bad experiences or bad information?

At the core of our beliefs resides this soulish, worldview level. And it is challenging to discover what it is, how we arrived at it, or even what motivates it.

Jeremiah, the Old Testament prophet, described it this way, "The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure. Who can understand it?" [Jeremiah 17:9, NIV]

Dale Carnegie quoted JP Morgan as saying, "A person usually has two reasons for doing a thing: one that sounds good and a real one."⁵

Richard Taylor writes in *The Disciplined Life*, "Too often the mind serves only the purpose of devising excuses for doing what the heart wants to do."⁶

The farther we move from actions to values, to beliefs, to worldview the more reticent we are to change. It gets more personal, more central to how we see ourselves, to what we think defines us.

You need a source of authority outside of yourself to clarify reality – something you give the right to challenge even your deepest most fundamental beliefs. Discovering this is essential, but we will leave that for the focus of another paper.

Breaking With Past Understandings

Here is our predicament. We don't have a complete understanding of cause and effect. We hear Einstein's insanity challenge and we think, "I've got to change what I'm doing!"



7

The Most Powerful Means to Effect Change

Because our assessment of the source of the problem is inaccurate – so is our solution.

If I assume my actions are action islands, unrelated entities, I will attempt to externally motivate my change. But if I understand my actions are sourced in my beliefs, I can begin to look for the real solution – core level belief change.

Approach your actions as evidence of belief - not merely as problems to be solved. Your actions, the actions of your team, or that of your company very well may need to change, but they are symptoms not sources.

Your issue is not that you are doing the wrong things. Neither is your problem that your actions don't line up with your beliefs. Your challenge is your actions line up with your beliefs, but you have the wrong or conflicting beliefs.

Your challenge is you are valuing the wrong things because your beliefs are skewed. Take a look at the actions you want to change, the business environment you want to adjust – and discover the beliefs that inspire your present actions and business culture.

Look for distorted or conflicting beliefs.

Jesus, the ultimate clarifier of character, put it this way, "The good man brings good things out of the good stored up in his heart, and the evil man brings evil things out of the evil stored up in his heart. For out of the overflow of his heart his mouth speaks [Luke 6:45]."

You are a believer, not merely an actor. Affect your beliefs. Your actions will change.



8

Coaching Directives

Og Mandino, in his classic book, *The Greatest Salesman in the World*, tells the story of Hafid, a poor camel boy who achieves lofty success. The book is a parable that tells of ten scrolls that hold the secrets to great sales. Scroll number nine challenges the reader to repeat one commitment – “I will act now.”

In order to catalyze our personal and business development it is essential to act on what we learn. In fact, it is doubtful that we truly learn something unless we act on it.

Each virtual leadership coaching module ends with process oriented questions that are similar to questions you would receive in one-on-one coaching.

In order for this process to be impactful, you must have a sufficient degree of pain tolerance. Samuel Chand wrote a book, *Leadership Pain: The Classroom for Growth*. One of the primary reasons we are where we are is because of the level to which we have been willing to experience the pain of discipline, internal and external resistance to change, and setbacks.

I had to smile when I looked at my Thesaurus’ list of synonyms for “impact.” Two categories: one under the word “influence.” The other – “crash!” If you are going to be effective, you must be willing to experience the natural collisions that will occur between your present you and the new you you will become.

The beauty of growth is the joy of the impact it can bring, but the process to get there is what makes it an exclusive club. Anyone can join, you merely must be willing to pay the entrance fee.

What follows is the beginning of your entrance fee. Ignore what follows or approach it lightly and you stay where you are. Seriously commit to the process, and the door begins to open to what you will become.

You will find that the most powerful changes actually are the ones that are fundamentally contrary to your tendencies and often come with a degree of internal resistance. Don’t be repelled or diverted by this sense



9

of internal resistance. Know that it is the price of all great development.

The following questions are process oriented questions. That is, they are meant not merely to be answered but to be processed. Each coaching module is designed to last two weeks. This is your first.

In addition, similar to a gym membership, the greatest impact will come if you work consistently and partner with someone else. The virtual coaching memberships are individual memberships, but to help you partner with another person, we have multi-membership discounts. At a minimum we encourage you to connect with someone who will hold you accountable for your processing of these steps.

Fully answer each question before proceeding to the next.

1. What are the top 3 habits or actions you want to change?
2. Prioritize these. Of these 3, which has the potential for the greatest return on investment if you were to change it? If you are partnering with someone else, have them answer this question for you as well. Do your answers agree?
3. Begin with this habit.

In an interview with Harvard Business Review, Charles Duhigg, said this *...habits are a big deal..., because about 40% to 45% of what we do every day sort of feels like a decision, but it's actually habit. But equally importantly, habits are a really big deal within companies. And we know this because in the last 10 or 15 years there's been this real wealth of an explosion in research in looking at organizational routines or organizational habits and trying to understand how those influence how work gets done. And what we've learned is that a huge amount of whether a company succeeds or fails is based not on sort of the big strategy decisions that people make, but on the habits that emerge within the organization.⁷*

[Duhigg is a reporter for The New York Times and author of The Power of Habit: Why We Do What We Do in Life and Business.]



10

4. Why do you think you need to change this habitual action?

5. What are the effects this action is having on your present life? For example, how has it affected your success in attaining your goals?

6. What about doing life the old way did you like? What is it that you value that makes you want to approach life the old way?

Note: Psychologists indicate that every habit has a cue (a trigger), a routine (the habit), and a reward (how we feel we benefit). Even silly habits have apparent benefits. Procrastination has the benefit of an easier life now (play now – pay later).

No matter how negative the old habit has been, everything we repeat has payoffs. If it didn't, we would not have repeated it. So what were the old habit's payoffs?

7. Expand on your belief. Why you believed this particular action is better also speaks to what you believe is true about life and the world. How would you define your worldview in regard to this belief? What has this habit said regarding what you believe is true about the world? For instance, procrastination can be an indication of a low view of the value of my life in regard to the rest of the world. I procrastinate because I don't believe my actions can have significance, so I might as well have fun for the moment.

Note: unless you get to the belief behind your actions, any change will be superficial.

8. What about that belief is faulty?

List the top three negative consequences of your previous belief.

List two things that illustrate that your previous belief is inaccurate.

9. What do you believe is actually true? Why?

10. What do you believe is a better way of approaching life?

List as many positive consequences as you can think of regarding your new habit, your new way of approaching life. Focus on the top three.



11

11. You have a direct connection with your actions. You can choose an action. You have an indirect connection with your beliefs. Belief is not a light switch that you can flip. Because of that, affecting your beliefs is a process.

What you immerse yourself in becomes what you believe. However brilliant and discerning we may assume ourselves to be, we are effectible. Choose what is affecting you.

Start simple. By simple, I don't mean simplistic or shoddy. Rather, discover a source that you trust implicitly that succinctly articulates what you are pursuing. Extract from this source a quote or pithy saying that defines the new belief or value you wish to develop. This is important to do well. Take your time. Choose carefully. It will become the banner you will follow. If the source is not one you truly trust, you are fooling yourself and just playing a game. If the quote is does not challenge you, you undercutting your potential for movement.

Shortcut this process and not only will you blunt the effectiveness of it, but you will also miss out on an opportunity to clearly identify what it is you are pursuing. For Hafid, the poor camel boy, one of his was "I will act now." It spoke to the importance of today.

Make it visible. Post it. Make it a screen saver. Get creative. Whatever you need to do, get this in front of you constantly. Physically put it where you will regularly live out the habitual change you wish to create.

Again, it is essential that you trust the source of your quote. In essence, you are establishing it as your source of authority. Because significant change is often contrary to your prior tendencies, having a source of authority outside of yourself is essential to the process.

Everyone by default tends toward a final source of authority. Discovering your source is key. This is the focus of a future coaching session.

12. Begin each day for the next two weeks focusing on that quote. Beyond Sunday, Inc. is a faith-based organization. We have found it dramatically enhances change to pursue God to catalyze your change. Pause and pray daily for the desire and ability to follow through.



12

The Psalmist (likely David, the most impactful King in the history of Israel) wrote, ⁹⁷ “Oh, how I love your law! I meditate on it all day long.” ⁹⁸ Your commands are always with me and make me wiser than my enemies [we might say competitors]. ⁹⁹ I have more insight than all my teachers, for I meditate on your statutes. ¹⁰⁰ I have more understanding than the elders, for I obey your precepts [Psalm 119:97-100 NIV].” (bracketed words added)

King David had absolute confidence in the reliability of the directives God had given through the law, and he focused on them continuously. According to him, this approach radically enhanced both his wisdom and his follow-through (obedience).

The more you immerse yourself, the greater the potential for belief change, the greater the potential for change.

The most powerful means of effecting change in your actions is changing the beliefs that have inspired your actions. Your belief change will be generated by committing to a focus change. Focus well.



13

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