White Paper

How to Change Behaviour

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Most problems don't need new technology, tools, data or processes as much as they need people to change what they DO. Leaders need to be skillful in influencing others to change their behaviour in order to achieve goals.

Simple, quick fix, 'single source influence strategies' don't work with complex problems. Anything from losing weight to changing the culture of an organisation is a complex behaviour change problem and requires an appropriate strategy.

The key to success is to create sustainable change in the few key behaviours that give most leverage toward results. There are three steps in the process.*

1. Identify your goal in clear, compelling, value laden language.
2. Identify the few vital behaviours that will give most leverage toward the goal. Work on the 80:20 principle, looking for crucial moments, behaviours that reverse norms and obvious behaviours that can easily be overlooked.
3. Use at least 4 of the 6 sources of influence in a change strategy.

As you make progress, measure it frequently and accurately, using measures that drive the right behaviour.

The six sources of influence are taken from individual psychology, social psychology and organisation theory. Combined in a coherent strategy, they over-determine success.

1. Personal Motivation - stress the positive, long term, big benefits of success. Turn the goal into something people enjoy.
2. Personal Ability – build competence that leads to confidence and pleasure from the effort. Work on creating success experiences.
3. Social motivation – check the norms that operate in a group and whether they work for or against the desired change in behaviour.
4. Social ability – identify people who support change; and those who block it.
5. Structural motivation – make sure incentives and rewards support change
6. Structural ability – modify the environment so it makes change easier and the old behaviour more difficult.

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Personal motivation

- Start by **not** assuming that people behave 'badly' because of some moral defect or inherent personal characteristic.
- Allow people choice in how they manage their own behaviour, so they are committed. Use empathy, not judgment, to find out what's really important and what they want to change.
- Let their own aspirations drive them. Connect their behaviour change to personal values and aspirations.
- Invite people *to* 'just try it.' Give them first hand experience of the changed behaviour.
- Use stories to provide vicarious experiences that evoke real emotions.
- Create games to add fun to the process; with goals, scores, competition.

Personal ability

- Learning a new skill is not a function of motivation, personality or character. It's a function of ability.
- Just do it. Practice creates competence and confidence. Fear of failure prevents us getting started.
- Deliberately practice the specifics of what you don't know. Get competent feedback.
- You often need to speak up to an authority figure to overturn cultural norms. That is a skill in itself that requires practice.
- Leadership too is a performance art needing practice and feedback.
- Don't rely on willpower. Rather use distractions creatively to make a difficult behaviour change easier and more interesting.

Social Motivation

- You need skill, courage, respect and credibility to speak up in support of changing norms: but one person speaking honestly can make all the difference.
- Unhealthy norms are barriers to change: conspiracies of silence protect bad norms. If you don't talk about things you can't change them: so speak up.
- Use humour, social and industrial theatre to bring the un-discussable into the open.
- Make people totally accountable by surrounding them with 'an unrelenting wave of social praise and social punishment' until you make change the path of

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least resistance. New norms take hold once people start to defend them by holding others accountable for them.

Social ability

- Friends and colleagues provide social capital. It enables or inhibits behaviour change through brain power, strength, experience, physical resources and networks. In new and novel situations several heads are better than one.
- Some people are part of the problem; blocking, ridiculing, or using malicious behaviour to stand in the way of change.
- Social capital can hold everyone in a group together. If one fails, all fail, and reputations are damaged. Business incubators work on social capital in a network of shared expertise.
- Coaches and friends can help with feedback on blind spots and specific problem behaviours where you need to learn fast.

Structural motivation

- Structural motivation removes disincentives so change can take place.
- Once people are motivated, incentives and rewards can be used to sustain behaviour change.
- Small incentives and rewards, for example flier miles and loyalty points, influence behaviour very effectively.
- Rewards can be symbolic, for example gold paper stars, badges, T-shirts.
- Use incentives to recognize small improvements immediately. Don't wait for final achievement of the ultimate goal.
- Don't overlook the very powerful, positive effect of praise. The impact of punishment is unpredictable.

Structural ability - change the space

- Change things, not people. It can be easier to change things than to train and motivate people to change. Things don't resist change and they stay changed. Often we overlook them as 'players' in the whole system of behaviour.
- It's important to notice how the environment affects you, positively and negatively. Micro wave cooking, TV sets in bedrooms and personal computing systems have radically changed the concept of family life. Working from home has an equally dramatic effect on work culture.

- You can manage the environment to make desired behaviour easy: keeping drug addicts away from users to help them control their addiction; removing sweets from desktops, and chocolate machines from corridors to assist dieters.
- Use calendared events and positive rituals to encourage specific behaviour.

Within these six sources of influence are many ideas and strategies you can use to create and sustain behaviour change. The more of them you apply, the more influence you will bring to bear.

The only limitations are your own creativity.