ignite. involve. inspire.

Positive Change

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Brain Science: The amygdala, part of our limbic systems, is primarily focused on survival. It gives us energy to protect ourselves by pumping adrenaline and cortisol into our bodies for energy and decreased pain sensitivity. It is responsible for survival, eating and mating. It cannot tell the difference between a life and death threat and an emotional one. So it often reacts as if there is far more danger than there is.

Caveman: We nicknamed the amygdala the "Caveman" because of its high emotion and lack of thought when activated. It triggers the Fight, Flight and Freeze responses. These rush through our bodies in milliseconds, before our conscious mind can make meaning of the situation.
These can cause a decrease in working memory[28] that can last 18 minutes. Our ability to see multiple options drops from 16 to 9 to 3 to 1; and that one response will be fight, flight or freeze.

Venting: Venting is a natural reaction to an F Response. If done well it can help diffuse an F Response. If done poorly it aggravates the F Response; for oneself, the listener, and the subject of the venting. Our guideline: Any way of expressing emotion is helpful–as long as no one gets hurt.
Suggestion: Ask your close friends, "Can I vent? Don't take what I'm about to say as my actual opinion. I just need to blow off steam."
Talk about your emotions and perceptions rather than name calling and blaming.
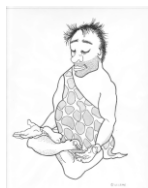
Calm the Caveman: Our parasympathetic nervous system sends out biochemicals that help us relax, recharge and refocus. They help us think more calmly and clearly[29].
When we balance the energy of the Caveman and the calm of the Thinker we can achieve a solution-focus. Plus, a solution-focus helps us to find this balance. It works both ways. This is one of the many wonders of how our bodies work.
Some ways of calming the caveman are: slow, deep breathing; positive imagery; taking a break from a situation; stretching, emotionally enriching experiences; thinking about the positive traits/accomplishments of the person you're upset with; soothing music… and a solution-focus.

The Power of Focus: The human brain can only take in so much data at once. What we unconsciously or purposely focus on ends up limiting our ability to see other things[30]. So what happens when we choose to look mostly at negatives or limitations? What happens when we focus mostly on success? Choosing to focus on solutions enables us to see opportunities that we may have otherwise missed.

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Positive Change Questions: Create positive direction, momentum and creativity–fast. Goals? This question can focus us on long-term objectives or the next action we need to do. It gets us back on track. What works? This helps us build upon momentum by first asking about our past successes and current strengths; then broadens our focus by learning from others' best practices. What else? This gets us brainstorming new ideas, adapting past practices and innovating. This is a more positive way to create solutions for a "gap" – with creating defensiveness for those who we think created the gap. This is also where we focus on our next steps–keep moving.

Bowling Study: In one study researchers used video to record a bowling match. For the one team, they edited out everything done right and used the traditional training method of showing the team its mistakes and strategizing how to correct them. For the second team, the experimenters edited out all of the mistakes and showed the team the film of everything they had done right. While both teams improved …   The team seeing what they did right had 100% greater improvement than did the team that was shown its mistakes.[4]

10:1 - Ideal Positive:Negative Balance: Using a "Capture Lab" researchers[22] saw a strong average correlation between positive language and performance. Low performing teams communicated 1 positive for every 3 negatives – 1:3; Medium teams averaged 2:1; High performing teams ranged from 6:1 to 11:1. Too much positive, 12:1 or more, "calcifies a team", making necessary change and adaptation difficult.
Sustainable marriages[18] apparently need at least 5 times as many positive emotions regarding one's partner as negative–5:1.

Problem focus often does work. It is a legitimate and natural approach. Drawbacks: It usually takes a longer to get to the solution. It creates more resistance along the way. Advantages: It is more intuitive, particularly under pressure. There are times where a brief time focusing on the problem is necessary before moving to solution focus; specifically venting, acknowledgment, empathy and/or apologies. These may be helpful at times to rebuild trust and get back to a solution-focus. At times analyzing past problems may yield useful data.

Mental Screen: Our body follows the image on our "internal screen". Highly successful athletes often visualize successfully accomplishing each step before attempting it. Jack Nicklaus wrote, "What we tell ourselves causes the whole body to respond to what the mind imagines is possible."[24]
Words create mental images and feeling states. Negative words such as "stop", "avoid" and "don't" try to negate them. The brain immediately sends out emotion biochemicals in response to imagery – creating feeling states within milliseconds. Plus, the brain does not know how to negate a mental image.
E.g., when we say to a child, "No, do not go into the swimming pool," the child's mental image is going into the swimming pool. Therefore, saying not to do something urges our body to do the very thing we want to avoid. Instead say what you do want done.

Positive Change

Placebo Effect on Us: We all have an "inner newsreel" going continuously in our minds, projecting ahead of ourselves both optimistic and fearful images. Scientific research is full of examples of our beliefs and internal images heavily influencing our capabilities. The placebo effect even helps people recover from many illnesses. Research on patients recovering from heart surgery has shown that; those who fared the most poorly had a 1:1 ratio of good:bad images or worse; those that recovered the best had a 2:1 ratio of good:bad images.

Placebo Effect on Others: Teachers in one experiment were told that certain children were gifted, and certain children had difficulty learning. In truth all the children were randomly selected. The teachers unconsciously began to treat these two groups differently. Even more remarkable was how the teachers' actions affected the children. The "gifted" children's performance improved and the "difficult" students' performance deteriorated. The effects, positive and negative, lasted for years.[25][26] In a 2007 article one student admits that he is still negatively. One poll of fortune 500 senior executives revealed that every one had a mentor that believed in them when they first started managing.

Placebo Principles: We form certain expectations of people or events. We communicate those expectations with various cues. People tend to respond to these cues by adjusting their behavior to match them. This is especially true for those who depend on us. They even adjust their self-concept!

Reframing: Reframing our language helps us to influence the mental images that we and others see. This can make a huge difference in how others perceive us and what we're telling them. This is also true with family and friends. This truly can help "Make Friends and Influence People". Because of our caveman, our immediate gut reactions are often to focus on risks and only see problems. This can quickly create F Responses in ourselves and others. Solution-Focus reframes focuses people's minds on the goals and how to achieve them.

Power Reframes: This tool can create more motivation, guide positive action more powerfully and have a longer lasting affect than regular reframes. This is done by creating multiple positive images and feeling states. The first images influence every one after that. Thus the key is putting the benefits FIRST. This helps to create positive images and feeling states before talking about the actions.

Positive Change Principles: These are keys to motivating busy people. Take the time to make goals clear and simple. The easier it is to contribute the more people do. Make starting steps doable and clear. Make sure people feel confident enough in their role. Frame goals, directions and other communication positively. Steady guidance at a strategic level keeps people on track and confident in success. Make questions specific, positive and generative

Positive Change

Ignite: It is critical to partner with leadership to ensure they will provide the necessary resources and motivation. Help them by igniting passion for their goals in your communication with them and others. Help them identify the quickest path to reach those goals. Start communications stating the benefits to the group your communicating with. Build on the best of your organization's DNA.

F x A x C x E x S > Resistance. Change is difficult. You will face resistance. The synergy created by solid use of the following 5 items will help you overcome resistance.

Fundamentals of Identity: Everyone in the organization must buy into the organizational DNA: Core Purpose – why we exist. Core Values – how we behave as we fulfill our purpose. This allows us to change many things and still be true to ourselves.

What **assets** do you bring to the change process? Think of talent, money, infrastructure, patents, good will, customer relationships, experience, and committed workforce. Use all of these to strengthen your change process. It's far easier to build on what your already good at, then to take on new processes. Communicating these assets also builds confidence and a sense of momentum.

What **concerns** do you have with the current situation? What will happen and what opportunities will be missed if the changes are not made. Do not dwell here; that can create too much fear and hopelessness. Move to solutions and positive ideas as soon as this is clear.

You need an **energizing vision** of the future (and it must energize everyone, not just leadership or owners). This vision needs to be clear, compelling to all stakeholders (including investors and customers). Make the overview it simple, clear and compelling so that people remember it and can move forward with their part in it.

Starting Momentum is vital. You want wins soon and you want to make them public. Focus on a few areas and celebrate every win as it arises.

Involve: It's important to get everyone who is part of the change thinking, learning and contributing. Encourage whole-system involvement, e.g., cross-functional teams. Gradually, create an improvement culture where looking for progress is the norm.

Meaningful Participation. Entice people to participate by celebrating contributions. Only ask for contributions you might actually use. Allow people to help shape the personality of the change process through ideas, fun activities and communications.

Positive Change

SUCCES Principles: Simplicity, Unexpectedness, Concreteness, Credibility, Emotion and Stories. These principles are based upon brain discoveries about memory. These principles help the important messages to stick in people's minds. They also compel people to move towards your goals.
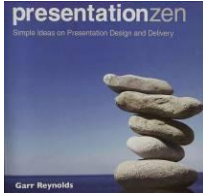
Simplicity, brevity and emotional impact are key for evocative visual aids. The book "Presentation Zen" has wonderful tips for high engagement slide shows. Avoid "death by PowerPoint"… remember, slides don't kill people – bullet points do. Slides should support the speaker by developing an emotional dynamic that supports your point. Handouts like this one tie the emotional impact of the presentation with content.

Inspire: Spark energy, creativity and productivity throughout change implementation. Use fun, entertainment, and engaging activities. The easier and simpler it is to successfully contribute the more likely they will do it. Ensure that people are given decisions to make that they have the capability, confidence and knowledge to make well. Keep the process moving, bogging down kills motivation.

Inspiration Tools: When people share best practices it builds pride, collaboration and valuable internal resources. The easier it is to apply changes the more likely it will be done. Learning aids can help. Gentle and respectful reminders can keep people on track and successful. Purposely designing small wins builds momentum. CELEBRATE PROGRESS! It's the most often forgotten and yet most important way of sustaining inspiration for the hard work change entails.
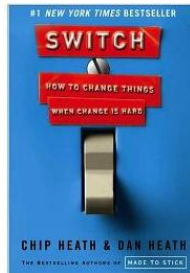
"Switch": Change requires that you do one or more of the following things for those you're trying to change. One, inform the "driver" (rational mind). Motivate the "elephant" (emotional mind). Shape the "path" – make it as easy as possible to do the right thing, and discouraging to do wrong things. The primary obstacle, say the Heath brothers, is a conflict that's built into our brains. The driver and the elephant compete for control. This book shows how to unite both minds using compelling, story-driven narrative.

Positive Change

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Positive Change

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Other Positive Change Resources:

° Daniel Goleman's "Emotional Intelligence: Why It Can Matter More Than IQ"

° Martin Seligman's "Learned Optimism" – from Positive Psychology

° Positive Deviance Method: positivedeviance.org

° Bob Faw's Blog: bobfaw.wordpress.com

Some organizations that use positive change approaches