

## **CHANGE**

### **79. Zen and the Art of Achieving Change Where It Already Exists.**

*"Some people look for things that went wrong and try to fix them. I look for things that went right and try to build on them."*—Bob Stone/Mr. ReGo/VP Al Gore's point man for "reinventing government"

*"Somewhere in your organization, groups of people are already doing things differently and better. To create lasting change, find these areas of positive deviance and fan the flames."*—Richard Tanner Pascale & Jerry Sternin, "Your Company's Secret Change Agents," *Harvard Business Review*

Bob Stone was a Zen master, a Sumo wrestler—a Master of Indirection. He knew he could not force change on the Federal bureaucracy; even the President rarely succeeds by frontal assault. But he also knew there were astonishingly effective, renegade Civil Servants at work in the underbelly of the system—plying their effective-but-scorned trade as far from the light as possible. The trick was to discover their existence and induce them to "come out" and serve as visible role models/"benchmarks" to their more timid peers.

Message:

- (1) Comb the underground for "troublemakers" who are creating and living tomorrow today.
- (2) Anoint them as Public Paragons of the New Deal-to-Be.
- (3) Encourage others to visit them and observe palpable models of new ways of doing business.
- (4) Applaud the Nouveau Copycats of the First Round Pioneers—and grow the Renegade Brigade as rapidly as possible.

**80. The Way of the Demo.** Change in "big" places is mostly a result of showing off "demos" from modest-sized "cool" places! (This happens also to be true with individual change.) You've got a great new software solution to a purchasing conundrum. You need a test bed. At a meeting, you get into a private discussion with the on-the-make General Manager of a small division of BigCo in Ireland; she thinks your new software is off-the-charts good, and is keen to get a jump on others by becoming an early adopter. Once she's done her bit, you can say to the slugabed big-division General Managers, "Why don't you go and look at what the Irish have done with this—it changed their world."

To succeed with "new stuff," you must find ... Kindred Spirits ... those who will ... Play with You (and your "cool stuff") ... which in turn provides you with ... "Demos" ... that you can Tout Far & Wide.

I call "it": THE WAY OF THE DEMO. And I will boldly state: Selling-by-demo is the single-best way to accelerate acceptance of a novel (=scary) idea.

NO DEMO.  
NO DEAL.  
PERIOD.

(I used the example of internal sales—precisely the same approach works wonders in external sales. Message: Do not, except in rare circumstances start by making presentations to "the big guys.")

**81. Big Change—All at Once!** I am an avowed incrementalist—even if the eventual aim is stratospherically high. That is, get going ASAP—and quickly experiment your way toward/to success. But when my wife and I had a Grand Idea in 2008 for a landscaping project that would change the look and feel of our Farm in Tinmouth VT, we decided, more or less, to ... do it all at once. There has been pain from biting off more than we could readily chew, but the story to this point has the mark of a real success far beyond our initial imaginings.

*The power of "getting going on everything at once" with but a sliver of a master plan (a couple of "napkin" sketches) was that we could envision from the outset the vague outline of what was going to (more or less) end up happening—thence we could adjust like crazy, improvise constantly, destroy and create using the entire palette, and dramatically reshape the overall work, and even the overall concept, as we went along. Which, of course, means we didn't really reject my beloved Rapid Experimentation Method—we just did it on and amidst a Grand Platform called "everything is in motion and up for grabs."*

I'm not sure I'd do things, big things, this way in every instance, but I do think there are times when such an "all at once" approach is merited—when you have a Big Idea but need to be living "in the middle of it," with all ends loose ends, to figure out what it means.

**82. Big Change—in a Short Time.** The story goes that General George Patton turned around a bedraggled U.S. Army in North Africa in a matter of a few weeks upon taking charge in 1943. (Some say a few days.) Upon taking over a new command, Admiral Lord Nelson would change the attitude of an entire fleet in ... *less than a week*. The CEO of a giant transportation company completely upended line officers' responsibility and authority and accountability (increased by an order of magnitude) almost "overnight"—literally everyone, including a couple of "hopeless bureaucrats," bitched and moaned and rose to the occasion—performance spurted more or less instantly, and then kept going.

Several expert analysts argue from extensive anecdotal evidence that "big change" is actually "easier" than small change. Mostly because it's far easier to get people excited about a Big Hairy Audacious Goal (Jim Collins's felicitous term) than "incremental improvement:" also big, quick change cuts off escape routes.

My "bottom line" after lots of thought and observation: Change will take *precisely* as long as you think it will. The "arrogance of absurdly high expectations" can pay off in very short order if you've got the nerve to go for it and the deep-rooted (messianic) belief that ... *"There's utterly no reason why we can't do this in a month!"*

**83. Clever? Never!**

*"The art of war does not require complicated maneuvers; the simplest are the best, and common sense is fundamental. From which one might wonder how it is generals make blunders; it is because they try to be clever."*—Napoleon

I make every effort to read new business strategy books and articles. In 90 percent of cases, I can dismiss neither the author's thought process nor his or her evidence—but I am always taken aback by the abundance of "clever" and the absence of any discussion or consideration of the ability to

implement the suggestions made or implied. There is total silence around the subject. For example, I did a quick analysis of the Index of one "famous" strategy tome circa 2007—words like "people" and "customer" and "leadership" and "implementation" and "execution" were *literally* missing.

(NB: I gave some thought to not including any commentary in #83, just letting Napoleon's quote stand alone on the page. I dearly do not want to dilute in any way the power and clarity and simplicity of his words.)

This document is #24 in a series of 48 highlights from Tom Peters' *The Little BIG Things: 163 Ways to Pursue Excellence* (HarperStudio, 2010). For more information, visit [tompeters.com](http://tompeters.com).

