

Change Persuasion

A Guide to Leading Change

SoulCo

FOR CHANGE LEADERS

By Charles Starrett, Co-Founder

Introduction

We at **SoulCo** have spent a lot of time thinking about how Change Leaders like yourselves can persuade others of your vision of change.

One thing we've learned is that no matter how sure any of us are that we're right, we can't convince people purely from the force of our passion and how loudly we yell from the mountaintop. Even if we get people to listen, as soon as they're out of earshot, they often go back to how they thought before. Only those who adopt the change themselves will keep it and act on it.

The reflections in this guide are here to help you create that sustained change by winning loyal supporters for your change idea whether in business, education, for-profit, or not-for-profit. This book is designed to be read however you prefer: straight through, or browsed at random. The pieces are written to stand on their own, and they're organized under three of the essentials for change persuasion: **Clarity, Connection, and Constancy**.

If you have an insight while reading, we encourage you to carry that insight into action and test it in your work. Our hope is that as you experiment with putting the words here into practice, you'll create your own methods that work for you. We at SoulCo would love it if you shared your successes, discoveries, and challenges with us at: clarity@soulcoleader.com.

To your highest success!

Table of Contents

Introduction	ii
Part 1: Clarity	
Clarity Powers Persuasion.....	2
Essential Change	3
Who’s It For?.....	4
Reframing from a Need, to a Want	5
Reframing the Problem into a Question	6
Part II: Connection	
Listening to Lead Change	9
Risk-Risk Analysis.....	10
Reframing and Singer’s Paradox.....	11
Push Forward with Silence	12
Part III: Constancy	
SUSDAT	15
Be Okay with Letting Go.....	16
Teaching Scales	17
Appendix	
Books.....	18
Online Media	18
Acknowledgments.....	19

Part 1: Clarity

Clarity Powers Persuasion

In the 1984 movie, Amadeus, Mozart tells a patron that the composition he's been waiting for is done but he can't see it. When the upset patron asks him where it is, Mozart points to his head and says, "Here. It's all right here in my noodle. The rest is just scribbling."

We need to compose our change ideas the same way. Before showing (or telling) anyone, the first step is to have a clear and complete picture of the change in our own heads. When we're clear on our change idea, it's much easier to describe our vision for change so others can see it and understand. It's like making a copy: the clearer the original, the better the copy. The clearer our idea is to ourselves, the easier it is to communicate.

This is especially important with change persuasion because we want others to understand a new idea. When we don't have a crisp, clear vision of the change we want, it interferes with our ability to influence others to come on board.

So, the first step for more effective change persuasion is to ask questions to clarify and refine the change idea. Questions like:

- Why do you want change? What's it for?
Change is hard to make. Be sure there's a strong reason for the change.
- Who's it for? Who needs to to change?
Change is rarely for everybody. Clearly define the people who would make this change, who benefits, and how.

- And finally, what does successful change look like?
Imagine you're watching it on video. Describe what you see on screen. Make it as clear as possible.

If you're struggling with gaining support, this is the first place to look for help. Stop talking, take a step back, and check how clear your idea really is. Take the time to refine it until it comes alive in your mind. The time you take now will pay itself back with interest in your future change persuasion conversations.

Essential Change

In his book, *Essentialism: The Disciplined Pursuit of Less*, Greg McKeown defines an “essential intent” as being “both inspirational and concrete, both meaningful and measurable.” Likewise, an irresistible change idea includes the elements of this essential intent. It needs to be:

- *inspirational* to attract people to come on board,
- *concrete* to show them how to be part of the change,
- *meaningful* to sustain engagement when the going gets tough, and
- *measurable* to generate excitement as people see progress.

Take **charity:water** for example: “*Our mission is to bring clean and safe drinking water to every person in the world.*” Their mission is big and audacious—certainly inspirational and meaningful for those who think about global health. Yet it's also very specific and measurable. They're tackling a single part of the problem: water; they've defined it well: “clean and safe;” and they've made it measurable: “to every person in the world.”

Take a look at your change idea and see how inspirational, concrete, meaningful, and measurable it is. With a few tweaks your idea could be getting a lot more attention.

Who's It For?

One of the lessons we learn in work and life is that some people get us, and some people don't. Some people are easy to be friends with, and some aren't. This is especially true of our change idea and the solutions that we can generate from it. As we talk about our idea, we quickly learn that it's not for everybody, especially at the beginning.

So who *is* it for?

Who is feeling the pain of the present, or the urgency of the problem, so strongly that they're willing to try something new?

Who needs your clarity of thought and energy of passion to be pulled into action?

The challenge at the beginning is connecting with people who will find your idea resonating with them.

What key questions can you use as a test to find them? How can you get to know them, what concerns them, and what excites them? Where can you see, hear, and meet them? What message do you have that might resonate with them? And what gets their attention?

Becoming an expert on the people you want to lead and serve, be they your employees, customers, clients, investors, or board members, will help you to spread your solution like wildfire.

In his book, *We Are All Weird*, Seth Godin notes that the bell curve of humanity is flattening. Our society used to have a large majority of people thinking similarly in the middle of the curve, but now the "normal" is getting smaller and the "margins" are getting bigger. There's never been a better time to be a Change Leader than now, with more people thinking differently, waiting for people leading differently.

Reframing from a Need, to a Want

Change ideas are often framed as a *need* to change. As Seth Godin points out in *All Marketers are Liars*, saying a change is *needed* may not be the strongest message:

Marketers profit because consumers buy what they want, not what they need. Needs are practical and objective, wants are irrational and subjective. And no matter what you sell—and whether you sell it to businesses or consumers—the path to profitable growth is in satisfying wants, not needs.

What if instead of talking about the need for change, we talked about the *want* for change? What if we showed the *opportunities* that would open up with change?

For instance, take the classic line that Harvard Business School professor Theodore Levitt [quoted from Leo McGinnea](#): “People don’t want to buy a quarter-inch drill. They want to buy a quarter-inch hole!” Professor Levitt sheds light on consumer’s motivation only part way.

Yes, we buy a drill because we need the holes that the drill can make. But why stop there? Why do we *want* holes? It’s because of the opportunities that holes give us. Opportunities like: hanging photos to share with company; making projects, and memories, with our kids; and putting up blinds in our office to make it more comfortable.

When talking about the importance of your change idea, push it further to help people think of all the possible opportunities that could come from it, especially ones which tie into their values and desires.

Reframing the Problem into a Question

Another way to get people thinking bigger about wants and opportunities rather than needs and problems is to reframe a problem into a “What if?” question.

When Helen Russell ran an academic skills program to help Boston high school students get into college, she kept coming up against the same challenge: her students didn’t believe their schoolwork was important for their future, no matter how much they were told that it was. Helen struggled to fight their belief, and with college looming on the horizon for these kids, she felt like she was always playing Beat the Clock.

She wanted to help her students discover the connection between their schoolwork and their future themselves, so they would change their belief. But their future was too hard for them to imagine, because they had no experience with the adult world of work.

Flipping the work experience problem into a “what if” question uncovers the opportunity that Helen saw: “What if high school students *had already* experienced the adult world of work?” Would that help them discover the link between their schoolwork and their future? Would they then want to do well in school?

Apprentice Learning is Helen’s answer to this question. The program gives kids workplace skills and work opportunities in eighth grade, before they start high school. In the classroom, students assess their work styles, discover their marketable skills and qualities, and learn professionalism. They then put what they’ve learned into practice in after-school apprenticeships with local businesses. Students get to feel what it’s like to work with adults; to enjoy responsibility, the pride of work well done, and the satisfaction of being treated like an adult themselves. They get a taste of what’s possible in their future and what they need to get there.

It seems to be working. Students who complete the program think about and plan more actively for their future. They're more motivated to use their high school years proactively to build towards work they want to do, not only keeping them in school and encouraging them to continue on to college, but also aiming beyond for work that uses their full potential.

This is the power of reframing a problem into a "What if?" question: it broadens the benefits and opportunities for the people your change is for: including your employees, customers, clients, investors, or board.

If you're struggling with a problem in the change you're leading, try reframing it into a "What if?" question and see if new possibilities emerge.

Part 2: Connection

Part II: Connection

Listening to Lead Change

There is a difficult truth that all Change Leaders need to face. People only change when they choose to. We can't change anyone on our own. It's like that bad lightbulb joke: "How many psychologists does it take to change a light bulb? Only one, but the bulb must want to change."

Then how do we motivate people to change? According to Simon Sinek, one way is to connect people's values and beliefs to the change we want them to adopt. This works for both for-profits and not-for-profits alike.

Sinek suggests that a big reason people take action, whether it's buying into a brand, or joining a movement, is to show the world what they value and believe. They do it for themselves, not as much for the person leading the change.

In his TED Talk, "[How Great Leaders Inspire Action](#)," Sinek argues that the people who showed up at Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s "March on Washington" didn't do it as much to support Dr. King, but to show the world that they're the kind of people who believe what Dr. King believes. That was their motivation.

Sinek makes the same argument about Apple's customers. More than just appreciating good design, they believe that they are the kind of people who appreciate good design. So they buy and use Apple products to show the world what kind of people they are.

But how do we find out people's values and beliefs?

We listen. That's the first step of persuasion.

Engage in conversation, ask questions and listen more than you talk. Follow their lead so you can understand what's important to them. Listen for their beliefs and values.

Listening and learning to find a match in beliefs is a powerful force for leading change.

Risk-Risk Analysis

A frustrated friend complained about manufacturing plants which won't update their technology. He even knows of plants that use 20-year-old computer systems and think it's better not to replace them. The result of their risk-benefit analysis tells them that the risk of upgrading outweighs the benefit, and supports their desire to stay with the status quo.

This isn't surprising.

Behavioral economists have discovered that people weigh the risks and effort to change higher than the benefits. People would rather not change what they have even if it means missing out on opportunities for gain. Risk and the benefit aren't in a fair contest in a typical risk-benefit analysis. People give more attention to the fear of risk than the hope of benefit.

A more useful analysis would compare risk versus risk.

What are the risks in not changing versus the risks in changing? What effort will we need to make if we *don't* change, versus the effort we need to make if we *do* change?

In this manufacturing example the risk of not upgrading are the time, money, and energy spent on emergency repairs, sourcing difficult-to-find parts, and unplanned downtime versus the money spent on buying a new system, time spent integrating it into the current workflow, and the

planned downtime to install it. We can also compare the cost in human terms: falling morale, creativity, and flexibility due to an aging system versus the learning curve and temporary drop in productivity while adapting to a new one.

These comparisons lead to better decisions through a fair analysis: risk versus risk.

Reframing and Singer's Paradox

The ethicist Peter Singer challenges his students with a **thought experiment**: if they spotted a child drowning in the pond they pass on the way to school, would they stop to save the child even if it meant ruining their clothes and missing their first class? His students say that they would. They even agree that they have an ethical obligation to save the child. I think most of us would agree.

The paradox comes in when Singer points out that these students, and most of us, have the opportunity to save people every day by doing without a luxury item and instead sending that money to an organization which saves the lives of those worldwide who are at risk of dying. And yet we generally don't. Why is it that we'd save the drowning child, but not the other children?

The reason Singer suggests is that the closer we are to a problem, the stronger we feel it and the more likely that it will push us to act.

This is what made Arnold Schwarzenegger's **reframing of the case for clean energy** so powerful. Frustrated that he hadn't been able to get more people to **agree with him on climate change**, he decided that it was more important to get people to act than to get them to agree.

So he took a method for slowing climate change, adopting clean energy, and reframed it as a health issue—a very personal health issue. He has the reader imagine being in a closed room with a running gas-powered car, or a running electric car, and think about what they're breathing. It doesn't get much closer to us than the air we breathe.

The next time people aren't connecting with the change you want to make, think about Singer's Paradox. How can you frame your change idea to touch something very close to the people you want to reach, whether they're your customers, clients, colleagues, employees, partners, investors, or board? Reframe your change idea to bring its impact closer to them, and see the difference that makes.

Push Forward with Silence

In conversation, silence can be as powerful as talking. It sends messages like: "I want to hear more." "That doesn't feel like the end." "I can wait."

It shows the other person that you're interested in hearing what they have to say; that you're more interested in their ideas than you are in talking about your own. It shows them that you're treating their words with respect and honor, which can help them to feel safer and open up more, so you can take the conversation deeper.

Longer silences create tension, and that tension can also drive the conversation deeper. People often become uncomfortable with silence. They feel a need to fill the space with sound. What can happen, as the tension of the silence builds, is that the other person will fill the silence by saying the thing they were avoiding—the thing they were afraid to say, but which needed to be said to move the conversation forward.

So the next time you feel a conversation has stopped moving deeper, try saying nothing. Hold silent for 10, 20, or even 30 seconds. It's not easy. It may feel awkward and uncomfortable. But as the other person feels the pressure of that silence, they could make the breakthrough that the conversation needs. Experiment with this and see what you discover. We'd love to hear your experiences.

Part 3: Constancy

Part III: Constancy

SUSDAT

Many things in life that seem difficult, aren't. They just require practice and attention to learn one step at a time. Learning to draw isn't difficult, and neither is learning to write computer programs, or to play the piano. I had a 75-year-old beginning piano student who made real progress week after week, not because of hidden talent, but because he sat down at the piano every day. And sitting down at the piano to practice isn't any more difficult than sitting down at the table to eat. It's just sitting, and doing.

Doing the work of practicing your art isn't what's hard. Doing is just doing. The hard part is in our head: getting out of our own way.

I heard the local author [R. A. Salvatore](#) on his book tour field a question about whether he struggles with writer's block. He replied with his typical Bostonian candor:

I don't. I don't believe in it. Writer's block is lack of confidence. Shut up, sit down, and type. Look at it in the morning. If it's not any good, throw it out, but you're still further along than you were when you started.

This means we do the work regardless of how we feel about the work, or how we judge the work, or even ourselves. We're free to feel however we want, but while we're feeling whatever we're feeling, we still need to be doing the work. It's the only way to move forward.

So whatever the voices or gremlins in our heads are saying, our response is the same: just show up every day and do the work. Show Up, Sit Down, And Type. SUSDAT.

Be Okay with Letting Go

In his summary of [Let's Get Real or Let's Not Play](#), Chris Taylor stresses that it's best to figure out if the person you're talking to needs your solution before trying to sell it to them. One reason for this is that it allows you to break off from a prospect who is just not interested, which saves everyone time:

And what happens if it turns out they don't actually need your solution? You exit gracefully. Because if you truly can't help them, (here's the kicker) they weren't going to buy from you anyway. Better to know up front and avoid a lot of extra time (theirs and yours).

Makes good sense, right? As Change Leaders, it's the same when we're trying to convince someone of our change idea. We're sometimes tempted to keep pushing even after listening and learning that their worldview isn't close enough for our change idea to be meaningful to them.

Why do we keep pushing? Why do we resist exiting gracefully? Why do we lie to ourselves about how different the other person's worldview is, and delude ourselves into thinking that if we just educate them a little more, then they'll be convinced?

A big reason may be that we don't want to face the [sunk costs](#) of our time spent trying to persuade them. We don't want to feel that we lost valuable time trying to educate someone who ultimately didn't sign on. (Humans [hate losing more than they like gaining](#), after all.)

Persistence doesn't always win the day. Remember who your change idea is for. Insisting on winning someone over who is just not interested isn't worth it. It's best to ignore your sunk costs, thank everyone for their time, and move on to work with those who get it.

Teaching Scales

We hope this book has given you some new approaches you can apply to spreading your change idea today. We also hope it has shown you how person-to-person conversations, rich with listening and empathy, are a powerful way to win support. You may worry, though, that there aren't enough hours in the day to talk with enough people to get all the support you need. One-on-one conversations don't scale.

There's a solution: teach others to persuade with you.

When you get yourself a true believer, teach them the techniques in this book. Teach them to persuade through conversation. Teach them to be clear about the change, to connect with and listen to people, and to be constant in their effort. And then ask them not only to spread your change idea, but also to teach others to spread it in turn. This is how your work continues with constancy, and your change scales in an authentic, human-to-human way.

We wish you success in your practice of change persuasion through Clarity, Connection, and Constancy. Feel free to pass this book along to anyone who might find it useful. And if you have a moment, [share with us](#) your challenges and triumphs.

We would love to hear from you at clarity@soulcoleader.com!

Appendix

Books

All Marketers Are Liars: The Power of Telling Authentic Stories in a Low Trust World, by Seth Godin

Let's Get Real or Let's Not Play: Transforming the Buyer/Seller Relationship, by Mahan Khalsa and Randy Illig

- Synopsis: www.actionablebooks.com/en-ca/summaries/lets-get-real-or-lets-not-play/

SPIN Selling, by Neil Rackham

- Synopsis: blog.pipelinersales.com/sales-management/sales-methodology/why-questions-matter-in-selling-a-synopsis-of-spin-selling/

To Sell Is Human: The Surprising Truth About Moving Others, by Daniel Pink

Who Do You Want Your Customers to Become? by Michael Schrage

- Interview with author: www.fastcompany.com/3000620/create-true-innovation-consider-who-you-want-your-customers-become

Online Media

"How Great Leaders Inspire Action"

TED Talk by Simon Sinek

www.ted.com/talks/simon_sinek_how_great_leaders_inspire_action

"Innovation Hub: Negotiating Smarter"

Interview with Professor Margaret Ann Neale

soundcloud.com/innovationhub/negotiating-smarter

“Leading Change: Why Transformation Efforts Fail”

Article by John P. Kotter

www.bestprincipledsolutions.com/uploads/2011_ClassicsCompendium_Must_Read_Articles_for_Managerial_Success_.pdf#page=127

“The Drowning Child and the Expanding Circle”

Article by Peter Singer

www.utilitarianism.net/singer/by/199704--.htm

“What Was I Thinking? The Latest Reasoning About Our Irrational Ways”

Article by Elizabeth Kolbert

www.newyorker.com/magazine/2008/02/25/what-was-i-thinking

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