

Additional Patterns for Fearless Change

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ABSTRACT

The patterns in this collection are an addition to those that appeared in our book *Fearless Change: Patterns for Introducing New Ideas* (Manns & Rising, 2005). Our passion for this topic didn't end when the book was published. Rather, we continued to read, observe, take extensive notes and, most importantly, listen to comments and suggestions from our readers. We have not stopped learning about leading change!

As people exchange ideas about the environment, and exchange patterns, the overall inventory of patterns in the pattern pool keeps changing. ...Of course, this evolution will never end. (Alexander, C.A., *The Timeless Way of Building*)

A pattern language and the patterns in it are living things. The work is never finished. We are grateful for the opportunity to share as we are learning. This paper contains the following new patterns: **Wake-up Call**, **Town Meeting**, **Emotional Connection**, **Elevator Pitch**, and **Pick Your Battles**. References to existing patterns in our book or in this paper appear in brackets, e.g. [Do Food]. Summaries for the existing patterns are in the Appendix.

The patterns follow a variation of Alexander's format. Each pattern includes:

- Name in bold
- Alias (if applicable)
- Abstract in bold

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- Opening Story in italics that conveys the essence of the pattern
- Context
- Problem statement in bold
- Description of the Problem and Forces
- "Therefore" in italics
- Essence of the Solution in bold
- Elaboration of the Solution
- Resulting Context
- Known Uses in italics

WAKE-UP CALL

Alias: "Houston, we have a problem."

To encourage people to pay attention to your idea, point out the problem that you believe has created a pressing need for change.

"Hey, we've got a problem here." The message from the Apollo 13 spacecraft to Houston ground controllers at 10:08 p.m. EDT on April 13, 1970 initiated an investigation to determine the cause of an oxygen tank failure that aborted the Apollo 13 mission.

You are an [Evangelist] who sees a need for change, trying to spread the word about your idea. Some are listening. [Innovators] may be excited, but [Early Adopters] are simply responding with noncommittal, polite comments. Skeptics are becoming challenging because they don't see the need for change. The critical mass does not see any reason for the organization to take action.

People in your organization are comfortable with the status quo. They don't see the need to change the current state of things. As a result, your suggestions are falling on deaf ears.

We are creatures of habit. When we are in a routine and are satisfied with the way things are, we're not likely to see an impending threat. We need help to understand that the world has changed.¹

Most of us have a built-in desire to make things right. Therefore, we are more likely to consider changing if we feel a significant amount of tension brought about by such things as a potential risk, a need for safety and comfort, a desire to feel good about ourselves, or to fulfill a value-based goal. If you create this tension, people will seek resolution.²

Well-known author John Kotter makes the argument that the first step in real change is to “get the urgency up.” He explains that showing people a compelling need for change will energize them to make something happen—it will get them “off the couch, out of the bunker, and ready to move.”³

It's also important to recognize that facing reality is difficult. People can feel overwhelmed and hopeless about their ability to face their problems.

When you talk about your idea, you are proposing a solution to a problem. But if people aren't aware that there is a problem, they are likely to see your idea as merely an interesting option rather than something that requires action. As a result, they respond with complacency, pessimism, or even defiance.

In the beginning your story may not match the current reality, either. You should always question your own understanding of what people face in the current environment.

Thomas Friedman, author of *The World is Flat* reminds us: “Where there is a problem, there is an opportunity.” Your idea is that opportunity.

Therefore:

Create a conscious need for change by calling attention to a problem in the organization and the resulting negative consequences.

Do your research and [Ask for Help] so you truly understand the problem and the situation it is creating. Present concrete information. Let the numbers talk but don't forget to include the human side as well and try to establish an [Emotional Connection]. Present the problem in a compelling and powerful way. Make sure it is something people care about. Relate it to the goals of the organization with [Tailor Made] and use [Personal Touch] to help individuals answer the question: What's in it for me?

Point out what could happen if the problem is not solved; describe various scenarios. Apply [Fear Less] and encourage a [Champion Skeptic] to help you uncover the worst case scenarios. However, don't just tell horror stories—you will be accused of exaggerating.

Keep it simple and explain [Just Enough]. Be careful not to overanalyze—you want to inspire hope and encouragement so people will have the courage to face the situation. Focus their attention with a concise, credible description of the problem. Get them intrigued enough to engage in discussion. Then, as you address their questions, you can bring out more detail about the solution you are proposing.

Tell your story—how you recognized the problem and developed your idea for a solution. However, be cautious about outlining a complete strategy—then it becomes all about you. It's more convincing if you involve others and [Ask for Help]. Encourage them to craft as much of the solution as possible. Think about holding a [Town Meeting] to solicit feedback, build support, get new ideas, and bring in participation.

Take it [Step by Step]. Deal with the easier problems first to gain some [Small Successes]. Keep a [Sustained Momentum]. If the urgency seems to diminish, you may need to bring new problems to light.

Keep in mind that you are not likely to get everyone to care about the problems you raise. If too many are not responding to your wake-up call, you may have to [Pick Your Battles] and move on.

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As a result, you will create awareness of the current reality in the organization and the problem(s) that created it. Listeners will stop and think, “Wow, I didn't know that!” You will likely uncover issues that many people didn't see or may have been denying. Some are likely to open their minds to the possibility of a new reality and recognize the need to take action. This allows you to propose your idea(s) for change.

But be careful about talking about an existing predicament; there can be serious political ramifications. You can come across as a nay-sayer, especially if the old way is owned by those with influence. You may want to keep this pattern in reserve until you need it.

The system for assigning faculty to committees at one university was tedious and outdated. Ellen drafted a new system that needed to go to the Faculty Senate for approval. Unfortunately, she didn't use [Corridor Politics], so there were many questions and concerns from Senate members following the presentation of her proposal. When Ellen realized that her proposal was not likely to pass, she politely stopped the

¹ Garvin and Roberto, *Change through Persuasion*

² Doppelt, *The Power of Sustainable Thinking*, p. 70.

³ Kotter, *The Heart of Change*, p. 3

discussion and back-peddled with a detailed explanation of the problems in the present system. Senate members reacted with surprise. They had not been aware of the problems and were immediately more willing to support her proposal. Ellen then suggested a [Trial Run] of her new system and the motion passed in her favor.

Mary was trying to start a community support system for those who have experienced a relationship “break-up.” She wanted this system to include a variety of resources so she talked with many different people including psychologists, biofeedback experts, breathing coaches, and medical personnel. Throughout her efforts, she discovered that most of these individuals did not see grief after a “break-up” as a serious problem—their advice was to just “get over it” and “move on” in a short period of time. Mary knew this usually isn’t possible, or even healthy. She made her case by describing the serious emotional problems and physical symptoms often experienced after a relationship loss. She used [Emotional Connection] and included stories of the struggles faced by people she was attempting to help. Once her listeners had a change of heart about the significance of the problem, she could give the [Elevator Pitch] about her idea. This would usually prompt a discussion about the support system and the role the listener might be willing to play.

Paul Levy was appointed to head the BIDMC hospital system, a product of a difficult merger between two hospitals that was now in need of fresh ideas. To signal the need for a new order, Levi developed a bold message explaining that this was BIDMC’s last chance to make improvements. Pointing to his private discussions with the state attorney general, he publicized the real possibility that the hospital would be sold. He knew this bad news might frighten the staff and patients but he believed a strong wake-up call was necessary to get employees to face the need for change.⁴

TOWN MEETING

As early as possible in your change effort and throughout, hold an event to gather as many participants as possible to solicit feedback, build support, get new ideas, and bring in newcomers.

Involve local communities in virtually every step of the conservation process. “We don’t present solutions,” says Francisco Nunez, scientist for the Nature Conservancy. “We put scenarios on the table and let them decide.” If you want to protect biodiversity, you need to give local residents a stake in preserving it.

But finding “win-win” solutions is not always easy. For every success story, many more projects fail, often because “solutions” are conceived without consulting all stakeholders. Or because the projects rely solely on one economic activity, such as ecotourism, that depends on factors often beyond local communities’ control. “This is a process,” says another scientist for the Nature Conservancy. “There aren’t easy solutions.”⁵

You are an [Evangelist] or [Dedicated Champion] who wants to explore the issues in a change initiative. You may be at the beginning of your effort, interested in identifying problems and possible solutions. You may have experimented with some of your ideas in your own work by deciding to [Just Do It], or you may have completed a [Trial Run] and want to share the results and thoughts about what [Next Steps] to take.

You want to engage others and try to understand how they feel, but personal conversations take time and are not an effective way for building consensus across a wider community.

It might seem easier to trust your own judgment and do whatever you think needs to be done but you risk taking actions that do not provide real help for the organization. Feedback is essential—you don’t want to work in a vacuum. You might be removed enough from the day-to-day environment that you have lost touch with the real needs of the organization.

You might miss important information or run the risk of people who feel ignored.

Therefore:

Hold a meeting to solicit feedback, build support, get new ideas, bring newcomers in, and report progress. Invite as many as possible.

Advertise the event with [In Your Space] and [e-Forum]. Try to personally invite as many as you can, using [Personal Touch]. Encourage participants with diverse backgrounds and ideas [Involve Everyone]. Include likely skeptics [Fear Less]. Make sure you invite those who will be most affected by the change. Use [Corridor Politics] to influence the lay of the land before you open the discussion to a large group.

Have a clear agenda. Begin by focusing on the purpose of the meeting. You might give a brief history of the change initiative. Solicit feedback on your ideas. Brainstorm new ideas.⁶ Check your ego at the

⁵ “The Poverty/Conservation Equation,” *Nature Conservancy Magazine*, Vol. 16, No. 2, Summer 2006, 20-30.

⁶ <http://www.effectivemeetings.com/teams/participation/brainstorming.asp>

⁴ Garvin and Roberts, *Change Through Persuasion*

door and explain that you are there to increase everyone's understanding, including your own.

Be sincere when you [Ask for Help]. Sometimes groups expect a leader to provide all the answers. It's a fine line between appearing incompetent and weak and bringing others in on the conversation.

Watch out for ineffective discussions and endless debate. Be willing to politely put these matters in a "parking lot" for later or for offline discussions.

End the meeting by discussing possible [Next Steps] and welcome willing volunteers to help. After the session, you can continue the conversation on an [e-Forum]. Post progress updates for everyone to follow [In Your Space].

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You will build visibility and knowledge of the change effort and the impact of potential solutions. It gives you a chance to solicit feedback, gather support and collect other ideas. The event can be the beginning of a [Group Identity]. People are more likely to take ownership if they have been given a say in the changes that could be made.

However, attendees will expect that their suggestions will be followed. If they are disappointed, they could get angry and work against you. Be sure to set clear expectations during the meeting that you are gathering feedback and suggestions. Be honest about your ability to please everyone. Don't make promises you can't keep.

Allen was hired as the new president of a university. It was a time for change. Allen saw problems and issues that needed to be addressed, so his staff scheduled a series of planning meetings to gather input for a strategic plan. Everyone on the campus was personally invited over email or phone to attend one of the sessions. Each meeting began by setting the expectations for the session and the suggestions that would be gathered. In each meeting Allen presented a list of specific questions. The responses were recorded, and a summary of the results was sent to each participant. The participants were kept current on how the summaries were being used in the strategic planning process.

Ralph, the head of the library, was retiring after 30 years of service. The administration decided that it was a good time to examine the organization's structure and procedures to determine what changes could be made. One representative from each department was invited to a series of meetings where these issues were studied. Their rough ideas and recommendations were then presented in a meeting with everyone in the library. The results of these meetings formed the basis for the new leadership as Ralph's retirement drew closer—changes in the org

chart, decisions regarding Ralph's replacement, and modifications to some processes and library facilities.

EMOTIONAL CONNECTION

Connecting with the emotional needs of your audience is more effective in persuading them than just presenting facts.

One CIO explains that he "was very fortunate early in my career to learn all anyone really needs to know about meeting clients' expectations." After personal interviews with business, corporate officers and general management, he reported, "... let me say what those clients were telling me in a single sentence: 'I probably won't remember what you say to me, I may not even remember what you do for me, but I'll never forget how you make me feel.'"⁷

You are an [Evangelist] or [Dedicated Champion] who has been studying and working with a new idea. You may be using [Test the Waters]. You may be trying it out in your own work [Just Do It]. As you learn more about the possibilities for your new idea, you are communicating this information in conversations [Personal Touch], in a [Brown Bag], or by posting [In Your Space].

People are listening as you present information about your new idea, but are not getting involved or taking any action to show that they have accepted what you are saying.

You are getting good at communicating the facts. You have a snazzy PowerPoint presentation with slides showing lists of bullet points. You have your [Elevator Pitch] ready, and you are careful to make sure others understand the problem [Wake-up Call]. This is a good way to begin—your listeners must know about an idea before they can be influenced to accept it. But a list of facts is not very persuasive.

Information overload is a fact of life and details are quickly forgotten. We all interpret facts to support our own deep-rooted belief system and, if the facts don't fit, we ignore, challenge, or dismiss them. As a result, listeners may respond with, "She isn't making any sense. Is she serious?" They will be anxious about how the change is likely to affect them and could even become angry if they don't see any signs that you, or the organization, do not relate to their concerns.

We all slip into automatic-response mode when possible. We avoid cognitive evaluation because it is

⁷ Kuebler, A., What my clients taught me, *ComputerWorld*, August 2008, <http://www.computerworld.com/action/article.do?command=viewArticleBasic&articleId=9112546>

hard work. This does not mean we are lazy; it is actually a primitive survival instinct. We automatically take the path of least resistance to conserve energy in case we are attacked or threatened. This is why we do not act on logic and reason. We make emotional decisions and then justify them with logic and reason.⁸

Someone who truly understands your pain can inspire a sense of hope in the power of a new idea for overcoming your troubles. Research reported in *The Heart & Soul of Change* has found that the chemistry in emotionally charged relationships is a key factor in inspiring hope and a desire to change.

Harvard Business School professor John Kotter explains, "... changing organizations depends overwhelmingly on changing the emotions of the individual members... Thinking and feeling are essential but the heart of change is in the emotions."

Therefore:

Build an emotional connection to bridge the underlying concerns of your audience and your idea for change.

Foster relationships that allow you to become aware of others' interests and fears. Be willing to listen to help you try to understand their thoughts and feelings. Become intrigued with all there is to learn from each person. Look for ways in which you are alike so you can identify with the person—this will build a relationship that connects on an emotional level.

Know your audience—what do they care about? Acknowledge, respect, and address their deep concerns. Personalize your presentations so you are no longer just a talking head with a good idea. Share your own experiences and be honest about your shortcomings. Tell your story about how and why you became convinced of the idea you are proposing. Exhibit humility and a sincere enthusiasm for the big possibilities in your little idea.

Think about how you can engage the senses of your audience. Include memorable images and stories with names, details, places and events that are meaningful and credible to your audience.⁹ Ask listeners to visualize a better future.

Create a sense of ownership for the problem and a "we can do it" belief in the solution. You will need to show that there is a problem [Wake-up Call], but there is no

need to dwell on it. Cultivate hope instead fear and resentment. Build an environment in which people will have a desire to act by expressing your belief in each person's value and unique ability to contribute.

If you become aware of any strong negative emotions among the people you are trying to convince, investigate the reason. Address it directly, but be patient—the passion in negative feelings, such as anger, does not allow people to be willing listeners. You may need to delay conversations until the intense anger has diminished.

To help you appreciate the role of emotions in decision-making, reflect on some of the decisions you have made in your life—what were the emotions that guided you? This will help you recognize and take advantage of the emotional reactions you see in others.

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You will become more persuasive. You will bring the participants more deeply into the game and make it possible to have more enlightening discussions about your idea and the changes you are proposing.

However, this may be difficult to put into practice. Most of us find it is easier to present the hard facts; analysis is more comfortable than digging deep into feelings. You can begin by just going through the emotions—cognitive scientists tell us that when we behave in a certain way, we become more like the image we project.¹⁰ Therefore, even if you are uncomfortable with this pattern, your behavior can gradually change the way you feel until you can develop deeper concerns for those you are trying to influence. Practice is important—taking [Small Steps] and continuing to [Just Do It] will allow you to improve.

This approach is also risky. Presenting facts gives you a solid foundation and safety. Good stories will really transport the message, but stories badly told are embarrassing. Even worse, if people don't like your story or your storytelling, then it can backfire and be painful because the resistance is personal.

*The Ormish program understands that bad habits and addictions are really misguided solutions to underlying psychological and emotional problems such as depression, stress, unhappiness and loneliness. Therefore, patients spend time with a support system of those who understand, care, inspire a sense of hope and teach addicts to learn, practice, and master a new lifestyle. (Read more in Deutschman, *Change or Die*, 2007.)*

⁸Brusman, B. *Leadership Secrets for Emotional Persuasion*. <http://ezinearticles.com/?Leadership-Secrets-For-Emotional-Persuasion---The-Brain-Science-of-Persuasive-Powers&id=1379252>

⁹ Denning, *The Leader's Guide to Storytelling*.

¹⁰ One study showed that seriously-depressed patients were helped as much by smiling as by drugs. Seligman, *Authentic Happiness*.

Before he became a U.S. senator, Frank Lautenberg was a corporate CEO. His firm was a pioneer of the computer age, and, like most businesspeople, especially those in technical fields, Frank thrived on facts. As a senator, he became a champion of the environment, mastering the technicalities of environmental legislation. When it came time to run for reelection, Lautenberg had a hard time translating his many environmental accomplishments into language his constituents could understand. He'd stand in a town hall meeting in Verona, New Jersey, and wonder why his audience would fall asleep. Amy Knox was a little girl who lived in Mt. Holly, New Jersey. Amy was battling cancer, a disease she believed she'd contracted because she lived near a toxic site. Amy was a tough, brave kid. She'd started a community group called PUKÉ (People United for a Klean Environment) and had written to her senator asking for support. Lautenberg had offered help and encouragement, doing everything a good senator should do. The jargon was removed from Lautenberg's speeches and replaced with stories of a little girl's courage. "When I'm on the floor of the Senate," he would say, "and the big polluters and their pin-striped lobbyists are trying to use our state as their dumping group, I think of Amy Knox." As a result, Lautenberg was able to communicate his message and win reelection.

KeySpan is a publicly traded \$6 billion, Brooklyn, New York-based energy company with 12,000 employees in New York and New England. It is one of the largest energy companies in the Northeast and the fifth largest natural gas distributor in the U.S. The company has spawned an atmosphere that most companies yearn for but struggle to achieve. Without fanfare, KeySpan has embraced a management philosophy that somehow balances bottom-line demands with a sense of caring and family. There is the palpable belief in the proposition that what is good for the soul is also good for business. Kenny Moore is the former monk with the title of "corporate ombudsman," a position created for him by Bob Catell, the CEO. Kenny reports directly to Catell and roams the company freely, listening to the concerns of both employees and executives while "engaging the soul of the company," as he likes to put it. His role is to help foster corporate change in a time of difficult transformation and to infuse the agenda with a sense of spiritual connectedness. What is different about KeySpan?... Perhaps it is the recognition that employees bring all their baggage to work. The company recognizes that it must reach people on not only a professional level but also on an emotional and a personal level.¹¹

Mahatma Gandhi began his change initiative by attempting to persuade others with facts. When this

didn't work, he became a master of appealing to people's feelings rather than their rational thinking. (See the movie "Gandhi" for the many examples.)

ELEVATOR SPEECH

Prepare a couple of sentences that you have ready to introduce others to your new idea.

I remember when I came back from my first agile conference. I was so excited! I couldn't wait to talk to my team and tell them about all the new ideas that were buzzing around in my head. The first person I saw when I came back on Monday morning asked, "Hey! How was the conference?" Words started tumbling out and thoughts began competing for air time. I saw myself overwhelming the poor guy but I couldn't stop. Half of what I said didn't make sense and I hummed and erred a lot. "OK! OK! I guess you had a good time! Maybe we can talk later!" It was a dose of reality for me. I needed a better way to answer the question he asked—and fast!

You're an [Evangelist] or [Dedicated Champion] working on your new idea. You are constantly encountering others who ask about your initiative. These people are busy and time is limited. You know a lot about your topic and could talk about it for days, but you have to transport the core ideas quickly.

At some point in your change initiative, someone will, by chance, appear on your radar screen. Since you are excited about your new idea, you don't want to waste time stumbling around for the right words to make your case.

We face this challenge all the time. Someone we want to influence asks, "What's that new idea you've been talking about?" You've got a small window of opportunity to get your message across in a way that makes them want to know more.

It was a similar issue—time constraint—that prompted the inverted pyramid style of most newspaper stories—where the essentials: the basic facts, the conclusion, the lead, come first. In the days of the telegraph, the whole story took a long time to transmit. The essentials were sent first since they were more important than the details for getting to press immediately.

Today, we are accustomed to sound bites. According to a study by sociologist Kiku Adato, in the 1968 presidential election the average time each candidate spoke without interruption on the network news was 42.3 sec. By the 2000 campaign, the average time had shrunk to 7.8 sec. The people you want to reach have been raised in the sound-bite culture. They're used to professional politicians, ad makers, and entertainers

¹¹ Catell and Moore, *The CEO and the Monk: One Company's Journey to Profit and Purpose*.

getting to the point in a matter of seconds. You need to do the same.¹²

If you don't have a clear message ready to share, your excitement about the idea could cause you to rattle on and on. This could give the impression that you really don't know what your goal is for this idea. You need to understand your key message as much as you need to have the ability to explain it to others.

Most of us struggle with the answer to the question, "What do you do?" because we know so much about our complicated lives that we feel the listener needs a lot of background to understand us. Without a prepared short introduction we either overload our listeners or we stumble around and give little worthwhile information.

Therefore:

Craft a short speech that contains your key message.

In a few sentences, describe simply and clearly what your idea is all about. This could contain the following:

- What is your idea?
- What problem does it solve?
(Make a connection between your idea and the situation it addresses.)
- What is your vision for the end state? (Where will this initiative take the organization?)

Keep it simple. [Just Enough] is always the watchword. What Mark Twain wrote in 1880 applies today: *"I notice that you use plain, simple language, short words and brief sentences. That is the way to write English-it is the modern way and the best way. Stick to it; don't let fluff and flowers and verbosity creep in..."* Beware of jargon, buzzwords, and long convoluted sentences. You'll be more effective the clearer and simpler you are.

Practice your elevator pitch out loud, until it flows smoothly and conversationally. You want to be convincing. Don't stumble around for the right words. But, try not to sound too rehearsed. Make sure your personality and enthusiasm come through.

Just deliver your elevator pitch and then allow a space to let the listener ask for more information. Don't crowd the listener by pushing for the "close."

Initially, your short speech will be the same for each person you encounter because you want to get everyone on the same page. When someone wants to know more, continue your conversation with a

customized message that meets the specific interests and needs of a particular domain [Personal Touch]: developers, testers, team leads, managers, marketing and business folks. When you meet someone in a new area, do your best to address their needs; make a note to create new follow-ons for your pitch.

You will not only need this approach when you start your work. Since you will always have opportunities to talk to new kinds of people and learn more about your innovation, you will want to continually update your pitch and the follow-ups to keep them fresh.

Post your elevator pitch on your web site or outside your office [In Your Space] and have it ready for publication.

Be sure to [Stay in Touch] to address any issues that might arise as a result of your brief introduction. Stay open to comments in conversations. Use your elevator pitch as a key to open doors for learning that swing both ways.

Here are some examples of elevator pitches:

"I connect people to computers. I create simple, effective user interfaces that make it easier for them to do their jobs. Would you like me to simplify your workplace?"

"I keep your company out of the Dilbert comic strip! I'm a management consultant specializing in change. If your company is experiencing rapid growth or change I can offer experience and wisdom to keep your employees happy and your profits in the black."

Search for elevator pitch examples on YouTube—you can find videos of innovators giving their pitch in an elevator and then being evaluated on the effectiveness of their message.

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You can start a dialogue that will help your cause. You'll increase your credibility with your audience because you'll make it easy for them to understand your key messages and take action. You will get everyone on the same page and begin to think about tailoring meaningful responses to any follow-on questions.

However, you can turn off people if you are too glib and too self-confident. Your job is to make the elevator pitch part of a [Personal Touch]. Your goal is to build a relationship. If you come across as a marketing guy just trying to make a sale, it will get in the way.

¹² Carville and Begala, *Buck Up, Suck Up...and come back when you foul up.*

I was on a panel at an agile conference recently. To open, we were each asked to give a 30-second definition of Agile. Preston Smith was so good—he started with a problem statement: If you're delivering late and not meeting customer expectations, blah, blah, blah, then having shorter iterations and working with the customer, blah, blah, blah. I thought it was a very good elevator pitch. It was short. It was convincing. It told me that he had thought about it and had his answer at the ready. The rest of us were good, but we stumbled around and lost the audience. Preston grabbed their attention and kept it—for a brief, convincing moment.

Mary was working on a climate change project that required her to talk with natural scientists, social scientists, business people, and the general public. She devised the same elevator pitch to begin her conversation with each person—a summary of the project, the problem she was addressing, and her vision for how her work would contribute to the issue of climate change. She quickly learned the questions each type of professional was likely to ask, so, if they asked for more information, she did her best to also prepare a collection of individualized responses.

*In his book *The Heart of Change*, John Kotter says: "What works? ... Visions that are so clear that they can be articulated in one minute or written up on one page." This is good advice for other things, including an Elevator Pitch.*

PICK YOUR BATTLES

Spend your energy in conflict only when it's important. Fight for the things you believe in, but don't fight if it's not important.

The notion of a Pyrrhic victory comes from the story of Pyrrhus, a king of Epirus who lived in the 3rd century B.C. In 279 B.C. he decided to take on the mighty Roman army. Before he sailed for Italy, Cineas, his chief ambassador, had the following conversation with him (faithfully recorded by the ancient historian Plutarch).

Cineas: The Romans are reported to be great warriors and conquerors of many nations. If the gods permit us to overcome them, how shall we use our victory?

Pyrrhus: That is an easy question. Once we conquer the Romans, there will not be any city in all of Italy that will resist us.

Cineas: Once we have Italy, what next?

Pyrrhus: Sicily, which is a wealthy island, should be easy to take.

Cineas: You speak what is perfectly probable, but will the possession of Sicily put an end to the war?

Pyrrhus: Carthage and Africa would then be within reach, and once we have them, who in the world would dare oppose us?

Cineas: No one, certainly. And then what shall we do?

Pyrrhus: Then, my dear Cineas, we will relax and drink all day and amuse ourselves with pleasant conversation.

Cineas: What prevents us from doing that now? We already have enough to make that possible without any more hard work, suffering, and danger.

But Pyrrhus didn't get it. He attacked and defeated the Roman army at Asculum in Apulia. He won, but his casualties were so heavy that he wryly observed: One more such victory and I am lost. Later his weakened army attacked Sparta and lost. Pyrrhus was hunted down and killed by an angry mob in the streets of Argos.

You're an [Evangelist] or [Dedicated Champion] struggling to introduce a new idea into your organization. You may have given some [Brown Bags], tried to [Do Food], or had some successes by starting to [Just Do It] and a [Trial Run] and shared some experiences in a [Hometown Story]. You're meeting some especially irritating resistance as you talk up your new idea.

Even if you had the time and the energy, you lose credibility if you fight every battle. Those who support your ideas will find themselves reluctant to get caught up in every little skirmish or worn out with trying.

It's easy to lose focus and become distracted by all the little annoyances and blow them way out of proportion. You may be torn between doing what you believe is the right thing and saving your energy in a world of too many tasks. It's hard to compromise when it comes to things we deeply care about.

We'd all like to live in a conflict-free environment. Perhaps getting to this point is a matter of figuring out what is really important, what is worth fighting for (and what's not), and, perhaps, being a little more open-minded and accepting of those around us. This may involve reevaluating our priorities, and, for most us, it's uncomfortable to question and compromise our ideals. We may feel that these priorities define us and being flexible with them destroys an important part of what we are.

Therefore:

Stop. Take a deep breath and think for a moment. Ask yourself if the current conflict is worth it.

Know who you are and what you believe in. Make a conscious decision to only fight for those things that will make a difference. Maintain your integrity, so that at the end of each decision moment you are proud of yourself.

Ask yourself:

- **Can I win?** If there is no hope for victory, what will you really gain? Choose wisely. You have limited resources. Be honest with yourself. Ask yourself what abilities are needed in this situation and whether you have them. This may be a battle worth fighting but do you have the skills it takes to do it? Even when you feel you are compromising deeply held principles, it's important to live to fight another day. History is full of examples of armies that won the battle but lost the war. Don't risk this fate by standing your ground for every tiny skirmish. At the end of the day, it's not about the battles fought and won, it's about making progress in the overall struggle to reach your goals.
- **Should I win?** Consider the importance of the relationship with your opponents. It might be of more value to support this relationship than to win the current decision. Often you can block your group's progress and perpetuate conflict because you are holding out for a win—you are so sure that you are right and the others are wrong. Compromising can mean that the group moves on rather than being stuck. Winning is not necessarily what it's all about. Seeing movement in the right direction is. Sometimes it's important to lose now in order to win later. You don't have to have the last word. Often it takes a bigger person to simply let the conflict go. Sometimes this can be a turning point—let the opponent win and you may win a convert.
- **What's it all about?** Maybe it's a simple misunderstanding. If it's worth fighting over, it's worth spending time to understand what the real issues are. Check your terms. Make sure your opponent really said what you heard and make sure your opponent really heard what you said. Things are rarely black and white. Try to see the many shades of gray. Be more open and accepting when other's values are different from yours. Try wearing De Bono's six thinking hats (described in the Appendix) to force yourself to consider all the sides. You can learn a tremendous amount about your own cause by doing this.

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You will create opportunities to live to fight another day, since you're not worn out by battling constantly. You will not put resources into something you are not likely to win. Focusing on the important issues will help you achieve your long-term goals since you'll be far more effective in winning the battles that truly are important to you. Choosing your battles wisely will lead to a more peaceful existence and will likely strengthen your interpersonal relationships, both within your working and your home environment.

However, this approach does take work, and, like any lifestyle change, sufficient motivation to make it work. It can be difficult to implement. It's easy for our brains to deceive us about whether we can win, since we are overly optimistic about our abilities, and we are rarely objective about our motives. It's an easy thing to see in others but really hard to do for ourselves.

Another downside with this pattern is that your decision to avoid fighting a certain battle may be the wrong one and have significant impact. You don't always have all the facts you need to make the right decision. History tells many stories of negotiators who chose "peace at any cost." Neville Chamberlain, Conservative British prime minister, thought Hitler was someone he could appease. After Hitler had re-armed the Rhineland, after he had "annexed" Austria (both in violation of the Treaty of Versailles), Chamberlain cut a deal with Hitler—the infamous Munich Accord of September 1938. Chamberlain agreed to allow Hitler to take over a large chunk of Czechoslovakia. After acquiescing to Hitler, Chamberlain declared, "A British Prime Minister has returned from Germany bringing peace with honor. I believe it is peace for our time.... Go home and get a nice quiet sleep." Chamberlain didn't rush in. He gave this battle his time and consideration, but his decision was wrong.

Ben Thacker-Gwaltney, community organizer in "We Make Change," explains: "I think organizing is a pragmatic profession. If you're too idealistic you're not going to make it. You're going to get disillusioned. You have to cope with failure and compromise on all the rest."¹³

A group of students were standing on the street, attempting to get as many signatures as possible on a petition to legalize gambling in North Carolina. When people reacted negatively to their ideas, the students did not argue with them. In some cases, they took a little time to listen to their concerns, but in most cases, they politely thanked the nay-sayers and moved on to the next pedestrian who might be a potential advocate for their cause.

¹³ Szakos and Szakos, *We Make Change: Community Organizers Talk about What They Do – and Why*

As a parent I have to recognize and respect the fact that peer pressure is real and that I have to deal with it. Constantly fighting with my child is counterproductive. If I criticize everything my child and his peers are doing, I risk shutting the door on communication permanently. It's not easy to live with an outrageous hairstyle or a baggy and sloppy wardrobe, but it may be better at times to let these things slide and to save my strength for the more important life struggles such as stealing, alcohol, or drug abuse.

My husband was a serious bike racer and entered a number of races where he could always see some overzealous, extremely competitive rider who couldn't bear to be left behind. The aggressive but not very tactically-savvy rider would always burn out because he forced himself to stay at the front and would exhaust all his energy before the race was over.

Linda has been interested in the difference between the cultures of the chimpanzees and the bonobos. The

chimp culture is alpha-male-dominated, aggressive, and hierarchical. They are territorial, have been observed killing members of neighboring communities and, it is a common tactic for a new alpha to kill infants to make their mothers available to him. Bonobos, on the other hand, are peaceful, non-aggressive, female-dominated and resolve conflict with sex. When the community is upset over anything, the first order of business is—everyone has sex with everyone—males with females, males with males, females with females, young with old, and then the conflict doesn't seem so important any more. A good lesson. Maybe there are few battles really worth fighting.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Deepest appreciation to our shepherd, Joe Bergin, and to our PLoP '08 workshop members: Takashi Abi, Miguel Carvalhais, Christian Crumlish, Dick Gabriel, Josh Kerievsky, Christian Kohls, Ricardo Lopez, Pam Rostal, Lubor Sesera, Steve Wingo

APPENDIX

Six Thinking Hats, Edward de Bono, Back Bay Books, 1999.

When wearing the:

White Hat, focus on the data and see what you can learn from it. Look for gaps in your knowledge, and try to fill them or take account of them. Analyze past trends, and try to extrapolate from historical data.

Red Hat, use your intuition, gut reaction, and emotion, and try to understand the intuitive responses of those who do not fully know your reasoning.

Black Hat, look at things pessimistically, cautiously, and defensively. Look for reasons why ideas and approaches might not work. Highlight weak points in a plan or course of action, and try to eliminate them, alter your approach, or prepare contingency plans to counter problems that arise. This can help make your plans 'tougher' and more resilient. It can also help you to spot fatal flaws and risks before you embark on a course of action. Black Hat thinking is one of the real benefits of this technique, as many successful people get so used to thinking positively that often they cannot see problems in advance, leaving them under-prepared for difficulties.

Yellow Hat, think positively. See all the benefits of the decision, the value in it, and the opportunities that might arise from it.

Green Hat, develop creative solutions to a problem, in a freewheeling, brainstorming way of thinking, where there is little criticism of ideas.

Blue Hat, control the "hats," for example, when ideas are running dry, ask for Green Hat thinking, or when contingency plans are needed, ask for Black Hat thinking.

Existing Patterns

Name	Summary
<i>Ask for Help</i>	Since the task of introducing a new idea into an organization is a big job, look for people and

	resources to help your efforts.
<i>Big Jolt</i>	To provide more visibility for the change effort, invite a high profile person into your organization to talk about the new idea.
<i>Bridge-Builder</i>	Pair those who have accepted the new idea with those who have not.
<i>Brown Bag</i>	Use the time when people normally eat lunch to provide a convenient and relaxed setting for hearing about the new idea.
<i>Champion Skeptic</i>	Ask for Help from strong opinion leaders, who are skeptical of your new idea, to play the role of “official skeptic.” Use their comments to improve your effort, even if you don’t change their minds.
<i>Connector</i>	To help you spread the word about the innovation, ask for help from people who have connections with many others in the organization.
<i>Corporate Angel</i>	To help align the innovation with the goals of the organization, get support from a high-level executive.
<i>Corridor Politics</i>	Informally work on decision makers and key influencers before an important vote, to ensure they understand the consequences of the decision.
<i>Dedicated Champion</i>	To increase your effectiveness in introducing your new idea, make a case for having the work part of your job description.
<i>Do Food</i>	Make an ordinary gathering a special event by including food.
<i>e-Forum</i>	Set up an electronic bulletin board, distribution list, listserv, or writeable web site for those who want to hear more.
<i>Early Adopter</i>	Win the support of the people who can be opinion leaders for the new idea.
<i>Early Majority</i>	To create commitment to the new idea in the organization, you must convince the majority.
<i>Evangelist</i>	To begin to introduce the new idea into your organization, do everything you can to share your passion for it.
<i>External Validation</i>	To increase the credibility of the new idea, bring in information from sources external to the organization.
<i>Fear Less</i>	Turn resistance to the new idea to your advantage.
<i>Group Identity</i>	Give the change effort an identity to help people recognize that it exists.
<i>Guru on Your Side</i>	Enlist the support of senior-level people who are esteemed by members of the organization.
<i>Guru Review</i>	Gather anyone who is a Guru on Your Side and other interested colleagues to evaluate the new idea for managers and other developers.
<i>Hometown Story</i>	To help people see the usefulness of the new idea, encourage those who have had success with it to share their stories.
<i>In Your Space</i>	Keep the new idea visible by placing reminders throughout the organization.
<i>Innovator</i>	When you begin the change initiative, ask for help from colleagues who like new ideas.
<i>Involve Everyone</i>	For a new idea to be successful across an organization, everyone should have an opportunity to support the innovation and make his own unique contribution.
<i>Just Do It</i>	To prepare to spread the word about the new idea, work with the new idea on your own to discover what the benefits and limitations are.
<i>Just Enough</i>	To ease learners into the more difficult concepts of a new idea, give a brief introduction and make more information available when they are ready.
<i>Just Say Thanks</i>	To make people feel appreciated, say “thanks” in the most sincere way you can to everyone who helps you.
<i>Local Sponsor</i>	Ask for help from first-line management. When your boss supports the tasks you are doing to introduce the new idea, you can be more effective.
<i>Location, Location, Location</i>	To avoid interruptions that disrupt the flow of an event, try to hold significant events off site.
<i>Mentor</i>	When a project wants to get started with the new idea, have someone around who understands it and can help the team.
<i>Next Steps</i>	Take time near the end of an event about the new idea to identify what participants can do next.
<i>Personal Touch</i>	To convince people of the value in a new idea, show how it can be <i>personally</i> useful and valuable to them.
<i>Piggyback</i>	When faced with several obstacles in your strategy to introduce something new, look for a way to piggyback on a practice in your organization.
<i>Plant the Seeds</i>	To spark interest, carry materials (seeds) and display (plant) them when the opportunity arises.
<i>The Right Time</i>	Consider timing when you schedule events or when you ask others for help.

<i>Royal Audience</i>	Arrange for management and members of the organization to spend time with a special Big Jolt visitor.
<i>Shoulder to Cry On</i>	To avoid becoming too discouraged when the going gets tough, find opportunities to talk with others struggling to introduce a new idea.
<i>Small Successes</i>	To avoid becoming overwhelmed by the challenges and all the things you have to do when you're involved in an organizational change effort, celebrate even small success.
<i>Smell of Success</i>	When your efforts produce a visible positive result, people will come out of the woodwork to talk to you. Treat this opportunity as a teaching moment.
<i>Stay in Touch</i>	Once you've sparked some interest in people, don't forget about them and make sure they don't forget about you.
<i>Step by Step</i>	Relieve your frustration at the enormous task of changing an organization by taking one small step at a time toward your goal.
<i>Study Group</i>	Form a small group of colleagues who are interested in exploring or continuing to learn about a specific topic.
<i>Sustained Momentum</i>	Take a pro-active approach to the on-going work of sustaining the interest in the new idea in your organization.
<i>Tailor Made</i>	To convince people in the organization of the value they can gain from the new idea, tailor your message to the needs of the organization.
<i>Test the Waters</i>	When a new opportunity presents itself, see if there is any interest by using some of the patterns in this language and then evaluating the result.
<i>Time For Reflection</i>	To learn from the past, take time at regular intervals to evaluate what is working well and what should be done differently.
<i>Token</i>	To keep a new idea alive in a person's memory, hand out tokens that can be identified with the topic being introduced.
<i>Trial Run</i>	When the organization is not willing to commit to the new idea, suggest that they experiment with it for a short period and study the results.
<i>Whisper in the General's Ear</i>	Managers are sometimes hard to convince in a group setting, so meet privately to address any concerns.