

**In the midst of helping a number of clients understand how to either change their culture or themselves, I was alarmed to read these opening words of a recent magazine article:**

“Could you change when change really mattered? When it mattered most? You wouldn't change. Don't believe it? You want odds? Here are the odds, the scientifically studied odds: nine to one. That's nine to one against you. How do you like those odds?”

**Below is a summary of that article, “Change or Die”, from Fast Company magazine, May 2005.**

## **Change or Die**

Research from Johns Hopkins University: 90% of people two years after coronary-artery bypasses have not changed to a healthier lifestyle, even when told it would save their lives. “Even though they know they have a very bad disease and they know they should change their lifestyle, for whatever reason, they can't”.

In the business world, change theory suggests that change is motivated by a crisis. But the above results suggest this is not necessarily the case.

John Kotter (Harvard Business School Professor and author of “The Heart of Change”) suggests: “Behaviour change happens mostly by speaking to people's feelings. This is true even in organisations that are very focused on analysis and quantitative measurement. In highly successful change efforts, people find ways to help others see the problems or solutions in ways that influence emotions, not just thought.”

### *It's important to go beyond the facts*

A medical trial of patients with severely clogged arteries was undertaken by Dr Dean Ornish, Professor of Medicine at University of California. Instead of motivating patients with the fear of death (fear led to denial, led to old ways returning), they were inspired with a vision of the joy of living: “Joy is a more powerful motivator than fear.” (See also Note 1)

From the field of neuroscience: minds rely on frames, not facts. Concepts cannot easily be changed by being told the facts. Therefore, “the story must be simple, easy to identify with, emotionally resonant, and evocative of positive experiences.” (See also Note 2). Messages need to be positive, inspiring, and emotionally resonant.

### *Rapid improvements are a powerful motivator*

Patients on Ornish's tough, radical program saw quick, dramatic results, and were motivated to continue with the change in behaviour. This contrasted with an alternative treatment, a smaller and easier lifestyle change, but which did not result in patients feeling better quickly enough, and they stopped taking that treatment – even though their lives depended on it.

In business, where radical change isn't always possible, quick, positive results are essential for providing emotional lifts. On short-term wins, Kotter is quoted: “victories that nourish faith in the change effort, emotionally reward the hard workers, keep the critics at bay, and build momentum. Without sufficient wins that are visible, timely, unambiguous, and meaningful to others, change efforts invariably run into serious problems.”

### *Support the change*

Address the systems which could inhibit change or undermine confidence. Ensure systems and processes align with the change.

### *The plasticity of our brains*

From the field of neuroscience: "the brain's ability to change is life-long." But why don't we change? The problem is in areas of specialisation. Experience and continual ways of doing the same thing make it harder to change – it leads to rigidity, yet the specialism is valuable for the business. Researchers suggest that businesses implement strategies "for continuous mental rejuvenation and new learning" e.g. time out to work in a different discipline. It doesn't "sacrifice your core ability but keeps you rejuvenated".

### *A final quote to ponder*

"What happens if you don't work at mental rejuvenation? Researchers suggest that people who live to 85 have a 50-50 chance of being senile. While the issue for heart patients is "change or die," the issue for everyone is "change or lose your mind." Mastering the ability to change isn't just a crucial strategy for business. It's a necessity for health. And it's possibly the one thing that's most worth learning."

## **Notes**

- (1) See February 2005 article on positive vs negative emotions:  
<http://www.amandahorne.com.au/html/resources.html>
- (2) See September 2004 article on storytelling:  
<http://www.amandahorne.com.au/html/resources.html>

## **About this article**

I aim to provide information to help you and your staff with your personal and professional development. Each month, topics covered are based on areas of interest raised by clients and colleagues. Material is drawn from journals, books, articles and shared experiences.

**Add / Remove:** Please send an email to me on: [info@amandahorne.com.au](mailto:info@amandahorne.com.au)

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