

Find the Feeling

1.

In 1992, Target was a \$3 billion regional retailer, a pip-squeak compared to its competitors Kmart (\$9 billion) and Wal-Mart (\$30 billion). But it aspired to be different. Even in those days, the chain's advertising was hip and fashionable. Unfortunately, the store's merchandise didn't deliver on the advertising's promise. Customers complained: *I see all these great ads, but when I come to the store, you've got the same boring stuff as Wal-Mart.*

You already know how this movie ends. Over the following fifteen years, Target became "Tar-ZHAY," the \$63 billion giant, the Apple of the retailing world, the keeper of the beloved bull's-eye, the champion of design. The new era started with the iconic Michael Graves teakettle and expanded over the years to Todd Oldham bedding and Isaac Mizrahi shower curtains and Mossimo sweaters and countless other products that combined the holy duo of hip and cheap.

The beginning and end points of the Target tale are pretty well known. But we suspect you don't know much about the middle, and that's a shame, because what happened in the middle was *the change*. It didn't happen in the boardroom. It happened because of people like Robyn Waters.

Waters had no intention of working for Target. She was a self-described fashion snob, and she'd vowed not to come back to Minnesota, where she was raised, and where winter takes over much of fall and spring. She certainly had no intention of working for a *discounter*. She had an enviable job at the posh Jordan Marsh department store and was living in high style: "I was going to Italy

and attending meetings with Armani and Versace and rubbing shoulders with all the fashionistas, and that was really cool when you're in your mid-thirties. But then one day we all got laid off. So that's how I came to be open-minded."

She joined Target in 1992 as the "ready-to-wear" trend manager, which made her responsible for black stirrup pants, sweats, and Looney Tunes T-shirts. She'd wondered how she'd managed to slip from Versace to Tweety Bird.

The company was at an important inflection point when she joined. Bob Ulrich had just retired as CEO, and he'd become chairman of the board. He had a very clear vision of Target as an "upscale discounter" that would differentiate itself through design. He dreamed that Target's bull's-eye would become a "love-mark," as respected and well loved as Coca-Cola or the Beatles or Lego. He wanted the bull's-eye to be as ubiquitous as McDonald's golden arches.

At the time, though, Target was a long way from realizing that vision. The merchants at Target—the people who select the merchandise that will show up for sale in various departments—had traditionally been copycats. Waters said the mind set among the clothing merchants had been to "find the best seller this year, take it to Asia, knock it off, and sell it next year at half the price." For Target to become a design powerhouse, the company had to stop lagging the trends and start riding the trends. That was Waters's mandate in the trend department.

The problem was that Waters had almost no power to advance this "trend-right" vision. The merchants didn't have to deal with her. "I had to win them over. I could never mandate, 'We have to have purple this year because that's the trend,'" she recalled.

Waters slowly built up believers. An early convert was the merchant responsible for turtlenecks. She was fed up with using the same tired patterns each year—you know, the cutesy snowflake-and-reindeer prints used by every discount retailer. So, at Waters's urging, she hired a designer to create some fresh patterns, and as they both predicted, sales improved dramatically.

These early-adopter experiments gave Waters much-needed success stories. Since Target had an analytical, numbers-driven culture, publicizing the early results was critical. Waters could point to “heroes” in the organization who’d taken a risk and succeeded. (“Check out what the turtleneck merchant did.”)

For a time in retail, trendy clothing was neutral in color. Everything was gray, white, khaki, tan, or black. Then, one season, color exploded at the fabric shows and in the retailers in London and Paris. It wasn’t an obscure trend; it was a big wave. So, as the design champion at Target, Waters needed to get her merchants excited about color. But the merchants, being numbers driven, would review the past few years’ sales and see that color hadn’t sold. (In this situation, a Rider appeal couldn’t possibly succeed because the data contradicted Waters’s position.)

Waters had to get creative. She went to the candy store at FAO Schwarz, where you could buy M&Ms in whatever color you wanted, and brought huge bags full of bright-colored M&Ms to her internal meetings. She poured the candy into a glass bowl, creating cascades of turquoise and hot pink and lime green. “People would go ‘Wow,’ and I’d say, ‘See, look at your reaction to color.’”

She brought in samples of Apple’s recently released iMac computers—in lime, strawberry, grape, and tangerine—which had been a sensation. For the first time, consumers were choosing the color of their computers with the same seriousness they used to choose the color of their cars. And she constantly brought in photographs from boutiques around the world. She’d show a merchant the photo of a polo assortment and say, “See how they have three neutrals, and a mild yellow, and then they add the bright blue for a pop.” Then she’d create a mock-up display with actual clothing samples so the merchants could see for themselves, *Yup, that blue color pops*. And, soon after, that blue polo shirt would show up on the floor of Target, for one clothing line, for one season.

This is how organizational change happens.

When Waters talks about this period, she is emphatic that she’s not the “hero” of the Target story. She says she was one person among many who managed to transform the company. However you

assess her contribution, the remarkable thing is that her successes came despite a lack of authority and resources. Waters said, “I had no head count at the time. I was always borrowing people, and my budgets never balanced. But I kept getting support from merchants who would say, ‘Oh, I’ve got an extra head count over here. And you can hire this designer, but she’s only going to work on our stuff.’ And in the next division they’d say, ‘Wow, I want one, too.’”

Not only did Waters lack control over the merchants, she didn’t even speak their language. Indeed, the biggest mystery of Waters’s success might well be this: In the analytical culture of Target, where numbers were the lingua franca, why did a bunch of demonstrations seem to make the difference?

2.

In *The Heart of Change*, John Kotter and Dan Cohen report on a study they conducted with the help of a team at Deloitte Consulting. The project team interviewed over 400 people across more than 130 companies in the United States, Europe, Australia, and South Africa, in hopes of understanding why change happens in large organizations. Summarizing the data, Kotter and Cohen said that in most change situations, managers initially focus on strategy, structure, culture, or systems, which leads them to miss the most important issue:

... the core of the matter is always about changing the behavior of people, and behavior change happens in highly successful situations mostly by speaking to people’s feelings. This is true even in organizations that are very focused on analysis and quantitative measurement, even among people who think of themselves as smart in an MBA sense. In highly successful change efforts, people find ways to help others see the problems or solutions in ways that influence emotions, not just thought.

In other words, when change works, it’s because leaders are speaking to the Elephant as well as to the Rider.

Most of us, in Robyn Waters's shoes, would create a "business case" for the power of design. We'd compile a PowerPoint presentation with charts and graphs and strategically selected quotes from the chairman who'd embraced the design-forward vision. When we finished our presentation, everyone in the room would understand what we meant. They might even agree! But would they change their behavior? Kotter's research suggests no.

Kotter and Cohen say that most people think change happens in this order: ANALYZE-THINK-CHANGE. You analyze, then you think, and then you change. In a normal environment, that might work pretty well. If you need to reduce duplication costs in your print shop by 6 percent, or if you need to shave off 5 minutes from your daily commute, then that process will serve you well. Kotter and Cohen note that analytical tools work best when "parameters are known, assumptions are minimal, and the future is not fuzzy."

But big change situations don't look like that. In most change situations, the parameters aren't well understood, and the future is fuzzy. Because of the uncertainty that change brings, the Elephant is reluctant to move, and analytical arguments will not overcome that reluctance. (If someone is unsure about whether to marry her significant other, you're not going to tip her by talking up tax advantages and rent savings.)

Kotter and Cohen observed that, in almost all successful change efforts, the sequence of change is not ANALYZE-THINK-CHANGE, but rather SEE-FEEL-CHANGE. You're presented with evidence that makes you feel something. It might be a disturbing look at the problem, or a hopeful glimpse of the solution, or a sobering reflection of your current habits, but regardless, it's something that hits you at the emotional level. It's something that speaks to the Elephant.

In staging demos for her colleagues at Target, Robyn Waters was honoring the SEE-FEEL-CHANGE philosophy. She set up displays that let the merchants see what was possible: *See how that blue polo shirt pops? See how it catches your attention and draws your attention?* She brought in iMacs and M&Ms and let people ooh and aah over them—"See, look at your reaction to color." (And, by the way,

wouldn't it be nice to be part of the same movement as Steve Jobs and Apple?)

Waters thought carefully about what her colleagues would *see* because she knew what she wanted them to *feel*: energized, hopeful, creative, competitive. They took the bait.

Let's remember, too, the story about Jon Stegner from [Chapter 1](#), the man who created the Glove Shrine. He knew his colleagues weren't enthused about his idea for centralized purchasing, so he didn't bother talking about the numbers. Instead, he showed them something that made them feel something. (*We really buy all these different kinds of gloves?*) SEE-FEEL-CHANGE.

Trying to fight inertia and indifference with analytical arguments is like tossing a fire extinguisher to someone who's drowning. The solution doesn't match the problem.

It can sometimes be challenging, though, to distinguish why people don't support your change. Is it because they don't understand or because they're not enthused? Do you need an Elephant appeal or a Rider appeal? The answer isn't always obvious, even to experts.

3.

Pam Omidyar, the founder of HopeLab, knew the struggles of teenagers with cancer. They endured weeks of brutal chemotherapy in the hospital and went home a mess—sapped of energy, their hair falling out, their throats raw and tender, their immune system wrecked. But when they finally walked out of the hospital to return home, there was one silver lining: The worst was likely over. Going forward, their obligations would be relatively simple: They'd need to immediately report any symptoms they developed, such as a fever, and take their medicine faithfully, which might include a regimen of antibiotics and low-dosage chemotherapy pills for two years.

But many teens simply failed to comply, partly because following the medication regimen wasn't easy. The side effects of

chemotherapy, even at low doses, were rough—nausea, skin breakouts, tiredness, irritability. The side effects of the home regimen, though, were nothing compared to the horror of intensive chemotherapy, and by missing their doses, kids were risking a recurrence of their cancer. Steve Cole, the research director for HopeLab, says, “If you skip 20 percent of your doses, you don’t just have a 20 percent higher chance of getting cancer again. Your odds go up 200 percent.”

How could teens take such a terrible risk? Omidyar was convinced that teens simply weren’t getting the message. She sought a new way of influencing their behavior—something unconventional, something that spoke in their language. Her inspiration: We’ll make a video game.

After months of effort, HopeLab developed a game called Re-Mission. In the game, teens became Roxxi, a silver-suited nanobot who charged through the bloodstream zapping tumor cells with electric-green chemo-rays. In between rounds of gameplay, teens watched short “briefing” videos featuring Smitty, a mentor robot, who provided additional information about chemotherapy and recovery.

Re-Mission featured twenty levels of play, each lasting an hour and packed with information. The team at HopeLab was convinced that if it could get kids to play the whole game, any misunderstandings that could lead to noncompliance would be wiped out.

Eventually the team launched the first clinical trial for Re-Mission. In 2008, the results were announced in the medical journal *Pediatrics*. To the team’s delight, the game had increased kids’ adherence to their medication plans. The amount of chemotherapy drugs circulating in the blood of kids who played the game went up by 20 percent. That may not sound like much, but small differences in adherence make a big difference in health. The odds of surviving cancer double if you can bump up chemotherapy adherence by 20 percent.

But there was a surprise buried in the evidence of success. A lot of the kids didn’t actually play the game all that much, attempting

only one or two levels instead of the twenty that had been designed into the game. Yet even those early quitters ended up taking their medications more regularly. In fact, the teens who played only two levels were changing their behavior as much as the kids who played all twenty.

At first glance, that finding seemed as absurd as if you'd discovered that students got comparable scores on their algebra finals whether they took only one week of classes or a whole semester. Research director Cole acknowledged, "Clearly, in one or two levels we're not teaching them a whole lot, since the bulk of that time is spent flying around the body blowing things up." Why had the underutilized game been so effective at changing the kids' behavior?

Cole started asking around, trying to understand the puzzling result. One of his friends, a marketing professor at Stanford, said, "Think about this from a marketing perspective. We can change behavior in a short television ad. We don't do it with information. We do it with identity: 'If I buy a BMW, I'm going to be this kind of person. If I take that kind of vacation, I'm that kind of eco-friendly person.'"

And it dawned on Cole: When teens didn't comply with their drug regimen, the problem wasn't knowledge, it was emotion. He said, "It boils down to an identity thing. After you have gone through intensive chemo, you've had your life stolen from you by cancer. So the kids think, 'I just want to get back to being the original me.' They don't want to be 'the sick kid' anymore."

The game was making a gut-level emotional connection. You are Roxxi, the nanobot, boldly defeating cancer. You fuel your ray gun by taking chemotherapy and antibiotics. Medicine means power. And the educational videos that pop up occasionally, with the mentor-robot lecturing you about the importance of compliance, are completely irrelevant to the change that's going on. The change is not one of understanding but one of feeling. It's realizing that *I can do this. I'm in charge*. Chemo isn't a reminder of the sickness; it's how you get your life back—how you steal back the real you from cancer. Take the pills, and you can stop being a cancer kid forever.

How Can You Make Developers Care About the End-User?

SITUATION At many software companies, the developers—who are responsible for writing new software programs—fall in love with their code. When their programs are tested by customers, they can be skeptical of the customer feedback. At Microsoft, for instance, one test of a new feature showed that six out of ten users couldn't figure out how to use it. When the test lab shared the data with the developers, their reaction was, "Where'd you find six dumb people?" Many companies experience a form of this problem. Is it possible to convince developers to be more responsive to customer feedback?

WHAT'S THE SWITCH AND WHAT'S HOLDING IT BACK?

Ultimately, companies need developers to tweak their software in response to feedback from customers; otherwise, the programs won't be successful. But sometimes developers resist or dismiss customer feedback and make only "token" revisions rather than trying to empathize with customers' difficulties. This is probably an Elephant problem—the developers understand what's being asked of them but resent being forced to change their beautiful code for the dummies in their audience. But let's not be too quick to treat developers as a "type" (e.g., as arrogant technologists). Character judgments

like that reflect a psychological bias that we explore in [Chapter 8](#). Let's focus on providing developers with more motivation and a smoother path.

HOW DO WE MAKE THE SWITCH?

- *Direct the Rider.* 1. Point to the destination. We should paint a picture of the group glory that will result from a successful product launch. The developers will be software heroes, and they'll have a line on their résumés that will always be impressive. Listening carefully to the customer is simply a way to accelerate that glory. 2. Script the critical moves. Are we being specific enough about what's needed from the developers? Imagine that we tell them that their program's "ease of use" is rated as "poor." What in the world can they do with that? Their Riders will spin for hours, trying to decide among dozens of possible improvements. It's our responsibility to define the critical moves—along the lines of, "We need to give people a quicker way to rotate these objects."

- *Motivate the Elephant.* 1. Find the feeling. At Microsoft, the developers were invited to visit the usability testing lab. There, from behind a one-way mirror, they could watch real users struggling with their programs. It made all the difference. The test lab manager says that when developers see a user live, "Twenty ideas just immediately come to mind. First of all, you

immediately empathize with the person. The usual nonsense answers—‘Well, they can just look in the manual if they don’t know how to use it,’ or ‘My idea is brilliant; you just found six stupid people’ ... that kind of stuff just goes out the door.” 2. Grow your people. Developers may worry that, if their code needs revising, it reflects negatively on their abilities. (We’ll talk about more about this in [Chapter 7](#), the section on the “fixed mindset.”) We should stress that the test of a great developer isn’t the quality of his or her first-draft code; it’s how well the developer codes around the inevitable roadblocks. We should make an effort to praise ingenious solutions to customers’ problems.

- *Shape the Path.* 1. Build habits. Is the customer feedback coming at the most convenient time in the code development cycle? Developers have routines that work for them. Can we make an effort to snap the user-testing onto an existing routine, so we’re not complicating the Path? 2. Tweak the environment. At many companies, programmers are given the best computers. This practice is great for productivity but lousy for customer empathy. One manager says that every time his developers use machines a generation ahead of their customers’ equipment, the software they create has usability problems. Why? Because the developers have no intuition about how slowly the software is running for typical end users. Solution: Require developers to program on the same machines

customers use. (This is another Path solution that has been pursued by Microsoft.)

4.

When people push for change and it doesn't happen, they often chalk it up to a lack of understanding. A mom grouches, "If my daughter just *understood* that her driving habits are dangerous, she'd change." A scientist says, "If we could just get Congress to *understand* the dangers of global warming, they'd surely take legislative action."

But when people fail to change, it's not usually because of an understanding problem. Smokers understand that cigarettes are unhealthy, but they don't quit. American automakers in the early twenty-first century knew they were too dependent on the sales of SUVs and trucks (and thus on low oil prices), but they didn't innovate.

At some level, we understand this tension. We know there's a difference between knowing how to act and being motivated to act. But when it comes time to change the behavior of other people, our first instinct is to teach them something. *Smoking is really unhealthy! Your chemotherapy medicine is really important!* We speak to the Rider when we should be speaking to the Elephant.

This realization—that we can make an impeccably rational case for change and people still won't change—is pretty frustrating. Why did Robyn Waters need to go through all the trouble of staging demos for her colleagues at Target? Shouldn't the logic of design innovation have been compelling enough on its own?

Why can't we simply think our way into new behavior? The answer is that, in some cases, we really can't trust our own thinking.

5.

As you watch, a stranger walks into a room and sits down behind a table. He picks up a piece of paper and reads aloud a generic-sounding weather report: “Tomorrow, we’ll see highs in the upper 80s with an overnight low of 53....” He completes his “report” in about 90 seconds and walks out of the room.

Next, you’re asked to guess his IQ.

You’re part of a psychology experiment, and you object to the absurdity of the request. *I don’t know anything about that guy. He just came into a room and read a report. It wasn’t even his report—you gave it to him to read! How am I supposed to know his IQ!?*

Reluctantly, you make a wild guess. Separately, Fake Weatherman is asked to guess his own IQ. Who made a better guess?

Amazingly, you did, even though you know nothing about Fake Weatherman. Two psychologists, Peter Borkenau and Anette Liebler, from Universität Bielefeld in Germany, conducted this experiment, and they found that the strangers’ IQ predictions were better than the predictions of those whose IQ was being predicted—about 66 percent more accurate.

To be clear, it’s not so much that you’re a brilliant predictor; it’s that he’s a lousy self-evaluator. We’re all lousy self-evaluators. College students do a superior job predicting the longevity of their *roommates’* romantic relationships than their own.

Savor, for a moment, the preposterousness of these findings. Fake Weatherman has all the information, and you’ve got none. He’s got decades of data—years’ worth of grades, college entrance exam scores, job evaluations, and more. Fake Weatherman should be the world’s foremost expert on Fake Weatherman!

If self-evaluation hinged on information alone, the findings of these studies would have been impossible. It’d be like discovering that you could beat randomly selected mothers on a trivia question about how many kids they have.

But self-evaluation involves *interpretation*, and that’s where the Elephant intrudes. The Elephant tends to take the rosiest possible interpretation of the facts. (“My 2.1 GPA is a sign of my intelligence—it shows that my intellect simply isn’t being challenged enough to keep me engaged.”)

We've all heard the studies showing that the vast majority of us consider ourselves above-average drivers. In the psychology literature, this belief is known as a *positive illusion*. Our brains are positive illusion factories: Only 2 percent of high school seniors believe their leadership skills are below average. A full 25 percent of people believe they're in the top 1 percent in their ability to get along with others. Ninety-four percent of college professors report doing above-average work. People think they're at lower risk than their peers for heart attacks, cancer, and even food-related illnesses such as salmonella. Most deliciously self-deceptive of all, people say they are more likely than their peers to provide accurate self-assessments.

Positive illusions pose an enormous problem with regard to change. Before people can change, before they can move in a new direction, they've got to have their bearings. But positive illusions make it hard for us to orient ourselves—to get a clear picture of where we are and how we're doing. How can we dispel people's positive illusions without raining down negativity on them?

6.

One way of cutting through positive illusions is suggested by an example from Massachusetts in a state agency called the Department of Youth Services. DYS dealt with delinquent kids—it was both a corrections agency and a social service organization. In the late 1970s, Massachusetts led a pioneering effort to overhaul its juvenile justice system, scaling back its youth prisons in favor of a network of nonprofits—halfway houses, group homes, outpatient counseling centers, job centers, and more. The goal of these nonprofits was to rehabilitate young offenders and keep them in their home communities.

As Massachusetts embraced this network model, DYS had to change substantially. The agency started working primarily through vendors—such as halfway houses and counseling centers—rather than delivering services to kids directly. As a result, agency staffers

had to adapt the way they worked, and most of them handled the transition well.

Except for the accounting department.

The head of accounting was an authoritarian manager who ruled his department with an iron fist. He was known as a yeller; some colleagues called him Attila the Accountant. Attila was meticulous about following the rules, to a fault. If you submitted an expense report to his team and left off a single detail—a date, a subtotal—the accountants would bounce the report right back at you rather than simply filling in the detail themselves. Because of this perceived pettiness, Attila was “pretty much hated throughout the organization,” recalled Sim Sitkin, who at that time was the director of planning and research for DYS. Attila’s accounting group saw itself more as a watchdog than as an internal service provider.

When DYS shifted to the network model, the focus of the accounting department shifted, too. Now it was outside vendors who were submitting the reimbursement requests, not employees. And we can say one thing for Attila: He was consistent. He treated the new vendors with the same dictatorial style that he had used with his in-house colleagues. If vendors submitted reports that weren’t perfect, he rejected them. This created big problems, though. As Sitkin said, “These nonprofits didn’t have a lot of slack. They were living on a shoestring, and so delays in payments really jeopardized their ability to serve kids.”

Sitkin and Gail Anne Healy, the deputy commissioner of DYS, began to field desperate calls from these nonprofits. In some cases, they couldn’t make payroll unless Attila cut their checks quickly. Sitkin and Healy tried to reason with Attila; they tried to explain why it was important to cut the vendors some slack. But, as we’ve seen repeatedly, the knowledge wasn’t enough to trigger a change. Attila stayed Attila.

Frustrated, Sitkin and Healy asked Attila to join them on a road trip. The three of them drove out to visit several of DYS’s key service providers. Often, these providers were operating from old houses in run-down neighborhoods. Their offices looked dilapidated and chaotic. And in the midst of this environment, the staffers were

earnestly trying to work small miracles. “The typical staffer,” said Sitkin, “was like a combination of a beat cop and a social worker. Sometimes they struck you as people who might have once been in the same position as the kids they were trying to reach. They were working hard and obviously not making a lot of money.”

During the visits, Attila saw firsthand how busy they were and how distracting the workplace was. They didn’t have closed-door offices as he did. It was noisy, thanks to the kids who were living in the homes—they were constantly coming and going, or cooking meals, or just hanging around and talking. Social workers were rushing around, trying to keep tabs on the kids, and shuttling them to doctors’ offices or job interviews.

Attila saw and felt the precarious financial situation of these nonprofits. They were hanging by a thread. When he held up one of their checks, it meant that they couldn’t pay for something. They might have to delay payroll, or skimp on food, or postpone a doctor’s visit for a kid who needed it. For the first time, Attila got a gut-check about the harm he was causing with his nitpicking. He came back to the office a transformed man.

Mind you, he was still Attila. He was still authoritarian, and he still yelled. But he changed what he was yelling about. “Before, he’d yell at his staff, ‘Why did you give me this form when it’s got something missing?!’” said Sitkin. “Afterwards, he switched to, ‘Don’t you realize what happens when we don’t get this check out on time?! People have to make payroll!’”

Attila’s transformation represented a victory over positive illusions. Before the field trip, if Attila had been asked to assess his performance as an accountant, he almost certainly would have put himself in the top 10 percent. In his mind, accounting was about paying attention to details, maintaining rigorous standards, and resisting political pressure.

He would have been right to score himself highly on those measures—but also self-serving. One reason we’re able to believe that we’re better-than-average leaders and drivers and spouses and team players is that we’re defining those terms in ways that flatter us. *(I am really a good team player. I constantly give my coworkers*

useful tips on how to improve themselves!) The ambiguity in terms like “leader” or “team player” enables our illusions—that’s why it’s so much harder for us to fancy ourselves better-than-average pole vaulters.

The ambiguity in being a “good accountant” dissolved when Attila met the social service workers. When he saw how hard they were working, and the raucous conditions they were working in, he couldn’t help but empathize with them, and that feeling of empathy gave the lie to his positive illusions. *I thought being a good accountant was about rigor, but now I see that it’s also about service.* Having been forced to experience the inadequacy of his old approach, he became a zealot for the new one: *Team, you better get those paychecks out ASAP—people are waiting on us!*

That may not be a heartwarming tale, but it’s a big switch. Attila the Accountant was a hard case. Healy and Sitkin managed to break through his prickly exterior and make him feel something. And once he felt something, he changed. That outcome should give all of us hope that we can reach the Attilas in our own life (Attila the Dad, Attila the Boss, or Attila the Teenager).

7.

It’s emotion that motivates the Elephant. In fighting for change, we’ve got to find the feeling. But *which* feeling? Anger, hope, dismay, enthusiasm, fear, happiness, surprise?

HopeLab built a video game for teenagers with cancer that gave them a feeling of control and power. Jon Stegner’s Glove Shrine shocked the execs and gave them a determination to fix the matter. The Microsoft usability lab made developers feel empathy for their customers. Will connecting with any old feeling do?

We often hear that people change only when a crisis compels them to, which implies that we need to create a sense of fear or anxiety or doom. Two professors at Harvard Business School, writing about organizational change, say that change is hard because people are reluctant to alter habits that have been

successful in the past. “In the absence of a dire threat, employees will keep doing what they’ve always done.” As a result, the professors emphasize the importance of crisis: “Turnaround leaders must convince people that the organization is truly on its deathbed—or, at the very least, that radical changes are required if the organization is to survive and thrive.” In other words, if necessary, we need to *create* a crisis to convince people they’re facing a catastrophe and have no choice but to move.

Similar beliefs about the importance of crisis once prevailed among therapists, most of whom believed that alcoholics or drug addicts couldn’t be helped until they hit rock bottom. Back in the 1980s, at a professional conference, the therapist Ruth Maxwell gave a presentation suggesting to fellow therapists that the now-familiar technique of family “intervention” could be used to convince addicts to enter a treatment program even if they hadn’t yet hit rock bottom. In her book *Breakthrough*, Maxwell wrote she was “nearly booed out of the room.... Coming from backgrounds deeply steeped in traditional psychiatric wisdom, they firmly believe that people cannot be treated unless they are motivated for treatment.” And being “motivated” required a rock-bottom crisis.

Speaking of the perceived need for crisis, let’s talk about the “burning platform,” a familiar phrase in the organizational change literature. It refers to a horrific accident that happened in 1988 on the Piper Alpha oil platform in the North Sea. A gas leak triggered an explosion that ripped the rig in two. As a reporter wrote, “Those who survived had a nightmarish choice: to jump as far as 150 ft. down into a fiery sea or face certain death on the disintegrating rig.” Andy Mochan, a superintendent on the rig, said, “It was fry or jump, so I jumped.” He was eventually saved by a rescue mission involving NATO and the Royal Air Force.

Out of this human tragedy has emerged a rather ridiculous business cliché. When executives talk about the need for a “burning platform,” they mean, basically, that they need a way to scare their employees into changing. To create a burning platform is to paint such a gloomy picture of the current state of things that employees can’t help but jump into the fiery sea. (And by “jump into the fiery

sea,” what we mean is that they change their organizational practices. Which suggests that this use of “burning platform” might well be the dictionary definition of *hyperbole*.)

In short, the “burning platform” is a great, uplifting tale for your people: “Team, let’s choose a dangerous plunge into the ocean over getting burned to death! Now get back to work!”

Leaving aside the silliness of the burning-platform metaphor, fear can indeed be a powerful motivator. Think of LBJ’s famous “Daisy” campaign ad in 1964, in which a young girl holds a flower while a mushroom cloud rises behind her. If you vote for Goldwater, the ad suggested, you might as well nuke your child. Or consider the sleazy real-estate-sales boss in *Glengarry Glen Ross*, David Mamet’s Pulitzer Prize-winning play: “First prize is a Cadillac Eldorado.... Second prize is a set of steak knives. Third prize is you’re fired.”

Health educators, too, have gotten in on the act. Remember the ads showing photos of smokers’ black, gnarled lungs, or the famous “This is your brain on drugs” commercial, which analogized drug users’ brains to frying eggs (those visuals, in turn, made pot smokers very hungry).

There’s no question that negative emotions are motivating. No one wants to see a kid nuked. But what, exactly, are these emotions motivating?

“If you have a stone in your shoe, it hurts and you’ll fix the problem,” said Martin Seligman, a psychologist at the University of Pennsylvania. In a sense, removing the stone from your shoe is what negative emotions are designed to do—to motivate specific actions. When you’re angry, your eyes narrow and your fists clench and you get ready for a confrontation. When you’re disgusted, your nose wrinkles and you avoid whatever has grossed you out. When you’re afraid, your eyes grow wide and your body tenses up and prepares to flee. On a daily basis, then, negative emotions help us avoid risks and confront problems.

Bottom line: If you need quick and specific action, then negative emotions might help. But most of the time when change is needed, it’s not a stone-in-the-shoe situation. The quest to reduce greenhouse gases is not a stone-in-the-shoe situation, and neither is Target’s

mission to become the “upscale retailer,” or someone’s desire to improve his or her marriage. These situations require creativity and flexibility and ingenuity. And, unfortunately, a burning platform won’t get you that.

So what will?

8.

In 1998, after psychologists had spent decades studying negative emotions, the psychologist Barbara Fredrickson wrote a provocative paper called “What Good Are Positive Emotions?” The paper became a classic. It eventually would be cited over a hundred times more often than a typical psychology paper, and it helped to fuel the rise of the discipline of positive psychology, which has yielded many popular books on happiness over the past few years. As Fredrickson suggested in her title, positive emotions are a bit of a puzzle. Unlike negative emotions, they don’t seem engineered to produce particular actions, such as punching or fleeing or avoiding. They don’t even have their own signature facial expressions. In fact, the emotions of joy, contentment, pride, love, and interest all tend to produce the same generic “I’m pleased” expression, which is known as the *Duchenne smile* (lips curled up at the corners along with a crinkling in the muscles around the eyes—or the way your spouse looks when you ask, “Have you lost weight?”). Most of our positive emotions are funneled through this same Duchenne mask, like a symphony pumped through a tuba. Worse, we can’t even distinguish readily between a genuine Duchenne smile and a fake Duchenne smile, as generations of beauty pageant winners have illustrated. (Hint: A genuine Duchenne has the eye-crinkling that is hard to fake.)

Negative emotions tend to have a “narrowing effect” on our thoughts. If your body is tensing up as you walk through a dark alley, your mind isn’t likely to wander over to tomorrow’s to-do lists. Fear and anger and disgust give us sharp focus—which is the same thing as putting on blinders. Police detectives, for instance,

frequently are frustrated by the testimony of gun-crime victims, who often can provide a rich description of the gun held by the perpetrator but can't recall whether the perpetrator had a beard.

Fredrickson argues that, in contrast with the narrowing effects of the negative emotions, positive emotions are designed to “*broaden and build*” our repertoire of thoughts and actions. Joy, for example, makes us want to play. Play doesn't have a script, it *broadens* the kinds of things we consider doing. We become willing to fool around, to explore or invent new activities. And because joy encourages us to play, we are *building* resources and skills. For instance, kids learn physical skills through rough-and-tumble play; they learn to work with objects by playing with toys and blocks and crayons; they learn to get along with others by pretending to be animals or superheroes.

The positive emotion of interest broadens what we want to investigate. When we're interested, we want to get involved, to learn new things, to tackle new experiences. We become more open to new ideas. The positive emotion of pride, experienced when we achieve a personal goal, broadens the kinds of tasks we contemplate for the future, encouraging us to pursue even bigger goals.

Most of the big problems we encounter in organizations or society are ambiguous and evolving. They don't look like burning-platform situations, where we need people to buckle down and execute a hard but well-understood game plan. To solve bigger, more ambiguous problems, we need to encourage open minds, creativity, and hope.

This brings us back to Robyn Waters, who was a master of positive emotions. She didn't try to create a burning platform: “Wal-Mart is eating our lunch! Target is on its deathbed! Come with me into the fiery seas!” Instead, she found a way to engage the fresh thinking and enthusiasm of her colleagues. *What if we had colors that “popped” like these iMacs? And look at this Paris boutique's display—what if we could arrange our sweaters like that?*

Waters helped shift an entrenched culture, product by product, because she found a way to instill hope and optimism and excitement in her coworkers. She found the feeling.

Tweak the Environment

1.

When some guy cuts you off in traffic, you probably think, instinctively: *What a jerk*. (Or perhaps your inner voice is more vulgar.) What you almost certainly don't think to yourself is, *Gosh, I wonder what's wrong that he is in such a hurry*.

It's not hard to see why we don't think that—it seems kind of naive, as if we're making an excuse for a bad person. But think about your own behavior. Think of a time when you were driving so crazily that others would have been justified to curse you. Was your crazy driving on that day a manifestation of your true character (i.e., you're a jerk to the core)? Or was it sparked by the situation you were in?

In the very first story in [Chapter 1](#)—about moviegoers who ate more popcorn when given bigger buckets—we saw how easy it can be to jump to conclusions about people. If we hadn't known about the effect of bucket size, it would have been easy to conclude that the big-bucket people were Popcorn-Gorging Gluttons. But of course the surprising part of the study is that, when you give people a giant bucket, they *become* Popcorn-Gorging Gluttons. And when someone behind the wheel of a car is twenty minutes late for a crucial appointment, that person *becomes* a terrible driver. What looks like a person problem is often a situation problem.

The same phenomenon holds true in the business world. W. Edwards Deming, the chief instigator of the Total Quality Management movement that revolutionized manufacturing, told a story about a company that used a variety of flammable products in its production process. Unsurprisingly, fires frequently broke out in

its plants. But the president of the company didn't think he had a situation problem; he thought he had a person problem. He sent a letter to every one of the company's 10,500 employees, *pleading with them to set fewer fires*. Ahem. (What looks like a pyromania problem is often a flammable chemical problem.)

We are frequently blind to the power of situations. In a famous article, Stanford psychologist Lee Ross surveyed dozens of studies in psychology and noted that people have a systematic tendency to ignore the situational forces that shape other people's behavior. He called this deep-rooted tendency the "Fundamental Attribution Error." The error lies in our inclination to attribute people's behavior to *the way they are* rather than to *the situation they are in*.

The Fundamental Attribution Error complicates human relationships. Marriage therapist Michele Weiner-Davis said, "Most people attribute their marital problems to some deeply engrained personality characteristics of their spouse." A wife might say, "My husband is a stubborn person." But Weiner-Davis might respond: "You've got to admit that your husband isn't *always* stubborn. He doesn't resist when his coworkers suggest a new client approach at work. And he doesn't drag his feet when you propose new ways to handle the family's finances. The stubbornness emerges mainly when you suggest a new approach with the kids at home—and when you do that, he is stubborn almost every time. It's the situation, not an immutable stubbornness built into his character, that produces the behavior." (This doesn't excuse his stubbornness, of course, but it should provide hope for a solution, since situations should be easier to tweak than people's core character.)

The Fundamental Attribution Error is the reason why we love TV shows like *The Dog Whisperer* or *Supernanny*, in which seemingly irredeemable dogs and kids are tamed by outsiders who come in with a new system of discipline. At the beginning of the episodes, we're presented with a dog that bites everything in sight, or a child who won't obey the simplest of commands, and we simply can't avoid jumping to conclusions about their character: That dog is vicious. That boy is a terror. And when they're reformed, in the course of a short intervention, it blows our minds.

If we could cure ourselves of the Fundamental Attribution Error, these shows would seem obvious to the point of absurdity. (It would be like watching a show whose premise was that if you take scalding-hot liquids—dangerous and slippery—and stick them in the freezer for a long time, they renounce their fiery former selves and *turn to ice!*)

Now you can see why the third element of our framework, the Path, is so critical. If you want people to change, you can provide clear direction (Rider) or boost their motivation and determination (Elephant). Alternatively, you can simply make the journey easier. Create a steep downhill slope and give them a push. Remove some friction from the trail. Scatter around lots of signs to tell them they're getting close.

In short, you can shape the Path.

2.

To see how a smoother Path can change behavior, consider some research that studied why college students did (or didn't) donate food to a canned-food drive for charity. The researchers knew some students would be more charitable and generous than others and would be more inclined to donate food. The researchers wondered: *Can we alter the situation so that jerks give, too?*

First, to distinguish “saints” from “jerks,” they polled all the students in a particular dorm, asking them to assess which of their dorm-mates (out of roughly one hundred) were *most likely* and *least likely* to make a donation. Once they compiled those rankings, they had a pretty good idea of which students were charitable or uncharitable types.

Then they altered the Path. Some students received a basic letter announcing the launch of a food drive the following week and asking them to bring canned food to a booth on Tressider Plaza (a well-known spot on campus). Other students received a more detailed letter, which included a map to the precise spot, a request for a can of beans, and a suggestion that they think about a time

when they'd ordinarily be near Tressider Plaza so they wouldn't have to go out of their way to get there.

The two letters were randomly sent to the saints and the jerks. A week later, after the food drive was over, the researchers had a precise list of who had given food and who hadn't.

Students who received the basic letter were not very generous. Only 8 percent of the saints donated and not a single one of the jerks. So far, the jerks were living up to their reputation (but the saints weren't exactly outperforming).

Then came the shock. Students who received the more detailed letter were substantially more charitable: 42 percent of the saints donated, and so did 25 percent of the jerks! This is an inspiring result. These researchers got 25 percent of the *worst individuals in the dorm* to donate simply by smoothing the Path a bit. (Bottom line: If you're hungry and need a can of food, you're three times better-off relying on a jerk with a map than on a budding young saint without one.)

What's more, the Path wasn't changed in any dramatic way—the letter just gave moderately more concrete instructions. Imagine what would have happened with a more aggressive intervention: What if volunteers had gone door-to-door collecting the canned food?

What looks like a people problem is often a situation problem. And no matter what your role is, you've got some control over the situation.

3.

Today, as you go through your day, notice how many times people have tweaked the environment to shape your behavior. Traffic engineers wanted you to drive in a predictable, orderly way, so they painted lane markers on the roads and installed stoplights and road signs. Grocery store managers wanted you to spend more time in their store, so they positioned the milk coolers all the way at the back. Your boss's boss wanted to encourage more collaboration

among employees, so she approved an “open floor plan” layout with no cubicles or dividers. The bank was tired of your leaving your ATM card in the machine, so now the machine forces you to remove it before you can claim your cash.

Tweaking the environment is about making the right behaviors a little bit easier and the wrong behaviors a little bit harder. It’s that simple. As an inspiration, think about Amazon’s 1-Click ordering. With one-tenth the effort of dialing a phone number, you can buy a new book or DVD. Talk about instant gratification. Amazon’s site designers have simply made a desired behavior—you spending money on their site—a little bit easier. They’ve lowered the bar to a purchase as far as humanly possible (at least until they launch “1-Blink Ordering”). By doing this, they’ve generated untold millions of dollars in incremental revenue.

The opportunities are endless for simple, 1-Click-style tweaks. A few years ago, a consultant named Peter Bregman was asked to help a management consulting firm with an administrative problem. Employees weren’t submitting their time sheets on time, which slowed the firm’s billing because charges to clients were based on hours worked. Traditionally, the consultants had submitted their time sheets on paper, and they’d done so pretty reliably. Then the firm developed an online time-sheet tool. Consultants weren’t using it. The executives held education classes to explain the new tool, but people kept on submitting their time sheets on paper.

Frustrated, the executives tried using fiat power, announcing that the new online tool was mandatory. “That worked for about half of the employees,” said Bregman. “The rest simply ignored it.” The executives were ready to escalate the battle: They prepared a memo saying that people wouldn’t get their paychecks unless they used the online tool. (Side note: In our experience, people who are trying to change things often reach instinctively for carrots and sticks. But this strategy indicates a pretty crude view of human behavior—that people act only in response to bribes and punishments. And it quickly becomes absurd. Are you going to break out the “no paycheck” stick for every change you want to make in your workplace?)

Bregman put the brakes on. “Wait,” he said. “Do we know *why* people aren’t doing the online time sheet?” The executives assumed that the consultants were Luddites or simply obstinate—classic labels inspired by the Fundamental Attribution Error. Bregman persuaded the executives to do a bit more investigation.

The employees who turned in paper time sheets were asked why they weren’t using the online tool. Paper was easier, they said. Skeptical, the interviewers asked if they could observe the employees while they filled out the online time sheet. The results were telling.

Lots of employees started grouching as soon as they encountered the “wizard” that was built into the online tool. Ironically, the wizard was intended to help people fill out the form. Think of the annoying paper clip guy in Microsoft Office who wants to help you write a letter. Now imagine that you have no choice but to accept his “help.” When the executives killed the wizard, allowing people to skip directly to the form itself, compliance rates rose immediately, and within a few weeks everyone was using the online tool.

“People weren’t being defiant,” said Bregman. They were just proceeding on the easiest Path.

What’s sadly typical about this story is that the executives didn’t initially look for a Path solution. Instead, they wanted to spook the Elephant by threatening to withhold a paycheck. Bregman says they were mentally stuck: “Well, I already *asked* them to do it. I *taught them* how to do it. I *told them* they had to do it. I don’t know what else to do!” At that point, the executives felt they’d tried every tool in their toolbox, so they jumped to punishments.

“We’re taught to focus on incentives by our business background,” says Bregman. “Or even our parents: ‘Do this or you won’t get your allowance!’” But executives—and parents—often have more tools than they think they have. If you change the path, you’ll change the behavior.

CLINIC

Can You Get Problem Students to Come to Class on Time?

SITUATION Bart Millar, an American history teacher at Lincoln High School in Portland, Oregon, is frustrated by a few of his students, like Robby and Kent, who frequently arrive late and then sit in the back of the room, talking to each other and laughing and disrupting the class. Millar has tried getting tough with them—being strict and even sending them to the principal a few times. Nothing seems to work. What can he do to get these students under control? [Bart Millar and the situation are real, but the kids' names are disguised.]

WHAT'S THE SWITCH AND WHAT'S HOLDING IT BACK? If Millar tries to get Robby and Kent to “act like model students,” he'll be doomed to fail. Let's focus on the critical move: Millar wants Robby and Kent to be in their seats before the class starts. If he manages to succeed with that (no small feat), he can keep snowballing the change.

What's holding back the switch? Let's face it, this probably isn't a Rider problem. Robby and Kent know exactly when they're supposed to be in their seats, so we won't even think about the Rider. It's an Elephant problem. The kids aren't enthused about showing up on time, especially if doing so

means less time hanging out with their friends in the hallways. The Path might also play a role: Are there aspects of the environment or culture that make it easier for the kids to get away with their tardiness?

HOW DO WE MAKE THE SWITCH?

- *Direct the Rider.* N/A. The teens know what is expected of them.
- *Motivate the Elephant.* 1. Find the feeling. Maybe the kids see Millar as an abstract authority figure rather than as a human being. Imagine a one-on-one conversation with each kid in which Millar says, “I feel stressed out because I’m expected to cover so much material in so little time. And that’s how I’m judged. And I know you don’t think it’s a big deal when you’re a few minutes late, but it makes my chances of doing a good job harder and harder. Can you do me a favor and just get here a second or two early?” Depending on the kids’ empathy level, this might work. Or, more likely, fail utterly.
- *Shape the Path.* 1. Tweak the environment. Lock the door when the bell rings so latecomers are stuck in the hallway. 2. Build habits. Start having a daily quiz with one or two quick questions at the beginning of every class. If Robby and Kent aren’t present to take the quiz, they’ll fail. 3. Rally the herd.

Post a class “on-time” record on the wall. Maybe when Robby and Kent see that they’re the only students violating the social norm to be on time, they’ll change their ways. 4. Build habits. Set a policy that the last student in his or her seat every day will be asked to answer the first question. 5. Rally the herd. Find a way to let Robby and Kent know that the *other students* dislike what they’re doing (as they almost certainly do). Often troublemakers have the illusion that their defiant behavior makes them folk heroes. They can be deflated quickly by frank peer feedback. 6. Tweak the environment. Do what Bart Millar actually did: He bought a used couch and put it right at the front of the classroom. It was immediately obvious that this couch was the cool place to sit—students could slouch and relax instead of sitting at a dorky desk. Suddenly Robby and Kent started getting to class *early* every day so they could “get a good seat.” *They were volunteering to sit at the front of the classroom.* Genius.

4.

Becky Richards worked at Kaiser South San Francisco Hospital, where nurses administer about eight hundred medications a day. “Medication administration” is what happens between the time a doctor prescribes a certain medication (such as 100 mg of ibuprofen) and the patient receives it. Nurses take the doctor’s chicken-scratch prescription, transcribe it so it’s legible, then fax the order to the pharmacy. When the medication arrives from the

pharmacy, they deliver it in the right dosage by the right method (IV drip, injection, orally) to the right patient at the right time.

Nurses have an impressive accuracy record: On average, they commit approximately 1 error per 1,000 medications administered. Still, given the huge volume of medications delivered at Kaiser South, that error rate led to about 250 errors annually, and a single error can be harmful or even deadly. For instance, if a patient receives too much heparin, a blood thinner, the patient's blood will no longer clot and the patient could hemorrhage. If a patient gets too little heparin, the patient could develop a blood clot that could lead to a stroke.

Richards, who was director of adult clinical services at Kaiser South, and her nursing staff wanted to drive down medication errors. Richards believed that most errors happened when nurses were distracted. It was easy to become distracted, because in most traditional hospitals, the medication administration areas are right in the middle of the nursing units, which tend to be the noisiest places on the floor. From memory, Richards quoted Tess Pape, a professor at the University of Texas who has studied medication errors, saying, "Today we *admire* people for multitasking, we celebrate people who can accomplish many things at once. But when you're giving out medications it is the *last* time you should be multitasking."

Put yourself in Richards's shoes for a moment. Your goal is clear: Change your nurses' behavior so they can focus better, so they're less likely to get distracted. How can you accomplish that? First, you need to identify the core problem.

The nurses understand what's expected of them—the critical moves are clear—so this isn't a Rider problem. Nor do the nurses have any emotional resistance to better focus. In fact, it annoys them when they're distracted by others, which means that, in this case, we have the luxury of a supportive Elephant. The problem, it seems, is the distractions themselves. No one thinks twice before calling out to a nurse who's walking the halls delivering medication. Worse, nurses feel an obligation to respond when others distract them. No one wants to tell a surgeon, "Sorry, bub, can't help right

now. I'm dealing with medication." Yet that's exactly what needs to happen if errors are to be reduced.

What Richards needed to do was make other people aware that they were interrupting the nurses. She needed to make the bad behavior visible. Ideally, when the nurses were administering medication, they would work inside a soundproof bubble, like the "Cone of Silence" from *Get Smart*. With that solution being architecturally infeasible, Richards came up with the idea of using a visual symbol, something that could be worn by nurses, that would signal to other people, *Hey, don't bother me right now. I'm passing out medication.*

After considering armbands and aprons, Richards settled on vests and decided to call them "medication vests." Where do you buy a medication vest? Richards had to make do with what she could find: "The first vest we ordered was off the internet. It was really cheesy. Cheap plastic. *Bright* orange. Be careful what you order off the internet."

Later, with vests in hand, Richards unveiled the idea to her staff: *When you're administering medication, you'll put on a medication vest. It's bright enough that people can see it from down the hall. And all of us, including the doctors, will know that when someone is wearing one of these vests, we should leave that person alone.*

She selected two units at Kaiser South for a six-month pilot study of the medication vests, and in July 2006 it began.

Richards quickly encountered a problem. The nurses hated the vests. So did the doctors. "Nurses thought the vest was demeaning, and they couldn't find it when they needed it," said Richards. "They didn't like the color. They'd ask, 'How do you clean it?' And physicians hated not being able to talk to their nurses when they passed them in the hall."

The nurses' written feedback was scathing: "Oh, so you want to draw *attention* to the fact we can make a mistake." "You want people to think I have a dunce cap on, that I'm so stupid I can't think on my feet." "Give me a hard hat and a cone and I can go work for Caltrans [the state highway department]."

“They were pretty brutal,” said Richards. The reception was so universally poor that Richards was ready to write off the idea and try something else.

Then the data came back.

During the six-month trial period, errors dropped 47 percent from the six months prior to the study. “It took our breath away,” said Richards.

Once the data were in, the hatred faded. Impressed by the results, the entire hospital adopted the medication vests, except for one unit that insisted they weren’t needed. Errors dropped by 20 percent in the first month of the hospitalwide adoption, except in one unit, which actually saw an increase in errors. (Guess which one.)

You know you’ve got a smart solution when everyone hates it and it still works—and in fact works so well that people’s hate turns to enthusiasm. Becky Richards had found a way to change the Path.

5.

The airline industry has long used a consistent practice. Because most aircraft accidents happen during takeoffs and landings—the most hectic and coordination-intensive parts of any flight—the industry adopted the “sterile cockpit” rule. Anytime a plane is below 10,000 feet—whether on the way up or the way down—no conversation is permitted in the cockpit, except what’s directly relevant for flying. At 11,000 feet, members of the cockpit crew can talk about football, their kids, or the loathsome passengers. But not at 9,500 feet.

One IT group adopted the “sterile cockpit” concept to advance an important software project. The group had embraced a substantial goal—to reduce new-product development time from three years to nine months. In previous projects with tight deadlines, the work environment had become increasingly stressful. When workers fell behind schedule, they tended to interrupt their colleagues for quick help, and their managers would wander by regularly and ask to be “stated” on the project. As a result, the software engineers were

interrupted more and more, and workweeks expanded to sixty and seventy hours as people started showing up on weekends, hoping to get some work done without interruption.

The leaders of the IT group decided to try an experiment. They established “quiet hours” on Tuesday, Thursday, and Friday mornings before noon. The goal was to give coders a sterile cockpit, allowing them to concentrate on complex bits of coding without being derailed by periodic interruptions. Even the socially insensitive responded well to this change in the Path. One engineer, previously among the worst interrupters, said, “I always used to worry about my own quiet time and how to get more of it, but this experiment made me think about how I’m impacting others.”

In the end, the group managed to meet its stringent nine-month development goal. The division vice president attributed this accomplishment to the sterile cockpit quiet hours: “I do not think we could’ve made the deadline without it,” he said. “This is a new benchmark.”

In these disparate environments—airplane cockpits and hospitals and IT work groups—the right behaviors did not evolve naturally. Nurses weren’t “naturally” given enough space to work without distraction, and programmers weren’t “naturally” left alone to focus on coding. Instead, leaders had to reshape the Path consciously. With some simple tweaks to the environment, suddenly the right behaviors emerged. It wasn’t the people who changed; it was the situation. What looks like a people problem is often a situation problem.

6.

We’ve seen lots of environment tweaking in organizations—offices and airlines and hospitals—but, make no mistake, we can turn these tools on ourselves, too. Many people have discovered that, when it comes to changing their own behavior, environmental tweaks beat self-control every time.

For instance, Brian Wansink, the author of the popcorn-bucket study described in [Chapter 1](#), has a devoted following of dieters who swear by his prime directive: Shrink your dinnerware. Use smaller plates, bowls, and cups.

Wansink knows that if we use big plates, we feel obligated to cover them with food—a half-full plate feels morally wrong somehow. And because we're wired to finish what's on our plate, that's a big problem. Big plates = big portions = overeating. To achieve eating control, according to Wansink, you must start with plate control. Store your dinner plates in a box in your closet, and start eating dinner every night off your salad plates. Use small wineglasses, not huge goblets. Never, ever eat snack food directly out of the bag or box; instead, pour a reasonable portion onto a small appetizer plate. These very simple environmental tweaks—swapping out the plates and bowls and glasses in your cabinet—have *huge* effects on eating behavior.

We all play these games with ourselves, trying to nudge ourselves to do the right thing. We know a guy who religiously lays out his jogging clothes and shoes before he goes to sleep. That way, when he wakes up, it's just a tiny bit easier to get going. Another friend never goes to bed without setting the coffeepot to auto-brew at wake-up time. The aroma of fresh-brewed coffee helps to fight the oversleeping urge. And there's a woman who actually freezes her credit card in a block of ice, so that when she feels the urge to spend, she forces herself to have a cooling-off (or, rather, a warming-up) period.

Self-manipulation works. Amanda Tucker used these same environment-tweaking principles to improve her management style at work. Tucker was the country manager for Nike in Vietnam. She traveled frequently to visit factories in outlying regions, and while she was out of the office, work piled up. When she returned home, she was often overwhelmed. "I had more plates spinning than I felt I could handle," she said. It was tempting to shut her office door and plow through the accumulated work, but she knew it was important to stay accessible to her team. In fact, she established an open-door

policy, allowing the individuals who reported to her directly to see her at any time she was in town.

Nine months into the job, Tucker solicited feedback from her team members about her performance as a manager. She was astonished when they complained that she didn't seem to have time to talk to them. "Some of them were offended that when they walked into my office, I would often continue to look at my computer screen and type while they were talking. This of course gave them the strong signal that what I was doing was more important to me than they were," Tucker said.

She knew they were right. It was a bad habit. And she also knew that the layout of her office was encouraging the habit. When people came to see her, they sat in chairs across from her desk. When she faced them, she still had the computer monitor in her field of view. So it was easy—too easy—for Tucker to glance back and forth from their faces to the screen.

Tucker simply rearranged her office. She moved the desk so it no longer separated her from her guests, and she added a meeting area with two small couches and a table. Now, when she was facing the people who came to see her, the computer was completely out of sight. No more temptation.

"Just by rearranging the furniture, I was able to connect much better with people who came to see me," she said. Six months later, she solicited more feedback and was pleased that her communication scores had soared.

If you'd seen Tucker's initial performance appraisals, you might have concluded that, despite her stated open-door policy, she was one of those insensitive managers who never listen to their subordinates. And you would have been committing the Fundamental Attribution Error. Simply by rearranging the furniture in her office, Tucker made herself into a different "kind of person." That's the power of shaping the Path.

There is something satisfying about outsmarting ourselves. (By now, you realize what “outsmarting ourselves” means—that our Riders are outsmarting our Elephants.) Tucker’s solution was appealing in its elegance—a seemingly messy management problem solved by an afternoon office makeover. Tucker shaped her environment to *disallow* her own bad behavior.

This is a topic that hits home for the two of us (your co-authors). While we were writing this book, we got annoyed by our tendency to get distracted by e-mail. We were aware of the irony of our giving advice to readers about reining in their Elephants while our own Elephants habitually prompted us to check Outlook. So we decided to take some of our own medicine.

If you use Microsoft Outlook, you know that when you get new e-mail, an alert sound plays through your computer’s speakers. That sound is like digital catnip. How can you not check your mail when you hear it? What if a rich Nigerian politician went down in a plane crash and you had a limited time to capture part of his fortune?

Chip decided to tweak his environment: He rummaged through the control panel until he found the place that allowed him to delete the e-mail sound at the system level. Later, he noticed that new e-mail also triggered an alert icon on the taskbar—more irresistible bait for the Elephant. He covered it with a Post-it note blackened with one of his daughter’s felt-tip markers. Now it can’t torment him. Ignorance is bliss.

Meanwhile, Dan went nuclear. He bought an old laptop, deleted all its browsers, and, for good measure, deleted its wireless network drivers. Now when he needs to focus, he takes the “way-back machine” with him to a coffee shop or library. There’s no hope of getting online. He’s been liberated by this restriction.

Our struggles with e-mail are a bit pathetic, but the larger topic is worth considering: Is it possible to design an environment in which undesired behaviors—whether yours or your colleagues’—are made not only harder but *impossible*? As it turns out, lots of people actually make their living contemplating how to wipe out the wrong kinds of behaviors.

Consider industrial safety. Many factories use dangerous machines that have a bad habit of lopping off fingers or hands that are in the wrong place at the wrong time. Suppose you're a factory foreman and one of your workers loses an index finger in an industrial accident. You want to make sure this never happens again. How might you accomplish that?

You could give your workers' Riders clear direction by means of clear signage—KEEP HANDS CLEAR OF THE MACHINE or DANGER: RISK OF INJURY—accompanied by an illustration identifying the machine's trouble spot.

You could appeal to your workers' Elephants, using fear. Here we can take inspiration from driver's-education courses in which teenagers watch films full of bloody, gruesome car crashes, so that when they finish driver's ed they will avoid driving like teenagers. In homage to these films, you could call together your workers and show them a video of the guy who lost his finger. Show them what the gory wound looked like. Have him urge his colleagues to take safety seriously. "I wish I'd paid more attention," he'd say.

Or you could focus on the Path, in which case you would disregard hearts and minds entirely. In fact, suppose you stipulated outright that your workers are hopeless, that they're irredeemable daredevils who are determined to waggle their fingers in the machine's danger zone for the sheer sport of it. Could you still keep them from dismembering themselves?

Absolutely. Many factories have done exactly that. For instance, one machine is designed so that it can be activated only if two buttons are pressed at the same time. The buttons are positioned so that to press both of them you must place your arms high and wide (like the "Y" in the "YMCA" dance). The beauty of this arrangement is that, if your hands are pressing those buttons, they are (by design) nowhere near the danger zone. And if they're not pressing the buttons, the machine is off. Either way, your fingers win.

Poof—you have made a dangerous behavior impossible.

8.

With that example in mind, think about all the innovations that have made “bad behavior” impossible or nearly impossible: childproof caps on medicine bottles, cars that won’t shift out of park unless the brake pedal is pressed, anything that’s fireproof. Notice that these are product-design innovations created to prevent injuries. “Injury prevention” is, in fact, a thriving field. Every state government has a few people on staff—usually heinously underfunded—whose job is to think about how to reduce injuries or deaths caused by small children falling into swimming pools, the elderly falling in their homes, car crashes, and other misfortunes. Rarely can such incidents be made impossible, but injuries resulting from them can be reduced.

In trying to minimize the risk of bad outcomes, injury-prevention experts often turn to the Haddon Matrix, a simple framework that provides a way to think systematically about accidents by highlighting three key periods of time: pre-event, event, and post-event.

Let’s say our goal is to reduce serious injuries from car wrecks. *Pre-event* interventions would include anything that would tend to prevent wrecks from happening: installing bright lighting on highways, painting clear lane markers on the roads, popularizing antilock brakes, launching advertising campaigns against drunk driving.

With *event* interventions, we accept that crashes will happen and ask ourselves how we can reduce the chances of injury. Seat belts and air bags are classic event interventions, but also think about breakaway light poles and those big orange barrels that line exit ramps (which are intended to soften collisions).

With *post-event* interventions, we acknowledge both that crashes will occur and that people will be injured. The goal of post-event interventions is to minimize the severity of the injuries and optimize the health outcomes. A speedy, effective emergency medical team will be important.

The Haddon Matrix is also useful for thinking about matters that aren't so life-and-death. Let's say you are the IT person in a small business and one of your many duties is to prevent the loss of important data that occurs frequently when computers crash. Some IT support people in this situation embrace not the Haddon Matrix but the "Hectoring Manifesto" and berate their colleagues for not backing up their work (all the while committing the Fundamental Attribution Error: *My colleagues are reckless and lazy people!*). But if you think in Haddon Matrix terms, you begin to see a more holistic picture.

Think about pre-event interventions: If computers don't crash, then you can't lose data. So maybe you schedule monthly computer check-ups, buy extra-padded laptop bags for everyone, and budget for complete replacements every three years.

Event interventions would call for ways of preventing a crash from leading to data loss. For instance, some computers have an extra hard drive where all data are mirrored in real time. A crash would be less likely to take out both drives.

Post-event interventions would accept the reality of data loss but focus on ways to minimize the damage. The most obvious strategy here would be to create an automated nightly network backup, so that if a crash happens and data are lost, you can restore the previous night's data. Another post-event strategy would be to find ways to prevent mission-critical data from ever ending up on a laptop. For instance, you might use an online application such as [SalesForce.com](https://www.salesforce.com) to host customer contact information, so that precious data would never depend on the health of a local hard drive.

Note that we've managed to create a robust plan against data loss without worrying about what our employees were thinking or feeling. We didn't mention their Elephants or their Riders. We simply tweaked the environment to make bad behavior impossible.

In 1999, some bad behavior was abruptly made impossible at a company called Rackspace. At one particular moment, company employees stopped doing one thing and starting doing another thing, and that behavior shift became the most important inflection point in the company's history. But before we get to that moment, a bit of backstory is necessary.

Rackspace is a company that hosts internet sites for other companies. It prides itself on customer service, as suggested by its slogan, "Fanatical Support." The firm's focus on customer service has paid off. Over the years, Rackspace has won an armload of trade awards for its service, and its "Net Promoter" score—a commonly used benchmark of customer word-of-mouth—has consistently been the envy of the industry.

But Rackspace wasn't always so customer-friendly. In 1999, Rackspace didn't think much about customer service. Company founder Graham Weston said that in the early days, Rackspace had a "denial of service" business model. Customer-service interactions were viewed as costs to be minimized—the more roadblocks that could be erected to keep the phone from ringing, the better the profits would be. (Notice the uncomfortable echoes of the Haddon Matrix: If you view customer calls as bad behavior to be prevented, you will do all you can to deter them. Recall that for many years, [Amazon.com](https://www.amazon.com)'s policy was not to publish a customer-service phone number.)

Then in the fall of 1999, Rackspace received The Call. It started normally enough. A customer tried to call for support. He pressed 5 to get help, but instead he got voice mail, which in effect said, "Feel free to leave a voice mail here, but we don't check it very often, so you're better-off sending us an e-mail." The customer grudgingly sent an e-mail message to the suggested address. And the team at Rackspace never answered it.

After a few more of these irritating cycles, the customer was furious, and with a bit of legwork he managed to track down Graham Weston at the office of a real estate business he owned. Surprised, Weston asked the customer to forward the e-mails he'd sent and promised to look into the matter.

Weston reviewed the long chain of e-mails, which had become increasingly angry as past inquiries were ignored. “Something hit me about what the customer was asking for,” said Weston. “It was something that we could do very easily that he couldn’t do. So the question in my mind was, why are we not serving the customer happily?”

Weston knew that his team couldn’t sustain a business based on dodging its customers. “We made a 180-degree turn,” he said.

Weston hired David Bryce to be the head of customer support. At his first meeting with the team, Bryce announced that Rackspace was going to transform itself from a company that dreaded customer support to a company that was passionate about support. He posted an aspirational banner on the wall: RACKSPACE GIVES FANATICAL SUPPORT. The phrase stuck immediately.

This was just talk, of course, but there was action to back it up. Weston started by overhauling the company’s business model. Providing great service would cost more, and if Rackspace offered both premium service and cutting-edge technological expertise, it would be forced to set its prices so high that no one would buy. So, remarkably, Weston began pushing for the company to become technologically dull: “We don’t want to be on the bleeding edge of technology. We believe in standardization. We want a narrow focus—these are the things we do, and these are things we don’t do. If you’re E*Trade or Amazon, you should host your own site, we can’t help,” he said. (Notice that this is clear direction for the Rider.)

Perhaps the most dramatic change made by Weston and Bryce was also the simplest. Rackspace, like all hosting companies, had a call-queuing system. (“Your call is important to us. Please press 1 for recorded tips that don’t address your problem. Press 5 to leave us a message we won’t return. Press 8 to repeat these options.”) The call queue is perhaps the most basic tool of customer support.

Weston threw it out.

“When a customer calls, that means they need our help, and we’ve got to answer the telephone,” he said. Without the queuing system, there was no safety net. The phone would keep ringing until

somebody picked it up. To Weston, this was a critical symbol of the service ethic. “When a customer has a problem, we shouldn’t deal with it when it’s convenient for us. We should deal with it when it’s convenient for the customer.” When Weston threw out the queuing system, it became *impossible* to dodge the customer. By 2007, the company was talking to an average customer three times per week.

Subsequently, the company launched the “Straightjacket Awards,” including actual Rackspace-branded straightjackets as trophies, which were presented to employees who’d been so fanatical about service that they’d become downright insane. (That’s an identity appeal for the Elephant: *We are zealots—that’s what makes us special.*) Not coincidentally, in 2008, Rackspace was one of the companies in *Fortune*’s list of Best Places to Work.

The focus on service paid off. In 2001, Rackspace was the first internet hosting firm to turn a profit, and over the next six years, it *averaged* 58 percent annual growth. By 2008, Rackspace had passed AT&T as the highest-grossing firm in the industry.

10.

What transformed the character of Rackspace’s customer-service people? Nothing. They had the same core character before and after the change. They were just people operating in a new environment. The old behavior (ignoring customers) had become harder, and the new behavior (serving customers) had become easier.

In this chapter, we’ve seen that what looks like a “character problem” is often correctible when you change the environment. The transformations are stunning. Take a bunch of customer-service slackers and rip out their call-queuing system, and they start helping customers. Take a boss whose employees say she “won’t listen” and rejigger her furniture, and suddenly the employees’ frustrations fade. Take the biggest jerks in the Stanford dorms and give them a page of instructions, and they’ll donate more food to the needy than the saints.

Simple tweaks of the Path can lead to dramatic changes in behavior.