

How to sell and lead change – tips from the masters

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Overview

Far too many well-meaning initiatives fail because we do not understand the psychology behind getting change to work. This ‘expert article’ explores the work of Steve Zaffron and Dave Logan’s, ‘The Three Laws of Performance’ and John Kotter’s, ‘Leading Change’. It covers the importance of Harry Mills’ “Self-Persuasion,” sets out an eight-stage process that will help you implement change, and offers guidance on delivering persuasive presentations.

As you will know from past experiences, the sales process of a new concept is not easy and can be prone to failure. I would argue that more than half the initiatives that are declined at the concept stage were under sold. In other words, given the right approach, the initiative would have gone ahead.

If you are not prepared to learn the skills to cover the common deficiencies in a selling change process I would argue that you are resigning yourself to providing the same service level for years to come. Selling change requires a special set of skills, and we all can and should get better at it.

Three books have opened up the way for us to rethink change and to apply techniques that will get change over the line.

Steve Zaffron and Dave Logan

Steve Zaffron and Dave Logan have written a compelling book, "The Three Laws of Performance," that explains why so many of these initiatives have failed. The first law is "How people perform correlates to how situations occur to them." The writers point out that the organisation's "default future" which we, as individuals, know in our bones will happen – will be made to happen. Thus, in an organisation with a systemic problem, the organisation's staff will be driven to make initiatives fail so that the default future prevails.

They went on to say that is why the more you change, the more you stay the same. The key to change is to recreate, in the organisation's staff minds, a new vision of the future, let's call it an "invented future."

Zaffron and Logan signal the importance of language (the second law). Without language, we would not have a past or a future. It is the ability to use language that enables us to categorize thoughts as either the past or the future. Without language, we would be like the cat on the mat, sunning itself for yet another afternoon, thinking about our next meal, but without the ability to process complex thought.

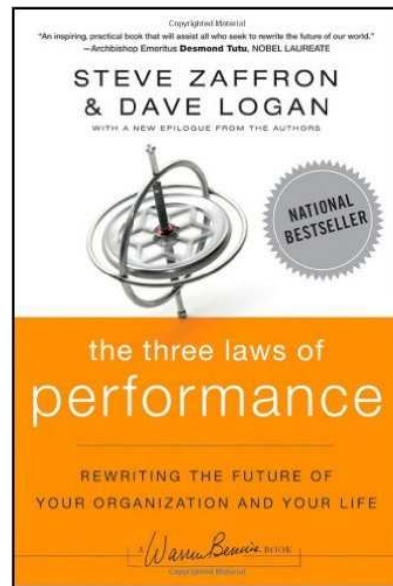
The next point they raised was that in order to make change, we need to use a future-based language (the third law). It is interesting if you listen to the outstanding orators of the past like Sir Winston Churchill, you will hear future-based language at work. These great speakers knew intuitively, about the power of future-based language.

"We shall fight on the beaches, we shall fight on the landing grounds, we shall fight in the fields and in the streets, we shall fight in the hills; we shall never surrender." Winston Churchill

Harry Mills

Harry Mills, a multiple business book author, has written extensively about persuasion. In his recent work "The Aha! Advantage" he talks about the significance of self-persuasion.

"Self-persuasion is fundamentally more powerful than direct persuasion essentially because of the way it reduces resistance." Mills talks about the four faces of the Aha moment, as shown in Exhibit 1.



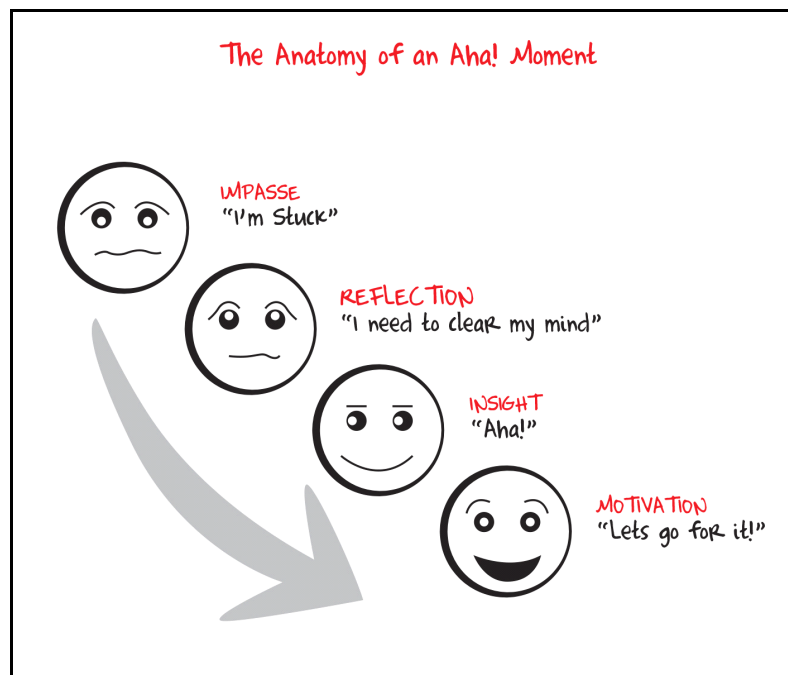


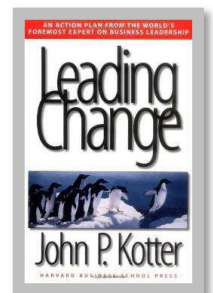
Exhibit 1 The Four Faces of the Aha Moment Source: The Mills Group

Mills' work is very consistent with Zaffron & Logan. We need to get the staff in the organisation to have, for themselves, that Aha moment, that "Hell no" we do not want the default future. When the staff comes to this point, change is inevitable.

This means we need to structure our workshops so there is more involvement, more chance for staff to have that Aha moment, and less dogmatic rhetoric about the facts.

John Kotter

In 1996, John Kotter published "Leading Change," which quickly became a seminal work in the field of change management. He pointed out that effecting change — real, transformative change — is hard. Kotter proposed an eight-stage process for creating major change, a clear map to follow when persuading an organisation to move. I will discuss each Kotter stage while at the same time embedding Zaffron & Logan, and Harry Mill's thinking. If you follow these stages, you will increase the chances of changing projects many fold.



Establish a sense of urgency— Here, we need to appeal both to the intellectual and the emotional sides of the executive team. There are two stages. First, ambushing the CEO with a compelling elevator pitch so you get to stage two. Second, delivering a masterful sales presentation of around 15-20 minutes aimed at obtaining permission to run a focus group to assess, validate, and scope the proposed initiative.

Create a guiding coalition— In every organisation you have oracles; those individuals everyone refers you to when you need something answered (e.g., "You need to talk to Pat"). These oracles exist right across the organisation and might hold seemingly unimportant positions. Do not be fooled.

An investment at this stage is paramount. In one case study, an organisation held three, two-week workshops which were designed to progress their planning tool implementation. Yes, that is six weeks of workshops. The CEO was present for part of each of the workshops, and the wisdom from the oracles was channelled, by an expert facilitator into a successful blueprint for the project.

No project will ever succeed without a guiding coalition of oracles behind it. In "The Three Laws of Performance" Zaffron and Logan point out that when you present the "burning platform," you are aiming for an overwhelming "Hell no" response upon asking the question, "Do you want this future?" The oracles want the alternative future, which you have also articulated.

However, Mills has warned us to be patient and give time for the staff to discuss, think, and mull over the content. In most cases, a two-day workshop will be more beneficial in giving staff time to let self-persuasion work.

Develop a vision and strategy— In order for the journey to be seen and resources made available, we must master future-based language that is compelling and motivational. As mentioned, Zaffron and Logan have signified the importance of language (the second law) and that it is crucial that you talk using a future-based language (the third law).

Communicate the change vision — Kotter emphasized that it's not likely that you will under-communicate a little bit; you will probably under-communicate a lot by a factor of 10 to 100 times. This will undermine your initiative, no matter how well planned. During a project, the project leader needs to obtain permission from the CEO to gate crash any gathering in the organisation and have a 10-minute slot to outline the project and progress to date. One sure fire way to failure is to believe that staff will read your project newsletters and emails.

Empower broad-based action— Early on, the need for change and the right to change must be handed over to teams within the organisation. Zaffron and Logan concur with this view. Once the invented future is set in the minds of the organisation's staff, the staff will march toward this future. All the great writers have emphasized that some chaos is good so let teams embrace the project in their own way.

Generate quick wins— Obvious to us all but frequently missed. Always remember that senior management is, on occasion, afflicted by attention deficit disorder. Progress in a methodical and introverted way at your peril. We need easy wins, celebrated extrovertly, and we need to ensure we set up the CEO to score the easy goals.

Consolidate gains and produce more change — This is the fly-wheel affect so well put by Jim Collins in his books "*Built to Last*" and "*Good to Great*". When the staff are working in unison, the fly wheel of change will turn quicker and quicker. This was very evident in the case study where they had six weeks of coalition-building workshops.

Anchor new approaches in the culture— Make heroes of the change agents, make sure their values are embedded in the corporate values and now ensure we weed out those in management who have not embraced the change and who, over time, will be dowsing the fire at night when nobody is looking.