

The A-Squared Approach
(to “change management”)
Allies & Action

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Preface: **Friends**, Not Foes

I have recently written a 172-page manuscript, inspired by several tweetstreams. Not sure whether or not it was a single tweet or something else that got me going, but get me going it did!

I am, in short, appalled by most of the “change management” literature. In a word, it’s 99% (or so it feels) negative.

“Overcoming resistance to change.”

“Dealing with objections.”

“Vanguishing foes.”

Etc.

Etc.

In a word: **Rubbish!**

The change process need not be negative. Indeed, when it is, it is rarely or ever successful.

The issue and opportunity, briefly addressed here, is ... ALLIES.

My message:

Forget ENEMIES.

Make FRIENDS.

So off we go ...

The A-squared Approach: Allies & Action

Not sure what triggered it, but I went on a Twitter rampage this morning (Thursday, 11/21/13) on the topic of change. Herewith, FYI:

Change agency: Forget the word “enemies.” Focus on/obsess on ...

ALLIES.

Big change is not about fighting the bad guys. It’s about surrounding them with your continuously recruited allies.

Success at change: Building a stable of allies. Failure: Pissing and moaning and picking fights.

Change agent time distribution: 50% recruiting Allies. 40% tending Allies. 10%

other. **0%** fighting enemies.

Change: Allies do not automatically remain allies. Tend them and do NOT NOT neglect them—the latter is a common sin.

Change the 4F Way: **F**ind a **F**ellow **F**reak **F**araway.

(Change agents need playmates and *distant* playpens.)

Change: Rack up and log ... **“small
wins”** ... like a ... *maniac*.

Change you want: **It’s already happening *somewhere*. Find it!**

Change the Bob Stone way: ***“Some people look for things that went wrong and try to fix them. I look for things that went right, and try to build off them.”***

Losses as critical as wins: ***Dotcom movement worked big time. Astonishing amount of experimentation in brief period. “LS” as/more important than “WS.”***

Change is about end runs—not a smash-mouth plunge down the middle.

Allies: Recruit the quiet ones as much or more than the noisy ones.

If you can’t find allies, you’re probably perceived as too far out. Find the sweet spot: Exciting/edgy w/o scaring the shit outta people.

A rigid stance nearly always generates an equally rigid response.

Change: Making loud noises is usually a loser’s strategy.

If you are really passionate, you tend to confront. Confrontation NEVER results in victory; it just entrenches your opponents and increases their determination to stop you. You play into the bad guys’ hands: “I knew he was a jackass. Never put him on the agenda again.”

Action Rules! 1 Thing (Only) I've Learned in 48 Years!

A Bias for Action. (No. 1/"Basics of Excellence"/*In Search of Excellence*/1982)

Ready. Fire. Aim.

(H. Ross Perot on EDS; as compared to GM's "Ready. Aim. Aim. Aim. Aim. Aim. Aim. ...")

Just do it! (Nike.)

Move fast, break things. (Facebook.)

Experiment fearlessly. (Trait #1/Great innovator companies/*Bloomberg Businessweek*)

Relentless trial and error. (Corporate Survival Trait #1 in crazy times/*Wall Street Journal*)

"You miss 100% of the shots you never take." (Wayne Gretzky.)

Fail. Forward. Fast. (Tech exec/Philadelphia)

CAN YOUR BUSINESS FAIL FAST ENOUGH TO SUCCEED? (*Economist* conf. title)

Fail faster, succeed sooner. (David Kelley/IDEO)

No matter. Try again. Fail again. Fail better. (Samuel Beckett)

Reward excellent failures. Punish mediocre successes. (Phil Daniels/Australian businessman)

Whoever Makes the Most Mistakes Wins. (Richard Farson/book title)

"The Silicon Valley of today is built less atop the spires of earlier triumphs than upon the rubble of earlier debacles." (Paul Saffo/tech futurist/Palo Alto)

"The secret of fast progress is *inefficiency*: fast/furious/numerous failures." (K. Kelly)

S.A.V./Screw Around Vigorously (TP: only possible success strategy for crazy times)

Demo or die. (MIT Media Lab credo)

"Don't 'plan.' Do stuff." (David Kelley/IDEO)

"Effective prototyping may be the most valuable core competence an innovative organization can hope to have."/"Minimize 'mean time to prototype.'" (M. Schrage/MIT)

"This is so simple it sounds stupid. You only find oil if you drill wells." (J. Masters/wildcatter)

"We have a 'strategic plan.' It's called 'doing things.'" (Herb Kelleher/Southwest Airlines)

"Can do!" (Motto/U.S. Navy Seabees/My starting point in 1966 in Vietnam)

"Execution is strategy." (Fred Malek)

WD40 (Water Displacement, 40 tries to get it right)

BLAME NO ONE. EXPECT NOTHING. DO

SOMETHING. (NFL coach Bill Parcells/locker-room poster)

"Quality is a probabilistic function of quantity." (M. Gladwell/"Creation Myth"/re J.S. Bach)

"Ever notice that 'What the hell' is always the right decision?" (Anon. screenwriter)

W.T.T.M.S.W. •/Whoever Tries The Most Stuff Wins.

WTTMSASTMSUW/Whoever Tries The Most Stuff And Screws The Most Stuff Up Wins.

WTTMSASTMSUTFW/Whoever Tries The Most Stuff And Screws The Most Stuff Up
The Fastest Wins.

WTTMSW:

Whoever

Tries

The

Most

Stuff

Wins.

Change: Recruit allies 2 or 3 levels “down” ... the magicians who reside where the real work is done and the place from which the system can be indirectly manipulated. I.e., “Suck down” for success/Make friends in “low” places.

Change: **ALLIES. ALLIES. ALLIES. ALLIES.**
ALLIES. ALLIES. (Then more **ALLIES.**)

Change agents: Commit no minor sins. Don’t let the bad guys find a narrow opening and bring you down for trivial reasons.

Change agents: Keep a civil tongue at all costs.

Winners: Recruit/nurture allies; try lotsa stuff; stay under the radar. Losers: Go toe to toe with the establishment; seek the spotlight.

Change agents: *Speak not ill of
thine enemies.* Even to pals in private. All
the walls have keen ears.

Change agents: No: Charts and graphs. Instead: Demos. Demos. Then more demos.

Change: *Success is more about momentum and
growing excitement around small wins than it is
about big wins.*

Change: Engage your allies in the design process—even if it introduces impurities. They must FEEL true ownership.

100% of change-that-works is NON-linear. (A wonderful saying: Winners are the ones who are “good at Plan B.” Or, I’d say, Plan Z.)

”

*Suck “down”
for success.**

*Make friends
in “low”
places.*

***Sucking up is for suckers.**

Change: *Joyfully let/encourage your allies to take*

100% *credit for the small wins they're involved in.*

Serious change includes bad days, bad weeks, bad months, perhaps bad years.

Change agents: Re-read all emails THREE times before sending.

Social Media is a marvel. But do NOT shortchange face-to-face with Allies.

Change agents: *Successful “small wins” with outsiders provide enormous street cred.** (*And, increasingly, “Co-invention” is “EVERYTHING.”)

Change agents: Preaching to the choir is just fine. More than fine: It produces a “multiplier effect”: *If the members of the choir preach to their choirs, it becomes a ... MOVEMENT!*

Greatest waste of time? Trying to “convert” non-believers. Instead, surround 'em. That is, you don't “convert.” “They” “discover”—come to appreciate what you're doing because a couple of their pals have joined up.

*#1 role of
allies?*

*Recruit more
allies!**

*Hence allies' perceived **“ownership”** is all important—allies need to “do it their way” to abet that sense of ownership. Give 'em space: No doctrinal rigidity, please!

Aiming for An Ally's "Ownership"

The following are simplistic, but give a flavor of "the approach" to prospective allies. I repeat: They are not "helpers." They are stakeholders with as much ownership/skin-in-the-game as you.

Herewith:

"Hey, I've been working on this idea; actually we've both talked about the issue before. Want to add your \$2.22 [not \$0.02] and help me develop it? Who knows, could be fun."

"We ran a little two-bit trial on part of this new program. Results look pretty good. Any chance you'd tweak it and try it with your team?"

"I've gotten these great results from this system tweak. But your group is very different from mine. If you like the data, would you consider doing something akin to it, using your parameters, in your place?"

"I tested this idea and had some pretty good results. Then Nancy James re-designed it big time for her department—and had promising results. Your department is more like hers than mine. If you're interested, I'm sure she'd be delighted to go through it with you."

Etc.

Etc.

*All alliances are social--
regardless of the role of self-
interest. Tend to the social
part—or perish.*

*“Allied commands depend
on mutual confidence, and
this confidence is
gained, above all, through
the development of
friendships.”* —General D.D. Eisenhower,
on managing the impossible—the D-Day alliance

Change I: **ALLIES.**
ALLIES. ALLIES.
ALLIES. ALLIES.
ALLIES. (Then
***more* ALLIES.)**

Change II: **“Suck DOWN**
for success.”

Change III: **Demo. NOW.**

ONE More/LAST Time:

Allies, Not Adversaries

“Overcoming resistance to change” is the quintessential B.S./misguided/stupid/ignorant approach to getting (important) things done.

Let me set you straight in precisely ... **SEVENTEEN** words:

Implementing desired change is not about “vanquishing” “enemies.”

Implementing desired change is about recruiting and nurturing allies.

That is the difference between ... **Negative & Positive.**

That is the difference between ... **Enemies & Friends.**

That is the difference between ... **Fear & Fun.**

That is the difference between ... **Night & Day.**

That is the difference between ... **Hell & Heaven.**

That is the difference between ... **Failure & Success.**

Q.E.D.