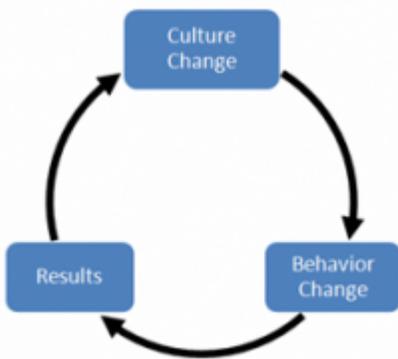


Cycle of Change

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Abstract / Teaser:

Change sees experts come and go, theories develop and evolve, yet few organizations are ever satisfied with their change efforts.

The following was written by David Silverstein, BMGI's CEO.

The subject of change is one that's seen experts come and go, and theories and models develop and evolve, yet few organizations are ever satisfied with their change efforts. An experience I had many years ago leads me to believe that change is actually much simpler to understand, and much harder to achieve, than most believe.

Years ago, when BMGI was much smaller, I was teaching a six sigma champion class for a client. This was a relatively small company with a very committed leadership team. In fact, the CEO had participated in the prior week's class—all three days—without ever stepping out for a meeting or phone call. For this second week, he kicked the class off with a motivating 45-minute explanation of why everyone was there, talked about his experience in class the prior week, and then proceeded to pop in and out for the entire three days, just to show his support. It was, as some might say, a textbook example of leadership.

So let's talk about change...

I was about mid-way through the third day of class when someone raised his hand. He was a very polite southern gentleman, somewhat reserved, and he asked, "Mr. Silverstein," (I was Dave

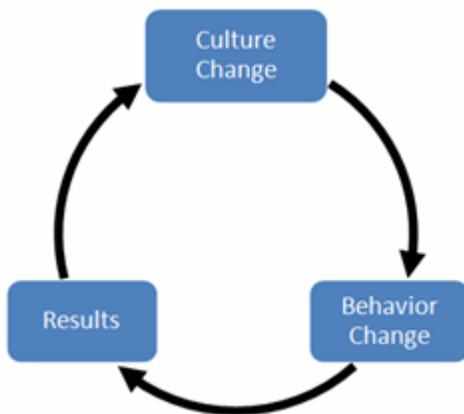
to everyone else) “Mr. Silverstein, I don’t want you to misunderstand the question I’m about to ask. I think everything we’ve been learning is spot on. We need to be more disciplined in how we approach problem solving. We need to be more data-driven. I love this idea of full time people called Black Belts. It all makes sense. Except one thing...”
“What’s that?” I asked?

“Well, like I said, I think this is all spot on, but two days ago our CEO came in and talked for nearly 45 minutes about culture change, and I don’t really get what all this has to do with culture change.”

I just stared for a moment when I heard the question. It was one of those questions where my first reaction to was to say, “Well that’s a dumb question.” But there are no dumb questions, we teachers tell people. So I stood there in silence and started thinking about how I’d answer the question, and I realized it wasn’t such a dumb question after all. How could it be if I was struggling to find the answer and put it into words?

So I did what any good instructor would do. I gave my class a 15-minute break.

As the class took off for the rest rooms and coffee pots, I grabbed a marker and walked over to a flip chart. I always think better with pictures. I found myself almost subconsciously starting to draw a circle. After all, everything can be answered with a circle or a four-square box, right?

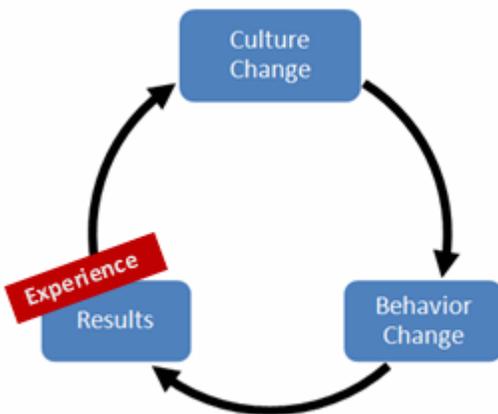


I broke the circle into three sections with arrows pointing clockwise. At the top I wrote, “Culture Change.” Next I wrote, “Behavior Change.” And lastly, I wrote, “Results.”

I went on to explain that my experience was that too many companies had tried to change their corporate cultures by “communicating” the new culture. They’d come up with a vision statement and a set of values, and they’d post them on the walls and print them on the back of ID cards thinking if they said it enough, it would all become reality.

My experience, on the other hand, was very different. While I had seen these communications exercises time-and-time again, I could not remember seeing one work. What did work was a very simple philosophy that required an understanding of three basic principles:

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1. Adults are just like children—we are merely a product of our experiences.
 2. Culture is a product of people’s behaviors and the results those behaviors achieve or don’t achieve.
 3. Values and beliefs don’t come from being told what to think; they come from what the individuals in an organization experience.
 4. People need to experience results, and if they do, they will value whatever it is that delivered results.



As I heard myself speak, I amended my drawing by writing, “Experience” over Results.

The point is that if people have positive experiences, they will begin to value whatever it is that granted them those experiences, whether it is a new tool, better leadership, or a new competency. And of course, if they have negative experiences, they’ll reject whatever created the experience. Experiences lead to new values and beliefs. Said otherwise, replacing old experiences with new ones is the only way to actually change values, which is the only way to change behavior, which is the only way to get results and change the culture.

Focus on experiences, not communication. Communication is merely a vehicle to share experiences, but if you’re not creating new experiences to share, communication is worthless. And when you try to fabricate experiences, people see right through you. It’s intellectually dishonest.

Phew, I’d said it. I’d answered the question.

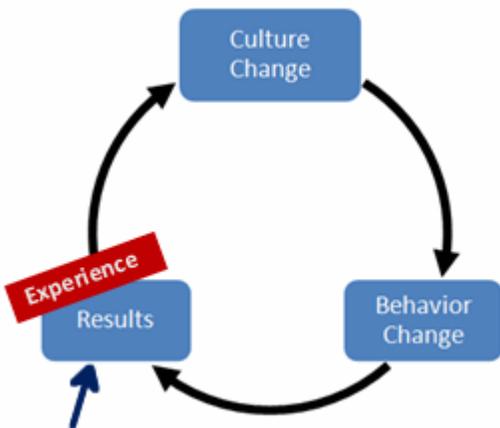
And then the hand went up again.

“Ok, thank you Mr. Silverstein, that definitely helps. But I have one more question if you don’t mind.”

“Sure thing. What’s that?” I replied, as I thought to myself, “I can’t give them another 15 minute break right now.”

“Well, that all makes sense, but that picture looks like a closed cycle. How do you get into it?”

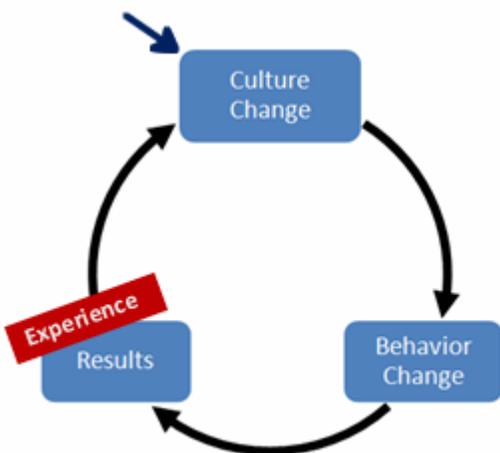
Wow! I hadn't anticipated that one. But after a few seconds, the answer came to me and it was clear.



“Brute force,” I replied. You’re right. You have to break into it somewhere. Let’s look at each part of the cycle.

First, we could try to break in at results. But you can’t really buy results. You have to earn them. And to the extent you can buy them by hiring, say, a consultant to do something for you, you’re still short changing the “experience.” So we can’t really enter at results.

Next, let’s see what happens if we try to enter at culture change. Nope. That doesn’t really work, either, because without new experiences, we’re just looking at one of those worthless communications exercises.



So where does that really leave us? It leaves us with some brute force behavior change. We CAN decide, of our own free will, that we’re going to do things differently (maybe aided by some strong events and training). It’s hard, and without positive reinforcement, it won’t last. But we can do it. We can commit to trying new ways to solve problems. And if they work, we’ll have positive experiences, which will drive new culture, which will in turn reinforce the new behaviors. And once we’ve run around the circle a few times, it will get easier and easier.”

So there you have it. Culture change is really all about creating a new set of positive experiences

for people.

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