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Thoughtful and interesting techniques for real change."

— Richard Riley, former U.S. Secretary of Education  
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SEVEN  
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OF  
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LEADING BUSINESS  
TRANSFORMATION  
THAT LASTS

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***PRAISE FOR DAVID SHANER AND  
THE SEVEN ARTS OF CHANGE***

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“This is a terrific read.”

—Terry Copeland, President and CEO, Altairnano, Inc.; Former Plant  
Manager and Director of Product Development, Duracell

“The process described in this book clearly and simply provides the means to achieve success.”

—Robert E. Gardner, Colonel, United States Air Force (Retired)

“Understanding and applying these principles has enriched my personal and professional life beyond  
what words can describe.”

—Lee McCarter, Chief Executive Officer, JW Aluminum  
Former Chief Financial Officer, Synthetic Industries

“Dr. David Shaner’s knowledge and understanding of Japanese history and culture are profound. His  
unique training in Aikido in particular has made him believe in the importance of the spiritual aspect  
in conducting successful business.”

—Akio Urakami, PhD, Chairman and CEO, ETG Limited  
Former Chairman and CEO, Ryobi North America Inc.

“Whether you know him as David, Dr. Shaner, Professor Shaner, or Shaner Sensei, his lessons are  
applicable to all. This is not a ‘quick fix’ book but rather a thought-provoking, enlightened recounting  
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“I have watched the growth and development of David’s ideas working with the very best  
companies in the world.”

—Jack Goldsmith, Co-founder, MARCO

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follower of the techniques detailed in *The Seven Arts of Change*.”

—John “Jack” V. Rice, PhD, Senior Vice President, W.I.N.G.S. Inc.  
Former Director of Training and Development, Frito-Lay

“*The Seven Arts* influenced my life deeply. Under David Shaner’s guidance, my career took off and  
I discovered for myself the benefits of true mind and body coordination. I highly recommend this book

for anyone interested in improving their performance and thus actualizing their true potential.”

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—Tony Stevenson, Principal Soloist, Metropolitan Opera

“So compelling, so applicable.”

—Greg Gardner, SuccessFactors, Inc.

“As someone with decades of experience in human resources in a large corporation, I appreciate the practical yet profound wisdom David’s Seven Arts offer. I highly recommend this read.”

—James E. Eubanks, Human Resources Executive  
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“The Seven Arts can help you and your organization live a healthier, more prosperous life. ”

—Thomas Crum, Author of *Three Deep Breaths*, *Journey to Center*, and  
*The Magic of Conflict*; Founder and President, Aiki Works Inc.

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# The Seven Arts of Change

Leading Business Transformation That Lasts

David Shaner



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## Dedication

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This book is dedicated to all the employees who first actively participated, then acted responsibly, then executed the business plan, and then extended the benefits across the value chain (from suppliers to customers). Most importantly, I am grateful to each and every one of you for taking a risk and helping this Seven Arts vision become a reality. It has been my hope from the beginning that the Seven Arts might be of personal benefit to you extended even more fully beyond the workplace. This is the fullest extension, and most meaningful extension, of the inclusive Seven Arts process. I hope that the quality of not only your work life, but also your personal life and spiritual life, has been positively affected by our shared learning and experience. I thank you for your trust, openness, and willingness to put yourself in the place of your partner. Remember that your life itself is your true monastery. And, since much of your life is spent working, why not let work itself become your whetstone for true spiritual transformation.



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# Introduction

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Why a spiritual guide for change? Because the big meeting often goes like this:

The leader expresses his belief in the organization. All that ability, he says, is needed now because the firm is facing extraordinary challenges. The economy, overseas competition, and [insert your own hurdles here] have mounted enormous pressure on the company, and, as a result, numbers are down and quality is slipping. Change needs to happen yesterday.

To meet the new challenges, the best and brightest consulting firm on the planet has reviewed the situation and blessed the company with their five-step prescription to thrive in today's market. Via company-wide presentation, the leader "Power-Points" the magic initiatives. Now, he concludes, it's up to everyone to team up and dig in. The organization is going to make it! Employees walk out with a sense of urgency and vitality that might last the afternoon. For the moment, they believe they won't lose their jobs.

The following day, everything settles to the status quo. The sparks of urgency and vigor dim. Some employees realize they don't understand the new plans and are frustrated. A few resent that outsiders dictated the plan of action. Others are apathetic. The unified vision of change begins unraveling, one emotion, one action at a time.

And so this is the progression of the common story: The leader expresses the need for change. The people don't buy it, get it, or care about it. And the change never happens.

## CHANGING HOW YOU CHANGE

Nearly every study of organizational change over the past two decades indicates that companies fail to make the change they intend approximately 70 percent of the time. And so the question forever being raised is: Why do change initiatives flop far more often than they fly? Volumes are written on the subject every year. Yet, most don't answer the question correctly, if at all. Allow me to put this rub to rest right away:

Change efforts fail when the spirit of a company remains the same.

A leader might be right about everything—the need to change, the reasons for change, and the timing of change. He might be extremely convincing in his pep talk. But if the leader doesn't understand where change begins, change won't happen, no matter how urgent it is.

Before organizational change can succeed, it must first occur at the subtle spiritual level in the individuals of the organization. That's because the spirit is the foundational source of energy that runs through our bodies and gives our lives meaning. Your spirit is the sum of your beliefs, your convictions, your moral codes and standards. All lasting transformation must begin there because ultimately, your spirit and mine is the primary driver of all our behavior.

Without grounding at the spiritual level, the change process becomes a cooked-up breadbasket of external tactics that never takes hold. Employees might do as they're told for a time, but they will eventually default to the behaviors driven by their spirits. In short, without tapping into the defaults of organizational behavior, people's behavior remains the same. It always has and always will.

I tell you this with a high degree of certainty because I've stood in the midst of change efforts for three decades. In one area of my life, I have helped professional athletes and artists transition to world-class performers. In another area, I transformed myself to top levels in both athletics and academics. In another area, I have helped massive organizations such as Umbro, Frito-Lay, Ryob

Duracell, Gillette, and Owens Corning Composites achieve their change goals with a 100 percent success rate. All this change succeeded because it started at the spiritual level first.

But I didn't see this right away. I used to differentiate each activity from the others, not seeing the underlying connections beneath them all.

Looking back, I can see now that I probably didn't link my diverse personal experiences of change with my change guidance because I was concerned my clients—particularly my corporate clients—would think me too unconventional. I figured that in a time when change was urgent, they'd be looking for decisive action and strong leadership, not personal development philosophy.

And so, when I worked with a well-known tenor from the Metropolitan Opera, I packaged my guidance into the context of music metaphors and theory—even though it was based on my lifelong practice of *Ki-Aikido* and the mindset I developed as a competitive downhill skier. When I worked with large international corporations like Mitsubishi Chemical, I translated my guidance into the cross-cultural business vernacular of goal setting, bottom lines, and shareholder value. I never considered mentioning that I'd learned many of these lessons as a professor of philosophy and Asian studies, or from my unique experience serving as a deputy sheriff in Aspen, Colorado—even though these things were inextricably linked to what I was teaching them. I assumed clients would wonder, *Who is this snow-bum/ philosopher/kung-fu fighter with no grasp of business reality?* I assumed they would lose them at the first hint of spirituality or ancient thought.

I have since learned my assumptions were dead wrong.

When I finally began to let the cat out of the bag and divulge to my clients the real foundation beneath my unique change guidance, I discovered that individuals and organizations alike responded with dramatic results to what I now call the Seven Arts approach to change. At its core, it is a spiritual guide to change that works whether you are changing a sports franchise, a mom-'n'-pop shop, a corporate conglomerate, or yourself.

I should have known my clients would respond well to knowing the spiritual truth behind the curtain of my guidance, as the same spiritual truths allowed me to navigate what appears to be an implausible journey of change in my own life—a journey that led to seemingly disparate expertise in downhill ski racing, martial arts, academia, and business.

I'll share the details of these diverse experiences in the coming pages, but, for now, it's important that you understand where this spiritual guide for change came from.

As a child, I was curious about everything different. Anything my parents would not or could not explain was immediately elevated in my mind as something exotic, something to be remembered, explored, and, ultimately, understood. My subsequent journeys led me to a love of unconventional wisdom. When I came across something that sparked my sacred curiosity, I jumped headlong into learning everything I could about it. I didn't always seek to become the best in that field, but I did always seek to learn from the best. This gave me an incredibly unique and behind-the-scenes understanding of several disciplines. (In fact, I actually lived with my highly acclaimed teachers in two different instances.)

From my teenage years, my life wound from learning competitive downhill skiing from a world-class coach named Jean-Pierre Pascal and a downhill champion named Philippe Mollard . . . to studying *Aikido* under Master Koichi Tohei, the man who brought the martial art from Japan to the United States in 1953, . . . to studying Asian philosophy under the world's foremost authorities in Hawaii . . . to understanding the biological basis of behavior from Harvard's Stephen Jay Gould and

Edward O. Wilson . . . to learning about law enforcement as a deputy under Dick Kienast, the famous sheriff of Pitkin County, Colorado, . . . to then applying my diverse education in contexts as far ranging as a Fulbright Project serving Prime Minister Indira Gandhi, to peak performance sessions for National Football League (NFL) and National Hockey League (NHL) players, to a thirteen-year change initiative for Duracell.

My love of “different” wisdom was not actually leading me down the path of a pinball as it seemed. Instead, the knowledge became a snowball, growing in size and scope as I rolled around every turn. This wisdom I was gathering was accumulating into something much more significant than a nice metaphorical lesson here and there.

Now here’s where I should stop and admit something: I didn’t see this snowball until I sat down six years ago to finish the last chapter of a sort of self-help memoir I was writing about personal and spiritual development based on the things I’d learned from my various mentors. While I had successfully led numerous companies through change initiatives at that point, I couldn’t give a concrete answer about why I’d been so successful. I still felt as though I had been winging it. It wasn’t until I was sitting outside at the picnic table in my backyard garden, penning the last sentence of my memoir that it hit me: Could it be that this seven-part path to individual spiritual development was the same path I had been using to guide organizations through change initiatives for many, many years?

Yes, I said to myself. It’s all right here. The phrasing was different but the elements of successful change were precisely the same. Each Art for personal spiritual development had a precise counterpart in the process of organizational change I had been using all these years.

The realization hit me with such clarity that I immediately set out to write a new book—this book. This time I would write a book focused upon successful change management and business development based upon my three decades of consulting experience; first, with the Alexander Proudfoot Company, and second, with my own company starting nearly twenty-five years ago.

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In the following seven chapters, you will discover, as I did, that by following seven basic Arts of spiritual development, you will be highly successful at not only leading change, but also sustaining change throughout an organization. Here briefly are those Seven Arts and the primary actions that embody each one:

### **THE SEVEN ARTS FOR SUCCESSFUL CHANGE**

- 1. The Art of Preparation: Assessment*
- 2. The Art of Compassion: Participation*
- 3. The Art of Responsibility: Accountability*
- 4. The Art of Relaxation: Clarity, Focus, Visibility*
- 5. The Art of Conscious Action: Execution*
- 6. The Art of Working Naturally: Sustainability*

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These Seven Arts are the fundamental elements of any change process because they go to the most basic level of human behavior, the spirit.

I should warn you that by “fundamental” and “basic,” I do not mean they are easy or quick to accomplish. If you want a superficial method to coerce change out of yourself or your organization, you won’t find it in these pages. As I tell my *Ki-Aikido* students, the Seven Arts will be demanding, but they will be the most exhilarating and valuable thing you can ever do.

#### WHY THE ARTS WORK

This book is written to those in positions that require them to lead change for departments, teams, and organizations of various sizes. But there is no rule that says you have to be in a position of leadership to lead change. Every one of us is a change leader in our own lives, first and foremost. And the truth is that it is only when we can effectively change ourselves that we can be effective in changing the lives of others. This book will serve you in both regards.

Whether your goal is to combine corporate cultures following a merger or to revamp a nonprofit to fit with the times, you will always achieve the best results by turning to spiritual principles at each phase of the process. In this way, you will at once be promoting both individual growth and team chemistry as each member is held together and motivated from the same foundation.

I use this strategy with all of my clients, and the results are undeniable. For example, my change guidance at Duracell (from 1987 to 2000) helped to yield a 2,000 percent increase in shareholder value, a 650 percent increase in revenue, a 24 percent per-year compounded increase in gross alkaline unit sales, a 400-plus percent improvement in operational efficiencies, and the purchase of the company by Gillette in 1996 for \$7.82 billion.

The Seven Arts are so effective because they allow an organization to decisively answer questions about its future in the most fundamentally sound manner—at the spiritual level. This is key, because failing to answer the key questions correctly—if at all—is the one common thread among failed initiatives. People are either left in the dark or they never grasp the change on a personal level. The Seven Arts avoid this fate because they require your organization to approach change on a spiritual level so the people become unified at their core, enabling your culture to change at its deepest foundation.

Ultimately, to change the collective spirit of an organization’s people is to change its culture. You’ll recall I previously asserted that change efforts fail because those leading the effort fail to facilitate a change in the spirit of the organization. That is to say, change fails when the spiritual roots of the culture stay the same.

My interchanging use of the terms *spirit* and *culture* is deliberate and has an important point. The term *culture* has become like old chewing gum; it has lost its flavor from years of overjawing. As a result, we don’t quite know what we mean when we say “organizational culture.” It means different things to different people in different circumstances. Let’s avoid this cloudiness altogether.

The term *spirit* points to the foundational humanity—the human spirit—from which all organizational achievement springs. This is organizational culture at its core: people believing

behaving, and expecting in a collective manner. At times, this collective humanity is wilted or collectively stifled. At other times, it is spry and collectively progressive. This spiritual characterization of culture is critical for you to understand as the leader because the majority of your competition (and, frankly, organizations in general) characterize their culture superficially. This is an unreliable foundation from which to lead change because it does not account for the core drivers behind all organizational activity.

The bottom line is that, despite how technological and automated organizations have become, their core they remain a collection of human energies that are merely being applied in an organizational environment. Resurrecting and guiding that human core of your organization is the secret to leading and sustaining change.

For this reason, I will refer to your organization's culture as its spirit, and vice versa. I will use the terms interchangeably so that this important paradigm shift happens more naturally over the course of the reading. In the end, the new vernacular will become your own, along with the process of lasting organizational change.

## WHERE? WHAT? WHOSE? HOW? WHEN? WHY? THE ANSWERS UNDERLYING ORGANIZATIONAL CHANGE

Before I enter into a change initiative with any organization, I explain the six primary questions that must be answered to give the leaders context for making spiritual change. It is important we do the same here. Think of the questions as the canvas on which your organization will apply the Art of Change. Answering the six questions prepares your canvas for change. Applying the Seven Arts is your change masterpiece. Here first, are the questions you will learn to answer successfully:

### **Primary Question #1: Where is the organization's culture?**

Change management initiatives often false-start when the leader cannot or does not answer the question. In fact, answering the question is so critical that I ask change leaders to answer it right away and I keep asking until they arrive at the answer.

"Where is the culture of your business?" I ask. "Is the culture in the building? The equipment? Is it in the intellectual property? In the brands you own?"

"No," everyone says. "The culture is in our people."

They then look at me expecting confirmation.

"Okay," I reply, "but where in the people is the culture?"

Eventually, we get to the fact that the culture is in people's hearts and heads. It is not tangible. Culture is the sum total of the emotions, experiences, beliefs, and expectations of everyone involved with the organization. I call this sum total the *collective mind* of the organization.

Whether your organization is made up of five people or fifty thousand, your culture is created and sustained in the sum total of what each person thinks, believes, feels, and expects about the organization. Nothing will change in the organization's culture until you figure out how to change the collective mind of your organization.

Occasionally, leaders have a major crisis on their hands and ask me, "How fast can we change the culture?"

"In a day," I tell them.

"You can?" is their astonished response.

“Yes,” I say, “but the only way to do this is to fire 100 percent of your people. Do that and you empty the organization’s mind; from there you can fill it with whatever culture you desire.”

Since this is a ludicrous option for most, changing the spirit of an organization typically begins with an exercise in understanding. You must be able to characterize your organization’s collective mind. What are its core emotions, experiences, beliefs, and expectations? Until you can describe these things, you cannot change the spirit. That’s because you cannot motivate people to change their behavior without understanding their motives for speaking and acting.

Perhaps you can now see why changing an organization is so difficult. Its main ingredients are not tangible. You cannot see the collective mind that dictates the activity of your culture. But you can clearly measure behavior and, therefore, glean clear evidence of what’s in the collective mind of an organization.

Suffice it to say for now that, if you are a leader, you must know what defines your people’s predominant behavior—and this requires knowing where to look. At the end of the day, all resistance to organizational change begins in your organization’s collective mind. Unless you develop a strategy for changing things there, your change efforts will not be understood, accepted, or executed.

I cannot overstate this point, because it is the foundation to everything else you will learn. The biggest which hinders a company from changing is ultimately inside the people. It is the collective voice that says, “Is this really necessary?” or, “We’ll get to that later,” or, “Let’s keep that in mind.” You must uncover, comprehend, and acknowledge these objections, or no change effort will take hold. You must answer, “Where is the culture?” with confidence to know what sort of change must occur. Answering the question will inform you of an accurate baseline for change. By first understanding the collective mind of your organization, you establish a place from which you can effectively birth the change process.

### **Primary Question #2: What starts the process?**

The tendency is to assume action is required to begin the change process. The truth is that that’s much further down the road. The company that jumps into action for action’s sake acts on unsubstantiated whim. Such action rarely results in lasting change.

The one thing that starts every process of successful change is knowledge. Without it, employees, managers, and executives cannot participate effectively in altering the direction of the organization. While this is a very basic concept, few leaders help employees understand the real business environment. This includes understanding the reality of new overseas competition, the reality of new technologies, and the reality of industry consolidation or expansion that dramatically affects the bottom line. I call this significant educational effort providing “boardroom awareness” to every employee.

In decades of working with senior executives and corporate boards, I have yet to learn anything so difficult that I could not explain it to a person with an eighth-grade education. (For example, you can explain the effective management of significant debt after a leveraged buyout simply by equating the issue with paying interest on money you borrowed to purchase a car.) Yet, “it’s too complicated” is a common excuse.

The only theory necessary to sustain a healthy business surrounds two basic concepts: (1) “Buy low, sell high” (unless you’re “shorting” the market), and (2) “Profit is revenue, less cost.” That’s it. The execution of a good strategy, however, is not so easy because the executors are people with emotions, habits, beliefs, and expectations that must be in sync with the business plan at the deepest level.

Getting people there is a complex task, but it begins with a solid understanding of the business that is being asked to change.

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Employees need to know the environment in which the change process is being executed. And as much as possible, they need to know the visible metrics being used to keep score so they can gauge if their collective mind is on target. Mind leads behavior. Your organization's intelligence—its collective knowledge of its collective mind—is its truest value. If you misjudge or guess at this, you will always struggle to lead change.

### **Primary Question #3: Whose culture is it?**

Change requires that you help everyone take personal responsibility for his or her role in necessary transformation. Your people must believe the culture is theirs to own. If you want people to think and act like an owner, the concept of "owning" the work environment must be clear.

In order to give your people a sense of ownership for the success of the enterprise, you must create tangible ways for them to participate in the change process. Without meaningful, heartfelt participation, people will not take responsibility for the improvement (or survival) of the organization. In most workplaces, people do not perform to the very best of their ability simply because they do not care.

To create lasting change, you must attach a deeper purpose to the work they do. When there is personal, spiritual meaning attached to your people's work, they care enough to work harder or in a different manner.

Work must become reinterpreted in the collective mind of the participants of change. It must become known as a place for personal growth, achievement, satisfaction, and spiritual development. If your people learn how to (1) exercise their potential, (2) reach new performance heights, (3) develop interpersonal skills, and (4) improve their ability to collaborate with a diversity of people, then the entire change process becomes an opportunity to expand personal awareness, creativity, tolerance, and fulfillment.

### **Primary Question #4: "How do you know if you are making progress?"**

Since the culture of your organization exists in its collective mind and this mind is not tangible, you must focus on visible behaviors. It is one thing to say you are going to change (for example, lose weight, work out, stop smoking, or do more community service), but it is quite another thing to actually change your behavior.

Are your people walking the talk? As the leader of this process, you must learn to not only read the invisible mind of the organization, you must read visible changes in speech, action, and regular behavior that signify the change initiative is taking place effectively. When you see change in your organization's collective behavior, you know change in the collective mind is taking place.

### **Primary Question #5: "When can you change the culture?"**

People involved in a change process must challenge their previous ways of thinking and behaving. Those old habits have, in part, led to the present crisis the organization is addressing. Unfortunately, most think they can wait to change. They do not realize how much the change process is held back by their habitual ways of thinking and behaving—by the ways they have traditionally perceived themselves and their role, responsibility, and relationship to the organization.

As the leader, it is your job to guide your people to think and act in the present moment instead of



according to their collective memory of the past. The way you have always done things exists in the collective memory of your organization. This includes the sum total of past emotions, experiences, and expectations of each employee, customer, supplier, and shareholder. This institutional memory can be toxic.

The only time when you can change the spirit of your organization is right now. World-class athletes know this. They unwaveringly focus on daily goals and improvement because the present moment is the only time they can (and do) improve. In the same way, leaders of change must create a sense of urgency because they understand successful execution will require that people do not wait to change themselves. Everyone must be coached to think and act differently—now.

A negative institutional memory will be the primary deterrent to people changing today. Some of these attached thoughts include “That’s the way we have always done things,” or, “Let’s wait for others to change,” or, “Let’s wait for our supervisor to get on board.” These institutionalized mantras hold people back. They become the equivalent of an organizational emergency brake, hindering progress. They are the root cause of the 70 percent failure rate of change initiatives.

So, when can you change the culture? The answer is *now*. But you can’t just say it. Instead, you must lead people’s thinking and behavior. Bad habits are old habits, and they exist first inside a person’s head. Changing how the collective mind functions today is the key to removing dependence on old habits.

The Seven Arts to be discussed in this book construct a paradigm that recognizes leading change initiatives requires everyone to feel, think, and behave in ways that address the present needs and opportunities, not in ways that support memories of the past.

### **Primary Question #6: “Why do people change?”**

The need to change is usually met with resistance. Most people value predictability, even if it means predictable mediocrity. If the leader of change cannot offer a consistent and compelling rationale for change, he will fail to win the collective mind of the organization, and change will not happen.

The compelling reason for change must not only be due to the urgent business crisis. It must also include a commitment to support and enable each individual to grow and develop personally. Your workplace must become a vehicle for desirable personal growth and development, and it must be understood as such in the collective mind.

When people begin to trust senior management, when they are meaningfully included in the direction of the business, when they participate in the rewards that accompany superior achievement, then you will have an organization where the people know why they are giving 120 percent.

Why do people change? They change because they are given a clear reason to.

### **PUTTING IT ALL TOGETHER**

By canvassing the six questions over your organization and then painting the Seven Arts atop them, you will be able to lead your people to a deeper, more meaningful level of change in their own lives. You will be putting personal emotions, personal growth, and personal experience before the organization’s needs. By doing so, you will possess the ability to effectively lead the organization—a collection of individuals—to change in the new direction it needs to succeed.

By applying the Seven Arts, you will essentially be doing unto others as you would have them do unto you. You will learn in the process that the Golden Rule is not merely good spiritual practice; it

also a principled way to effectively lead and motivate others. Employing the Seven Arts inspires positive change because you, the leader, are guiding meaningful, organizational improvement that ultimately benefits every individual employee. I will show you precisely what that looks like in the coming pages.

As with any spiritual practice, putting your positive insights to work requires more than words. Translating the necessary answers we've just discussed into strategic, proven action is the focus of the Seven Arts. Specifically, you will learn how to serve and develop others so they can serve and develop the organization. This is the irrefutable link between spiritual development and leading successful change. Both require strong, trustworthy guidance at the deepest human level.

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As I finally discovered for myself, it is no coincidence that this mixture of leadership strategy and spiritual development works. It's something that I always innately knew and used to guide me, even if I didn't consciously know I was doing it. I have always believed that treating people well and having better business go hand in hand.

Each chapter of the book will cover one of the Seven Arts. I will describe how it came to be a fixture in my strategy for organizational change and why it matters. We will then examine separately how it relates to and can be practiced by your organization. I'll provide many examples from both macro corporate and individual performance consulting to give the Arts handles for you to pick up and apply to your own specific circumstances.

But I must remind you that these are "Arts," not sciences. The application of them requires your own unique treatment. Because the culture and makeup of every company is different, I cannot give you an exact prescription for successfully leading change in your organization. Any author who tells you he can is blowing smoke.

What I can and will do now is get you at the right pharmacy (spirituality) and in the right aisle (the human spirit) to discover your prescription for effective change. Once you possess the remedy for overcoming resistance to change, you will see clearly how successful change can occur in your personal life as well as in your organization.

## THE ART OF PREPARATION

DURING THE SUMMER OF 1982, I had an experience that solidified my thoughts about the initial requirements of widespread change. In this case, the desired change was far broader than in a single organization; the change was to take place over the entire country of India.

After accepting a professorship at Furman University in Greenville, South Carolina, one of my first responsibilities was to travel to India as part of a Fulbright Fellowship. (I was chosen for this opportunity because of my previous experience as an international management consultant for the Alexander Proudfoot Company and my Asian studies background at Harvard and the University of Hawaii.) The project required me to tour throughout India and conduct economic development research that would assist Prime Minister Indira Gandhi in her efforts to improve her country. The project was timely, as she was also preparing for her first meeting with President Ronald Reagan (the first in his first term).

President Reagan had just delivered his famous “Evil Empire” speech before the British House of Commons, where he called communist and socialist regimes “the axis of evil.” While his words were clearly aimed at the Soviet Union, Mrs. Gandhi, the democratically elected head of the Socialist Party, was rightfully concerned as she was seeking the assistance of America to help modernize her country. Her administration was eager to modernize India and greatly desired American support and resources to do so.

My job was to study the effects indigenous village belief systems would have on villagers' willingness to accept the prime minister's modern changes. The major question was whether villagers with 99 percent illiteracy found modernizations like birth control, chemical additives to crops, and various new sanitation practices to be counter to their religious beliefs and practices. What if, for example, lifestyle changes like family planning were believed to create negative karmic consequences? What if something like the use of modern birth control was believed to adversely affect one's eternal soul? My objective was to find the answers.

These were significant considerations, not because the prime minister needed to outsmart her people but because successful, countrywide modernization required that her citizens be spiritually prepared for the changes she felt would ensure their best future. Prime Minister Gandhi understood that lasting behavioral change (no matter how well intended) would never take root and lead to significant improvement in the welfare of villagers (who make up most of the population of India) without first preparing these peoples' consciousness for change.

Like any great leader, Indira Gandhi intuitively understood the first of the Seven Arts for effective change: the Art of Preparation. It says that any leader of change must understand that the process first requires the mental and spiritual preparation of all parties affected. If the change itself, as well as the change process, is in sync with the collective mind of the people, then it will yield fruit. If it is not, the change process will fail every time.

### WHERE ALL CHANGE BEGINS

Successful change can't happen because you have correctly manipulated your organization's culture. It can only happen when the desired change is aligned with the culture. In India, the prime minister

understood that her modernization would be successful if it was in sync with the most widely held spiritual beliefs of the villagers, who were her culture's largest representation. I needed to determine what those spiritual beliefs were and then to specify how the modernization might best align with them.

In accord with what we experienced and learned about village life, the prime minister had instituted a unique form of government-supported rural education that would inform and prepare people for the health and economic changes ahead. She felt that once villagers understood how the changes would benefit them personally they would not resist them.

We now know she was right. Today, India is experiencing explosive modern growth. But the change would not have taken place had the ground not been made fertile nearly three decades ago through a strategy that ensured modernization would be understood and widely adopted. The lesson is in the basics.

If you want fresh coffee in the morning, you will have to take the additional preparatory step of grinding fresh beans. If you want a better body, you will have to get up earlier in the morning (or perhaps more accurately, go to bed earlier the night before so that you aren't too tired to exercise). You might also have to store better food in your house so that when you're faced with food craving you are prepared to eat more healthily instead.

A friend once told me about the advice his grandfather—a Protestant minister—once gave him for getting the most value out of church. "Sunday morning," the grandfather asserted, "begins Saturday night." There is foundational truth in that statement. To achieve any change, one must prepare to achieve the result. Only in rare instances like unexpected tragedy or severe disaster do people actually change in a moment. Most changes are preceded by many moments of preparation.

But whether you invest in changing a nation or changing your coffee routine, the Art of Preparation is about laying a foundation that will ensure immediate and long-term success. Without the right foundation, the change process will not take hold and the effort will end in failure.

It should not be surprising that there is a 70 percent failure rate when companies try to change their culture or restructure. This is a failure rate that makes sense when one thinks about how difficult it is to sustain one positive change in your own life, like exercising more. The astronomical odds against leading a group of people to change their patterns of behavior simultaneously are clear.

Leaders of organizational change routinely underestimate the difficulty of change and do not dedicate the necessary resources in order to achieve the desired end. Most assume their people can be coerced to change. But trying to simply convince someone to change is no different than asking a smoker to quit just by telling him it's not good for him.\*

A smoker doesn't smoke because he thinks it's good for him. He smokes because smoking feels better than not smoking. To lead a smoker to change, you must help him understand that there is greater pleasure on the other side of quitting. Until he is prepared at a deep level like this, he won't get through the pain of getting to the other side.

## CLARIFYING THE DROPS

Imagine that the collective mind of your company is like a large bathtub of water. And imagine that the water is a brown muddy color that reflects the bad habits, negative thoughts, and counterproductive behaviors that must be changed for your company to survive. Let's also say that the desired business culture is represented by crystal-clear bath water.

Every time a person speaks or acts in your company, he or she puts a “drop” of water into the bathtub. Sometimes it’s a brown muddy drop, and other times it is a crystal-clear drop. The culture of your company is always reinventing itself through the speech-drops and behavior-drops that enter the bath water. To lead positive change, you must ensure that everyone’s drops are crystal clear because it is only after thousands of clear drops are put into the tub that the water begins to change.

Success requires that your people understand what words and actions represent clear drops and what these matter to them. This is why Prime Minister Gandhi took such great lengths to educate her people about the modernization she advocated before actually commencing the change. The education was an exercise in clarification at a spiritual level. This foundational exercise—what I call the Art of Preparation—is necessary in the corporate realm because it: (1) initiates the practice of spiritual development in your organization and (2) sets you up as the spiritual guide of lasting, meaningful change. The effect of this combination is unmatched by any other change strategy.

## ORGANIZATIONAL CHANGE MUST EQUAL SPIRITUAL GROWTH

When you tie your company’s desired change to the spiritual growth of your people, your employees have a compelling personal reason—the most compelling reason, in fact—not only to advocate the process but also to help propel it forward. This shared motive is a crucial ingredient for change.

There are five reasons this spiritual association serves as the best preparation for change:

- 1. People recognize that spiritual development is something of ultimate significance and importance.*
- 2. People understand that a journey of spiritual development is both difficult and takes time.*
- 3. People expect to take an honest and frank look at themselves with each step of a spiritual journey.*
- 4. People know that spiritual development requires focus and therefore daily, even hourly, commitment.*
- 5. People on a spiritual journey understand they must practice patience and discipline in order to resist the daily temptation to do things the way they have always been done.*

When your people equate organizational change with the process of deep personal growth, they attribute to it the same set of expectations as above. In sum, there is something unique, significant, and lasting in the effort for everyone. This makes all the difference.

## SOLIDIFYING THE SPIRITUAL ASSOCIATION

With the importance of a spiritual basis for change now understood, we can turn to the key question: How does a leader make that happen? How can you ensure that your people equate organizational change with their own spiritual growth? To answer that question, we will simply turn the five statements about spirituality above into statements about your specific change effort. You’ll notice we’ve just substituted *organizational change* in place of *spiritual development*:

- 1. People recognize that your organizational change is something of ultimate significance and importance.**

Step back for a moment and consider your work life in relation to the rest of your life. People forget how much time we spend at work. Since you spend most of your waking hours at work, it makes sense

to attach real meaning and significance to your commitments there.

Why should your people start their day thinking negatively about the place they spend most of the waking hours? Why should they only practice positive self-discipline during their limited time away from work? As part of the shared community that is your company, your people are presented daily with opportunities to develop interpersonal skills, leadership skills, and performance skills. Why shouldn't a time of genuine business crisis serve as an opportunity for everyone to actualize his or her best self? If you can reach people at that root level, you have the greatest chance of having them come on board your change mission.

Most leaders miss the fact that every employee possesses a latent willingness to change. Leaders often ignore the fact that personal progress is one of our strongest human desires. Your job as the leader is to connect the new business need with an opportunity for personal progress.

Because every organizational makeup is different—different numbers of people, different backgrounds, different interests and personal circumstances—I cannot tell you precisely how to do this. In the coming chapters, however, I will discuss further how your people can become more personally engaged in the change effort. Suffice it to say for now that each person must relate to the change at a personal level. The human resources (HR) manager must see that investing herself into the change effort will help her become a better mother, a better friend, a better person. The sales manager must see that investing himself into the effort will help him become a better father, friend, or husband.

When I consult, I often interview each person in the organization to determine how the change effort might serve every individual. I then provide the leader of the initiative with a snapshot of how the change lines up with his company's collective mind. This sort of knowledge is invaluable in preparing your people for change. (I have found that many leaders possess at least some personal knowledge of the individuals in their company to begin. What they do not know can often be filled in by managers and other supervisors who have a more day-to-day relationship with the people.)

Cultivating a personal association within every individual is important enough to make a concerted and genuine effort to ensure it. Some companies with whom I've worked spent up to three months on this first step. They came to see that when you sync organizational change with personal significance, the change process is met with little resistance.

## **2. People understand that the journey of organizational change is both difficult and takes time.**

For years, I have sat through strategy sessions facilitated by other consultants serving my client in other function-specific capacities (for example, expanding markets and increasing sales). They often make things seem quite easy and, frankly, leave an organization with an unrealistic expectation of success. This is a bad place to begin because expectations establish the size of your fuel tank. If you think change will come quickly and easily, you'll run out of gas when nothing significant has occurred after six months. I see this a lot.

Once the function-specific professional consultants leave your office, I am the retained consultant asked to help you *execute* the new plan. After helping your company establish the first perceptives above, I then help you and your people see that execution in the real business world means approaching the change process with the same passion and commitment necessary for true spiritual development.

A phrase I often hear growth strategy consultants use is "seamless execution." The consultant points to the low end of a chart, and I know its coming; I can feel it. He says, "Right now you are here [tapping the low end]. But with seamless execution your company will be enjoying this position [tapping the high end]."

of the chart] in just two years.” I am sitting in the meeting silently (for now) thinking that fortunately I know what these guys don’t know. I know whether the collective mind of the company is yet ready for this seamless execution they speak of. I also know these well-meaning and highly intelligent consultants are missing an arrow in their quiver. Their thorough projections are without the most important consideration of all: the current spirit of the company. The truth is that my client is actually paying for some good experienced senior consultants, who make the presentation, as well as the student junior consultants, who actually collected the data and prepared the beautiful charts. Unfortunately, this group alone doesn’t set the company up for successful change. At best, they whet their appetites for how things could be. It’s not all bad, but it’s not enough.

At this early stage of the change process, I am looking to fully prepare my client for success, which always includes telling the truth up front. People must know that the process will not be instantaneous or by any means simple—especially when it’s company-wide. And the effort will be about a lot of other things before it’s about seamless execution.

A recent client likened the change process to building a bonfire. “We placed the logs onto the pile first,” he said. “And then once the bonfire pile (the infrastructure) for successful change had been built over three fiscal quarters, the change process publicly ignited.” It is a realistic analogy.

Over the three-year change timeline, this same client experienced a 3,000 percent return on the investment as measured by their own productivity indicators. The change process was rolled out in the tumultuous textile industry whose labor was being largely outsourced overseas. The major person-incentive for my client’s employees was to save their jobs. They understood up front that if they could dramatically improve performance, they would win the case for keeping labor in house—it was the best form of job security. It therefore wasn’t difficult for them to comprehend the degree of difficulty in the change process. As the leader, it’s your job to find that link between what matters most to your people and how the change effort will help them to achieve it. This will ensure a gritty, genuine effort to see the change through. Without this, your people are just doing their job. It’s not enough to sustain most changes.

### **3. People expect to take an honest and frank look at themselves with each step of the organizational change, which includes actively seeking feedback to expose their hidden weaknesses and subconscious devices.**

Being prepared for change requires collective self-assessment, which includes a willingness to receive and act on negative feedback. Effective spiritual development requires understanding weaknesses, devices, and attachments that cause an individual to be less than his best self. Similarly, your organization must proactively seek feedback and create an environment that encourages and facilitates open communication to uncover any hidden hurdles to the change process.

I like to call this an environment of *bulletproof* communication because no one shoots the messenger and everyone actively seeks bad news because they are protected. A client’s plant manager once declared his factory’s change mantra was, “Bad news is good news if it is given early.” It’s not a bad way to think.

Companies without this kind of thinking are easy to spot; it takes about five minutes. You can actually feel the politics slithering through the office—the posturing, the gamesmanship. And these companies always struggle to change even the smallest procedure because the unspoken rules say no one can handle the truth.

Let’s put it this way: Your company’s change efforts will rarely fail because of your strengths. It is

your weaknesses, your hidden hurdles, which will hold you back or take you down. Uncovering weaknesses up front makes it possible to eliminate their threat to the change process. In this case, defense is a great offense.

I always set out to learn as much about a client as possible. I look at the financials, board presentations, and company strategy. I attend senior management meetings and other meetings throughout the company to observe the collective mind of the business. I conduct confidential, one-on-one interviews with approximately 200 people from all functions and all levels of leadership. I learn enough to give honest feedback to the chief executive officer (CEO), and if he or she can't take it, I know there's a serious problem. If I assess a company and the communication is not open and honest, and it seems like the CEO does not want critical feedback, there are only two options: (1) I walk out the door telling them their company is hurting due to a cancerous environment, or (2) I take the waters, push back hard, and explain why and how an open and honest environment is needed. This is always a defining moment.

In fact, for this reason it is now common practice that I insist on the following:

- The CEO personally hires me (not the human resources senior executive)
- I report directly to the CEO
- He or she gives me complete access to his or her schedule
- He or she understands why time for change management activities will be required in significant quantities
- That honesty and bulletproof communication become the norm between us and everybody else

These criteria are not a lot to ask if the company is engaged in the most difficult challenge it has ever faced, or at least one that must happen for it to survive.

The Art of Preparation requires your company to lay out the realities of the present state of the business. Identifying the real interpersonal challenges you face at the outset gives you the immediate opportunity to create change plans that avoid the collaboration and communication mistakes of the past.

Resistance to change is normal, even when the perception about it is positive and necessary. Resistance to positive change often happens subconsciously when blind spots and egos stand in the way of clearly assessing your current standing. Without accurate assessment, your company is vulnerable to being blindsided. It is absolutely necessary to get the truth on the table.

#### **4. People know that organizational change requires focus and therefore daily, even hourly commitment.**

Anyone involved in a change of thinking or behavior must learn to practice new habits on a daily basis. Habits are not easily changed, and so daily focus is tantamount. The same is true of organizational change. Daily, "drop-by-drop" behavior is the only level of focus that will produce measurable, sustainable changes in everyone's performance. It is the only way the water will clear up. When such results occur—when change becomes tangible—the new habits get a strong dose of momentum and positive reinforcement. This first taste of positive change strengthens the collective belief that the new ways of performing and conducting business are indeed better for all involved.



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