

Week 3

There are many metaphors for what champions of change do. Champions of change have *skin in the game*. They are willing *to put their money where their mouth is* by investing in the change itself. Said another way, they *walk the talk* and are willing to *eat their own dog food*, so to speak.

Each of these metaphors indicate that the Champion of change is willing to take on the challenge of putting words and ideas into action by being at the forefront of the change itself. To foster change, one has to go beyond just the words and the imparting of a vision – one must be willing to do the thing itself; *to be the guinea pig*.

An example of this is a short story about a champion of change in an organization that needed to streamline operations to be more competitive. The Champion of change, we'll call her Joss, knew that the continued reliance on paper was slowing down her ability to do business. However, her peers were reluctant to let the tried-and-true paper-based methods go, because they believe that digitizing the paper would complicate things and ultimately wouldn't provide any streamlining to the organization.

Joss decided to be the guinea pig and digitized her department's paper documents to show the benefits of removing the paper from the business process. Joss was able to show that digitizing the documents reduced the time it took to service customers by 85%. Not only were the response times to customers much faster, it showed in the customer satisfaction surveys, and the increased efficiency of her team allow them to take on more accounts without increasing personnel.

As a champion of change, Joss showed that she was willing to take the risk of the changes that she was suggesting. Her willingness to take on those risks to prove her point showed the others in the organization that the idea was both viable and brought value to the organization. Her peers quickly followed in her footsteps and further streamlined the business.

As the story shows, it's not enough to merely talk about a change. There are other important aspects that a champion of change needs to be aware of when it comes to 'selling' changes to one's peers. As any farmer knows, tilling and fertilizing the field before planting the corn provides the best environment for the growth of the crop; as Cialdini (2016) observes, it is vital to lay the preparatory groundwork in anticipation of developing an audience receptive and ready to accept change. The Champion needs to understand the goals and concerns of one's peers. In order to do that the Champion needs to listen to peers and discover what these elements are.

It's also important that a champion of change needs to have a vision for the possible improvements that the idea could ultimately bring to the organization. The vision needs to be realistic in order to be able to sell it to one's peers. But even then, some peers will still be reluctant to embrace the idea. This is when the Champion should be ready to offer ways to share the risk of the possible changes. Perhaps that could be done through a pilot test, or by stepping out and doing what Joss did by trying on the change and putting it into practice themselves as a demonstration.

As the old adage goes '*actions speak louder than words*'. There's nothing more convincing than a proponent of change taking on the challenge in making the suggested changes themselves. Talking about change and sharing of vision are important aspects of stimulating change; but the Champion of change should be willing to lead the way and where possible show how the changes can bring value to the organization.

Reference

Cialdini, R. (2016). *Pre-suasion: A revolutionary way to influence and persuade*. Simon & Schuster.