



# Change is hard.

*...How leaders break through*

By David Parks

# Hard & Happening . . .

Yes, change is hard and it keeps happening to us in today's hyper-complex, uncertain, competitive, high stakes world.

Consider these alarming statistics:

- 75% of projects fail – Gartner<sup>1</sup>
- 71% of companies do not feel their leaders are able to lead them into the future – Brandon Hall<sup>2</sup>
- 87% of employees worldwide are not engaged at work – Gallup<sup>3</sup>

***In summary, projects are a disaster, leadership is diabolical and people are severely disengaged.***

A piece of friendly advice: **STOP** stockpiling statistical knowledge about how bad things are “**out there.**” Dwelling on this is more likely to evoke a “I give up, why bother” reaction. Rather, take a thorough, honest inventory of what’s going on “**in here.**”

**What are you doing, or not doing that might be adding or detracting from positive change?**

# Leaders Drive Change

Leadership is so important when it comes to change. When prospective clients call me and ask “do you do anything in Change Leadership?” The little voice in my head quips “isn’t it all change leadership?”

Former mentor and boss, Jim Kouzes<sup>4</sup> defines leadership as “*the art of mobilizing others to want to struggle for shared aspirations.*” Leadership is at the heart of change. Note the deliberate choice of word “**struggle.**” This change stuff is not easy.

**“Only three things happen naturally in organizations: friction, confusion and underperformance. Everything else requires leadership!” —PETER DRUCKER<sup>5</sup>**

Everyday well-intentioned leaders, managers and individual contributors show up at work. They have goals, objectives and projects to deliver. Great leaders bring focus to the stuff that matters, they help people make meaning and combat the *friction, confusion and underperformance* per Peter Drucker.

# Theory to Action

There are many ways to approach change and many theories abound on how to manage it. An appreciation and understanding of research is important – think Kegan & Lahey, Kotter, Bridges<sup>6</sup> etc. I love reading the research and piecing it together in a way that make sense for me and my situation.

***Filter the research through a lens of practicality.  
What is going to WORK in your organization?***

Ultimately leaders are measured by the outcomes they achieve. Leadership is a verb and change is active not passive. So, what does it take to drive big outcomes, lead change and take action? Here is a leadership checklist to ensure your change advocacy is clear at every level:

**YOU**

**OTHERS**

**TEAMS**

**ORGANIZATION**

*Making Meaning Of Change At Every Level*

# Road Map for Change

## **YOU as a leader of change – Have I earned the trust to lead others in times of change?**

Shine a light back on self and examine your own actions and behaviors. Are they mirroring the change you want to see in others? This requires self-reflection, courage, bold action and very intentional reframing and reworking of habits that either serve or hinder.

## **OTHERS who will make the change happen – Do I enable (or disable) others to drive the change?**

Great leaders are great teachers, coaches and mentors. They help others see that they are an important “cog in the machine,” that they bring unique skills and competencies to the table and that they are valued.

## **TEAMS driving high leverage outcomes – Do I have the right people working on the right projects that will drive a high value outcome?**

One of the biggest drivers of innovation is diversity of thought. Yet as human beings, we tend towards the familiar and comfortable. Who and what do you need to change in the teams you are leading?

## **ORGANIZATION direction and alignment – Where are we headed? What is the strategy?**

How do I as a leader articulate the change in a way that people hear it, get it, are excited by it and take-action on it? Of all the leadership competencies, communications is arguably the biggest one. People need to understand what the future looks like. It is the job of the leader “make meaning” of the big picture.

# Quality & Frequency

This pocket map for leading change is not a silver bullet. There isn't one quote or skill or technique to impart to you that will magically become the panacea for all change.

As in rock climbing the quality of every handhold and foothold is key. It is the same for every leadership interaction for change. Frequency and quality of interactions minimizes risk and enables you to reach new heights with a sense of purpose and direction. In times of change people need to hear, be reminded and inspired on a frequent basis.

Last word goes to free climber Alex Honnold<sup>7</sup>. who overcome tremendous fear and danger to be the only person to scale El Capitan in Yosemite without ropes:

***“When I’m planning on doing something challenging, I spend time visualizing what the experience will feel like and what the individual sections of it will [feel like].”***

**—ALEX HONNOLD, FREE CLIMBER**



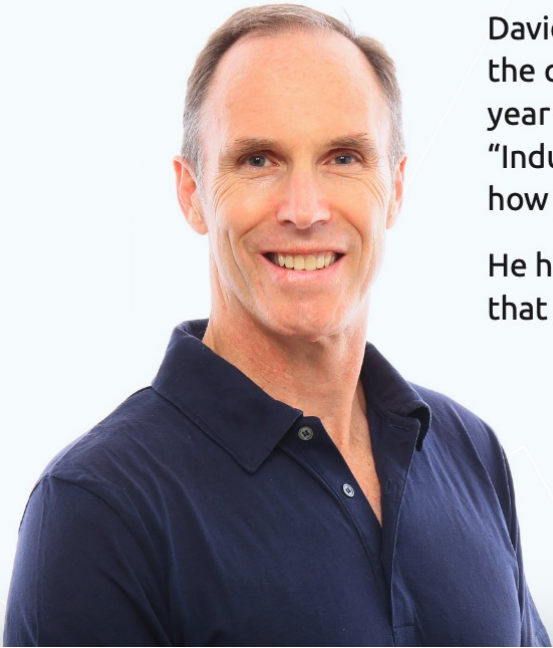
# Un-Freeze Fear

Fear of change can freeze us.

Just as Alex Honnold rehearses his mental state to quiet fear and plan his ascent strategy for each individual section of rock, consider what your change plan will be for each level of the organization.

What is the change plan: for **YOU**, for **OTHERS**, for your **TEAMS** and for the **ORGANIZATION**?

If this is your map, then your mantra should be “*quality and frequency.*” Every leadership interaction counts – every conversation, team meeting, presentation is an opportunity to advance and ascend.

A portrait of David Parks, a middle-aged man with short brown hair, smiling. He is wearing a dark blue polo shirt. The background is a light blue gradient.

David Parks spends his time working with organizations to significantly improve the quality leadership and their business results. Sample projects in the last year have ranged from helping a 126-year-old organization transform from “Industrial to Digital” (changing the world) to tackling the opioid epidemic and how healthcare organizations tackle the challenge (saving lives).

He has worked in the area of leadership development for 21 years and prior to that collected battle scars in the real world as a manager and leader.

**References:** 1. Gartner - newsroom report March 2016; 2. Brandon Hall – *Where Did We Go Wrong With Leadership Development* report 2015; 3. Gallup – annual engagement survey 2018; 4. Jim Kouzes – co-author of *The Leadership Challenge*; 5. Peter Drucker – various sources; 6. Keegan & Lahey - *Immunity To Change*, John Kotter - *Leading Change*, William Bridges – *Transitions*; 7. Alex Honnold – free solo rock climber best known for his record ascent of El Capitan in Yosemite National Park.