

Demystifying Social Change, A Series

by John Jensen, Ph.D.

Summary by Victoria M. Young – It is highly recommended that everyone takes the time to read and contemplate this series in its entirety.

“We can wish and hope for change, or we can set causes in motion.”

Nelson Bunker Hunt’s three-step formula for success:

1. Decide on your goal.
2. Determine its price.
3. Pay the price.

“When we do not pay the price, we fail.”

Nothing happens without first being made necessary. What would make a change necessary?

You master the influences that govern every step toward your goal.

It requires attention to quality and excellence: how ideas are framed, how they are spread, how people perceive them and apply them personally.

Make everyone feel “wired into” the campaign. Think what it would take to do that: individual attention, tasks fitted to the person, pointed training, a team to work with, responsibilities assigned and monitored, glitches removed, problems solved.

Our quality of thinking determines our results. Poor quality means poor results. Less obvious is that **our quality stays low if we’re pained when others try to help us improve it.** If you fend off others who have different ideas, pruning them out of your life so that you never have to interact with them, the effect is that you lose the ability to notice the limitations of your thinking.

Social change seldom yields itself to the initiative of a single person. The one must become many.

To truly comprehend a system you need to probe past the big phases because its success *can hinge on the perfect functioning of a single part.* [It] depends on someone grasping the whole, and then foreseeing how *an army of people can incorporate an array of details into it.* Lacking such penetrating thought, however, people vote for directions and principles whose details they don’t understand.

In a complex system, *it’s much easier to be wrong than to be right.* How can we know when we’re right? The most reliable evidence is that **our version of cause and effect works,** such conclusions are empirical and pragmatic — based on evidence — instead of ideological. The opposite is exerting a lot of effort with little return--“beating a dead horse,” continuing “a losing battle” because you don’t want to admit you were wrong in the first place. That it didn’t turn out as you expected is a clue to a flaw in your thought process.

“It’s just these pesky *barriers* that keep me from solving the problem.” That view is a cop-out. You admit that your plan doesn’t include removing the barriers even though *they’re at the heart of social change*. They’re part of the system of society, often stabilizing it from change too rapid or poorly considered. How you overcome them is fundamental to your success.

Your solution for the system has to include how you draw from what they know, or how you help them change when they’re wrong, or, in the last resort, how you work around them.

The most common barrier to better thought — the primary cause of failure in human systems is simply mediocre thinking, *smart people allowing each other to think dumb*. The group instead must correct the flaws in individual thinking, which requires getting past the tendency to agree just to be agreeable.

The skeptical voice sounds argumentative.

When someone contradicts you, this is a *precious* moment.

First, remember your motive-- realize you aren’t getting the results you want *and you know you need help*. (*ALL working to improve the education system must acknowledge this.*)

Listen carefully.

Write down what they say (your self-protective instincts are likely to extinguish it before you even think it through)

Promise to get back to the person

Keep the promise

Listen in more detail

Follow through with them.

Unregulated conflict can fracture a group. The best setting occurs instead *when people feel bonded enough to each other* (through explicit appreciation of each other’s strengths) *that they can challenge another’s thought without threatening the bond*.

Everybody thinks better than anybody.

Whatever corner of society you work on, you first have to comprehend it and then bring the same high quality thought into every phase of your actions.

The brave social concepts that lift society can work no better than citizens can understand and apply them.

To cause change successfully, you need *to deliver the principle* of good thinking throughout the spectrum of people whom you hope will cooperate with your efforts. With people you hire, this is considered training, but in a more fluid group whose collaboration is less defined, it amounts to an entire field of communication of which training is a part.

Be alert to clues; *this is a bad sign when*:

- you get upset when others criticize the quality of your thinking.
- you focus immediately on flaws in *their* thinking or motives or viewpoint.

•you prevent them even from delivering an idea to you because you didn't invite them, or they aren't of your status, race, clique, ideology, identity, or turf. Pigeonholes strangle the emergent idea.

You need to be so committed to finding the best thinking that you deliberately welcome the contrary idea; you grant each other the freedom to hash things out, **and still remain bonded** in the service of the common vision you subscribe to.

Outcomes are proportioned to the number of people involved and the unity of thinking among them.

What does it take to bring numbers and unity of mind together?

The glue is a concept *important enough to warrant people devoting their lives to it.*

People in general *are seldom guided by a comprehensive concept* but instead go first to their personal needs and interests.

Our own self-restraint now will later benefit others we regard as our own; we seldom reach this conclusion by ourselves.

Social change involves much explaining, imagining, and sense-making.

????the good of the whole

Change depends on common agreement. What people agree on, they can do.

An organizing task likely to remain urgent for a long time is *enlarging people's viewpoint* so that they can recognize how they damage others, and commit to set this right.

We can't just tell others our conclusions and expect them to be followed out, but need to disseminate both the desire and ability to grasp and pursue the causality we observe.

To the extent that we can involve others in comprehensive thought, we're more likely to solve problems.

People wish to defer hard thinking to others.

Whenever people are loyal only to a limited purpose, they structure the situation for a cessation of trust at a certain point, leaving society in stalemate over problems unresolved.

"We want to know where people's hearts are, what they think and believe, so that we can trust the initiatives each brings to the table."

Do you have an idea?

Does it contribute to the good of the whole?

Can others apply and develop it?

Is it the right thing to do?

The bottom line is that **we ask each other to do it because it's the right thing to do**, regardless of whether it benefits us or not.

If you want to change society *purposely*, you need to think like engineers sending a mission to Mars: clear purpose with all on the same page, common plan, details to master, training and development, clear assignment of tasks well carried through, and so on. *You accept the discipline inherent in the task.*

If you don't change your thinking, you'll never be more effective than you are now. You have to close the gap between how you think now and the requirements of the task.

Internal Changes

The steps 1) **think through what you believe and what you will do about it.**

2) **to accept that change will be long-term.**

3) **to make changing society important to you personally.**

4) **the good of the whole as an organizing principle**, a means of sorting priorities and weighing where to place effort.

5) **everyone has something to teach you.** Give everyone your ear.

6) **continue to learn about everything.**

7) **to work with others**

8) **being willing to take time for them and for group action.**

9) **help develop the group's ideas.**

10) **to welcome correction of your thinking and face the hard truth about its limitations.**

11) **to confront others with the hard truth about the limitations of their thinking and actions.**

12) **talk out disagreements.**

13) **to become an expert listener, and then listen to others in depth.**

14) **provide a group experience that encourages personal connections and effective action.**

15) **to do reliably what you agree to do.**

16) **noticing your personal weaknesses and disciplining yourself to do what contributes to group effectiveness.**

17) **invite others to actions that fit them and that express the group's values.**

18) **we plan together for group activity.**

Especially at the start, you need to comprehend your furthest aim, which I suggest is 19) **ever greater numbers adopting constructive principles for changing society.**

A foundational tone that affects everything else is 20) **balance within and harmony between.**

The big secret in group process is that *people change easiest by accepting three things at once: membership in a group, a way of thinking the group embodies, and the actions implied by it.* We are inevitably faced with supplying the three conditions: group membership, new thought, new action.

We have to deliver the ideas to them. The critical piece usually missing from most attempts to do this is *the personal channel that's opened for ideas to pass through*, face to face or via telephone.

Membership is worth it to people for two reasons--how they think about its purpose, and the quality of the people within it. Both must be attractive, and either one missing will kill the attempt to expand.

Involve people in an action and build persisting energy.

What you need is 1) a mutually supportive group who will work together 2) to evolve the most powerful picture of the changes needed, and then 3) convey it to the public in the most impactful way.