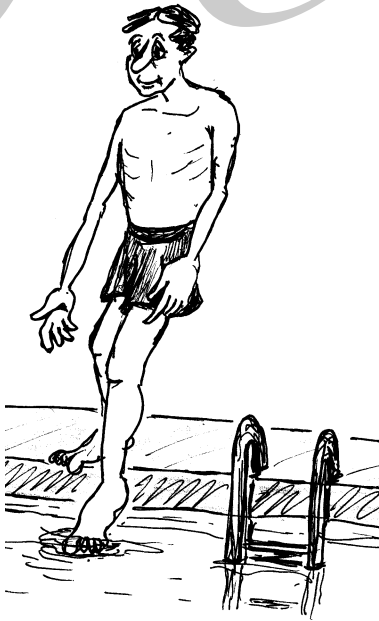


CHAPTER THREE

Where Do I Start?



Maybe you attended a seminar, read a book, or heard about a new approach from a friend. You're excited because you think it can help your organization, but you don't know where to start. This chapter describes the very important pattern Evangelist(144) and a small package of patterns to always carry with you on your journey: Test the Waters(237), Time for Reflection(240), Small Successes(216), and Step by Step(224).

Think about how important it is when building a house to first decide where to build it. Only then can you make intelligent decisions about the house itself. In the same way, some of our patterns are better when applied before others. However, there isn't a strict ordering on the entire collection.

We have created a framework that provides some structure for using the patterns but it does not impose a rigid plan for you. The framework suggests rather than dictates. It's a springboard for action that you can adapt to your own organization and culture.

We believe that an effective change agent begins as an Evangelist(144). That is, we see this pattern with this name as the starting point for the rest of the pattern language. The name has a religious flavor and there's a good reason for that: We've found that unless you are truly passionate about the new idea, others will not be convinced to leave the tried and true ways and follow you. There's another piece to this rationale. If you don't have faith in your proposal, then you won't survive the bumpy road to grassroots adoption. There will be successes and failures along the way, and you must celebrate the former and withstand the latter. Only a sincere and abiding belief will carry you through all this turmoil. You must have passion and share that with others. At the same time, you should guard against being overzealous because, as you can imagine, there's a difference between having passion and being a fanatic. A fanatic is likely to turn people off.

Mark Twain said, "You know, I'm all for progress. It's change I object to." That's not true for everyone all the time, of course. Sometimes you're excited by change and look forward to it, but even when you welcome it, change is hard. Some people always seem to resist it. Research has shown that people are more easily convinced by those they like, those who are enthusiastic. As Ralph Waldo Emerson observed, "Nothing great was ever achieved without enthusiasm."

We found the following testimony to the Evangelist pattern in *Agents of Change* by Barbara Bouldin.

*Several years ago, I set out on a crusade. Management declared me a missionary and commanded me to go forth and convert everyone in our organization. I was spreading the word about the need to embrace the concept of productivity in the form of an automated software tool called Excelerator. As far as I can tell, management selected me because I was a true believer; in other words, I was the first convert.**

*Bouldin, B.M., *Agents of Change*, Yourdon Press, 1989.

Evangelism Is Critical for Success

We strongly believe in the importance of this pattern for another reason. We have known change agents who were “hired guns” brought in from outside. We have a pattern called Dedicated Champion(129) (introduced in more detail in Chapter 8). This pattern recognizes that you can’t effectively spread the word without having some part of your job dedicated to the task. In other words, a volunteer change agent is limited by lack of resources—particularly the time and energy for the required tasks.

We’ve talked to several who were hired to fill the role of a Dedicated Champion. We believe that those who weren’t successful failed because they felt that since they were paid for introducing the innovation, they didn’t have to be concerned about the sales aspect of the task. In other words, they thought they could bypass the evangelism. We’ve discovered that without the essential elements of passion, enthusiasm, belief, and commitment, a change agent who is “just doing his job” is not likely to be successful. So, even for a person who immediately dons the mantle of a Dedicated Champion, even if you are in a management position, becoming an Evangelist is critical.

A manager at one large company told us:

The important thing about new product development is that the champion of a new product develops a passion for that product and inspires passion in others. It’s like a new business venture. People who have a passion for something find the time to work on it, at lunchtime, before or after work, weekends, whenever.

So the answer to the question “Where do I start?” is “Use the Evangelist pattern.”

A Small Package of Patterns

We know how you feel as you embark upon this journey. You’re passionate about getting started, but you have so little time, no resources, and no management support.

We do hope, however, that you have a goal for your innovation, a vision for its ultimate adoption. Yes, this is important; you must have vision, but in our experience there is no need for a detailed master plan.

To help you better understand what will work in your environment, we provide a small package of patterns: Test the Waters, Time for Reflection, Small Successes, and Step by Step. Have these in your “carry-on bag” as you embark on your journey. You will use them, not just at the start, but throughout, to be applied at each turn and each new juncture.

The first pattern in the package, Test the Waters(237), enables you to fit your strategy to your setting. Each company has its own character and its own culture. We don’t advise throwing out the old and wholesale bringing in the new. Rather, we recommend a gradual, experimental strategy that begins with a little investigating and experimenting to see if your idea has a chance in your environment. Some of the patterns you can use for experiments to Test the Waters are described in Chapters 4 and 5: Ask for Help(104), Innovators(170), Brown Bag(113), Piggyback(201), and Do Food(132). These patterns require minimal investment on your part and the feedback will help you decide what steps to take next.

The pattern Time for Reflection(240) suggests taking time out to learn from your experiments so that you can decide what patterns to apply next. It may not seem obvious that this is necessary. It’s one of the great illusions in any endeavor that you learn “on the fly,” that somehow, lessons from your experiences are automatically carried forward in life. In reality, you need to dedicate time for this activity—to ask the questions: What worked well? What should be done differently? What still puzzles me? Without careful consideration of these questions and an attempt to find answers, you risk failing to learn.

Mary Lynn tells the following story about reflection.

My students asked me if I would consider “extra credit” in the quantitative analysis course this semester. I replied, “I’ll put that on my list of things to think about.” One student replied, “That’s funny. I make lists of things to do but I never heard of making a list of things to think about.” I suddenly saw myself at her age, moving from one activity to another, rarely taking the time to reflect.

One change agent reported this use of Time for Reflection:

At our company, retrospective data was used to document patterns for software design, system test, and customer interaction. When data from successful teams showed that a team size of no more than ten was a factor in the successes of the projects and when those results are backed up by observations and the literature,

this is an important pattern. Capturing this information and giving the pattern the name “No More Than Ten” was a useful way to ensure that this knowledge was not lost.

One of the results of this exercise, of course, is that you could decide not to continue your effort. Here’s a comment from one change agent we interviewed:

I went from successfully introducing <a new idea> at a medium-sized company to attempting the same thing at a small company. Even though the support of a Local Sponsor(186) and Corporate Angel(123) were easy to get and the developers were enthusiastic, most had no time to attend Brown Bags(113). The company had no resources for training or conferences, so despite all the support, I got tired and gave up. I realized that some companies with tight schedules, especially small ones, have no “slack” for investing in innovation.

The third pattern in the package, Small Successes(216), reminds us to celebrate even the small things along the way, instead of being overwhelmed with all the challenges and potential disappointments that are ahead of us. Eamon Kelly, president of Tulane University, featured in the film *The Journey*, observed, “My success resulted from moving from one failure to another failure with enthusiasm.” Celebrate the moving forward!

Robert Schaffer tells the following story in his book *The Breakthrough Strategy*.

At Amstar Corporation, maker of Domino Sugar, all of the refinery’s departments needed improvement, but trying to tackle everything at once would have been an overwhelming task. Instead, they chose to focus on the packaging area, where a lot of sugar was lost when bags were overfilled or broke while being filled. The first project included only one supervisor and seven hourly employees and was launched with a few short-term goals: making adjustments to the weighing scales, identifying damaged bags before they could break; resolving packaging problems caused by one kind of sugar. In 6 weeks, the team had reached its initial goals and 3 months later had reduced breakage by 80% and overfills by 56%. The process was extended to other packaging lines and, over the next several years, to every department in the refinery. The first success led to far-reaching improvements as they learned how to achieve significant, immediate results and new work patterns. They used their initial successes as stepping-stones to sustained improvement.

The Amstar story also illustrates the last pattern in this package, Step by Step(224), which cautions against doing too much and expecting results quickly. We have all heard the observation from the oft-quoted Lao Tzu, “The longest journey begins with a single step.” Vincent van Gogh wisely noted, “Great things are not done by impulse, but by a series of small things brought together.” When your focus is on the long-term goal, it’s hard to maintain enthusiasm day after day. A common mistake we all make is to take on more than we can handle. Innovations are best spread slowly and quietly, so you can learn from your failures and build on your successes. The risk in adopting everything at once, rather than incrementally, is that your effort may overwhelm project members.

The five patterns introduced in this chapter work together. We recommend that you use the pattern Test the Waters to conduct an experiment by trying a few patterns from this book. Then use the pattern Time for Reflection to consider what worked well and what should be done differently. Don’t forget to use the pattern Small Successes; this will help you stay focused on the good things that are happening instead of being overwhelmed by setbacks. Finally, use the pattern Step by Step to continue to make small changes that move you closer and closer to your final goal.

Colonel David Hackworth writes in *Steel My Soldiers’ Hearts*, his compelling account of change in Vietnam:

*Some command principles are just common sense. Good small-unit leaders make for good battalions, so I fired two small-unit leaders and replaced them with my men. A thousand other changes needed to be made, but I didn’t want to bury my staff on our first day together. If I’d ordered all shortcomings squared away immediately, I’d have sent them into overload. I approached the conversion the same way I’d train a pup. Just a few tricks at a time. “Starting now, we’re going to follow the two-rule plan,” I said. “I’ll tell you what the two new rules are and you’ll make them happen. Once your troops have mastered the first two rules, we’ll add two more and we’ll keep doing that until we’re squared away. First we’ll crawl, then we’ll walk and then we’ll run. Just stay with me—because we’re going to run faster and faster every day.”**

*Hackworth, D.H., and E. England, *Steel My Soldiers’ Hearts: The hopeless to hardcore transformation of U.S. Army, 4th Battalion, 39th Infantry, Vietnam*, Rugged Land, LLC, 2002.

We hope you feel ready to begin your journey. You're enthusiastic (Evangelist(144)) but you know that just having a dream isn't enough. You need to check out the lay of the land (Test the Waters(237)), learning from your experience (Time for Reflection(240)), celebrating each win (Small Successes(216)), and moving gradually forward (Step by Step(224)). Once this foundation is in place, never lose it. Now you're ready to take those initial steps. The next chapter will provide some patterns you can apply without spending resources and taking a lot of your own valuable time. After all, at this point, you're still a volunteer!

