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Third Edition

Change Activist

Making change happen can feel daunting – as well as exciting. At times I have definitely gone for the duvet day. We'll look at this through a prism of scared (and occasionally lazy, right?) which, as I will tell you through personal experience, is normal. So please don't think this is change bootcamp, it really isn't. Deep, genuine, lasting change is more likely to happen from love and care than 'I should' and fear.

This is a hand-holding, encouraging voice to echo your own inner kind, wise voice. That's all. But all those caveats aside, I really, really want to help you learn to think like a change activist. By doing so I promise you will build up your change muscle, so that you can lift the heavier things in your life more easily, when the time comes.

What do you stand for?

Before we go any further, I want to ask:

- Do you feel like change just happens and you can't do much about it?
- Do you know what really motivates you, what you want to achieve for yourself and your family?
- Would you like to feel more energised, more coming from the true you?
- Would it be nice to feel you were steering more, more in control of your life?
- Would you like more confidence, feel you are able to make things happen?
- Do you know what you value most, spiritually, emotionally, materially? (Is that a word btw?)

Then great. This is the place to figure stuff out.

Change activist advantages	Passion	Purpose	Plan
	Care rather than despair	Sense of cause, mission, clear goal	A clear approach to get to the desired outcome
	Compassion	Knowing why you want to take action	Practical, simple set of steps to help others feel part of the cause
	Power to dissent, rebel, disagree	Clarity on how things will be better	An end goal, something to aim for
	Harnesses the power of strong feelings to motivate	Seeing the big picture	Having a career or personal change map based on your true self
	Energy and desire to do something	Energy knowing your life is going in the right direction	Thinking about the baby steps towards where you want to be. Taking them
	Curiosity, desire to self-educate, find out more, get others involved	Feeling like the true you, sense of authenticity, peace	Knowing when you have made change happen – you worked the passion, purpose plan!

‘The most common way people give up their power is by thinking they don’t have any’

Alice Walker, author, civil rights activist

Social activists are great role models for those of us who want our lives back.

Why have social activists been so keen to change the world? Often the individual activist story gets interesting when deep values are

challenged. The efforts made by social change activists to improve the world are very often founded on passionate commitment to a set of higher values.

Activists are juiced on values. And that gives a huge boost to performance. Imagine that feeling when you wake up in the morning and want to go out in the rain and get the bus, because the work waiting for you when you get there gladdens your heart, reflects the values you hold dear. Values are the fuel for our careers and our life achievements. Values are the things that are most important to you. If your job doesn't rotate around them, you will start to rotate around something that allows you to escape – a drink, a busy hobby, or TV. Are you working on something that means a lot or a little to you right now?

'Values' sometimes seems to be a laden term. I contend that values are essentially neutral. You can have high moral values, or low moral values. The words denote a hierarchy. But let's just consider the wider picture.

When one person is asked – 'what is important to you?' – they might reply – 'the values I live my life by: honesty, freedom, justice and creating a loving homelife'. When asked to rank them in order of importance, they might place honesty first. When asked why, they might say that they prize honesty because it's the foundation for the things they want to achieve. When asked for an example, they might say, 'Well, if I feel that I can be completely honest with my friends and colleagues at work, I am happier, more relaxed. I feel that honesty is the cornerstone of my life. Honest business is good business and I can feel at peace with myself.'

Ask another person: What is important in your life – financial security, a nice house, big car, at least two international vacations per year? What is most important? They might reply, 'Oh, easily money because then I can do what I want. If I have money then I feel good about myself and have fun. I enjoy living the high life. So money is very important to me.'

Both these people live by their personal values. The first person wants to ensure that s/he lives a life of honesty. The second is guided by financial success. Who's to say right and wrong without understanding context? There's certainly cause and effect in terms of

building everything around money at the expense of relationships or societal contribution. But who can judge that choice? Maybe working for money alone is like playing tennis only to see the scoreboard.

Would being a materialistic person mean you have fewer friends? Would dedicating yourself to helping others make you more popular? Well it isn't as simple as that. Our life choices are guided by the often invisible steer of our values. And we create change with greater or lesser urgency, depending on the prominence we give to certain values. I know some great investment bankers who work full on for money. That's their number one. Why? Because they want a life without personal debt, and to give their kids a better home life than they were able to have.

And I know some social activists who live for personal growth and development and have become so inwardly focused that they don't know how to give to others at all on a one-to-one level.

One suggestion on values and balance comes from the Life Orientations organisation³ which over 30 years has developed a personal development framework through understanding basic personality types and preferences. It suggests that any strength, carried to extreme, becomes a weakness. So avoid being so supportive that your co-team leader can't get a word in edgeways.

The route away from dysfunction is to value diverse values and to assess what is most important to you.

Exercise: What is most important to you?

Write down the things that are most important to you right now.

And try to put them in a ranked order – 1 to 10.

Then ask yourself if I could have 1 but not 2, which would I choose? If you could have freedom, but not money, which would you choose? Promotion but less time with your family, which would you choose? Financial security but little job satisfaction? Check out your first guesses.

Do this exercise with someone who knows you. Ask for their views.

Is there anything more important than finding out the values that can potentially fuel all you do?

Values definition The moral tenets and convictions or accepted behavioural code of a person or group. Beliefs that help you to decide what is right and wrong and how to act in different situations.

Principles definition A fundamental truth that forms the basis for a system of belief, behaviour or reasoning. In other words, a personal rule of behaviour.

Values and principles help us define who we are, guide our decisions, underpin our personal development and relationships. But I think it's quite tricky to think about this in isolation – everyone signs up (I hope) to values like respect, honesty, openness, fairness. But what about your relative values – what do you give most weight to in your life? Maybe values only come to life when they're tested. Going back to the exercise above, what did your priority values suggest about the direction of your life? How aligned are you with what is most important to you, for example?

'This above all else; to thine own self be true'

William Shakespeare

I have learned that as long as I hold fast to my beliefs and values, and follow my own moral compass, then the only expectations I have to live up to are my own.

Michelle Obama

Exercise

So now over to you. What is your definition?
Being true to myself means

And right now, how is that going?

What would need to happen to be more true to myself, more often?

Please come back to this – it feels like to thine own self be true might be a sort of foundation value, informing everything else. Deep values are the tide, the current we carry our lives upon. The trouble is, like the current – it's not always visible. So how on earth does anyone know? Well, now you've had a chance to think through – let's look at some situations, and maybe ask yourself how you'd react.

You are notified that you have to work over the weekend. But it's your mum's birthday and you are planning a family get together. Is this when you ask yourself 'Is work just more important than family?' Or would you write back saying, 'No sorry, can't do, family commitment'? Or would your work have to come first? – maybe the boss wouldn't ask unless it was urgent. And you'd go see your mum later? But if your heart said your family, and your head said 'do this for the boss', which one would win? No value judgement on this – just saying if it's your family, can you be true to yourself and say no, and why? If it's work, can you find a way to be true to yourself and tell your family honestly?

That deep current of values moves your action even when no one will find out. The cliché – returning the found wallet anonymously and saying nothing. Donating to the food bank anonymously. What do you enjoy doing to make a difference, without anyone knowing? And