

This is an exposure draft of *How to Change the World* by Les Robinson

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## Chapter 8.

### **Find the right inviter**

You'll probably hate me for this, but don't buy this book. Instead go and buy a copy of *Jamie's School Dinners* DVD. I got mine through Amazon.uk for just £9.97 plus delivery. It's a total course in being a change agent.

In 2005 Jamie Oliver, the perpetually laddish celebrity chef, accepted the challenge to transform the lunchtime eating habits of 20,000 or so school kids in an entire London borough. I'm not going to tell you the story. Go and watch it yourself. But I do want to celebrate one of the personal qualities he displayed.

As you'll see, Jamie was not objective. He was genuinely affronted at the "cheap shit" and "scrotum burgers" that were served as lunchtime meals in English schools. "It's not right", he said "I wouldn't feed it to my dog". He was so bollicking mad that the DVD comes with a "swearing deleted soundtrack". He was practically speechless that primary school kids couldn't name rhubarb, leek or asparagus "I don't believe it", he said, "I think I'm gonna pass out".

He worst fury was reserved for Turkey Twizzlers, a concoction of Turkey parts, fat and salt that were served by a private company contracted to provide the meals in one of Britain's poorest counties. "Fucking Turkey Twizzlers. I tell you what I'm gonna fuckin' send a

bomb around to their factory and shove it right up the arse of their MD. And if you're watching Mr Turkey Twizzlers can you just do me a favour and just...phew!"

Jamie's anger gave him the gift of perseverance. He collided humiliatingly with one obstacle after another, but never gave in. Instead, he dusted himself off and tried another angle. When the kids hated his food, he left the school kitchen and entered the classroom. When that didn't work he went into family homes and worked with parents. When his cooking lessons didn't change kids' attitudes, he tried bargaining: "throw your packed lunch in the bin if you want to stay in my class." Then he noticed the kids who left his class were resentful at being left out, he used the fear of exclusion to get kids involved. He learnt his way into this horrendously complex social problem by trying hunches and observing the results. Exactly like a scientist, he proceeded by hypothesis and experiment.

Jamie's case also illustrates how passion is often associated with that other great quality of successful change agents – naivete. Jamie didn't know he was supposed to fail. He didn't know that one person was not supposed to change the eating habits of a school, let alone a whole borough with 20,000 kids. Thousands of intelligent adults were sitting back helplessly watching a public health catastrophe play out. Why? Because they had the curse of knowledge. Jamie, however, knew nothing about the school system or the vast weight of institutional habit that contrived to maintain the problem. His ignorance made it possible to be optimistic.

Passion like this isn't associated with good looks, education, IQ or family money. Anyone can have it. And in case you're thinking Jamie did well because he's a celebrity, let me tell you I've seen

plenty of successful change agents who were not famous or fabulously gifted. But they were passionate. They had a dream, lived it in their lives and didn't give up.

Despite innumerable setbacks Jamie eventually achieved success beyond his wildest dreams. His TV show made crappy school lunches an issue in the 2005 general election. The Blair government was shamed into spending millions to raise food standards, including extra funds to renovate school kitchens and retrain school cooks. School inspectors were directed to add the quality of school lunches to their inspections, and a School Food Trust was established to lift nutritional standards.<sup>1</sup>

You'll recall from chapter four how behaviour change so often travels along social networks on a wave of conversation. It travels from believers who are living the dream to those who have not yet, for whatever reason, adopted a new behaviour. Let's call the first group "inviters" to celebrate their role as catalysts who invite change in others. And let's call the others "actors" to celebrate the fact that, provided all the pieces come together, they will be the ones who act in future.

What does it take to be an influential inviter? Can anyone be an inviter? Can "the government" be an inviter? Could you be an inviter?

Inevitably, good inviters are passionate believers who are living the change in their own lives. Their passion gives them the optimism and perseverance to continue talking about change in a cynical, resistant world. And their contagious optimism helps others believe in their own ability to change too. They walk the talk and talk the

walk. When Ghandi famously said "Be the change you wish to see in the world" he was precisely right.

But passion alone is not enough to qualify someone to invite change in others. The best inviters embody certain other qualities too: respect, connection, powerlessness, similarity, and belief in people. Let's see why.

### **Be respected**

In Feb 2007 British billionaire Sir Richard Branson, the ubiquitous head of Virgin Everything, and Al Gore, formerly the next president of the United States, got together to launch Branson's \$25 million Virgin Earth Challenge, a prize for designing a commercially viable method to remove greenhouse gases from the atmosphere.

That \$25 million was just a down payment on the roughly \$3 billion that Branson has pledged to spend on reversing global warming.

What led Branson to make these extraordinary pledges?

According to the ABC News story:

Former Vice President Al Gore convinced him over breakfast one morning.

Branson, in fact, admits to being skeptical about global warming in the past.

"I was skeptical, but I've met a lot of scientists. I've read a lot of books. I've had Al Gore spend two hours at my home giving

me his personal time to convince me, and sadly, I'm now convinced that the world has a serious problem," Branson said today on *Good Morning America*.

Gore, who appeared on the show with Branson, said he didn't have to strong-arm or lay a guilt trip on the transportation and music mogul.

"We just talked about the facts of the situation," Gore said.

"You know, all of us have problems absorbing the reality of what we're facing with this. It's really a planetary emergency."<sup>2</sup>

Facts alone did not convince Richard Branson. Scientists did not convince Richard Branson. What convinced Richard Branson was two hours with Al Gore – perhaps one of the few people on the planet he was helplessly impelled to respect. What's more, if the article is true, Al Gore didn't even have to ask.

I like to think that everyone has someone they can't say "no" to on a given issue. One of the qualities of these people is that we respect them, and one of the unconscious rules-of-thumb we use to decide whether we respect them is whether that person has social status in our eyes.

"Those who have high status, competence and [social] power" make the most influential role models, wrote the pioneering social psychologist Albert Bandura.<sup>3</sup>

Early experiments showed children were more likely to imitate a model whose behaviour they see being rewarded,<sup>4</sup> who is the same age or slightly older<sup>5</sup> or who they like or admire.

A classic experiment on respect involved pedestrians obeying or disobeying automatic lights at a pedestrian crossing.<sup>6</sup>

The experimenters used a 31 year old male model who was alternately dressed in high status and low status clothes. The high status clothes included a freshly pressed suit, shiny shoes, white shirt, tie and straw hat. The low status clothes included scuffed shoes, soiled patched trousers and an unpressed denim shirt.

When the low status model crossed against the "wait" light only 4 percent of other pedestrians followed him. But when the high status model violated the signal 14 percent of pedestrians followed.

It seems we look to higher status peers to help us decide how to act and think. The more prestige or respect they have, the more we are likely to instinctively follow their lead.

The question for change agents is, obviously, how do you get status?

The quickest, easiest way is: as a *gift*. You can be granted status by prestigious local backers or "gatekeepers".

One of the first things I learnt as a facilitator was the importance of being gifted status by someone in the group who already has it. So, when I work with a new group, I first ask to be introduced by the most respected person or authority figure present. That gives me a "foot in the door" I can build my authority on.

Paul Castelloe and Thomas Watson from the Center for Participatory Change in North Carolina wrote a wonderful article called "How to enter a community as an organizer".<sup>7</sup> They explain the importance

of gatekeepers:

“Gatekeepers are folks who are well connected in the community, who understand your work, and who are willing to support and sanction it. Such people understand the needs and opportunities of the community, and they are trusted and respected by both grassroots leaders and formal decision-makers. It gives us so much credibility when I say, ‘Yeah, we’re new to working in this county, but we’ve been working for a while with Robin Mauney over at REACH, and she’s on our board and she’s been helping us. And Lisa Twiggs over at the Family Resource Center, she helped us put this thing together too.’ That just gives people an automatic sense of ease, because Robin and Lisa have lots of connections and are trusted in the community.”

The power of respect, and the idea that everyone has someone they can’t say “no” to, suggests an interesting strategy for social change. It’s a little bit like the “Six Degrees of Kevin Bacon” game. Say you wanted to change the mind of the President, Governor or Prime Minister. You wouldn’t lobby them directly. Instead you’d locate someone they respected. Then you’d do some more research and find out who those people respected. And so on, until, finally, you worked your way down to someone who respected you. Then you’d ask THAT person to lobby their friend to lobby their friend etc, all the way back to the president. I suspect this is how the political influence game really works. Everyone has someone they just can’t say “no” to. The art of influence is to figure out those respected people are and work with them.

And if you think it’s a little cheap to use the same methods as Tupperware, I ask you to consider the awesome power of the Tupperware Party model. The hostess is always someone you know

and respect. So, despite your better judgement, you can't say "no" to their invitation, so you go along. You know you can buy exactly the same plastic containers for half the price in the supermarket, but you also know that, despite your better judgement, you'll need to buy at least one item to avoid offending the hostess. You arrive, the hostess introduces the Tupperware demonstrator who then inherits her social status, becoming someone else you also can't say "no" to. The hostess makes the first purchase, setting the social norm for the evening. Basking in the hostesses' status, the demonstrator invites you to buy a completely useless party dip ensemble. You summon up the will to say "no" but instantly feel so bad that you say "yes" to next offer. The psychology behind this model is potent, and respect is the key element.

Everyone has someone they can't say no to. It explains a lot about how changes travel through society. It also explains terrorist recruitment. What could cause well educated, apparently hopeful young architects, doctors, engineers and family men to become suicide bombers. The answer is horrifyingly simple: someone who they respected asked them.

### **Be connected**

Todd, an unwell 53 year old man, was sitting quietly playing a poker machine in his local hotel on a Saturday night when a drunken 27-year old Aboriginal man named Peter walked up to him and said "buy me a beer or I'll punch you in the face". Todd told the stranger to leave him alone. The younger man punched him in the face. Fortunately bar staff quickly came to his rescue. Peter was arrested and charged with assault and malicious damage.

Peter had 58 previous convictions, 32 for violence, 27 of which involved sentences of imprisonment. At the time of the assault he was on periodic detention for assault, malicious damage and breach of bail.

If the law was supposed to change Peter's behaviour, there was a problem with its theory of change. A different approach was needed. His case became the first trial of "circle sentencing" in New South Wales.

Circle sentencing originated in Canada in 1992 for the sentencing of indigenous law breakers, and later spread to the United States and Australia. The model is a novel departure from conventional criminal proceedings. Instead of sitting in remote majesty at the head of a court, the magistrate is simply the facilitator of a discussion circle that includes respected community elders, social workers, the prosecutor, the victim, the offender's supporters and the offender. All have the right to be heard and speak their minds. The sentence is agreed through open discussion, and (provided it fits the state's sentencing guidelines) the magistrate confirms it.

In Peter's case the transcript began with the prosecutor asking him why he committed the crime. "I don't know" was his reply. Discussion moved onto the effect alcohol had on Peter. He admitted he had a drinking problem, "I need help, I blame myself," he said. "I'm doing weekends but that still gives me five days to get on the grog. I need to get off the grog."

The elders had known this man all his life so they also knew about his hopes and fears. One said "Do you want the little fellows coming to the gaol to visit you, is that what you want, you want them to follow in your footsteps?" Said another "You should be looking after

your Nan [grandmother], what if she dies while you're in gaol. You should be alongside her, she needs you now."

One of the effects of a circle court is that it empowers elders act like elders. They are often heard to make spontaneous offers of support, employment, and supervision beyond their formal role in the court. "I'll help you but you'll have to spend time with me", said one in this case.

Together the circle agreed on three months home detention and nine month's good behaviour bond under the supervision of an elder. Before they parted, Peter unexpectedly apologised to the victim.

Six months later the magistrate received a report on Peter's progress. He had started a three-day-a-week job. He had been surprisingly successful at making and selling artwork and had spent the profits to pay off much of his fines and buy furniture for the home he planned to set up with his de facto wife. He hadn't taken alcohol or drugs since the circle court. He'd provided constant care for his grandmother, given counselling to teenagers, and presented talks at community justice seminars. The report said: "The progress [the offender] has made in the past five months is more than he has in the whole of his life. His confidence has improved...His artwork has great potential... He maintains that the circle sentencing has helped him get his life into perspective and is looking forward to a life without crime...".<sup>8</sup>

Peter's is not the only circle sentencing success story. The process has a powerful affect on the behaviour of offenders, on recidivism rates, and on the happiness of victims.

But why?

One reason seems to be the freedom to speak and the dignity given to all, including the victims who aren't permitted to speak openly in a conventional court. Combined with a caring and supportive environment this freedom and equality help transform the event from punishment to healing. It's called "restorative justice" for that reason.

Another reason is its emotional intensity. Offenders report being unprepared for the cathartic emotions that come when they meet those they have harmed in the presence of the important people in their lives.

Criminologist John Braithwaite suggests restorative justice works because it uses shame and guilt to reconnect people with their positive hopes for themselves, as well as rebuilding important social ties.<sup>9</sup>

Others researchers have written "By seeing that they are respected and loved by people whom they in turn respect and love, and who condemn their bad behavior but do not view them as a bad person...Both their desire to maintain those links and to maintain a favorable sense of self motivate offenders not to reoffend."<sup>10</sup>

The success of circle sentencing suggests that those who are *connected* to us have the power to influence us in ways that strangers cannot.

If you want to be a successful inviter it will help immensely if you're part of same circle as those you intend to invite. If you're not part

of the circle, then you should be at least someone they're likely to bump into again.

Of course we don't usually have a bunch of well-connected elders handy. So the question is: Can we create a sense of connection where none exists before? The key is to create an on-going relationship. TravelSmart and its offspring, LivingSmart and WaterSmart<sup>11</sup> achieve this with a kind of case manager approach, where the same telephone operator stays in contact with each particular household. That way the householders get used to hearing a familiar voice and expect they'll hear it again.

Another similar example was Water Efficient Durham. That project employed university students to repeatedly visit the same 300 homes to discuss water saving techniques.<sup>12</sup>

An even better approach is to create a community. Parents' groups, bush regeneration groups, sustainability action groups, community leadership programs etc all act like social networks where subtle invitations are continually being issued by those who are living a dream to those who aren't.

### **Be powerless**

We've already talked plenty about the dangers of resistance. Resistance happens whenever people think they're being manipulated or pressured.

Resistance is very likely whenever an inviter is perceived to have power, control or authority over an actor. Even when there is no intention to exercise control the mere existence of unequal power can cause a perception of pressure. Messages from state agencies

and councils are especially problematic because of the unstated threat of criminal sanction.

The best way to avoid resistance is to be a neutral, independent person with no vested interest in the outcome - an ordinary Jane or Joe.

Even then, it's easy to use language which unintentionally creates the impression you are pressuring others to change.

The solution is to completely avoid telling people what to do. Here are some interesting alternatives:

One is to simply state neutral facts, like this advert in a Toronto rest room that aims to get people washing their hands after using the toilet. All it says is:

"Caution. 92 percent of guys say they washed. 34 percent were lying."<sup>13</sup>

A second way is to talk about what *you will* do, not what *they should* do. This inspires and challenges people with your own commitment but avoids telling them they are wrong.

"Next Saturday I'll vote Green in the Senate". – Murray Black, The Greens

"I'd rather go naked than wear fur." – Joanna Krupa, PETA

A third way is to argue against your own self-interest.

This was neatly demonstrated in an early social science experiment where subjects were asked to decide between the credibility of two arguments. Both arguments were for courts to have more power to convict criminals. In one case the source was Joe "The Shoulder" Napolitano "serving the third year of his twenty-one year sentence for smuggling and peddling dope". The other was G. William Stephens, New York prosecutor.<sup>14</sup> The subjects decided that Joe The Shoulder's argument was more credible because he was arguing against his own interest.

If you can't argue against your own interest then you can at least give reasonable weight to the opposing point of view. There's good evidence that such two-sided arguments have more credibility than one-sided arguments.<sup>15</sup> Here's how a two-sided anti-tobacco ad might read:

"I love nicotine. It keeps me alert and in control. But I also hate the way it controls me. Giving up was the hardest thing I ever did, and the best."

Two-sided arguments work for two reasons. They make the speaker seem less biased and so more trustworthy. And they turn off the counter-arguing voice in peoples' heads. Since the counter-argument is being voiced by someone else, the listener is saved the trouble of voicing it herself, neutralising the negative self-talk that's the mechanism for denial.

To summarise, a good inviter should be someone who has no power over the actor and who also carefully avoids the perception of pressure by telling them how to live their lives.

## **Be similar**

We are easily influenced by people who are similar to ourselves.

An early social psychology experiment divided boy scouts into two groups.<sup>16</sup> Each group was shown a film of a 12 year old boy playing a war strategy board game.

One group was told the boy was “a boy scout just like you are. He enjoys camping and hiking. He lives here in Twin Cities and goes to the same kind of school as you”. The boy in that film was wearing a boy scout uniform.

The second group was told: “This boy doesn’t live in Minnesota. He doesn’t go to the same school as you. He doesn’t like to do the things you do in boy scouts, like hiking and camping. I guess that’s why he never joined boy scouts.” The boy in that film was dressed in street clothes.

After watching the films, each child was left alone with the board game and observed. All the boys played the game, but the ones who saw the similar model imitated the model’s strategies 40 percent more accurately.

Another experiment involved primary school children who were poor at maths.

The children watched four videos over two days showing another child successfully solving maths problems. Some videos showed similar students solving the problems and others showed a teacher solving the same problems.

The results were dramatically different depending on the model. Those who observed the teacher got 62 percent more correct answers than the control group, but those who watched similar student models beat the control group by 130 percent.<sup>17</sup>

The consensus amongst psychologists is that role models are most effective if they are a similar age, sex and background to the people they want to influence.<sup>18 19 20 21 22</sup> So, for instance, if you want to send an anti-drinking message to young men, male role models are likely to be more effective than female role models.<sup>23</sup> The effect could hold true even if the models were similar-looking paid actors, rather than actual members of the peer group.<sup>24</sup>

It doesn't even matter whether the similarities are trivial or irrelevant. One experiment showed that people were more likely to comply with a request even if the only thing they had in common with the inviter was the same name, the same birthday, or similar fingerprints.<sup>25</sup>

But if the role model is *dissimilar* the invitation can boomerang! Another experiment showed that seeing similar people enjoy music made them like the music more, but seeing *dissimilar* people enjoy the same music made them dislike it!<sup>26</sup>

The choice of role models can therefore make or break a change effort. One example of what can go wrong was a £2.4m anti-smoking ad campaign depicting "cool" teenage role models aired on MTV Europe in 2001. The evaluators found that teenager viewers were more, rather than less, interested in smoking after watching the ads. They concluded that the campaign flopped for three reasons. First, teenager viewers thought the message was unrealistic and lacking in credibility. Second, the style and execution

jarred with their lifestyles. Third, they strongly disliked the central characters in the ads, seeing them as “too perfect” and “snobby”.<sup>27</sup>

Jamie Oliver, despite his passion and perseverance eventually realised he was not the best inviter for the school dinner ladies. His celebrity status got his foot in the door but it didn't bring the grass roots credibility he needed to invite dinner ladies out of their comfort zones. Instead he faced repeated demoralising setbacks.

So what did he do? Finally, in a climactic moment of the series, he found the right person to do the inviting: Nora, the redoubtable head dinner lady who had been his toughest opponent.

Her request, which I'll reveal at the end of this chapter, was a masterpiece of persuasive invitation.

### **Believe in people**

Carl Rogers was one of the first psychotherapists to experimentally investigate the effects of personal counselling. In 1956 he wrote an extraordinary paper in which he proposed that just three factors predicted the success of a counselling relationship.<sup>28</sup>

The first factor was whether the therapist was genuinely *himself*. Whether he or she was comfortable in their own skin, natural and not putting on a contrived performance or façade.

The second factor was whether the therapist had empathy for the patient. That is, whether they genuinely understood and sympathised with the patient's feelings. For Rogers, accurate empathy meant skilful reflective listening that clarified and amplified a person's own experiences and values, without imposing the

counsellor's preconceived views. "It is the client who knows what hurts, what directions to go, what problems are crucial, what experiences have been deeply buried."<sup>29</sup>

Recent studies confirm that empathy is vital for successful counselling. In a University of New Mexico study involving alcoholics, psychologists William Miller and Stephen Rollnick found that two thirds of the change in drinking behaviour after six months could be predicted from the empathy shown by counsellors during treatment. "Those treated by low empathy counsellors," they wrote "were less likely to improve than if they had been sent home with a good book."<sup>30</sup>

The third factor was whether the therapist had "unconditional positive regard" for the patient. By this he meant a warm, uncritical acceptance of every aspect of the patient's personality.

"When someone expresses some feeling or attitude, our tendency is, almost immediately, to feel 'That's right'; or 'That's stupid'; 'That's abnormal'; 'That's unreasonable'; 'That's incorrect'; 'That's not nice'. Very rarely do we permit ourselves to understand precisely what the meaning of his statement is to him. I believe this is because understanding is risky. If I let myself really understand another person, I might be changed by that understanding. And we all fear change. So as I say, it is not an easy thing to permit oneself to understand an individual, to enter thoroughly and completely and empathically into his frame of reference."<sup>31</sup>

Rogers therefore proposed that the factors that predict the success of a counselling relationship belong to the counsellor, not the patient. "People who believe that they are likely to change do so.

People whose counsellors believe they are likely to change do so. People who are told they are not expected to improve do not," wrote Miller and Rollnick.<sup>32</sup>

Paul Castelloe and Thomas Watson of the Centre for Participatory Change believe that successful community organisers need a similar state of mind:

"Start with a rock-solid belief in everyday people. Your entrance into a community should be upon a core belief that everyday people can come together to create positive change in their community...It's important who makes the change in a community. Is it us, as outsiders, or the people themselves? I believe that it has to be the people. So often people have no one who believes in them. And if I can be that one person to believe in somebody, it will help them believe in themselves. Because if they don't believe in themselves, change will not happen.

"Also, I have to believe that change can happen. I have to believe that the people can make change. I have to be real clear, and say, 'I believe that your ideas can happen. I believe that we can do it.' I try to give examples where other people have created similar change. These conversations are the beginning of the seeds that will grow into future community action."<sup>33</sup>

If we are optimistic and believe in people, then those beliefs will infect the minds of our actors. When parents believe in children those children believe in themselves and do better academically.<sup>34</sup> When an audience thinks a communicator likes them they are more likely to be influenced by the message.<sup>35</sup>

On the other hand, if we are doubtful, cynical and negative then those beliefs are likely to infect our listeners too.

### **The art of invitation**

So, here is the model of a good inviter:

They are passionate believers.

They are similar, respected and connected.

They are powerless to enforce their requests.

And they believe in the people they hope to influence.

And, of course, they are dynamic: they *ask* the actors to take that first step to a better future.

Jamie Oliver, upon meeting the MD of Scholarest, the company that supplied Turkey Twizzlers, avoided responding to any of the MD's pathetic excuses. Instead he established who he was, which was not Jamie the celebrity chef but Jamie the guy who just proved he could get a whole school to eat healthy meals, on budget. Then he offered an inspiring vision to the MD: "Be the first and ban these reconstituted products." Then he made a simple, unambiguous request: "Will you ban Turkey Twizzlers?"<sup>36</sup>

In PR-speak it's called the "call to action".

Strangely, it seems to be one of the hardest lessons for change agents to learn. Here's a typical invitation scenario created by my students:

Irascible oyster farmer, Bob Holland, eloquently recounts the tragic tale of how pollution destroyed his Oyster farm on Wallace Lakes, and, with a tear in his eye and a choke of emotion, exhorts the meeting of Clyde River oyster farmers to go for "green certification" and "not let the same thing happen here".

Then the project officer takes to the floor, outlines the benefits of certification, thanks everyone for coming, looks a little confused, and sits down.

I'm sitting at the back of the room thinking "Come on, come on...make the call the action! Don't forget to ask!"

You've got people's attention. They've been touched by hope. They believe the actions are do-able and can make a difference. Now they need to know *precisely* what they have to do to get started. So spell it out big and simple: "Sign the expression of interest form and hand it in before you leave." It's the punch line to your invitation: *the simple, precise, first step in the path to a different future*. Spell it out. Make your request. And then sit down.

An inviter needs to be a dynamic player. Your job is to *invite*. So do it. Then be silent and watch what happens.

## The silent invitation

Intriguingly, not all invitations need be verbal or even involve an interaction. There can be *silent* invitations which take place entirely in the actor's imaginations.

One of my students told me this story: She lived on a large block of land which was heavily infested with weeds. She was a council environmental officer, and she knew some of those weeds were classed as noxious which meant she could have fined herself for not eradicating them. She knew she had a problem but denied it until a new neighbour moved in. After a few days she heard on the grapevine that the new neighbour was a farmer. That was all it took. Shame, and her imagination, did the rest. She threw herself into spraying and digging until her block no longer looked like a threat to the farming community. She and her neighbour never spoke a word about those weeds. Her change was triggered by a person-to-person interaction but it was one that occurred entirely in her imagination.

This kind of invitation works through *expectation*. All it requires is that actor expects that a conversation is imminent and that it could be the kind of conversation that challenges their virtuous view of themselves.

You could use this trick in lots of situations. You could, for instance, get doctors and nurses to wash their hands more frequently (it's one of the biggest infection control issues facing hospitals.) All you'd do is put up stickers that tell patients they can expect doctors and nurses to wash their hands with anti-bacterial fluid before touching them. The doctors and nurses would then expect an imminent, challenging conversation with any patient who didn't

observe them washing their hands. The conversation never need occur. The expectation would be enough.

### **Can governments and corporations be good inviters?**

That's an interesting question, and an important one, because so many change efforts are sponsored by government agencies.

There's been a fair amount of research into what makes a corporation or government agency able to influence public opinion.

The key is credibility.

Research by risk communication guru Vincent Covello concluded that the public judges the credibility of government agencies according to four tests:

Are they empathic or caring? (50 percent of the judgement)

Are they competent? (15-20 percent of the judgement)

Are they honest and open? (15-20 percent of the judgement)

Are they committed and dedicated? (15-20 percent of the judgement)<sup>37</sup>

Another study found that credible agencies need to exhibit competence and expertise, dynamism, lack of bias, fairness, concern for the community's well-being, honesty and openness, and consistency and predictability.<sup>38</sup>

Does your organisation meet these standards in the eyes of its public? Let's be honest. Probably it doesn't. In an age where the media feeds every kind of cynicism about institutions it's unlikely that yours has the credibility to invite people on the seemingly risky journey of change.

That's why, if you're in government, it can be a good idea to run joint programs with respected grass-roots community organisations or to invite independent similar-respected-connected spokespeople to endorse your efforts.

### **What makes a persuasive invitation**

Recently David Suzuki, the great Canadian environmental advocate, came to my town and the council organised a public meeting so we could hear his views.

Suzuki is one of the most charismatic public speakers of our time, yet his message was quite gloomy. He berated politicians for sitting on their hands while the planetary ecosystem collapsed under the weight of corporate greed. I enjoyed his zestful assault on American and Australian politicians. Yet I walked away feeling hollow and somewhat deflated.

There was only one moment that captured my heart and made me buzz with my friends afterwards. At the start of the evening our crusty old Lord Mayor, a local businessman with no renown as an environmentalist, introduced the speakers. Drought is a big issue in our part of the world and it's certainly been worsened by global warming. Therefore water saving is a hot topic. In the middle of his short speech, the Lord Mayor said "I've got a bucket in my shower. How many of you have bucket in your shower?" Then he waited,

staring around the room as a scattering of hands rose. He then invited us all to do more to save water. It was humble, simple, and surprisingly arresting.

What made these few words stand out compared to the brilliant pyrotechnics of one of the world's great orators?

The Lord Mayor's words were a nice example of a persuasive invitation.

Let's look at the ingredients.

For a start, he was talking about what I was already talking about with my friends and family. He connected to the buzz.

Then he caught us off guard. No one expected our Lord Mayor to be personally committed to saving water. His words were schema-busting. And they highlighted my own discrepancy: if he was bending over backwards to save every drop of water, why wasn't I?

Next, those of you who are very astute will have noticed that the Mayor's invitation was SUCCES-ful. It was a short, unexpected, concrete, credible, emotional story. That's right, a persuasive invitation shares the same contents as a contagious story. That's why it got me talking to my friends afterwards.

And there were three extra ingredients. These are things that transform a contagious story into a compelling invitation to change behaviour.

First, he reminded me of my frustrating discrepancy: my guilt about wasting water.

Then, he proposed a simple action that would address the discrepancy: use a bucket to collect shower water.

Then, he asked me to act.

He got the formula for persuasive invitation just right. It's an unexpected, emotionally-arousing story that reminds the listener of a frustrating discrepancy, offers a credible solution, and asks for the first step along the path. Unfortunately that doesn't make a groovy acronym like Chip and Dan's SUCCES<sup>39</sup>, so I'm just going to have to call it a Persuasive Invitation.

Our Lord Mayor also added a brilliant optional extra to his Persuasive Invitation.

He asked for a show of hands.

Requesting a physical response is a great way to engage people. It forces them take a position. What's more, they know they are being *seen* to do so by their peers. As we saw in the last chapter visible demonstrations of commitment can be potent methods of influencing people's subsequent behaviour.

But he also made a mistake. He asked "who uses a bucket in the shower?" – which, unfortunately, is an *uncommon* practice. Even with a green-minded audience he must have known that only a minority of people would raise their hands. So instead of a drawing attention to a positive social norm he drew attention to a negative social norm. We know that people are influenced to follow what they think is normal, so this wasn't as astute move. The trick when requesting a physical reaction is to choose one that a lot of people

will respond “yes” to. It would have been better to say “how many of you saved water this week”. The resounding show of hands would have primed people nicely for his subsequent request to put a bucket in the shower.

Here’s a perfect example of a well-crafted Persuasive Invitation. It’s dinner lady Nora’s invitation from Jamie’s School Dinners DVD. Jamie wanted to invite scores of school dinner ladies to a special training weekend, so he asked them to a restaurant and invited Nora to address them. Here’s what she said. It’s a masterpiece of Persuasive Invitation.

“I’m not going to say nothin’. Just ask me questions... How horrible it was? It was terrible (chuckles). Everyone moaning. The staff in the kitchen moaning. Teachers moaning. But when you see them eating it it’s just marvellous. I mean, I’m old. I thought I’d give them burgers and chips until I retire, you know. But it’s actually put a spurt back into me.”

It’s got all the ingredients. Passion and optimism. Counter-argument to undercut the audience’s doubts. An emotionally touching story. A reminder of frustrated personal hopes. A solution that answers that frustration. And it was followed by a simple call to action (sign up for the training) that kick-started the audience on their path a different future.

And here’s what she *didn’t* do. She didn’t pressure her audience. She didn’t argue with them. She didn’t batter them with statistics. She didn’t rabbit on about childhood obesity, corporate badness or the ruinous impact of junk food on kids’ health. Instead she inspired them with a hopeful personal vision that every one of them could relate to and then issued a simple request to act.

## Can you be an inviter?

Clearly, therefore, no one can be a universal inviter, just like no one can be a universal lover. You can love some of the people of the time, but not all of the people all of the time. Whether you are a good inviter depends on qualities that are hard to fake. It's about *who you are* and the nature of your connection with those others.

So could you be an inviter? The answer is: with some people yes; with others no. It's important to be realistic about this. You need to think about *who you are* with those actors. If they see you as passionate, caring, similar, respected, and connected to them, then the answer is "yes". If not, then your best role is not to be an inviter yourself, but to be an introduction agency, bringing the right actors and inviters together.

Some colleagues in a government agency recently told me about a meeting they organised to tell dairy farmers about the advantages of protecting native vegetation. Instead of fronting the meeting themselves, they drove a grizzled red-faced 60-something dairy farmer up from Victoria. His clothes were rumpled. He had no presentation skills. His speech was halting. Yet he had the rapt attention of the other farmers because they knew who he was and what he had achieved on his land. He was the perfect inviter.

There are two kinds of change agents. Those who invite directly, and those who work behind the scenes, choreographing change moments which bring the right inviter together with the right actors. It's important to know which role is yours.

So, the next time you're inviting someone to act, here's a checklist of things to consider:

Firstly, ensure that you are:

- Passionately living the dream they talk about
- Similar to the actors
- Respected by the actors
- Connected to the actors
- Powerless to enforce their invitation
- A believer in the actors' ability to make a difference.

If you're not, then find an inviter who is.

Secondly, ensure your invitation includes:

- An emotionally touching story
- A reminder of the actors' frustrations
- A credible solution to those frustrations
- A simple, do-able call to action
- An absence of argument or pressure.

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<sup>1</sup> Check it out at [www.schoolfoodtrust.org.uk](http://www.schoolfoodtrust.org.uk)

<sup>2</sup> The ABC News item is at <http://abcnews.go.com/GMA/story?id=2477400>

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<sup>5</sup> Brody, G.H. and Stoneman, Z. (1981) Selective imitation of same-age, older and younger peer models, *Child Development* Vol 52, pp717-720

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- <sup>31</sup> Rogers, op. cit. p18
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