

World Changers'

TOP THREE

Biggest Mistakes

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MISTAKE 1

EDUCATION DOES NOT
CREATE CHANGE

MISTAKE 1: EDUCATION DOES NOT CREATE CHANGE

There's a pesky problem that crops up whenever we try to get people to change. It's a principle called ***The Value-Action Gap***. It means that there's no relationship whatsoever between educating people on an issue, and that education leading to people engaging in any real or measurable change.

This phenomenon has been studied by behavioral scientists in many different scenarios, such as getting a group of people to watch a documentary or attend a class about energy efficiency. When asked about how they feel about the issue, the people in the study claim to be *very emotionally moved* about the issue. But when observed for any change in their behavior towards energy efficiency, such as switching off lights, using heaters less, or closing windows etc, there is nothing.

It's easy to assume that there is a natural connection between a person learning about a serious issue, and then taking action on that issue. You'd think that a light bulb turns on in their mind and their actions are forever guided towards the light. *But no cigar.*

It doesn't mean that education is not important in a social change campaign. Education *is* important. But your campaign needs to be targeted primarily around promoting *a specific behavior change action*. The educational component can be used as a "learn more" feature that plays second fiddle, or even third or fourth fiddle, to the target behavior.

Education plays a role in building up what's called *intrinsic motivation*. This intrinsic motivation will help get your audience to stick to the behavior you want them to do, but it won't flag them to commence the action or help them to build a regular habit. We need to look into their daily life and see where we can interrupt their daily flow to inject a new behavior.

EXAMPLE:

THE EDUCATION VS BEHAVIOR CHANGE APPROACH

Lets say we want to get people in a large office building to use fewer disposable plastic bottles.

If we were to fall into the mistake of thinking that education leads to change, we might design an **education** strategy like this:

- Make everyone watch a documentary on how bad plastic is for the environment
- Get a local environmental leader in to give a talk about plastic pollution
- Put a pamphlet on reducing plastic on everyone's desk
- Put up a poster that has facts about plastic waste in the lunchroom
- Go to a conference about plastic pollution

Then we cross our fingers and hope people will stop bringing plastic bottles to the office.

But value-action-gap theory indicates that this educational campaign will fail to produce a result. It goes even deeper. Studies have shown that ***how much people care about the environment*** is not even an indicator if they will change! Getting people to care isn't actually the most important thing to creating change. How amazing is that? Whether they care or not might actually be pretty irrelevant.

Ok, so *how much* people care doesn't matter. Then what does? What matters is *how empowered* people feel to influence change. They need to feel like *their one action is making a difference*. Then, even if they care only a tiny bit, they'll change. There's more it than that, but we can start with empowering our group of people *for action*.

When considering how to empower *behavior*, we go about it in a totally different way. People already know that disposable plastic is not the best thing. They really don't need a whole lot more education or emotional persuasion.

A campaign that targets the **behavior** might include:

- Giving everyone in the office a reusable water bottle
- In order to receive the water bottle, each person needs to make a written pledge to use it
- We put all the written pledges up on a wall where people can see them
- We make a sticker chart and put a happy sticker (like a happy face, a star, a dolphin etc) on for each person who uses their reusable plastic water bottle.
- Install a SodaStream in the office kitchen
- Install filtered water refill stations in easy to reach places

Now you could add all the other educational material from the first example for people who want to learn more. But you might not even need to. It could be linked somewhere or sent in a group email. You can add your educational material *on the tail* of your change strategy. The education will help the behavior sink and take hold, but it won't manifest it in the first place.

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MISTAKE 2

FORGETTING THE FEEDBACK LOOP

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We all need to understand the concept of the feedback loop. Feedback loops are fundamental to the the field of systems theory or cybernetics, and they are important because *everything in the universe is a system of some kind*. A feedback loop is the communication back and forth between an organism and the thing they are interacting with.

Our behavior is constantly adjusting to feedback in our environment. A hotplate turns red and we know not to touch it. Google Maps shows a crimson traffic jam so we catch the train instead. We see clouds and drizzle out the window so we put on warmer clothing for our walk. These are all feedback loops of information that effect our behavior.

A feedback loop is fundamental to understanding human motivation. Without a feedback loop, we are asking people to act in a void. It is fundamental to our *sense of agency* over a problem.

How do we use a feedback loop in social change? Your campaign needs to communicate the change people are making back to them, with as little time lag as possible. A little bit like how Facebook communicates a notification with a red dot. We need to communicate a change in the system back to the person.

A lack of measurement and feeding back data is one of the biggest mistakes social change campaigns have made. It's critical mostly for the designers of of the campaign, so they themselves know that their campaign is effective.

How do you know your campaign is working if you can't measure it yourself? How can you stay motivated on a cause if you can't be sure you are making a difference? How can you expect other people to be motivated to join your cause if you can't show them that they are making a difference? You need to communicate the change in the system as immediately as possible back to the person you are trying to influence.

EXAMPLE: AN IPAD CONNECTED TAP

Think of a regular bathroom tap.

A tap without a feedback loop doesn't tell you anything about how much water you are using when you turn it on. It is not feeding back data from itself to you. You are not altering your behavior and feeding back an adjustment in your usage for the tap to measure. There is no communication between you and it.

How do we create a tap *with* a feedback loop? A tap with a feedback loop would be fitted with a gauge that measures how much water it uses. The tap would have a small screen (it could be an iPad) sitting above it, connected to the water gauge. Everytime you used the tap, the screen would tell you, in real time, how much water you were using. The tap can now communicate with you, and you can communicate with it by adjusting how long you leave it running. The tap now has a feedback loop.

It would then only take a very small amount of education in water conservation, if any, to get people to start changing their behavior. The feedback loop does the heavy lifting in human motivation for you.

We can augment the feedback loop to make it work even better. Imagine there was a little red dot (similar to a Facebook notification) that showed up when you got your tap usage at less than 200ml. Maybe it shows a cute animal when you get it really low. Maybe an angry shark shows when you leave it running brushing your teeth. The possibilities for adding fun gamification techniques like this are endless.

The immediate feedback loop is extremely effective in getting people to change. It's because the feedback loop is *immediate*. Every social change campaign needs to be built up upon a skeleton of feedback loops so it can be constantly optimized to achieve the *greatest measurable win*.

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MISTAKE 3

IDEA BIAS KILLS
GOOD IDEAS

MISTAKE 3:

IDEA BIAS KILLS GOOD IDEAS

Have you got a good idea? Have you got a bad idea? Maybe you have at one point had a really good idea, but then realized it was actually a pretty bad idea? Most importantly, is your focus on your current idea, suffocating new and better ideas from coming through?

What I see happen over and over again, is that people come up with an idea and the idea starts to take up their whole consciousness. Usually ideas are slight alterations of existing ideas, like "Facebook for dogs", or even simple ideas like publishing a book or starting a blog. None of these ideas are new, or hardly even 'ideas' at all. But the way to come up with really, *really* good ideas shouldn't be through the appropriation of old ideas tacked on to your unique angle. There is another way to come up with *the real killer ideas*.

Ideas should be generated from looking deeply into your data and thinking up ways to move the numbers. You will generate completely different (and much better!) ideas this way. *These kind of ideas will be the ones that matter*. You'll also come up with many ideas, probably too many!

How can you tell if your current idea is suffocating better ideas? Ask yourself how often you check your idea against the measurable effect the idea will have on the data you care about. If you are not constantly checking your idea against your data, you may well have a stale idea that is suffocating new fresh ideas.

It's easy to get attached to ideas you've had for a long time or might have worked on. But there's no shame in killing off the old to make way for the new. Often the greatest innovations and artworks come with the scrapping of vast amounts of previous work in order to focus on the very best.

Every idea is only as good as its ability to create measurable change. If you can't prove that your idea is making measurable change, kill it off, and innovate an idea that does. Anyway, that's the fun part.

EXAMPLE: FESTIVALS VS GARDENS

Imagine there is an organization puts on an annual festival or conference. I chose this example because it's very common. All over the world there are festivals and conferences that exist to promote causes. The organizers are so caught up in the logistics of making the event happen, that they aren't able to focus on new and better ideas that *could actually lead to real measurable change*.

If you remember the *Value Action Gap* from *Mistake 1*, it's likely that events fall smack bang in the middle of the value action gap and don't actually make any measurable impact on anything we really want to change. Events are great for networking, but largely ineffective at creating lasting change.

Let's say there's a local sustainability festival. It's a typical event that happens once a year where vendors congregate in stalls, there are a few keynote speakers, some food stalls, and lots of local people pass through.

If we ask the question, "*What do we want to change in the world?*" and then "*What metric can we use to measure this change?*" then the organizing team can look deeply into available data sets on the issue and start brainstorming ways to shift the dial. It doesn't mean we need to do away with events. But events need to be used as one tool in a toolkit that ultimately creates a behavior change. The event needs to be constructed entirely to support a key behavior. If it can't support a behavior, it should be deleted.

The event organizers could be *so attached to the idea of the festival*, that they are closed to coming up with new and better ideas.

But these particular organizers are smarter than that. They learn of the *Value-Action Gap* and realise they need to refresh the event. They think though what they want to change, in terms of numbers. They decide that they want to focus on food sustainability as a key metric.

They look a little deeper into the numbers and figure there are few different ways of measuring food sustainability. They come up with a list of these data sets:

- Food waste in landfill
- Composting
- Plastic packaging
- Pesticide use
- Water use
- Fossil fuels used in farming
- Industrial animal agriculture

That's quite a few data sets! They have a brainstorming session and think through ways they can make a change in these numbers from within their local community, whilst also utilizing their event management skills.

Letting go of their attachment to the idea of an annual festival, they come up with these ideas:

- Get people to grow more food locally
- Give out stickers and signs that people can put on their trash to help remind them to put food waste in the compost bin.
- Lobby local government to do compost pickups from homes and businesses
- Make the percentage of food waste in landfill data from the local landfill available publicly online to the community
- Recruit schools and businesses to help get the number down
- Hold a DIY composting class for locals
- Give out free calico bags for people to buy plastic free bulk foods
- Hold classes in residential food gardening

The organizers realize after this brainstorming session that what they really need is a regular event that builds a community movement. They also need to hold classes and workshops that teach people skills in sustainable living.

They come up with a whole new mission, that is clearly measurable. It is *"Our mission is to have our residents grow 50% of our own food locally"*.

They realize in order to make this come true, they are going to have to work out what the current surface area of food garden is. They get their members to let them know, and they plot them out on Google maps. They realize what they need to get to. They print out a copy of the map, with all the local food gardens highlighted in bright green. They can then use this map to try and recruit new food growers. They show them the map to people in the community and say something like this *"We need to bring our local food growing from 243 square feet up to 20,000 square feet. Could you help us reach this goal? Please come to our food growing monthly meet up. Our community also helps with garden blitzes where we can help you build a food garden"*

The sustainability festival has now been reinvented. It now runs all year long and consists of:

- Monthly public meetups that showcase local community initiatives
- Weekly committee task-force meetings to work on specific issues.
- A website that shows the numbers on what they are trying to change
- A website that has courses and tutorials online to teach food growing, composting, and sustainable living.
- A local gardening blitz group that helps people set up new gardens.
- A points system where people gather points by attending gardening blitzes. Points can be redeemed for gardening support by the community.
- An annual party and awards night for everyone involved in food growing, where top food gardeners are given awards and prizes.
- A measurability project to track the surface area of local food gardens.
- A thermometer online that shows the current surface area of local food gardens and the number the community needs to reach in order to reach their goal of 50%.
- A door-to-door team of community gardens who go around and invite people to be involved in turning their garden into to a food garden.
- Put photos local top food growers on social media.

What an amazing strategy for change!

What's the happy ending? The community is injected with excitement and positivity. They are making new social connections, learning new skills, and everyone is inspired because they are seeing real and tangible change happen every week.

Now this wouldn't be possible if the event organizers were so attached to their original idea of the annual event that they couldn't grow into this fabulous new strategy, filled with much, much better ideas. All these new ideas came from trying to *shift the numbers*.

You can see from this example that the organizers are still involved in event management and community building. However their strategy now revolves around making a measurable goal come true. The events are only means to shifting the numbers on the ultimate mission of achieving 50% local food grown.

This issue of idea bias could be applied to so many more examples. It could be used for products, technologies, or business services. The moral of the story is this - ***don't get attached to ideas***. They should flow freely and easily from your process of studying your data. Be free to let your ideas go and invent new ones quickly and easily at the speed of thought.

Remember, the only idea that really matters is the one that shifts the numbers.

Thanks for reading!

Hope to hear about your
new killer ideas soon!

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