



Choosing Change

How Leaders and Organizations Drive Results One Person at a Time

THE SUMMARY IN BRIEF

If there's one certainty in business today, it's this: Change is coming your way. You have no choice in the matter. The choice you do have is either to embrace it or bury your head in the sand.

In *Choosing Change*, ASTD Chairman Walter McFarland and leadership executive coach Susan Goldsworthy offer a proven new model for not just facing inevitable change but leveraging it as a tool for long-term success. The first step is personal: You must decide that you are going to change; only then can you lead change. From there, the authors present the tactics and strategies you need to compete today.

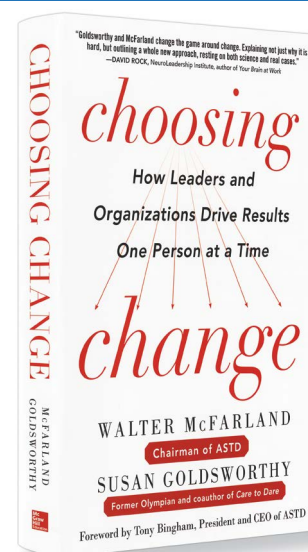
Organized into two thematic sections, *Choosing Change* takes you step-by-step through the authors' dynamic model for leading any company to success. Part I explains how to apply the newest research findings in psychology, neuroscience and executive development to implement change in yourself. Part II focuses on organizational theory, management and organizational learning, showing you how to integrate change into your organizational DNA.

If you want to survive and flourish in today's business world, you must be prepared to adapt to changing marketplace circumstances. Sudden changes in markets, society and the economy have ruined industry-leading companies overnight — because they weren't change-focused.

Don't be one of them. Lead yourself and your organization to the top — and stay there — by *Choosing Change*.

IN THIS SUMMARY, YOU WILL LEARN:

- The Five Ds of the successful change process: Disruption, Desire, Discipline, Determination and Development.
- How to apply key findings from the field of neuroscience to maximize the success of any revolutionary change effort.
- How to implement a successful revolutionary change in yourself and in your organization.



by Walter McFarland
and Susan Goldsworthy

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THE COMPLETE SUMMARY: CHOOSING CHANGE

by Walter McFarland and Susan Goldsworthy

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Introduction: The Choice of Choosing Change

Change is a natural part of life, so why is change so hard for people and organizations? We believe the reason lies in the fundamental approach to change taken by both individuals and organizations. In today's business world, change readiness occurs only at the moment of revolutionary change, when the threat is great and the fear is building.

We propose a different model — one that sees change as part of daily practice. And it starts with you. Why? If you want to lead others to change, you need to first be open to change yourself. So the change we're discussing is triggered by the leadership of oneself *and* an organization; it leads to putting new approaches and processes in place to achieve a goal, or growth of some sort, that has consequences and implications for everyone involved.

We use a framework called the Five Ds to compare the key elements to be aware of during both individual and organizational change.

- **Disruption:** This relates to an event or experience that triggers a conscious choice to change. The disruption creates an awareness of something that might require attention and creates a case for change.
- **Desire:** What exactly does the person or organization want to achieve; does it believe in the possibility, and how serious is it about making the change happen?
- **Discipline:** Applying those small, consistent and frequent steps required to build the momentum that

delivers sustainable change. Discipline is essential in order to manage the many demands of life and to keep pressure on the processes of change.

- **Determination:** Having the resilience to focus and deliver even when faced with setbacks. Determination is a necessary requirement because any major program of change will create resistance and will have setbacks.
- **Development:** Continuous improvement, feedback and ongoing learning for the individual and for the organization.

Neuroscience and Change

An important part of implementing change is understanding how your brain works. The brain is focused on survival. For most of human history, the brain saw survival as *physical* survival — life and death. Recent research indicates that in modern times, the brain also sees survival as *social* survival.

From long experience, the brain has learned that even minor changes in the environment can mean the difference between life and death. For this reason, the brain views environmental changes with profound suspicion. Change often triggers responses in the brain similar to those triggered by physical pain.

The brain has evolved specialized systems to quickly detect and react to changes in its environment. Key ones include

- **Working memory:** This is the brain's initial holding area for new perceptions and ideas, and is associated



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with the prefrontal cortex. The challenge is that working memory is quite limited — we can't process very much information at any one time. Because change efforts require a greater use of working memory, they can overwhelm it, causing physical discomfort and reducing the brain's capacity for learning, creativity and adaptability.

- **Long-term memory:** This is held in the brain's basal ganglia, which doesn't tire like the prefrontal cortex. We use this region for physical habits and activities we can do without thinking. Change requires the difficult work of changing habits — something the basal ganglia actively resist.
- **Error detection:** The brain's focus on survival causes it to continuously scan the environment (up to five times per second) for "errors" — unexpected changes in the environment. Change efforts can generate error signals, which can trigger a fear response.
- **Fear response:** This is the brain's fight, flight or freeze reaction to perceived danger. Once triggered, it is the most extreme resistance to change possible.

Change efforts can threaten multiple systems in the brain (many of which are not conscious), eliciting behaviors to avoid and/or actively resist the change effort. This is why it is vital to apply knowledge of how our brains work in focusing on change at both the individual and organizational levels. ●

Part I: The Change-Focused Leader

Disruption: What Conscious Choice Will You Make?

Before we choose to initiate a change, our thinking needs to be disrupted in some way, usually by an external event. The essence of a disruption that enables change lies in asking yourself the question, "Can I afford to ignore this?" Controlled change requires a conscious choice triggered by an external event that gains your attention; one that makes you reflect, stop and think; one that disrupts your normal course of thinking or action.

Brain research shows that for every move you make, you have 0.2 seconds in which you can actively, consciously intervene in the process and choose a different response. But it takes considerable energy and attention to leverage that 0.2-second choice point. If you do not have an awareness of your choice point, your habitual response will play out like a prerecorded program. So, it becomes vital for

you to catch yourself in the process of making a habitual response so that you can exercise your choice point.

Habits have a three-step loop: cue, routine and reward. The cue is the trigger that tells the brain to go into automatic mode and follow a particular habit. The routine can be physical, mental or emotional. The reward helps your brain work out whether the routine is worth remembering in the future. Unless you deliberately fight a habit or replace it by finding new routines, the pattern will unfold automatically.

You must become attuned to how you are feeling and how your body is responding. Catch your cues — notice them and write them down. The more aware you can become, the more you are able to exercise your choice point at the opportune moment, and the more you are then able to change your behavior. ●

Desire: What Do You Really Want to Change?

Desire is the bridge between your dream and your reality. After disruption has occurred — whether it is a crisis moment in your personal life or your professional performance — you may experience an awareness that perhaps you could do something differently. The disruption shakes you, but you still have the ability to retreat back into the safety of a comfort zone. This is why the second step, desire, is so important. The essence of the desire for change lies in asking yourself, "Do I really want to apply the focus necessary to make a change or not?" If the desire is not there, then any energy expended is likely to be a waste of time.

To adapt to and drive your role in making your desired change, you need to see the difference between a "wish," which indicates a certain lack of empowerment or engagement with the goal, and a "want," which is driven by a deep consciousness of your needs and goals. A want more closely aligns your head with the desires of your heart in a way that resonates with you. The desire then translates into a belief that its achievement is possible.

Understanding Your Beliefs

Your identification of your wants — the sustainable goals that will carry you through a major change initiative — can be strengthened by doing an inventory of the beliefs you have about yourself. Consider the following questions:

- **Core belief:** If all else failed and you lost everything that is dear to you, what one truth do you believe to be true about yourself?

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- **Secure bases:** Who are the people who can both support and challenge you and who have your best interests at heart? How are you engaging your secure bases in pursuing your goal?
- **Empowering beliefs:** What are your strengths — the things you know you are good at?
- **Limiting beliefs:** What are the negative things you believe about yourself — the things embodied in your critical self-talk?
- **Personal statement:** Write a sentence in the present tense about the person you want to be when you've achieved your goal.
- **Vision:** What is your desire, your goal? And what are the key actions and timelines associated with it?

Taming Your Inner Critic

To complete the process of defining and owning your desire for change, you'll need to confront your inner critic, that mental voice that raises doubts about your ability to achieve your goal by reminding you how you have failed in the past or how unlikely it is that you will succeed.

Identifying the voice of your inner critic, naming the emotion, and then separating and isolating the thought that comes from the critic is a way of managing negative thinking. By labeling your negative emotions in a few words, ideally using symbolic language, you can actually reduce the intensity of those emotions.

Using visualization is another way to tame your inner critic. Visualization is the process of creating a mental picture of what you want to achieve. It works best when you use as many of the senses as possible. The more you repeat it, the more you can train your mind and body to perform in the way you have imagined.

Your Goals Need STAMINA

To increase your chances of success, it is important that you frame your desire and make sure that your goal has STAMINA — that is, specific, time-stamped, achievable, measurable, inspiring, narratable and actionable. Your goal needs to be specific and as descriptive and detailed as possible. You need to be clear about the time frame within which you want to achieve the goal. It must be achievable — it can certainly be a stretch goal, but it should also be feasible. You need to make it measurable, meaning that you know the stages and milestones along the way. It has to be inspiring; it is important that you gain energy just by thinking about your goal. Make it narratable: What is the story that you can tell yourself and others in relation to the goal? It must be actionable. Ask yourself every day, “What can I do today to work on my goal?” ●

Discipline: What Are Your Small Steps to Big Success?

Our desire may be clear, but applying the necessary discipline takes energy, focus and considerable effort. Many of us start an initiative but stop when we find it too difficult to sustain the effort. Discipline involves habitual behavior, developing willpower, looking after your mind and body, and practicing mindfulness.

When change is involved, the essence of discipline lies in asking yourself the question, “What can I commit to do on a daily basis to achieve my goals?”

Taking Small Steps to Success

Learning the discipline required to make change work for you is first about taking small steps. Every day, you have the opportunity to do something that brings you closer to your goal. These small steps build day after day, week after week, month after month, until they become habits. Developing momentum is a critical aspect of successful change at both the individual and the organizational levels. Every small win that you achieve builds up your confidence that greater goals are reachable.

If you train yourself to implement different routines, you will see a gradual and sustained change result. When you repeat something over and over, you can potentially replace an old habit with a new one. The more you can create rituals that make your actions into routines, the greater your chance of success. Turn those things that you do every, day no matter what, into nonnegotiable actions.

The Discipline of a Healthy Body and a Healthy Mind

Diet, exercise and sleep are the three key practices that deliver immediate improvement in the performance of your brain, thereby helping you to have more discipline during any type of change. To perform at your best, you need to be disciplined in these three basic areas.

Leaders who wish to develop in the area of discipline and in other areas linked to self-awareness are strongly encouraged to consider mindfulness. Mindfulness is defined as awareness of one's present thoughts, emotions and actions. “Here and now” awareness contributes to mindfulness by liberating mental energy and allowing you to pay heed to your immediate experience in the moment when it happens. Mindfulness is a proven way of reducing stress and providing significant benefits. ●

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Determination: How Can You Embrace the Setbacks?

Setbacks will happen, and when they do, you need to have *determination*, defined as “firmness of purpose; resoluteness.” The essence of determination lies in asking yourself, “How will I deal with setbacks and failure?” Rejection is part of the game — you need to view it as feedback and learn not to take it personally.

Resilience, the ability to recover quickly from change or misfortune, is an essential ingredient of determination. It is about accepting the reality, learning from it, and moving on from the setback. Working to improve your own resilience involves gaining awareness of where you are today, intervening in your daily routines and habits to make a change, and getting the necessary support from others.

Managing Transitions

Change is about dealing with transitions successfully. Transition is all about letting go of somebody or something and entering a period where we allow confusion and potential chaos to be before preparing to let something new or different come in the future. The mantra of “let go, let be and let come,” is most helpful in dealing with transition difficulties. When you let go of an old habit or an old way of thinking, you create space and release energy for something new to come. ●

Development: How Will You Keep Growing and Who Will Help You?

The essence of development for change lies in asking, “How can I continually learn and grow?” Adopting a mindset of continuous improvement is the best way to maximize your potential for continuous success.

There are several thinking skills and behaviors you must develop if you are to strengthen this frame of mind and apply it to leadership and to life. These include knowing when to go back and practice the basics and knowing how to let go of perfectionism, maintain humility, align intention with impact, give and receive nonthreatening feedback, and seek out secure bases that challenge you and hold you accountable.

For people who have been successful in one field, it can be difficult to let go, go back to the beginning, and become successful in a different walk of life. However, if they apply the learning that made them successful the first time around, are willing to go back to basics and can work with the Five Ds, they can enjoy success again.

When you pursue a life of continuous learning and development, you open up to opportunities and never quite know where the path may take you.

The learning person demonstrates self-knowledge, self-acceptance, self-respect, autonomy, and the seeking of both solitude and company. With self-knowledge, you are able to assess your own abilities, aptitudes and motives realistically. With self-acceptance, you are able to affirm the essential validity of your own being or reality and recognize and acknowledge your own feelings and reactions. With self-respect, you are able to think well of yourself regardless of your particular achievements or possessions, and you feel adequate, lovable, acceptable and worthy. With autonomy, you are able to accept your own need for others, but you are also emotionally independent, believing that you have the emotional resources needed to handle life’s opportunities and crises. Finally, when you seek both solitude and company, you are willing to spend time alone and also with others.

Having Secure Bases to Support You

You cannot see yourself as others do. We all have blind spots, and we require feedback from others to become aware of them, particularly during major change events, when the pressure is greater. Secure bases can tell you things you may not want to hear, but because of the strength of the bond between you, you will listen to them and even act upon their advice, no matter how reluctant you are. Find secure bases who can support, stretch and challenge you in the achievement of your goals. ●

Part II: The Change-Focused Organization

Disruption: Balancing Challenge and Opportunity

The ways in which organizations experience disruptions are both similar to and different from the ways in which people experience them. Organizations experience disruption differently because of the intensity of 21st century competition. Organizations in many industries are experiencing more competitive disruptions and view these as real threats to their survival.

A disruption can elicit great performance improvements in both people and organizations. The disorienting effects of disruption can trigger the deep reflection and changes in perspective that are required for leaps in learning and performance. To lead change in yourself, you must choose

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to *act* on a disruption — to use it for personal growth. To lead change in your organization, the choice is not *whether* you will act on a disruption, but *how*. Your first step is to quickly and effectively reframe the competitive disruption as the opportunity it can become.

Competitive Disruption and Revolutionary Change

Competitive disruptions are periodic occurrences that are unexpected and so significant that they threaten the very existence of the organization. Because competitive disruptions threaten survival, organizations take them seriously and often respond with large-scale change efforts that we refer to as revolutionary change. The goal of the revolutionary change effort is to quickly and effectively address performance gaps and make the organization more competitive.

The initial steps of leading revolutionary change are about refocusing your organization away from the fear and uncertainty of competitive disruption to the opportunities it always brings by taking fast and considered action. Here are some recommendations.

- **Create a guiding philosophy:** The guiding philosophy, a sort of “core values” for organizational change, works best when it is created by the senior executive team in close collaboration with the workforce. Build an organization-wide consensus on what great organizational change is and how it is implemented. The guiding philosophy should inform every decision in managing revolutionary change.
- **Establish a change leadership council:** Quickly creating a high-level management structure to lead and oversee the change effort is a critical first step. The change leadership council defines the nature and scope of the change effort and sets goals that are in line with organizational strategy.
- **Formulate a change strategy:** A great change strategy is brief, clear and inspirational. It helps build desire for the revolutionary change by increasing organization-wide understanding of the change effort, why it is important, and how it will unfold. Formulating the change strategy is a great opportunity to involve the workforce.
- **Initiate communication:** Executives we interviewed underscored the importance of great communications in the early stages of change, when anxiety and confusion are highest. Communications should begin as soon as possible, focus on informing and integrating the change effort, and be frequent, detailed and personal. ●

Desire: Building Motivation to Change

Making deep changes in yourself requires transforming a wish into a more powerful “want.” You must choose to build in yourself a desire that is strong enough and sustainable enough to fuel real change. At the organizational level, your ability to build a strong and sustainable desire is also essential if you are to achieve real change.

Building the Desire for Change

We recommend three actions for building strong desire in your team and your workforce during revolutionary change:

1. Shape the environment during change: Your actions can help your team and workforce reframe the change effort from something to avoid to something to approach. Model appropriate behavior. No matter what happens, stay calm, focused and positive. Provide insight and context to help your team members interpret change-related events positively as they occur.

2. Develop people during change: When you focus on developing your people, every part of the change effort gets easier: Your team members handle the disruption better; they contribute more; and they find it easier to build and sustain the desire for change. Involve people immediately; train them to be proactive and adaptable; make development personal; celebrate success and reward performance, and focus on a higher purpose.

3. Create an organization-wide communications strategy: Make it transparent and objective; it should inform, enable, integrate and celebrate the change effort. It should not attempt to coerce or persuade. The strategy should be comprehensive, consistent and inclusive and should use every means available to ensure that every person in the organization is reached. Align the communications strategy with the change strategy. Ideas should be shared and openly recognized.

Your ability to actively shape the organizational environment makes revolutionary change less threatening to the brain. This enables improved thinking and builds a desire for change. ●

Discipline: Coordinating Energy, Focus and Effort

Achieving discipline for organizations requires you to coordinate the energy, focus and effort of many people over time. Without discipline, revolutionary change efforts fail to sustain the desire necessary for true organizational

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change. When this happens, the organization, like the individual, reverts to a former familiar state, and change fails.

One reason for the inability of modern organizations to sustain desire is the continued and/or unexpected resistance of stakeholders. Another is the arrival of new high-priority problems that divert attention and resources. A third reason is poor management of the change effort. Building the management structures that are needed to develop and sustain discipline is about experimentation, persistence and insight. You must ensure that you have the right balance between control and flexibility to achieve lasting change.

Building and Sustaining Discipline

We recommend taking the following actions to create a great management structure for revolutionary change:

- **Establish a change implementation team:** This team is created by the executive change leadership council and reports to the council. The team has two primary purposes: creating the change implementation plan and using it to guide the day-to-day implementation of the change effort. The team coordinates and integrates all change-related activities across the organization.
- **Create a change implementation plan:** The plan has an overriding purpose: to provide the organization with a clear road map for the change effort. It has at least five benefits: it focuses attention on the change effort, builds understanding and clarity, builds participation and collaboration across the organization, improves performance, and balances control and flexibility.
- **Build a cadre of change leaders:** Perhaps the most important consideration in leading successful change is building a cadre of change leaders that is optimized for your organization. Great leaders enable an organization to perform change efforts better, faster and with fewer resources. Change leaders quickly reframe disruption as opportunity, build and sustain the desire for change, provide additional discipline and determination, and actively enhance the development of people, teams and the organization.

Great change leaders are proven business executives. They understand the organization, including its core business and operating model. Successful executives understand the organization's culture and how to navigate successfully within it. They have developed important relationships and trust across the organization. Great change leaders balance the technical, political and developmental aspects of leading change. They also shape the organiza-

tional environment during change and create a balance between control and flexibility.

Identifying and Integrating a Change Leadership Competency

It is the job of your organization to define a change leadership competency tailored to meet its own vision of great organizational change. The following steps provide a general guideline for formally identifying an organization-specific competency for leading change and integrating it into the overall leadership model:

- **Work with HR to define a new, organization-specific competency for leading change:** A small team of HR professionals can define this competency, ensure that it is valid, reliable and defensible, and create a development program in two or three months. The new competency should be defined for every leadership level.
- **Integrate the new competency into your organization's overall leadership model:** This means integrating the new competency "leading change" into your organization's overall definition of leadership. Adding the leadership of change to the model tells everyone that this is a priority. It says that leading change isn't something special or separate but is an integral part of leadership in your organization.
- **Identify development actions, and integrate them into your overall leadership development program:** Everyone who's seeking advancement in the leadership ranks should be required to have development and experience in leading change.
- **Modify the performance management system so that leaders are formally assessed on their performance in leading change:** Make their performance in this area a factor in their advancement. A leader's performance in organizational change efforts should inform decisions on compensation and advancement. In this way, the importance of leading great change becomes increasingly understood. Over time, these actions help to embed the leadership of change into your organization's culture. ●

Determination: Coping with Setbacks

Setbacks are so common during organizational change that we have invented a "best practice" when consulting on large-scale change efforts. Before the change effort begins, we advise our clients to prepare themselves in two ways:

- Build the change intervention in a way that anticipates setbacks and plans for them in advance.

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- Understand that no matter how good your advance planning is, you will experience setbacks.

Expect setbacks, and commit to the determination to push through them. Your goal is not merely to push through setbacks but to recognize and exploit the opportunities that they provide.

The Nature of Setbacks

Two types of setbacks are *typical setbacks* and *derailers*. Both are important, but the approaches for managing them are quite different. *Typical setbacks* are routine occurrences that affect the performance of change efforts. By *routine*, we mean things that often occur during change efforts and therefore can be anticipated. Examples include

- **Reduced priority of the change effort over time:** New business issues and other distractions begin to challenge the effort for priority. When the priority of a revolutionary change effort begins to fall, the effort is in jeopardy, and you must act.
- **Loss of vision:** The organization loses sight of its vision for the change effort over time. If the reason for enduring discomfort is lost, reverting to old behavior is an easy way for the brain to stop the discomfort. Successful change demands that the vision stay strong over time.
- **Senior leadership conflict and/or “stonewalling”:** One manifestation of this occurs when leaders become defensive and/or try to minimize the effect of the change effort on their business unit or function. This often occurs when insufficient effort was invested in building senior leadership consensus and/or when the CEO and the top management team are not directly engaged in the change effort.
- **Inconsistent and/or ineffective change leadership:** Some change leaders foster high levels of performance and collaboration, but others foster the opposite effects. It makes great sense to build a cadre of change leaders before change is necessary.

We define *derailers* as unexpected occurrences that threaten the success of revolutionary change efforts. Derailers arise from the growing complexity of the competitive environment: increasing globalization, unprecedented competition, more or different stakeholders, economic uncertainty, energy constraints, resource scarcity and political instability.

Managing derailers in a volatile, uncertain, complex and ambiguous environment is a difficult task for any organization. Even so, two things will help: improving your organization's ability to “sense” its competitive environment and creating an internal environment in your organization that is optimized for continuous change.

Managing setbacks effectively involves reducing or eliminating their adverse effects and exploiting the opportunities they provide. We recommend four actions: anticipate typical setbacks, improve environmental sensing, continually optimize the organizational environment, and manage your determination. ●

Development: Learning Continuously About Change

Change leaders must embrace and focus on coordinating the development of individuals, teams and the organization as an integrated system. The primary goal of this system is to develop the ability to constantly carry out organizational change better.

Developing your organization's ability to continuously improve organizational change is about learning. Enabling learning in individuals, teams and the whole organization is the key role for you as a change leader. Three actions are important in accomplishing this:

- **Enable learning in people:** Act as a coach and a mentor, providing important context and perspective. Your focus is on creating an environment that is conducive to learning about change.
- **Enable learning in teams:** Act as a facilitator, focusing on drawing out and using the best thinking of teams.
- **Enable organization-wide learning:** Act as an integrator, focusing on building the structures and processes needed to share and use learning across the organization.

Our recommendations complement two of the foundational competencies of a change-focused organization: *develop people constantly, and ensure organization-wide learning*. Without learning, there is no sustainable change.

Your role as a change leader can accelerate the learning of people, teams and your whole organization on how to constantly perform organizational change better. ●

RECOMMENDED READING LIST

If you liked *Choosing Change*, you'll also like:

1. ***Practically Radical* by William Taylor.** Taylor offers a handbook for successful transformation and a valuable tutorial that can help leaders effectively implement their change agendas.
2. ***Change with Confidence* by Phil Buckley.** Buckley addresses the 50 biggest questions that change leaders ask time and again and provides the context, examples and advice to answer them well.
3. ***Change-Friendly Leadership* by Rodger Dean Duncan.** Learn how you can achieve successful change by implementing the Four Ts of change: Think-Friendly, Talk-Friendly, Trust-Friendly and Team-Friendly.