From Know-How to Do-How

The Short and Simple Guide to Making Change Happen

Dave Corbet and Ian Roberts
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Take-Aways

• “Do-how” means moving beyond simple know-how to getting things done.
• People possess plenty of know-how, but too little do-how.
• “Hidden rules” determine much of individuals’ and organizations’ behavior and subsequent actions.
• Your rules – not you – make all your choices.
• Habitual thinking often sabotages your efforts to reach your personal goals.
• Corporate culture enforces similar “hidden rules” and achieves a similar negative effect.
• Real change requires purposely choosing how to behave.
• To change a dysfunctional corporate culture, substitute a positive “change story” for the current, problematic narrative.
• Use the “three Rs” – “reality plus response equals results” – and the “do-how” step-by-step map to achieve behavioral breakthroughs.
• Individuals and organizations can change only when they are working toward clearly defined goals.

Rating (10 is best)

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Relevance

What You Will Learn
In this summary, you will learn: 1) How people and organizations can move “from know-how to do how,” 2) How “hidden rules” shape behavior, 3) How to follow a step-by-step “do-how map” and 4) How to link your real situation to a practical response.

Recommendation
When it comes to changing your life, you may know what to do, but not how to do it. Performance consultants and change experts Dave Corbet and Ian Roberts teach readers how to free themselves from negative thought patterns and how to make positive, lasting changes in their lives. Their manual includes useful exercises to help you develop insights into how you think, how to recognize your – or your organization’s – unconscious assumptions and how to find new paths. The authors cover ways to recognize personal and corporate assumptions and to work toward new goals. Despite the book’s faint gee-whiz, New Agey tone, getAbstract recommends its practical advice to individuals seeking personal growth and to those working to improve their corporate cultures.

Summary

Stuck in the Mud
In Russia, people tell a story about a poor farmer who was on his way to the market with produce to sell. He needed to arrive before his vegetables spoiled, but his handcart’s wheels got stuck in the mud of the rural road. The farmer was strong, but the more he pushed the cart, the more deeply it got mired. A stranger came along and immediately understood the problem. He saw that when the farmer pushed forward against the cart, he forced more mud under the wheels, thus embedding the cart even deeper. The stranger saw that the only way to free the cart was to pull it backward out of its muddy ruts. “Have you tried pulling the cart back out of the mud instead of pushing it?” he asked.

“It’s no use,” the farmer replied. “I’ve tried everything, and it won’t budge. I’ve pulled from the front; I’ve pushed from the back...There’s nothing more I can do.” The stranger offered to help free the cart and began to pull it backward. He wasn’t strong, but he rolled the cart slowly out of the ruts. The farmer immediately understood what the stranger was trying to do and jumped in to assist. Within a couple of minutes, the two men backed the cart out of the mud. With thanks to the stranger, the farmer hurried off to market.

This folk tale perfectly illustrates the “do-how” principle at work. The farmer’s thinking was as trapped as his cart. He had no idea how to free it and he was certain he had exhausted all his options. Since he couldn’t imagine any other way to achieve his goal, he initially discounted the stranger’s idea. However, the stranger had both the know-how (a “new way of thinking” about a problem) and the do-how (willingness and ability to tackle it) to accomplish the task. Watching the stranger succeed jolted the farmer’s thinking. Once jolted out of his mental rut, he embraced a new solution that released his cart from its physical rut.

Do-how – understanding how to do what needs to be done – manifests when you take your know-how – “knowing what to do” – and apply it in productive ways to accomplish your goals.
A Do-How Deficit

Know-how is a common commodity. Most people know how to do their jobs and if they lack specific skills, they can acquire them through research, classes, reading, training seminars or advice from others. Knowing how is not the tough part. Problems arise when people discover that they can’t translate their know-how into the do-how they need to accomplish their plans and achieve their goals.

Before you can begin to translate know-how into do-how, you must clearly identify your goals. When firm objectives are in place, people or companies can plan orderly steps for productive, results-oriented action. Failure to set new goals often stems from ingrained “habits, culture and choice.” People operate according to habitual thought patterns that, while largely opaque to the thinker, prove inordinately powerful and resistant to change. Often, real change cannot take place until people find a way to recognize and put aside or transcend their customary ways of thinking – or for organizations, their familiar ways of transacting business and the routine thinking that underlies it. The transition from know-how to do-how is never easy, but it is learnable.

A disclaimer: Habitual ways of thinking and behaving do perform a valuable purpose. They enable people and organizations to navigate the world’s complexity. Habits are often shorthand for the methods you utilize to deal – or avoid dealing – with life’s challenges. They function without depending on conscious thought. Habits let people and organizations make countless mundane decisions with little awareness. Yet despite these benefits, habits restrict the options that remain available for action. The standard routine becomes the default option that people and companies choose by habit without conscious consideration of their actions.

Alas, habitual behaviors seldom prove productive in times of shifting circumstances. During times of change, habits hinder rather than help. When an organization’s culture – that is, its version of “the way we do things around here” – begins to work against its success, things must change. People and companies must select new behaviors that lead to achieving identified goals.

The “Three Rs”

You can make major changes in your life with minor changes in your thinking and behavior. To understand how this works, consider the three Rs model: “Reality plus response equals result.” Say that one of your colleagues criticizes your work (that’s reality). Your response creates a particular result. If you ask your colleague why he or she feels that way and how you should adjust, your query may lead to helpful feedback (result number one). If you respond with anger, you may turn your colleague into an enemy (result number two). The result you want should govern your response. To put this model to work, follow three rules:

1. “Results” – Determine the result you want by using your “capacity of intention.” Precisely specify your goal before formulating your response.
2. “Reality” – Confront your reality by embracing your “capacity for awareness.” Choose the most appropriate response by thinking about, for example, the motivation behind your colleague’s feedback. Was it to embarrass you or to offer constructive guidance? To achieve breakthroughs, seek out, investigate and review any hidden assumptions you might be making to ensure that your conclusions are accurate.
3. “Response” – Select a response that lets you get the result you seek. Your know-how can help. Review your knowledge base; for instance, perhaps you once attended
a workshop on how to handle feedback and learned alternative ways to respond. Put them to use.

“Hidden Rules”
Outcomes are often untidy because hidden rules get in the way of choosing the best responses to life’s situations. These rules are such common, inherent thoughts that people don’t notice, such as, “I must always win the argument” and “I must avoid any form of conflict.” Such hidden rules govern what people view as “good or bad, right or wrong, true or untrue, possible or impossible.” They are the filters through which human beings perceive, process and understand life’s “raw sensory data.” Most people let their lifelong hidden rules determine their behavior, rather than consciously and rationally weighing their options. Hidden rules take three forms:

1. “Unconscious intention” – Hidden rules define what is important to pursue or to avoid. People seem to have a difficult time setting goals that don’t fit these unconscious parameters.

2. “Limited awareness” – Hidden rules tend to distort reality. People selectively look for evidence that supports what they want to think and ignore the evidence that doesn’t concur with it.

3. “Habitual action” – Hidden rules limit the actions people take to bring about change. They may render potentially positive actions unacceptable, inapplicable, irrelevant or unhelpful.

Hidden rules can identify but limit an individual’s strengths. Take Malcolm, a senior governmental manager. He is expert at recognizing problems before they turn into disasters. This special talent helped Malcolm advance, but his primary strength became a problem when he applied for a CEO position at another government agency. The officials interviewing him asked Malcolm to visualize the organization’s future. He responded in classic Malcolm fashion, detailing all the things that could become problems and explaining what he would do to fix them.

An exercise in negativity wasn’t what the interviewers wanted from their potential CEO, so they didn’t hire him. He could not see the potentially negative impact of his hidden rule – “always look for the risks” – but everyone who knew him understood why Malcolm didn’t get the job.

The “Do-How Map”
The “do-how map” can help you make behavioral breakthroughs by discovering and avoiding limiting hidden rules that hamper your thoughts and actions. The breakthrough cycle activates when an “idea leads to practice leads to insight leads to a breakthrough.” The map has four steps:

1. “Recognize your do-how moments” – Do-how moments can cause notable anxiety because they occur outside your comfort zone. You may experience “fear, anger, frustration, sadness or any other negative emotion.” Recognize these feelings as helpful signposts that you are at a crossroads: a do-how moment. This is the time to block the hidden rules that normally manipulate your thinking. Take the time to reflect: “stop, look” and “choose” the best response. Don’t simply act: Think first, so you can step courageously out of your comfort zone and select a new path.

2. “Spell out the breakthrough you want” – Be precise and ambitious when you plan your desired outcome. Specify the way you want to respond to the reality you now
“Awareness is just like any other capacity. The more you exercise it, the stronger it gets.”

“The real breakthrough is to choose your behavior. That is what leads to do-how.”

“Everybody knows that change is difficult, but it doesn’t have to be complicated.”

“Uncover your hidden rules” – Try to get in touch with your embedded assumptions, even though it isn’t easy, and examine how they affect your thinking. Your hidden rules are stories you tell yourself, like “People don’t like me” and “Things always go wrong.” Don’t automatically accept that the narratives of your hidden rules are true. They are mental shortcuts, nothing more. To find your hidden rules, consider what you avoid, what makes you uncomfortable and in which areas you are strong. Be willing to feel a little unnerved in order to identify your hidden rules.

4. “Take responsibility for your choices” – You aren’t a victim: You are in charge of your life, your choices, your behavior and your actions. Don’t blame others – or circumstances – for your choices. The next time you confront a problem, solve it yourself. Ask yourself, “How do I want things to be?” and then decide, “What can I do now to take responsibility for getting the results I want?”

Move from Do-How to Do-Now
Don’t wait for a perfect time or place to reach for your breakthrough. You can begin your change journey from anywhere, anytime – like now. Anticipate some uncertainty and confusion at the start, since you may not have latched onto a clear goal. But down deep, you know something isn’t right and that you need to make a change. Turn this adversity to your advantage. Embrace your uncomfortable feelings and use the three Rs to clarify your thinking and determine the choices available to you. Create your own do-how map. Expect it to be confusing at first – being unsettled is part of the change journey. The more you use your do-how map, the better you will become at meeting your goals. Don’t expect perfection; just step up to being the co-creator of your reality – and not a spectator.

Do-How for Organizations
Organizational culture often gets in the way of meaningful change. Corporate culture takes the role of an organization’s hidden rules. Translating know-how into do-how will prove problematic if the organizational culture doesn’t match the change strategy. In the same way that individuals must scope out their hidden rules, an organization must uncover the aspects of its culture that make its employees uncomfortable or that weaken its operations. That investigation will help organizational leaders identify what elements of their culture need to change.

Essentially, organizational culture is a narrative. For example, in a “conformance culture,” rules dominate. The story underlying this kind of culture is: “It’s safer to ‘not get anything wrong’ than to ‘get things right’.” To bring about notable change in your organization, change a negative story to a positive one by deploying the three Rs. Altering organizational culture requires clear, consistent communications. Your executives’ behavior will always be your organization’s most powerful form of communication. Employees will watch – and mimic – what executives do, far more than what they say.

About the Authors

Dave Corbet and Ian Roberts own Greengage Consulting Ltd., in the United Kingdom.