

HOWARD GARDNER

Changing Minds

*The Art and Science of Changing
Our Own and Other People's Minds*

THIS BREAKTHROUGH FRAMEWORK from a renowned expert in cognitive psychology can help you become more successful at changing minds—no matter who your audience may be.

Your daughter is insisting that she's never going to college...Your boss doesn't believe you're the right person for that big promotion...You're lobbying to pass an important merger vote in your childrens' school district...You're debating a political issue with a friend with polar opposite views...Your aging father is ill, yet refuses to move to a place where he can get better medical care...You've always been afraid to fly, but now that the kids are grown, your spouse wants to travel the world...

WE TRY TO CHANGE PEOPLE'S MINDS EVERY DAY, all the time, about all kinds of important issues. And more often than not, we are not successful. The truth is, changing minds is an exceedingly difficult thing to do, yet little attention has been paid to *why* that is—and whether it's possible to improve the way we go about this important enterprise.

In *Changing Minds: The Art and Science of Changing Our Own and Other People's Minds* (Harvard Business School Press; Publication Date: April 19, 2004; Price: \$26.95), renowned Harvard psychologist Howard Gardner, whose groundbreaking theories have changed our thinking about intelligence, learning, and creativity, demystifies the process of mind change for the first time. Gardner, who has been studying the workings of the human mind for more than thirty years, argues that far from being a random and mysterious process that results in a sudden “thunderbolt” shift in perspective—mind change actually occurs slowly, in identifiable ways that can be actively and powerfully influenced.

Changing Minds outlines a systematic and transparent approach that can greatly improve our success in changing others'—and our own—minds about all kinds of important issues. Gardner explores one of the most striking paradoxes of mind change: that while as children we change our minds easily and often, as adults our minds become exceedingly resistant to change. This paradox helps explain why we cling so tightly to certain ways of thinking, even when new alternatives are clearly superior.

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About the Author

Howard Gardner is the John H. and Elisabeth A. Hobbs Professor of Cognition and Education at the Harvard Graduate School of Education and Senior Director of Harvard Project Zero. The recipient of a MacArthur Fellowship and twenty honorary degrees, he is the author of more than twenty books.

The Seven Levers That Impact the Process of Mind Change

Based on decades of cognitive research, Gardner identifies seven “levers” that can have a significant impact—for better or worse—on the process of mind change:

1. Reason (making logical arguments)
2. Research (presenting factual data)
3. Resonance (connecting with an individual’s or group’s emotional or spiritual core)
4. Representational redescrptions (presenting the same idea in multiple formats, reflecting our various intelligences)
5. Resources and rewards (offering positive or negative reinforcement)
6. Real world events (leveraging happenings that are out of your control)
7. Resistances (identifying and countering longstanding, contrary beliefs)

The book identifies six arenas in which most attempts at mind change occur—from large-scale changes involving a diverse population or a homogeneous workforce, to smaller-scale changes involving just two individuals or even oneself—and reveals a single comprehensive framework that can be applied to nearly every attempt at mind change. The key is to present the mind change being sought in the format—and through the levers—that are most appropriate for the audience you seek to change.

Mind Change in Action

Gardner points to dozens of fascinating examples from history, politics, business, science, the arts, and everyday life to illustrate this framework in action. Through these engaging and insightful true stories, Gardner reveals which levers work best with each type of audience, and shows how famous and ordinary individuals have successfully managed these levers to bring about important change and how others have bungled them. For example:

- Biologist Charles Darwin used *research*, *reason*, *representational redescription*, and chipped away at powerful *resistances*—particularly longstanding religious accounts of the story of creation—to change the mind of the scientific community, and eventually of the wider society, about human origins.
- Newt Gingrich’s “revolution” ultimately failed because the stories he told (and the way he lived his own life) didn’t *resonate* with many of the diverse groups that make up the U.S. political audience. In addition, Gingrich underestimated *resistances* to his platform, relied on overheated rhetoric, and was stymied by a *real world event* (the effectiveness of Bill Clinton’s opposition).
- Working with media experts, Harvard professor Jay Winsten creatively marshaled their *resources* to feature redeeming social messages in video presentations (*representational redescription*). One of Winsten’s best-known interventions featured the now-routine practice of appointing a designated driver when going out drinking.
- Thomas Jefferson and John Adams used restored *resonance* and *real world events* (the end of their respective presidencies, growing old)—and overcame *resistance* through motivated communication—to mend a friendship that had been broken by political antagonism for decades.
- George W. Bush used a devastating *real world event*—the terrorist attacks of 9/11—to change his own mind in fundamental ways about the direction and scope of his foreign policy.

Gardner distills important lessons for aspiring “change agents” who want to bring about positive change on any scale—from the larger society to your workplace or neighborhood; from your relationship with friends and family members to your understanding of yourself. A fascinating work by one of today’s most important thinkers, *Changing Minds* demystifies a phenomenon—and brings a new way of working, relating, and understanding within reach.

A Conversation with Howard Gardner about *Changing Minds*

How does your theory of “multiple intelligences”—which challenged the traditional view that there is only one type of intelligence—relate to your current theories about mind change?

On the most basic level, a change of mind involves a change of mental representation. If you had always believed that there was only one type of intelligence, and I’m trying to convince you that there are many types—such as logical, musical, intrapersonal, etc.—then I need to alter the images, concepts, and theories by which you were accustomed to thinking of intelligence. The more of an individual’s intelligences you can appeal to when making an argument, the more likely you are to change a person’s mind, and the more minds you are likely to change.

You introduce seven “levers” that can help or hinder our efforts to change someone’s mind. Do different levers work best with different types of audiences?

In general, a mind change is most likely to come about when the first six levers of mind change operate in concert and the seventh lever—resistances—are relatively weak. But various levers certainly take prominence depending on the person or group you are targeting. For example: Reason and research are most important for those involved in intellectual argumentation, such as two policymakers debating a political issue. Resonance comes to the fore in intimate relations, such as a wife trying to appeal to her husband’s emotions or his love of family to get him to quit smoking.

You say that it’s important to “do your homework” so to speak—when it comes to trying to change someone’s mind. How can we improve our chances of success?

The purpose of a mind-changing encounter is not to articulate your own point of view, but to engage the psyche of the other person. Your goal is to search for the resonances that will bolster your argument, and to find ways to stamp out the resistances. The more you can find out about the traits, dispositions, and favored mental representations of the person whose mind you are trying to change, the more you can tailor your approach and improve your chances of success. For example, if the person in question cares about logic, consistency, directness, and verbal argument, you’d treat that encounter very differently than you would with another who is concerned about emotion, respect, subtlety, and nonverbal forms of communication.

The ability to change minds will be critical in the upcoming presidential elections. What aspects of your framework will best serve President Bush and his opponents as they seek to sway voters?

Political leaders are generally most successful when they can create a compelling story, embody that story in their own daily lives, and present the story in many different formats so that it can eventually topple the counter-stories that permeate society. This “story” must be simple, easy to identify with, emotionally resonant, and evocative of positive experiences. When it comes to political persuasion in today’s “Television Age,” individuals must also be able to alter their tone and message and recreate themselves when needed.

The approach you describe involves straightforward, transparent attempts to change others’ minds consciously. But won’t emerging technologies make other, less palatable forms of mind change possible?

Just like technology can be employed for moral or immoral means, so can mind change. Religious training can induct Islamic (or Christian or Jewish) youths to undertake a holy war against infidels or to lead a peaceful life in a pluralistic society. Intimate mind-changing within families, therapy, or love relations can proceed in ways that are constructive or destructive. The cognitive perspective I talk about in this book provides a way of thinking and an array of tools. It is up to us whether we choose to use these, and whether we do so in ways that are selfish and destructive or in ways that are generous and life enhancing.

A Systematic Approach to Changing Minds

WHETHER YOUR AUDIENCE IS YOUR BOSS OR YOUR SPOUSE, a classroom of students or a team of colleagues, your child or even yourself, this framework can help you tailor your approach in a way that will increase your chances of successful mind change. Following is an example of perhaps the most intriguing form of mind change—that which occurs within our own minds:

Determine the current content: what idea, concept, story, theory, or skill is presently reigning. Prior to 9/11, the general perception in the nation was that President George W. Bush was poorly informed about many issues, particularly foreign policy. The Bush team called for a lower profile in foreign affairs, and the President's foreign policy was determinedly unilateral.

Define the mind change you seek to bring about. Following the terrorist attacks of 9/11, Bush had a new and authentic mission: he was the President of the United States who was going to do whatever it took to rid the world of the terrorist networks and to keep terrorist acts from recurring on U.S. soil. To do this, Bush would have to become more focused on foreign affairs, become better informed, make difficult decisions, and search for allies internationally.

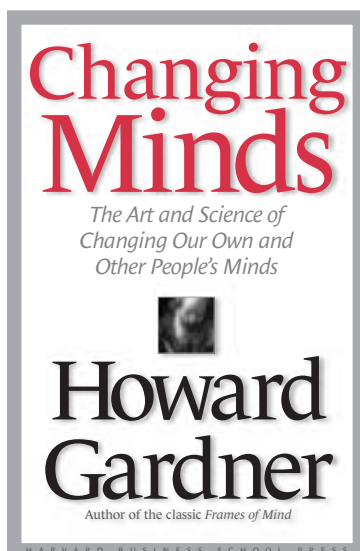
Identify the counter-content: what ideas will have to be overcome in order for the new idea to take hold? Bush had previously seemed disengaged and disinclined to master the details or think through the broad trends of the international scene. He seemed content to follow the advice of his inner circle rather than engage problems directly. And his own proclivities were distinctly non-interventionist and against “nation building.”

Assess your audience: what type of idea and approach work best depending on the size and type of the audience whose minds you are seeking to change? In order to make the transformation necessary to lead his country through an incredibly precarious time, the main audience Bush had to convince was himself. He would need to change his mind about how he approached his foreign policy and his presidency.

Determine the most effective format to convey the new idea. Bush determinedly became better informed and more involved in decisions through briefings and through meetings with staff and with world leaders. Always strong in interpersonal intelligence (a good knowledge of your relationship with others), Bush began to deepen his intrapersonal intelligence (knowledge of oneself) as well—a mind shift that was necessary as he proceeded in uncharted political and military terrain.

Decide which combination of the seven change levers will best help you reach a tipping point with your audience. It seems clear that at a minimum, the *real world event* of 9/11 led Bush to change his own mind about the purpose of his presidency. It can be speculated that he also changed his mind about important issues, including the relationship of the United States to other countries; the need to become involved in troubled spots around the world; the importance of communicating the national mission both to his own people and to those abroad; and the dangers posed by terrorism, among others.

(Adapted from Changing Minds by Howard Gardner; HBS Press; 2004)



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