



Chapter 1

Repeat after me:
no one is going to die from
the changes you make in
business. Say it: “No. One.
Is. Going. To. Die.”

I had just sat down to dine with some business friends at an upscale Chinese restaurant in San Francisco when the waiters set down finger bowls in front of us, each with a little floating flower.

The friend who was sitting next to me looked at the flower and then asked, “Jeff, I get the finger bowls, but are you supposed to eat the flower?”

“I don’t know,” I said. It looked harmless enough. “I guess you can.”

My friend had no sooner put the flower in his mouth when the Chinese maître d’ rushed over, waving his hands and yelling in broken English, “No, no, no, no! Decoration! For decoration!”

My friend spit out the flower and looked horrified. We laughed for a moment, and then I noticed that the flower had turned my friend’s tongue black.

“Dude, look at your tongue! It’s black!”

“What?” My friend grabbed a mirror and looked at his tongue. “Oh my God! Oh my God! My tongue is black! Do you think I’ve been poisoned? Do you think it’s poisonous? Will it kill me?”

The maître d’ rushed over. He looked down gravely at my friend, who looked up in sheer terror.

The maître d’ paused. “No die. Little sick maybe, but no die.”

My friend was fine that night, and guess what? You will be too. So, before we go any further, remember: no one is going to die when running this gauntlet. Not you. Not your employees. No one. Little sick maybe, but no die.

Yet still, as you start to make the changes you need, you will think, “People are going to die.” But they aren’t. So don’t think that. Your *business* might die. But that’s probably because it already was not breathing well.

Yes, if you are in manufacturing, please: safety first. If you are making lifesaving equipment, please do not cut corners and ignore important details while you are executing change. I don’t want to hear anyone saying, “Jeff Hayzlett told me no one was going to die, so I didn’t check the defibrillator.”

The truth is, businesses that aren’t checking their defibrillators are *not* changing; they are cutting corners and hoping they can survive. Change is not about being irresponsible, reckless, or careless. And while lives are not at stake, livelihoods are. If you are not successful, jobs will be lost. Mortgages and retirement and college funds will be affected. This is not a game. Driving change is about driving success, and it is serious. You know that. You’re playing with your reputation, and your future, too. Or you’d better be. Otherwise, please put this down and give it to someone I can respect.

I mean it. Good economy? Bad economy? It doesn’t matter. I am sick and tired of people acting scared, whining about all the things they can’t do, thinking through every little detail, and then playing it safe. That’s the path to mediocrity, and it makes

change agents miserable. Heck, it makes everyone miserable. You may *think* you need to play it safe so you don't "lose." But you don't ever *know* what's going to work. And so what! Please, tell me: what's the worst that's gonna happen? You make a mistake? People point fingers? You lose a client? You lose some money? You lose your job? Maybe. Most likely, the worst you will get is a paper cut—literally and figuratively.

In the end, most businesses can sustain a little "ready, fire, aim" when they're changing. If you want to test something out, go for it. Think it through, but take risks. Push like crazy, and be persistent. That's the mental edge you need. One mistake or setback does not mean total failure. Seven out of every ten things change agents do will be good, and three will fall flat. Those are good odds. Be strong as you run the gauntlet.

You'll need that strength to overcome your fear—and let's face it: this is scary. In order to enact change, you need to create tension. Causing tension is the foundation of the change agent's no-one-is-going-to-die attitude. You walk around all the time asking, "What can we change? What can we do to make it *better*?" Having trouble getting started? Do what change agents like me do: look for change everywhere you go. Go to a restaurant you love or a business you admire and ask yourself, what do you think it could do better? Then turn that same spotlight on yourself and your business.

But don't wait for every change to happen before you start selling it. Remember, no one is going to die. Sometimes you need to put things out there and move a little faster than you are actually moving. Or, as I like to say: put a stake far enough out.

Think of this like a business version of what *Survivorman*'s Les Stroud does to film his TV show. Les goes it alone in the woods for seven days with no food and no shelter. Yes, *alone*. Unlike the people on other knockoff shows, Les brings his own camera. There's no crew. No gimmicks. So, how does he film it?

He actually walks to where he wants to shoot, plants the camera, walks back to where he started, and then walks back to the camera.

Leaders need to do this metaphorically. For example, Kodak did this in 2006 when the wonderful Carl Gustin, whom I succeeded as CMO, created a brilliant four-minute video called “Winds of Change” (Google Kodak + “Winds of Change”) to tell customers about the company’s transformation from analog to digital. Watch it. Were all the changes mentioned in the video already in place? Heck, no. But Carl was putting a stake in the ground for everyone to see. (Kodak and other companies still use this video today.)

And what did I do after I took over from Carl as CMO? I changed it.

I realized the video was perfect for consumers, but we needed a different version for Kodak’s rapidly growing business-to-business side, which was dominated by white males. Our editors knew this. Not only did they change the content, but they changed the language, using more colorful expressions—none more so than when the actor on stage gestured at his crotch and said Kodak had “big brass *cojones*.”

I love to cause tension, but that raised even *my* eyebrows.

When I screened the video for my team members, most of them women, I asked if it passed the “female filter” for crassness. They loved it. I took their word for it and let it fly. Maybe I should have run it through the Hispanic female filter, not just the female filter, because the feedback was immediate: mostly positive from the customers, but negative from a few media people and bloggers and a bunch of people inside the company who found it crude and unfunny . . . including my CEO. My *Spanish* CEO.

Imagine getting *that* call after being on the job for a couple of weeks. I was thinking, “I’m gonna get fired.” I felt like throwing up as I headed to his office.

“Jeff . . . do you know the meaning of the word *cojones*?” he asked. (I was sure at that moment that I didn’t in full.) “In Spanish, *cojones* is *the crudest description* of the male anatomy.”

You can’t worry about setbacks like this as a change agent. If you believe it is the right thing to do, you must stand behind what you do and really push to the edge of the table.

And sometimes you don’t know you have pushed things *off* the edge of the table until they *hit the floor*. I changed the video overnight. It is now a legend—a lightning bolt for representing change.

And no one died.