

ACTIVATING  
CHANGE

# 20 ways to be a more effective rebel, maverick, edgewalker, change agent

By Lois Kelly



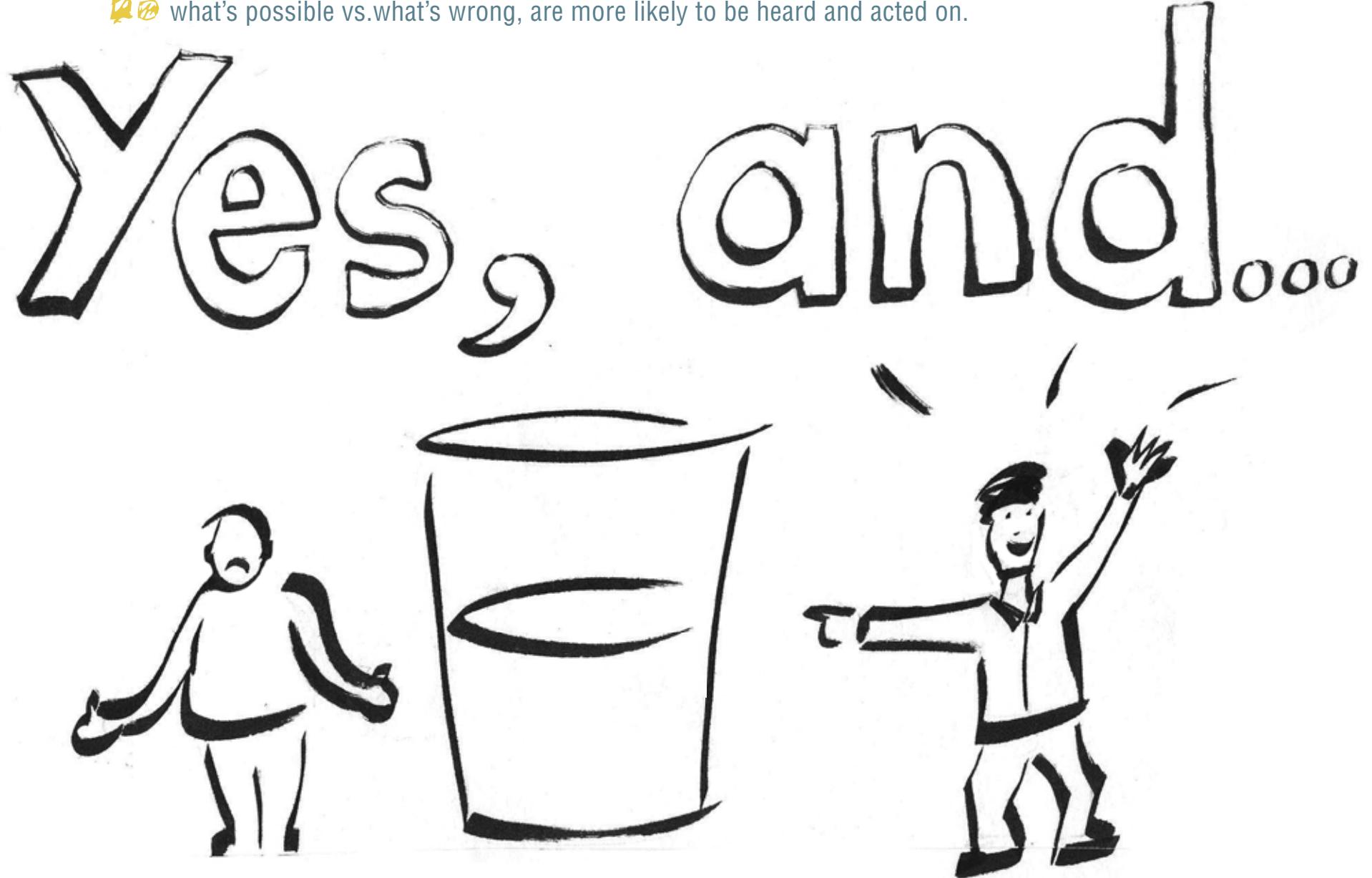
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So many corporate mavericks and rebels have great ideas, but those ideas often never see the light of day because of the way we truth-tellers and fire-starters behave. As a lifelong outlier — yet successful business executive — here are some of the things I've learned, often the hard way, that may help you or the rebels in your organization.

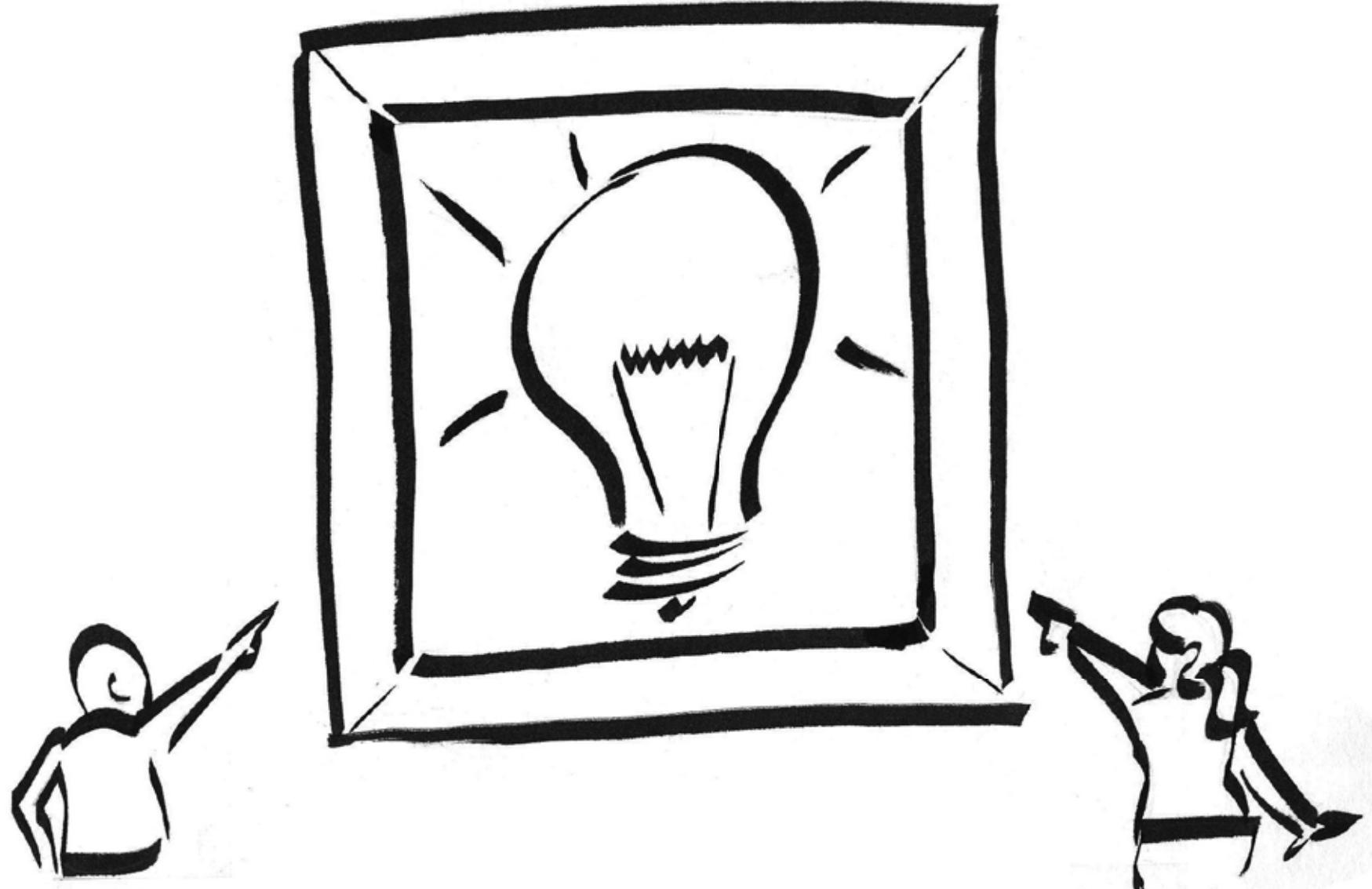
1

**Be positive:** recommendations that are stated in the affirmative, that show what's possible vs what's wrong, are more likely to be heard and acted on.



2

**Frame it:** frame how your idea helps the organization's goals, cause, purpose. The more relevant the idea is to what everyone wants to achieve, the more open people will be to the idea.



3

Ask questions that highlight the possibilities vs. further damn the problems. Possibilities create energy, problem dissing saps it.



4

**Judge ideas, not people.** The first creates useful conversations,  
the second hurts, disrupts and usually dead-ends.



# 5

**When angry, stop and wonder why.** This has been especially helpful to me. I used to get so angry that I'd immediately react, or should I say over-react. Wondering why a person or company did or said something provides helpful perspective. The more we understand hidden motivations the more we can frame our ideas.

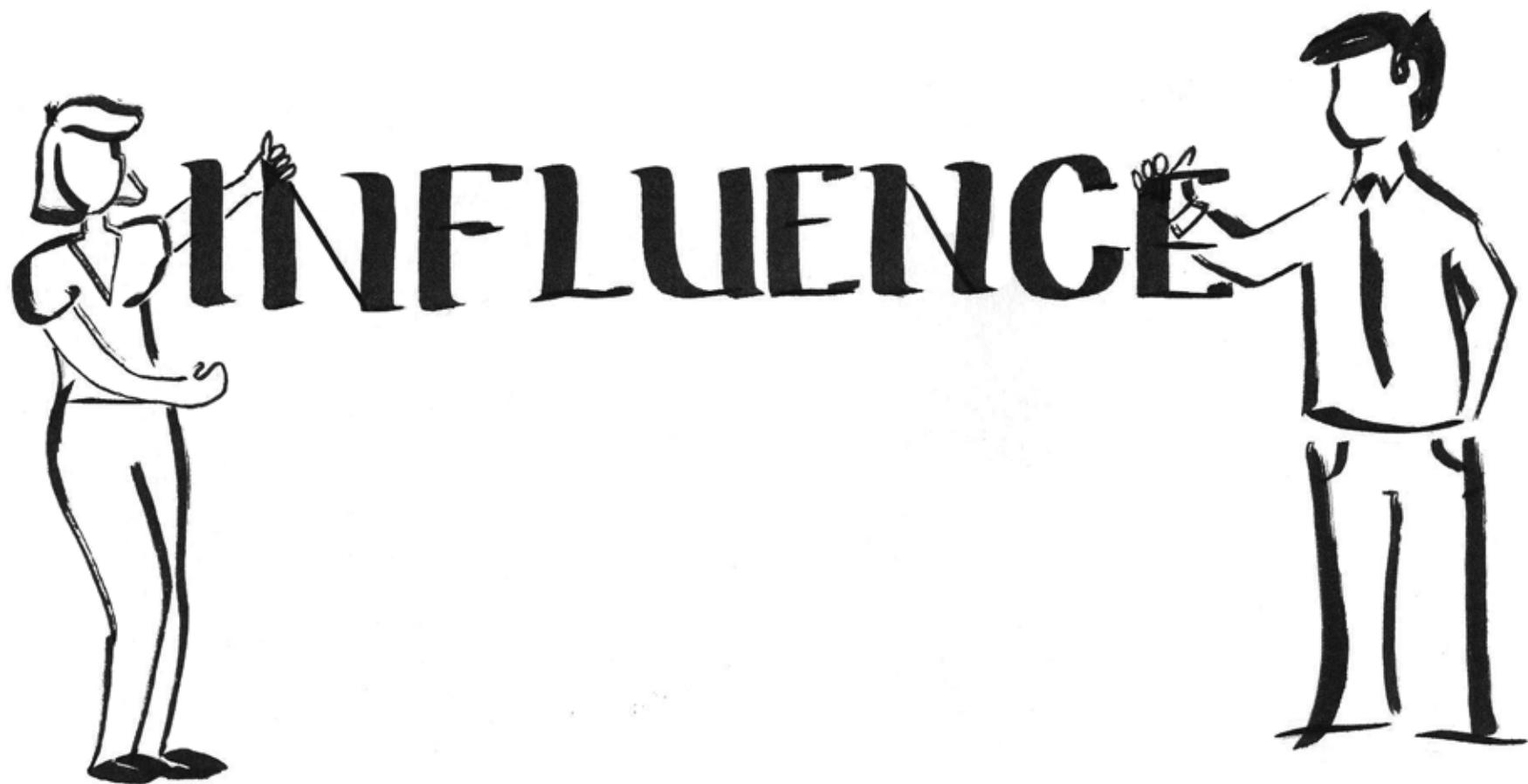


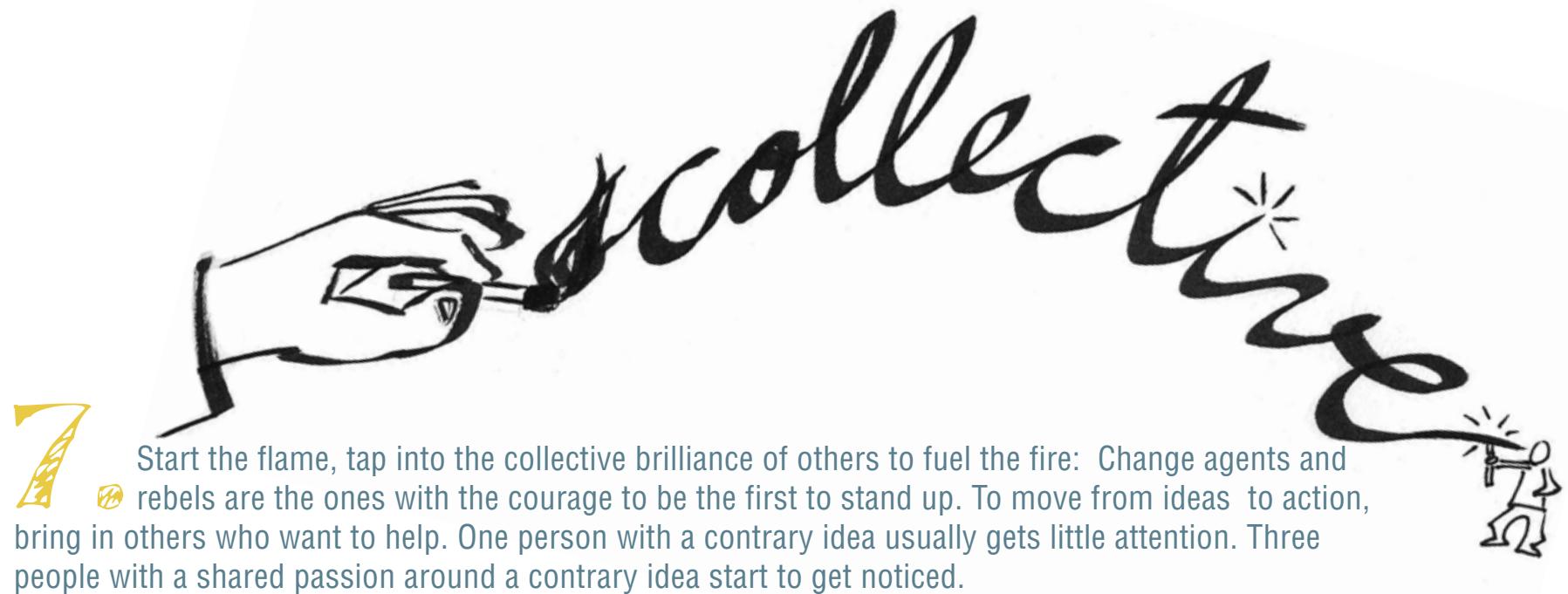
POSSIBILITIES

ACTION!!!



6. **Strive for influence not power:** influence inspires and motivates people to believe and act; power requires them to do so. Influence evokes possibilities, power evokes fear. Power





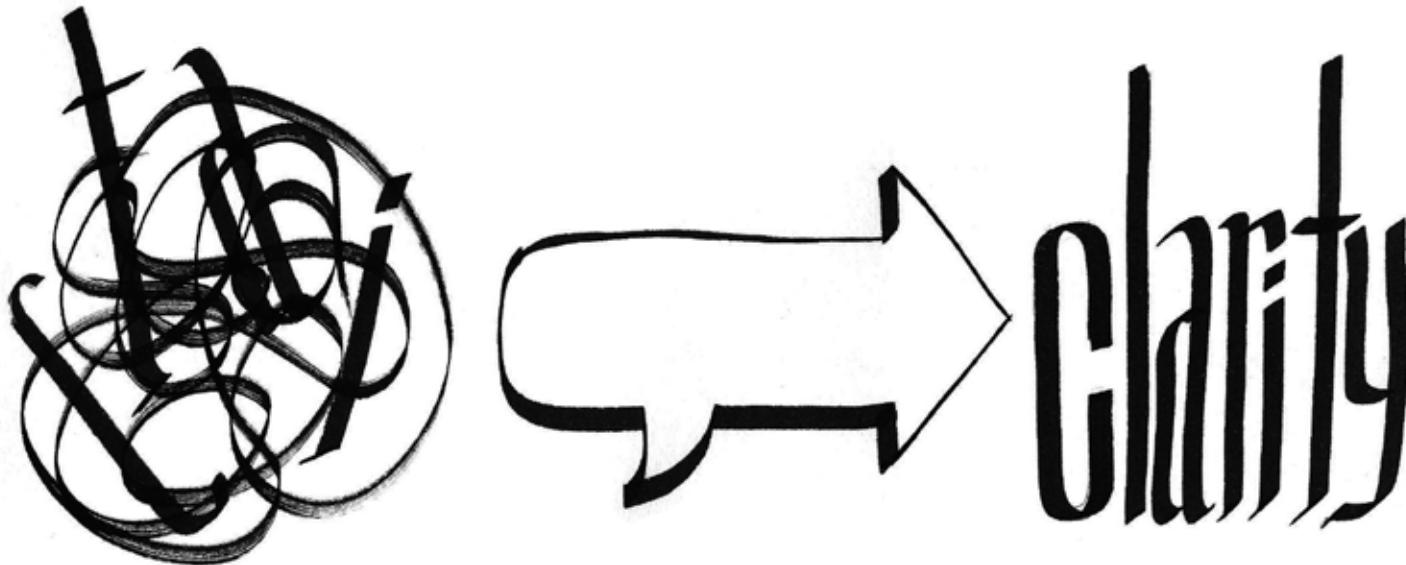
7 Start the flame, tap into the collective brilliance of others to fuel the fire: Change agents and rebels are the ones with the courage to be the first to stand up. To move from ideas to action, bring in others who want to help. One person with a contrary idea usually gets little attention. Three people with a shared passion around a contrary idea start to get noticed.





**Share the glory:** Revel in achieving something that benefits many, sharing the credit and the glory of all involved. During my freshman year in college a philosophy professor told us, "Those who know know." Even if it's never publicly shown.



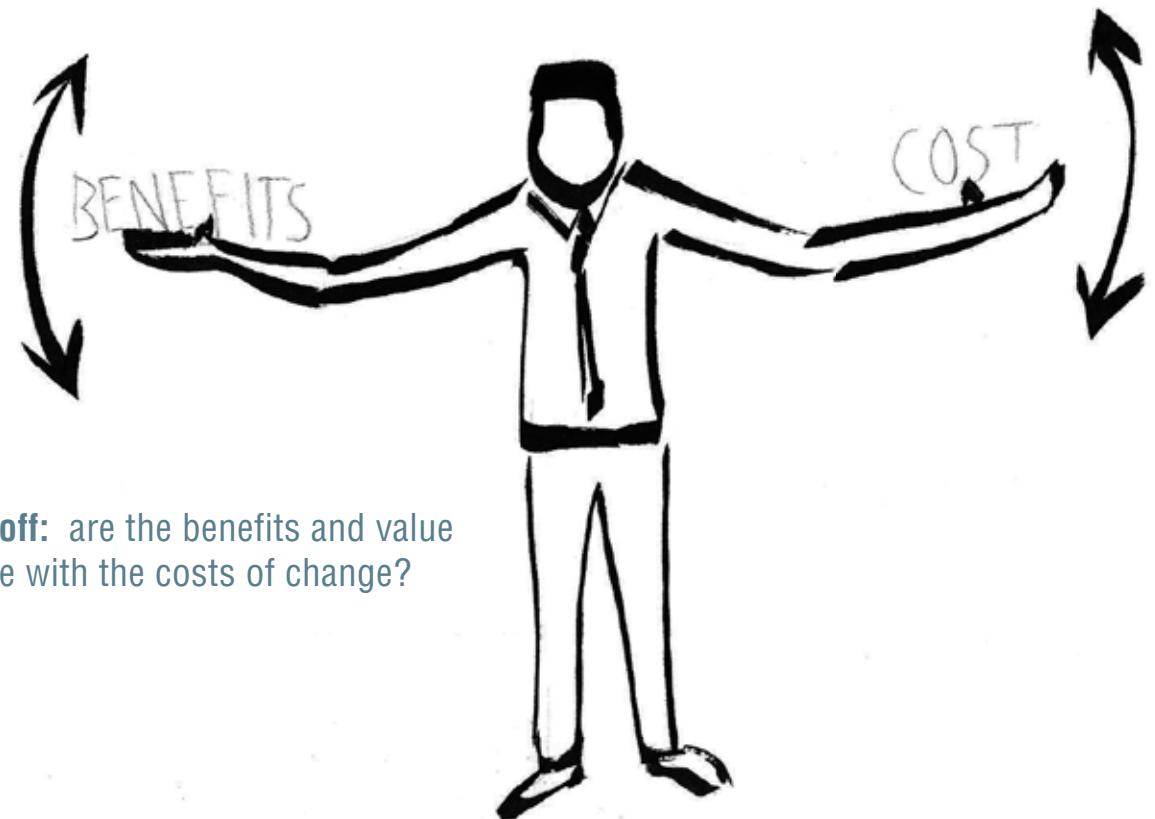


**Communicate in ways that create clarity from complexity:** People need to understand what the idea is, why it's relevant, and how it will provide value. Too often we get caught up in the "how we're going to change things" before addressing the other important issues: context, relevancy, value.



10.

**Address the cost/value tradeoff:** are the benefits and value of the new way commensurate with the costs of change?



CHANGE



## 11.

**Let it breathe:** people often need time to absorb a new way, think on it for a while. As rebels we see things sooner and clearer than most and get impatient with other people who aren't as fast and decisive as we. If we go too fast, we can mow over people, hurting the chances of being able to affect change. In my corporate rebel research study, one write-in comment summed it up, "know that our velocity scares people."



**12** **Pick the right boss or executive sponsor:** find that person who appreciates your creativity, your fire-starting ideas, your naked truth-telling — and who can help guide and protect you through the complexities of organizational politics and decision making.



13

**Ask good questions, become a keen listener:** These two skills will serve as your advanced navigational systems as you chart through often foggy and potentially dangerous corporate seas.



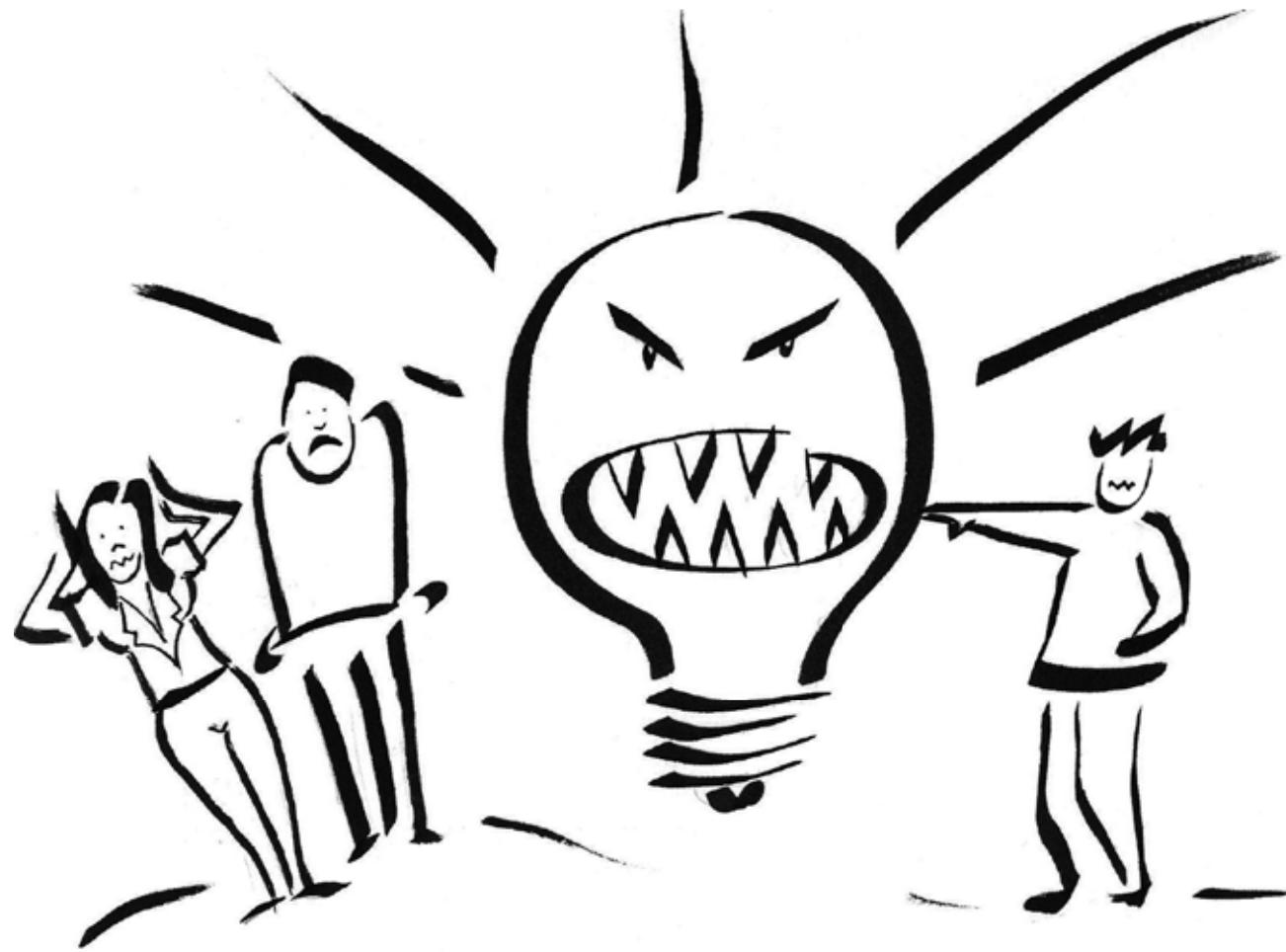


**14** Learn how to facilitate messy collaboration workshops to improve on your ideas, get buy in from others. People act on what they believe in. The more people who participate in shaping a new way, the more likely it is that they will adopt that new way.

15.

>Show how success can be measured.





16.

**Address the fears:** understand what people fear about the idea; respect, explore and test their assumptions; and/or explain how you plan to remove or minimize those fears.



17

**Learn how to have constructive conversations.** Most organizations are used to discussions (usually in the form of PowerPoint) that advocate for ideas, a win/lose form of communications. Constructive what/if conversations examine assumptions, open up possibilities, invite everyone to contribute, and value all points of view. A good book on this topic is “Naming Elephants: How to Surface Undiscussables for Greater Organizational Success.”



18

**Be thoughtful in all you do:** Thoughtfulness engenders support, abets truth telling, brings more humanity to our work, and adds more meaning to our cause.



19

**Know when to walk away:** perseverance is important. But so is knowing when to walk away, when the support for your idea just isn't there. It may have nothing to do with you or the idea, the timing might not be right. Or the risks may be too great for the corporate culture. Or people might not believe it's really possible. Don't let your idea turn into a negative soapbox, where you lose your influence and rob yourself of energy and health. As Yogi Berra supposedly once said, "If no one wants to come, there's nothing we can do to stop them."

20

Believe you are enough.





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