

# CHANGE ON PURPOSE

by Will Marré

Change or die. It's nature's biggest in-your-face lesson. Just ask a dinosaur. But there is a wide gulf between understanding the lesson and living it.

Change is hard. It's difficult for individuals and extremely challenging for organizations. New findings in neuroscience confirm that change generates high emotional stress, stimulating our "fight or flight" response. When this happens, our triggered brains start denying, resisting, blaming — anything but adapting.

Studies also reveal that external benefits don't motivate us to make big changes. Whether the reward is more money,

better opportunities, or simply retaining our current job, none of these is sufficient to inspire epic change. Instead we resist changing and make a mess of things.

Successful change is possible, however, and it tends to follow a pattern. Psychological research concludes that successful change requires six important conditions:

**1. Purpose.** Our sense of meaning drives our most powerful motives. We will die for causes we believe in.

**2. Imagination.** We visualize a positive future. We see ourselves changing and succeeding.

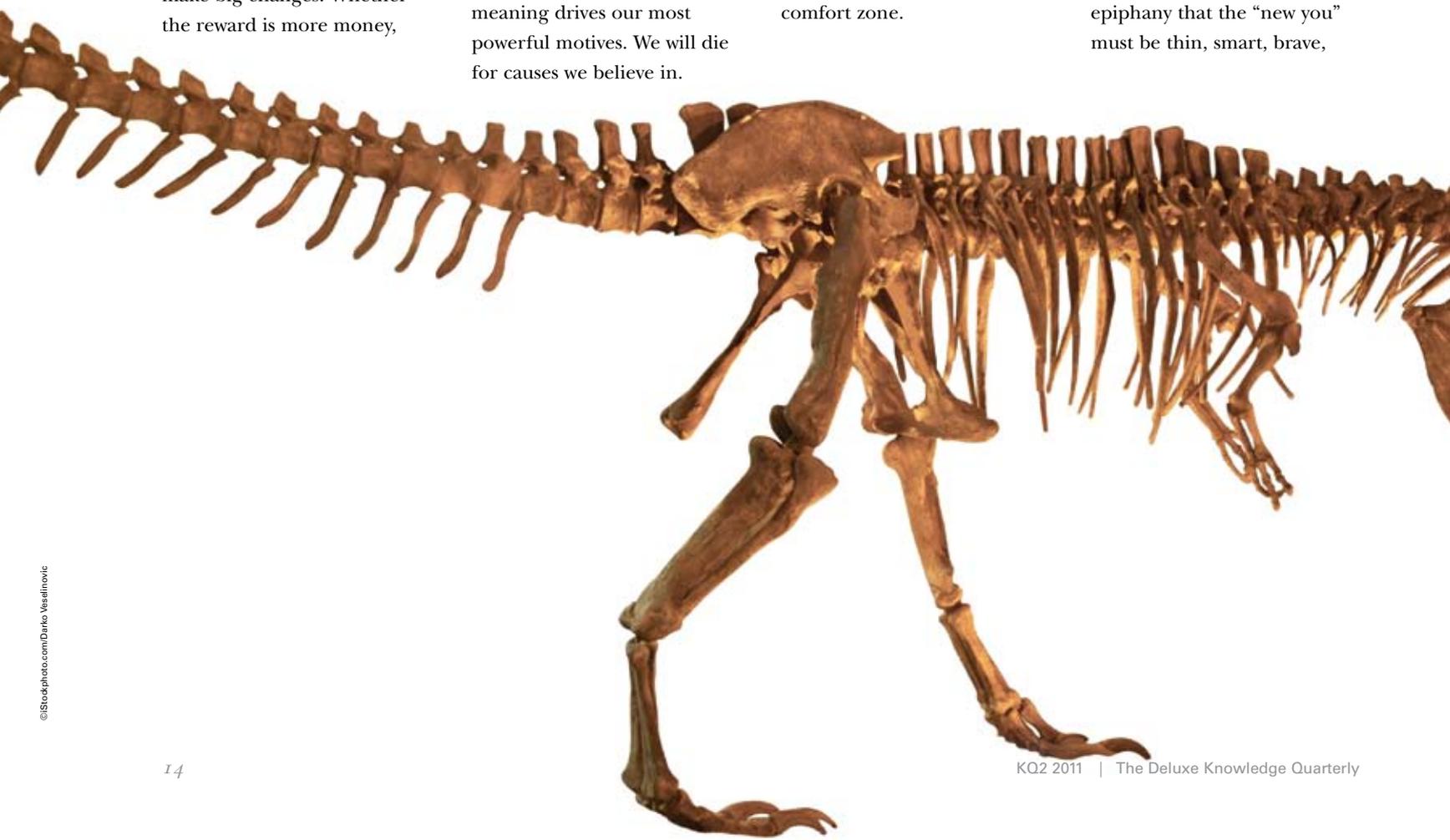
**3. Speed.** Fast change creates results that give us confidence to make even bigger changes.

**4. Accountability.** Engaging others to guide us, encourage us and hold us responsible helps strengthen our weak self-discipline, especially as we move beyond our comfort zone.

**5. Focus.** Investing in what's working — and eliminating what's not — speeds the process.

**6. Advocacy.** Becoming a public voice for the changes we seek solidifies our commitment.

If you look for it, you'll see this pattern in the lives of successful people from Oprah to Steve Jobs. The key is that successful change starts with a change in mindset. Not a trivial one, but a big whopping epiphany that the "new you" must be thin, smart, brave,



independent or whatever else is required to thrive in the new circumstances you face.

Usually this sudden awakening comes with a new inspiring purpose. This personal, intrinsic reason blows up old excuses. For example, the most successful smoking cessation program in history is pregnancy. Fully 80% of expectant mothers who smoke quit during their pregnancy because their new goal is a healthy baby. New purpose creates a new mindset that changes everything.

It's a chain reaction that is critical to large-scale corporate change as well. According to my research team's ongoing *Apple to Zappos* study, which focuses on effective leadership in the hyper-competitive 21st century, today's successful leaders are focused on the same thing: changing



mindsets. The new normal world requires constant adaptation, so the most important change we can make is increasing our ability to change. And we will if we have an inspiring reason to do it.

#### **Endless journey**

In the 20th century, leaders talked about change as a journey. That journey always had a destination. A popular metaphor was the pioneers moving steadily westward. Today, change is still a journey — but it's one that never ends. There is no destination. No place to settle down into business as usual. Leaders are realizing that any effort to change an organization from “this” to “that” is fruitless. Before they complete the change, there is a new “that.”

Instead, successful leaders are making *adaptability itself* the core of corporate culture. This requires a powerful compass to make sure nobody gets lost — an inspiring purpose that serves as “magnetic north,” guiding all effort in the same direction.

When this core purpose is meaningful enough to change thousands of employees' minds, the results are undeniable.

Neuroscience bears this out. When a company's ultimate objective is to help humanity or enable customers to lead

better lives, it triggers employees' creative centers. We roll up our mental sleeves and put our shoulders into innovations that matter.

Recent examples are easy to find. Take Nike's emphasis on breaking gender and racial barriers through sports — a big, meaningful ideal. Or think about the Starbucks brand, which promotes sustainability and social justice, inspiring both employee and customer loyalty. IBM's drive to create “a smarter planet” has made them smarter.

A clear, meaningful purpose enables enterprises to make sweeping, strategic changes faster because it creates the essential condition of successful change — an inspiring story of a positive future. In every case we've examined, the most successful companies are those that have redefined what is most important to them.

In the Industrial Age, economists said the purpose of business was to make money. In the Innovation Age, the leaders we most admire are rewriting this maxim. According to them, the purpose of business is to create new value. Meaningful value. This is the change of mindset that changes everything. It inspires cultures that create change instead of resisting it.



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Change is not logical;  
it's psychological.