

THE POSITIVE CHANGE PLAYBOOK

Little things.
Memorable moments.
Better change.



THE POSITIVE CHANGE PLAYBOOK

HOW TO USE THIS PLAYBOOK

26 practical plays across six focus areas. These are small, human ways to build trust, encourage participation and make change stick. Find a situation, borrow an idea and make it your own.

01

SHOW UP AS YOU

4 plays

Before the meeting, prepare the human.

02

LOOK AGAIN

4 plays

Same situation. Different view.

03

MAKE IT MEAN SOMETHING

4 plays

Don't just hand out tasks. Show the boat.

04

THE ONE-PERCENTERS

6 plays

Tiny choices. Big relationship energy.

05

MAKE IT STICK

4 plays

Don't just tell them. Let them feel it.

06

INFLUENCE THROUGH ACTION

4 plays

Relationships are not a side project.

I Prepare John

Before a meeting.

“

Your presence influences the tone of the meeting before the first slide appears.



WHAT IT IS

Choose your energy, intention, outcome and how you want people to experience you.



WHEN TO USE IT

Before a meeting.



HOW TO USE IT

Before entering, decide how you want people to feel. Choose one intention and check your energy before you speak.



TRY THIS

Who do I need to be in this room?

Rapport On Purpose

First conversations.

“

People are more likely to share what matters when they feel genuinely noticed.



WHAT IT IS

Be curious, warm, attentive and genuine. Remember what matters to the person.



WHEN TO USE IT

First conversations.



HOW TO USE IT

Start with genuine curiosity. Ask about their world, listen closely and resist the urge to pitch your own agenda.



TRY THIS

Ask one question you actually want the answer to.

Remember & Return

After someone shares.

“

A small follow-up shows that the conversation was not just polite small talk.



WHAT IT IS

Remember personal details and follow up, rather than letting the conversation disappear.



WHEN TO USE IT

After someone shares.



HOW TO USE IT

Note a detail that matters to someone. Follow up later and ask how it went.



TRY THIS

Ask how that thing they mentioned went.

Make It Easy To Talk

When people hesitate.

“

An approachable style makes it easier to surface issues before they grow.



WHAT IT IS

Be approachable. Give people room to speak without performing the expert.



WHEN TO USE IT

When people hesitate.



HOW TO USE IT

Make space for people to speak. Use an open question, listen without interrupting and acknowledge what you hear.



TRY THIS

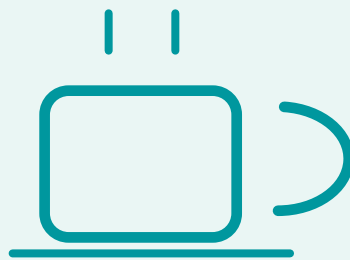
Ask: What have I missed?

Coffee Cup Moment

When perspectives clash.

“

A physical demonstration gives the team a memorable way to name different perspectives.



WHAT IT IS

Hold up a cup. People see the handle you cannot. Name the different perspectives.



WHEN TO USE IT

When perspectives clash.



HOW TO USE IT

Hold up a coffee cup and ask what each person sees. Turn it around to reveal the different perspectives.



TRY THIS

Ask: What are you seeing that I'm not?

Better Questions

When you need the real story.

“

Open questions uncover information that a prepared presentation might miss.



WHAT IT IS

Ask what nobody has asked, where the process may break, or what would make things easier.



WHEN TO USE IT

When you need the real story.



HOW TO USE IT

Ask one open question, listen to the answer, then ask what you have not yet understood.



TRY THIS

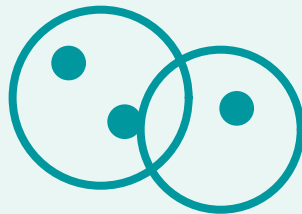
Use one open question before offering an answer.

Cookie Thief Moment

When assumptions harden.

“

The story creates a shared reminder to check assumptions before judging.



WHAT IT IS

Use the Cookie Thief story to remind teams that the visible story may be incomplete.



WHEN TO USE IT

When assumptions harden.



HOW TO USE IT

Share the Cookie Thief story and invite people to notice how quickly we judge with incomplete information.



TRY THIS

Ask: What else could be true?

Fact Or Story?

When information is missing.

“

Separating observations from interpretations helps teams discuss uncertainty clearly.



WHAT IT IS

Notice when people fill information gaps with interpretations.



WHEN TO USE IT

When information is missing.



HOW TO USE IT

Write down what you observed, then separately what you inferred. Ask what evidence would change your view.



TRY THIS

Separate what we know from what we assume.

Boat Builders

At the start of an engagement.

“

The video opens a practical discussion about adoption, sponsorship and coordination.



WHAT IT IS

Play the short narrated story and discuss what slowed the captain's vision. Link lessons to this change.



WHEN TO USE IT

At the start of an engagement.



HOW TO USE IT

Show the 2-minute, 16-second video. Discuss the captain, the crew, sponsorship and what created real adoption.



TRY THIS

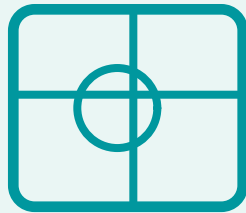
Play the video and ask what people noticed and how it could have been done better.

Task To Purpose

When work feels fragmented.

“

Connecting tasks to purpose helps people understand why their contribution matters.



WHAT IT IS

Connect everyday tasks to the outcome for customers, colleagues and the organisation.



WHEN TO USE IT

When work feels fragmented.



HOW TO USE IT

Ask someone to explain their task, then connect it to the outcome it makes possible for others.



TRY THIS

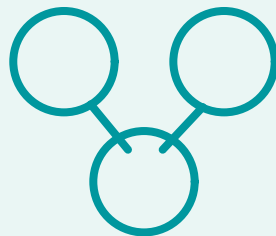
Explain who benefits when this work is done.

Involve People Early

Before a solution is final.

“

Early involvement gives people an opportunity to shape the change, not just receive it.



WHAT IT IS

Invite input while there is still something meaningful to shape.



WHEN TO USE IT

Before a solution is final.



HOW TO USE IT

Invite affected people into the conversation before decisions are locked in. Ask what you may have missed.



TRY THIS

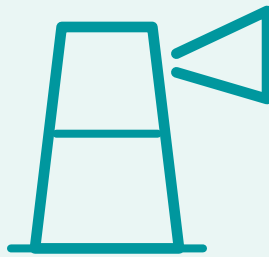
Ask: Where should we involve the people doing the work?

Explain Sponsorship

When leaders are unsure.

“

Specific sponsor actions are easier to follow through on than vague requests for support.



WHAT IT IS

Show sponsors the actions that make a difference, not just a request to communicate.



WHEN TO USE IT

When leaders are unsure.



HOW TO USE IT

Ask sponsors for one visible action: a conversation, a decision, a demonstration or removal of a barrier.



TRY THIS

Agree one visible leadership action.

Acknowledgement + Impact

When someone helps.

“

Naming the impact makes appreciation specific, credible and memorable.



WHAT IT IS

Say what they did and why it mattered. Specific appreciation beats generic thanks.



WHEN TO USE IT

When someone helps.



HOW TO USE IT

Thank the person for their contribution, then describe specifically how their work made a difference.



TRY THIS

Thank someone for the difference they made.

Emoji With Intention

In teams chats.

“

A considered reaction can convey attention better than an automatic response.



WHAT IT IS

Choose a reaction that fits the message instead of always using a thumbs-up.



WHEN TO USE IT

In teams chats.



HOW TO USE IT

Choose a reaction or reply that matches what the person actually shared. Make the acknowledgement personal.



TRY THIS

Pause before the next default response.

Forget Me Not

Before a meeting starts.

“

A welcoming ritual can make routine meetings feel more human.



WHAT IT IS

Play music while people arrive. Create warmth and a ritual people remember.



WHEN TO USE IT

Before a meeting starts.



HOW TO USE IT

Play welcoming music as people arrive. Notice what makes the room feel more open and connected.



TRY THIS

Try a welcoming song before your next meeting.

Pass The Dad Joke

At recurring team meetings.

“

A simple recurring joke can help people connect beyond the agenda.



WHAT IT IS

Invite a clean joke; the teller nominates next week's volunteer.



WHEN TO USE IT

At recurring team meetings.



HOW TO USE IT

Invite a short, appropriate joke at the start of recurring meetings and rotate who brings the next one.



TRY THIS

Try a light ritual that fits your team.

Book The Room With A Grin

When meeting names display.

“

Playful meeting names can signal warmth and approachability.



WHAT IT IS

Use playful room booking titles such as Super Change Guy or Alignment King.



WHEN TO USE IT

When meeting names display.



HOW TO USE IT

Use a light-hearted room booking name when it suits the culture. Keep the humour inclusive and professional.



TRY THIS

Find a harmless way to add personality.

Thoughtful Follow-Through

After everyday interactions.

“

Closing loops demonstrates that you listened and that someone's input mattered.



WHAT IT IS

Respond with care, remember details and close loops.



WHEN TO USE IT

After everyday interactions.



HOW TO USE IT

Return to an earlier conversation. Share what happened with the input and thank the person for helping.



TRY THIS

Notice an opportunity to make this play your own.

Sign With The Other Hand

When teaching change capability.

“

Feeling the difficulty helps people distinguish knowing from being able to perform.



WHAT IT IS

Have people sign with their non-preferred hand. Knowing how is not the same as doing it easily.



WHEN TO USE IT

When teaching change capability.



HOW TO USE IT

Ask people to sign their name with their non-preferred hand. Discuss knowing how versus being able to do it.



TRY THIS

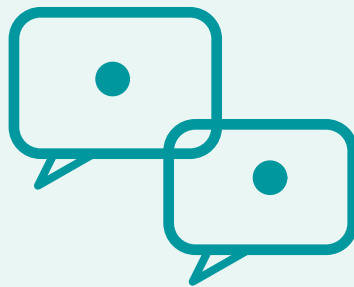
Ask: What support would make the new way easier?

Shared Language

After a memorable exercise.

“

Shared shorthand lets a team revisit an insight without repeating the whole exercise.



WHAT IT IS

Reuse phrases such as Coffee Cup moment or Cookie Thief moment in real conversations.



WHEN TO USE IT

After a memorable exercise.



HOW TO USE IT

Give a memorable moment a short name. Use the phrase later to recall the lesson without another presentation.



TRY THIS

Name the insight so the team can reuse it.

Use What Works

When a tool seems familiar.

“

An old tool can still be powerful when used in the right moment.



WHAT IT IS

You learned the signature exercise through Prosci. Its value comes from using it, not inventing it.



WHEN TO USE IT

When a tool seems familiar.



HOW TO USE IT

Reuse a simple tool that has helped before. Adapt it to the audience rather than chasing novelty.



TRY THIS

Bring back one tool you've stopped using.

Humour With Care

When the room needs warmth.

“

Appropriate play can lower formality without taking away from the work.



WHAT IT IS

Use appropriate humour, music and play without making participation uncomfortable.



WHEN TO USE IT

When the room needs warmth.



HOW TO USE IT

Use gentle humour to reduce tension, not to make someone the joke. Read the room and keep people safe.



TRY THIS

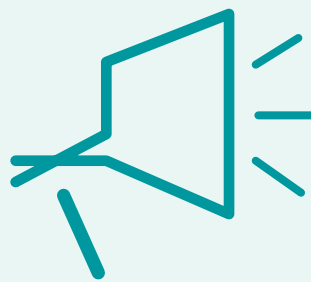
Make connection easy, never compulsory.

Passion Isn't Influence

When you feel strongly.

“

The way a message is delivered can determine whether it gets heard.



WHAT IT IS

The fist-on-desk 'what about the people?' moment shows that delivery can undermine a good point.



WHEN TO USE IT

When you feel strongly.



HOW TO USE IT

Pause before challenging someone. Replace forceful advocacy with a question they can engage with.



TRY THIS

Choose a question instead of a demand.

Help Beyond Your Role

When work needs doing.

“

Helping with a real need builds trust through action, not just promises.



WHAT IT IS

Sometimes you write the SOP because it helps the team, even when it isn't your job.



WHEN TO USE IT

When work needs doing.



HOW TO USE IT

Notice a practical problem outside your role. Offer to help solve it, then follow through.



TRY THIS

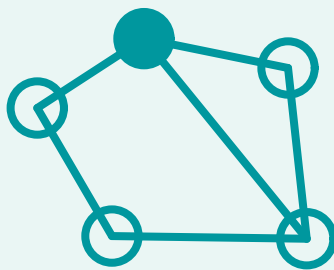
Ask: What would be genuinely helpful?

Find The Real Network

When stakeholder maps fall short.

“

Informal influencers can shape what people believe and how they respond.



WHAT IT IS

Notice who people actually turn to for guidance and reassurance.



WHEN TO USE IT

When stakeholder maps fall short.



HOW TO USE IT

Ask who people turn to for advice and whose opinion carries weight. Engage those people with curiosity.



TRY THIS

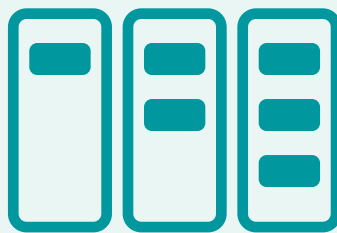
Ask: Who do others listen to?

Visible Ways Of Working

When collaboration gets messy.

“

Visible actions and owners turn a good conversation into follow-through.



WHAT IT IS

Use a shared whiteboard for ideas, actions, owners and follow-through.



WHEN TO USE IT

When collaboration gets messy.



HOW TO USE IT

Capture actions, owners and dates where everyone can see them. Return to the board at the next meeting.



TRY THIS

Make the next action visible.

BRING POSITIVE CHANGE TO YOUR NEXT EVENT

A FRESH VOICE CAN CHANGE THE CONVERSATION.

Bring an experienced, independent perspective to your next conference, leadership event or team gathering.

MEET JOHN MERKUS

The Positive Change Guy | International keynote speaker and enterprise change leader | 20+ years of real-world transformation experience.

REAL STORIES

Practical, relatable stories from real change experiences.

HUMOUR & CONNECTION

An engaging, energetic style that gets people thinking.

PRACTICAL IDEAS

Simple, actionable ideas people can use straight away.

FEATURED KEYNOTE

Navigating Change When It Feels Constant

Build confidence and momentum when change doesn't slow down.

JM | JOHN MERKUS

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