

Cpp
North
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Opening Keynote
How to Change the World

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How to Change The World

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How to Change One Thing, Probably Pretty Small, In Your Sphere of Influence

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What is a Change?

- Get people to “Stop Teaching C” when they teach C++
- Form an activist group that changed (some of) the community practices
 - Especially around conferences
- Start (and run for decades) a business that employed people, bought goods and services, and helped clients succeed and thrive
- Encourage people from historically excluded populations to stay in this industry, and show them ways to excel
 - Send the elevator back down
- Encourage everyone to think about more ways to succeed and excel

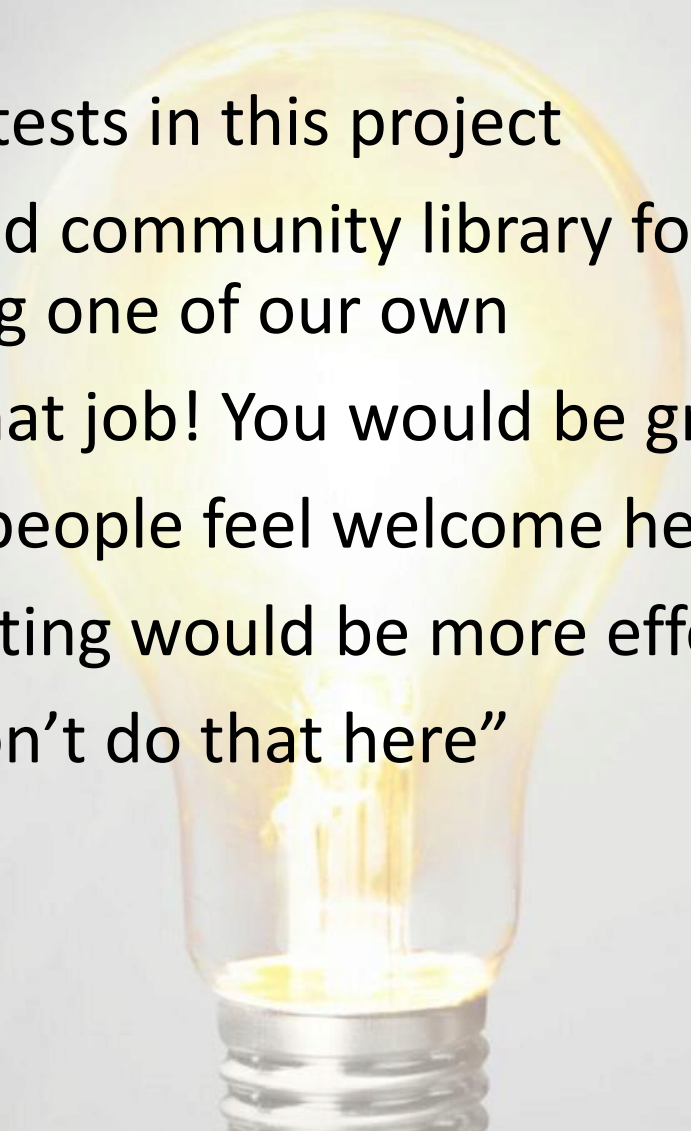
What is a Change?

- Inventing a new language?
 - Only if a lot of people end up using it
- Making a utility website publicly usable?
 - Sure, if it's compiler explorer
- Writing a book?
 - If people read it and change the way they work
- It's not so much the single act of creation, it's what follows
 - Some of that is luck
 - More of it is work

Changing the world means changing people,
getting them to do something different than
they would otherwise have done

What is a Change?

- We should have more tests in this project
- We should use a trusted community library for this task instead of writing and maintaining one of our own
- You should apply for that job! You would be great at it!
- We should make sure people feel welcome here
- I think the weekly meeting would be more effective if...
- “Not cool” and “We don’t do that here”



Out of Scope

- Changing yourself
 - quitting smoking, losing weight, picking up a new hobby
- Persuading others to help you with a change for you
 - Moving, new job, getting chosen for something
- These are changes, for sure
 - And could in theory change the world
- But the skills to get there are not what I'm talking about today
- Think "We should", "You should", "Someone should"
 - "Wouldn't it be better if"

Change is Hard

- Change is work
- You don't have to complete a change within yourself before trying to change others
 - But it usually helps to have started and to lead by example
- Not everyone will welcome your efforts
- You don't know if it will work or not
- You don't have to do it alone
- You don't have to start with huge things
 - Even if they are the most important and urgent



How Do You Do It?

- Decide to be brave
- Formulate a clear position
 - This may not be one you share in this form
- Think about who (people, orgs) would need to change
- Evaluate who you are able to change even a little right now
- Either
 - Start changing those people and orgs
 - Join or gather a team that will have more “change power” than you do alone
 - Put in the background work to have more “change power”
 - Change your scope (work on something smaller)

Who Needs To Change?

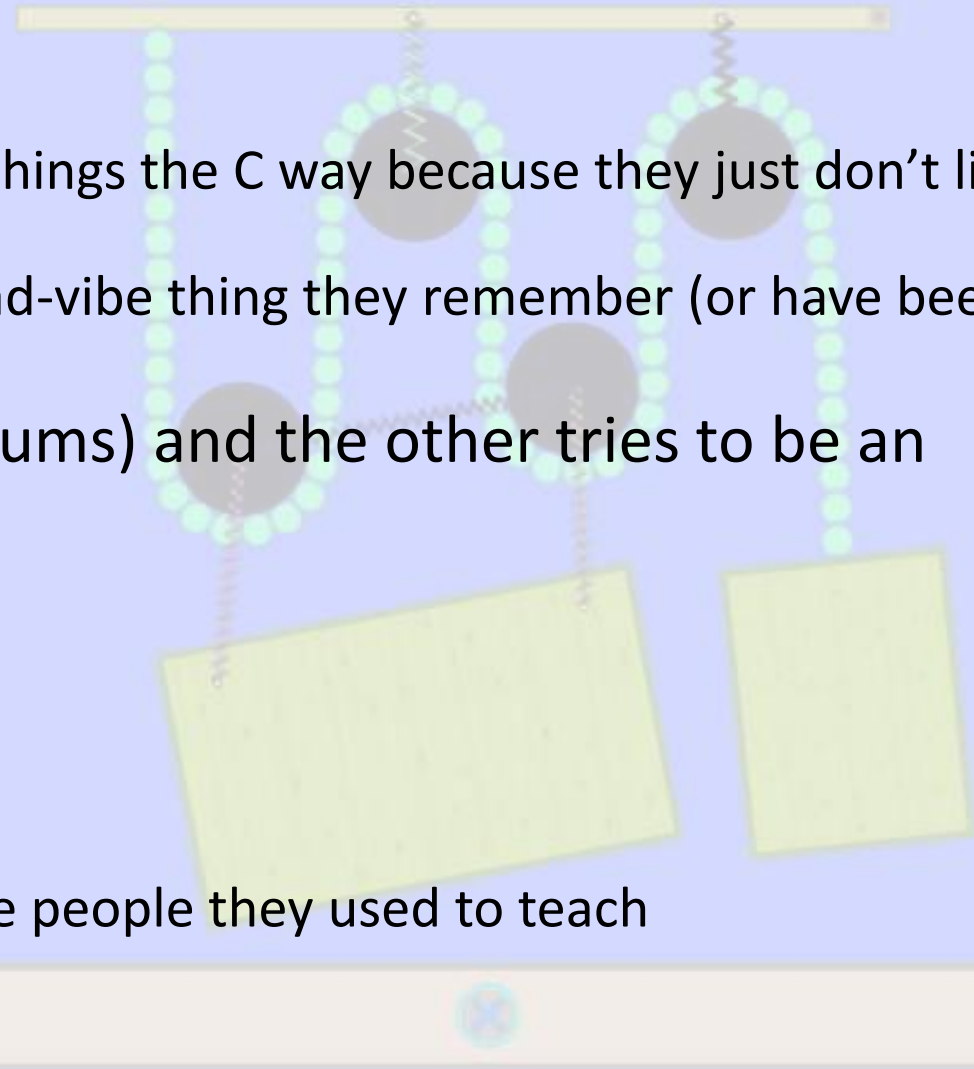
- Your team mates
- Your company policy
- Another organization
 - A conference
 - A standards committee
 - A tool or library vendor
 - An open source community
- Your industry colleagues
 - A subset such as “speakers”, “trainers”, “influencers”
- Everyone

Who Needs To Change?

- It's harder to convince bigger groups
 - need bigger reasons, bigger benefits
 - layers of objections from different levels in hierarchy
 - More inertia, more resistance
- You must use different techniques
 - Team mate techniques don't work on conference organizers
 - Vendor techniques don't work on the public
- You can make things worse if you go about it the wrong way

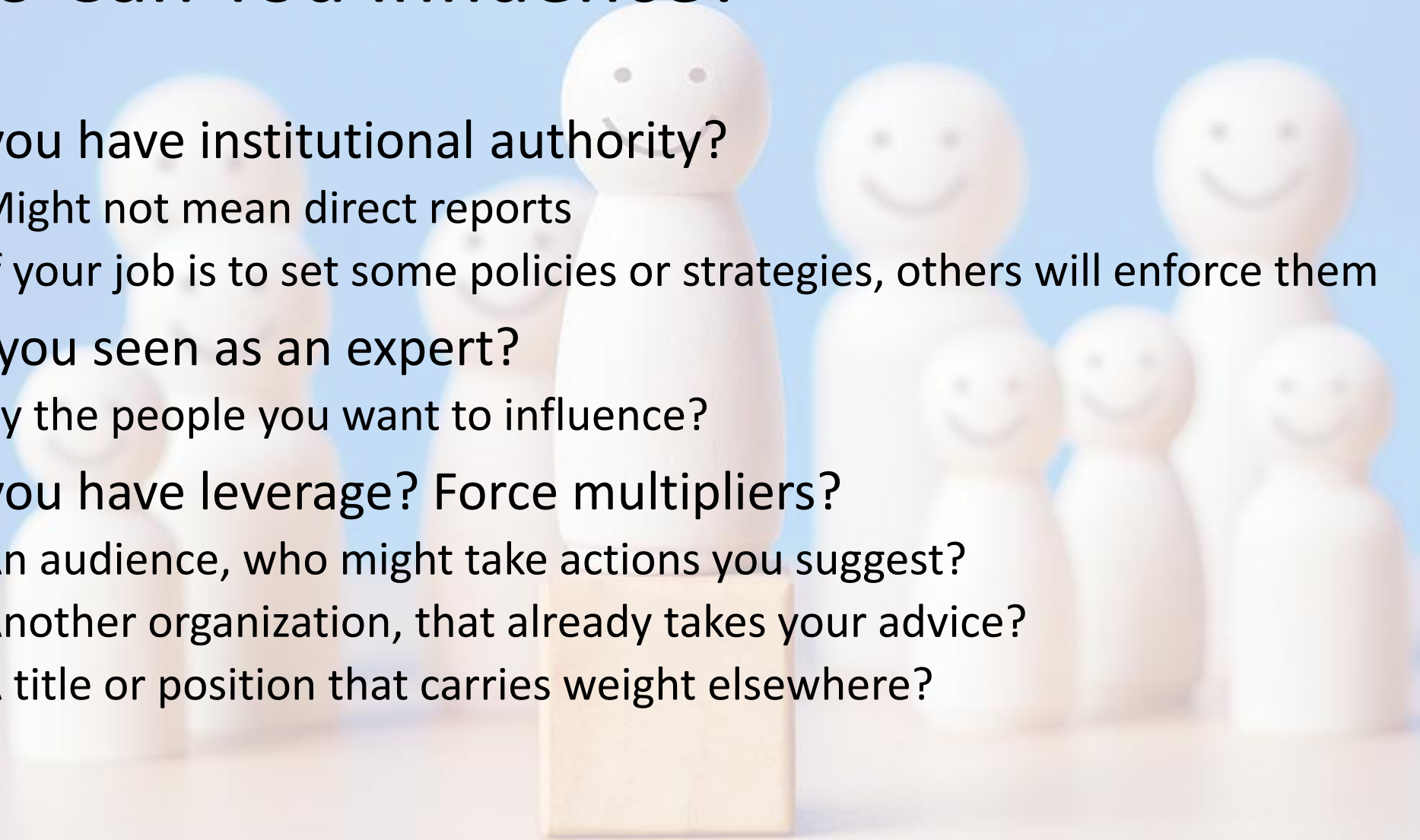
Are You Trying To Change Your Target?

- Know who you are addressing
- Compare these two:
 - No more forums telling people to do things the C way because they just don't like the vibes of the STL
 - teach people that the STL isn't that bad-vibe thing they remember (or have been told about) from 2002
- One tries to change influencers (forums) and the other tries to be an influencer and out-influence them
- Another level of indirection?
 - Can be a force multiplier
 - Can be "surgery wearing oven mitts"
- I prefer less indirection
 - Let the misguided learn along with the people they used to teach



Who Can You Influence?

- Do you have institutional authority?
 - Might not mean direct reports
 - If your job is to set some policies or strategies, others will enforce them
- Are you seen as an expert?
 - By the people you want to influence?
- Do you have leverage? Force multipliers?
 - An audience, who might take actions you suggest?
 - Another organization, that already takes your advice?
 - A title or position that carries weight elsewhere?



Evaluate

- Is there anyone who you could change right now?
 - Influence
 - Nudge
 - Persuade
- Are they the group you want to change?
 - Or a subset of that group?
- You must have clarity here

There's No-one You Can Convince

- You are
 - young, inexperienced, an outsider, not known in the team, company, or industry, not granted authority by anyone yet, part of a historically-excluded group
- You have
 - no platform, no audience, no influence
- Your argument
 - Is not immediately convincing on first hearing regardless of background knowledge
- This is not a change you can start making now

Tilting At Windmills

- Some things are very hard to change
- Some things don't actually need to be changed
 - Perhaps the reason nobody agrees is that you're wrong?
- Some changes take decades
 - Others are much quicker and more local
 - Enough quick and local things can become an industry-wide shift
- You may have an end goal, but are there smaller goals that lead toward it?
 - Would it be worthwhile to reach those smaller goals even if that's all you do?

Get Some Company

- Are you sure you can convince literally and precisely no-one?
- If you get one person on board, evaluate again
 - Now with your combined change power
 - Your boss? Instant authority if your target is your team mates
 - Another team mate? Might have a great example that persuades people quickly
- Each person brings audiences, authority, ideas, connections
- “If you want to go fast, go alone. If you want to go far, go together.” -- almost certainly not an African proverb

Join A Group

- Some group may exist that is doing some things you care about
- If you join, you'll be working towards things you care about
- You can help make it better, too
 - More diverse
 - More local or more global
 - Attract more participants / bigger audiences / more something
- You're achieving your goals
- And you're getting better at the work of change

Try Something Smaller

- A smaller change
 - “Switch to TDD” vs “we should have more tests”
 - “Change C++” vs “change the way our team uses C++”
 - “Eliminate A and B” vs “show people alternatives to A and B”
 - “Rewrite our flagship product in Rust” vs “use Rust for some of our auxiliary products and utilities”
- A smaller target
 - “Get all the X to do Y” vs “get the X I am part of to do Y”
 - Change my industry vs Change my company vs Change my team
- It’s super if this smaller thing is a subgoal of the big goal
 - But it doesn’t have to be
- The smaller the change you try for, the lower the risk
 - **and** the greater the chance of success

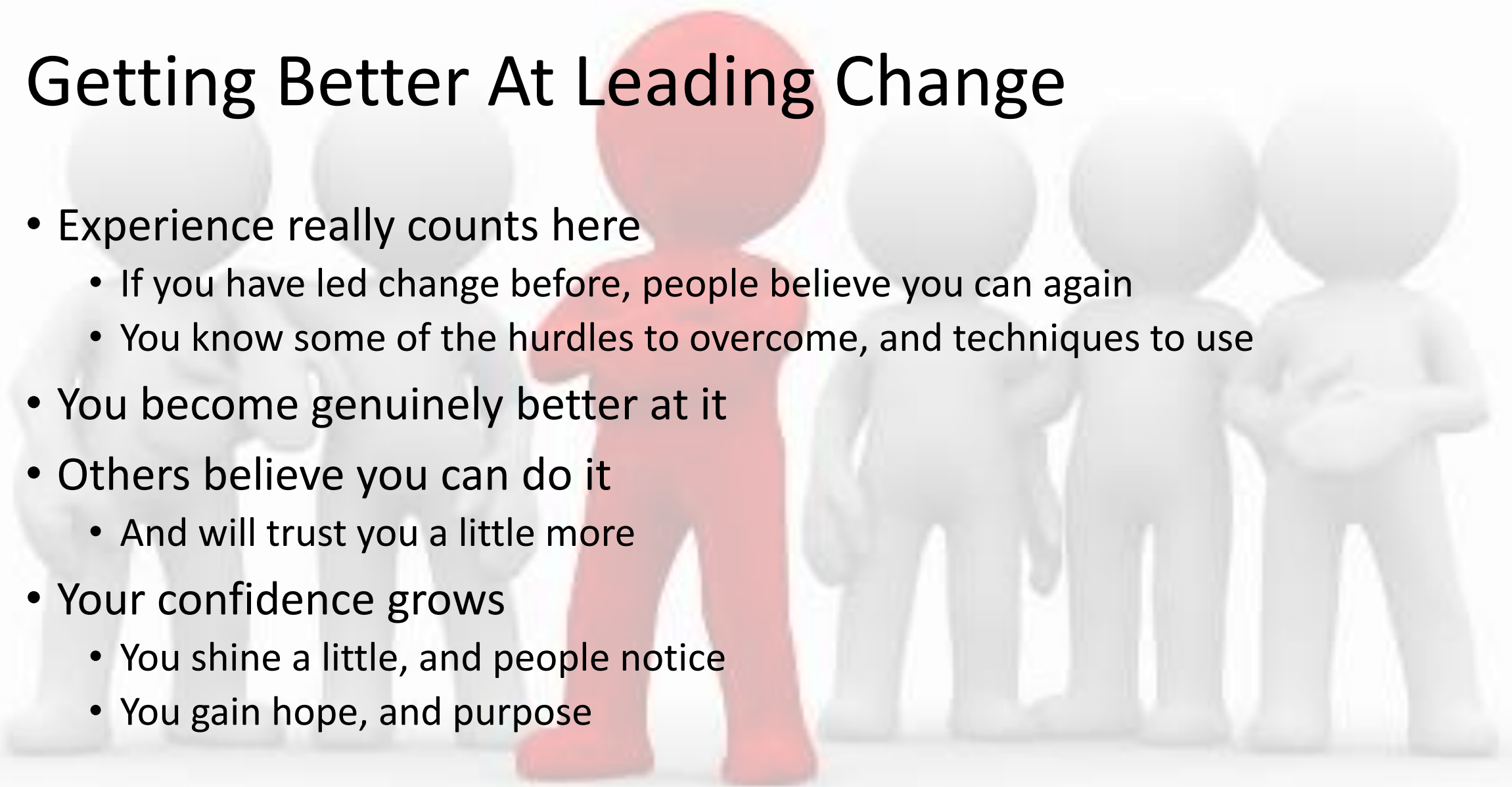
Build Your Change Power

- Get older
- Gain experience
- Get better known
- Earn authority (work towards it)
- Build an audience
- Build influence
- Get more skilled at the techniques you're using
 - Public speaking
 - Blogging
 - Paper writing
 - Social media
 - Bystander intervention
- Learn how to make change happen
 - And become known as someone who does



Getting Better At Leading Change

- Experience really counts here
 - If you have led change before, people believe you can again
 - You know some of the hurdles to overcome, and techniques to use
- You become genuinely better at it
- Others believe you can do it
 - And will trust you a little more
- Your confidence grows
 - You shine a little, and people notice
 - You gain hope, and purpose



But What Do You Actually Do?

- Just how do you nudge, persuade, influence and convince?
- Two parts
 - Give people information
 - Benefits, costs, alternatives, reasons, history, big picture, explanations, examples, testimonials, ...
 - Ask people to change
 - We should ...
- In what order?
 - It depends
- How much information?
 - It depends

Ask A Question

- Why are all the pictures on our conference website or recruiting website or ... white men in their 30s?
- Why are all the names in our examples male WASP names like Jim and Steve? Why no Sue, Andrei, Noor?
- Did we test this biometric-ish thing against a diverse group?
 - Or just the 5 white male developers who worked on it?
- How could a vengeful ex use this product to hurt someone?
 - Or malicious stranger (airtag dropped into purse)

Benefits Beat Guilt

- Your “ask” should be specific, actionable, and easy to grasp
- But also, compare these two:
 - Someone who isn't you deserves something they aren't getting; I need you to make sacrifices and give things up and work hard so that they will have a better life
 - If you did what I am suggesting, you would get the following benefits and cool stuff; life can be better!
- Some positions can only be expressed as one or the other of these
 - But they are the exception
- Which gets a better response?

What Motivates Your Target?

- Actual mission statement
- Money
- Reputation
 - Who will speak at my conference / work for my company?
 - Who will attend my conference / buy my product?
 - Legacy building
- Avoiding hassle, trouble, arguments, embarrassment
- Getting elected, promoted, awarded

Meet People Where They Are Lead Them To Where You Want Them To Be

- Build bridges, find something to agree on
- Understand why things are as they are
 - including unwritten and unacknowledged reasons
 - what really needs to shift?
- You can try appealing to fairness, but market advantage is more likely to succeed.
 - Show benefits rather than appealing to guilt or obligation
- Promote and publicize those who change
 - As a reward
 - To make it feel safer for others to join the change
- Point out the benefits as they are reaped and connect them back to the change

Examples and Analogies

- Some information contains a very obvious “we should” within the information itself
- It can make “the right thing” clearly the easy and simple thing
- If you also provide a name or handle, you can move mountains!
 - Names make it easy to remember and remind each other later
 - Names carry a suggestion that “everyone knows” this thing
 - Moves from “one person’s opinion” towards “a known fact about society”

The PacMan Move

- A way to make conferences, meetups, and other informal networking or chatting times more inclusive and welcoming
- <https://www.ericholscher.com/blog/2017/aug/2/pacman-rule-conferences/>
- Don't form closed (complete) circles as you stand around chatting
 - Leave an obvious gap for someone else to join you
 - Explain out loud what you're doing and why
 - When someone joins you, welcome them and adjust the circle to be still open

The Nazi Bar

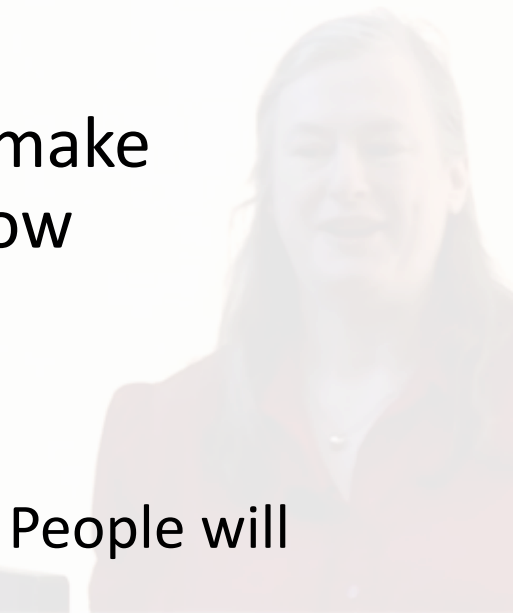
- <https://bsky.app/profile/iamragesparkle.bsky.social/post/3lbidcyttps2b>
- “No. Get Out.”
- Applies to many gatherings, online social spaces, etc
- Any time you say “they haven’t broken any rule yet” you are showing that you do feel
 - They have misbehaved
 - They will break a rule eventually
- It’s ok to act on that

When You Don't Have a Saying Handy

- Think about what you're trying to change
- Think about why you feel that change is good
- Think about which of those reasons might motivate your audience
- Present the reasons that are most likely to move people
 - Even if they aren't the "main" ones

Example: Stop Teaching C

- By 40 seconds I said the course will be more enjoyable and make better C++ programmers compared to how we're doing it now
- By 2:30 "makes C++ an easier language to learn"
- Eventually I start talking about being fair and being nice
 - But only after repeating the benefits: people will like your course! People will like your language more!
- And I close with the benefits
 - Look how much more you can cover!
 - The learners will have learned more!
 - They will have enjoyed it!



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Add Information

- People often believe they know the cost of what you're suggesting
 - It will be more work!
 - People will laugh at us!
 - I don't know how!
- Provide the benefits
 - Not on request, but as part of your "ask"
- Compare:
 - "I think we should x"
 - "I think we should speed up our releases by doing x"
 - "I think we should improve our employee retention by doing x"
- Make it easy to see the information that backs you up
 - Summarize the blog/video/book, don't just link to it
 - "I've been doing this for 6 months now and my [something] is up/down [amount]"
- Clarify the costs as well when you can
 - We did this on a project at my previous employer and it only added 2 days

Overcoming Objections

- We don't need to make that official because that's what we do anyway
- This is how we've always done it
 - Nobody else has a problem with it
- We can't control who applies

We Don't Need To Make That Official

- Generally saying that what they are doing is close enough
- Or that your change is small and unimportant
- “So you agree? It should be done and won't take long!”
- You can offer to help since it's so little work
- “Let's make sure that whoever comes after us continues to do it the right way, as we have been doing”
- “Let's make sure folks outside this team know this is something that matters to us”
 - Or something they can count on

Everyone Else Is Fine With It

- Everyone else **who is here**
- Who are you not reaching?
- Who have you historically excluded?
 - And have you been wondering how to fix that?
- Who could be a superstar for you if you didn't do things this way?
- If you have stories of people who left an employer, or didn't apply, or left a team, etc, for similar reasons, tell them now
- Also a good place for legacy / reputation nudges
 - You could be the one to start this shift here

We Can't Control Who Applies

- “That is literally your job”
- If no-one applied, would that be ok?
 - But it's ok that no women did? No people of colour? No one outside a certain age range or geography?
- Sure, it's hard
 - Offer to help
- Generally just “reaching” those who aren't applying will not work
 - You have to change to show you're safe to interact with or that the work of applying won't be wasted
 - You have to understand why they are not applying

Will You Fail?

- Yes, everyone fails sometimes
- You'll fail to persuade people to do what you're advocating for
- You'll persuade many people, but the initiative will fail
- You'll get a change thoroughly and completely made and it will turn out to be the wrong thing to do
- You won't wonder "what if I had tried?"
- You'll learn important lessons and gain skills
- And other times, you'll succeed!

What If You're Threatened?

- This can happen, for real
- Your employer may tell you to stop doing things
 - Under your real name, anyway
- Other people may threaten to (or actually)
 - Get you fired
 - Smear your name
 - Get you hurt
 - Hurt your family and friends
- Do not ignore this possibility
- Often, it's a sign you're making real change
 - That doesn't remove the risk, but might help you feel better

Some Risk Can't Be Avoided

- When you stand up for a principle, there's a chance it can hurt you
- So be smart
- Choose what to do publicly, under your real name
 - It's a show of power to do this, so do it wisely
- Be part of a team
- Protect your data
- Know what you can risk
- It might help to Try Something Smaller for a while
 - Move that window of acceptable activism slowly

Remind Yourself

- If it was easy, anyone could do it
- All we can do is all we can do, but often that makes all the difference
- If somebody should, can you be somebody?
- It may not be your fault, but it is your problem. What are you going to do about it?
- If not you, who?
- If not now, when?

Becoming A World Changer

- Decide to change something
 - Be precise
 - Know your target and their motivations
 - Evaluate your change power and scope
- Put in the work
 - To know your audience
 - To reach your audience
 - To build your change power
- Don't work alone
 - Teams are stronger, safer, and happier
- Ask for change and give information
 - Use tools, learn from your tries, iterate
- Adjust your goals
 - Smaller to make things easier
 - Larger as you grow your change power
- Celebrate your wins
 - And share the celebrations with the people who changed at your request