

CHANGE THAT STAYS · CHAPTER SIX

The Ninety Days After Done

Five practices set in order, from reading the record of past changes to rehearsing the absence of the person who carries this one.

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A NOTE BEFORE YOU READ

This work is offered for education and leadership development. It is not legal, financial, accounting, investment, medical or psychological advice; take the advice of a qualified professional who knows your circumstances. Companies and events are described from the public record as the author understands it; characterisations are the author's analysis. Examples are illustrative, and no particular outcome is promised to any reader.

ABSTRACT

Five practices set in order, from reading the record of past changes to rehearsing the absence of the person who carries this one. It is a quarter to eight on a Monday in late spring, and the operations director of a firm of some six hundred people is at her desk before anyone else on the floor. On Friday the firm celebrated the end of a year-long improvement programme: a new way of scheduling work across its three sites, shorter lead times, fewer late orders, a short speech by the chief executive and a buffet in the atrium. The programme team has been thanked and is being released back to its old jobs this week. On her desk is the closing report, which says the programme is complete. Beside it is a list she wrote on Sunday evening of the firm's last three improvement programmes and what became of each. Two of them she can no longer find in any report.

CHAPTER SIX

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Monday, the week after the launch

It is a quarter to eight on a Monday in late spring, and the operations director of a firm of some six hundred people is at her desk before anyone else on the floor. On Friday the firm celebrated the end of a year-long improvement programme: a new way of scheduling work across its three sites, shorter lead times, fewer late orders, a short speech by the chief executive and a buffet in the atrium. The programme team has been thanked and is being released back to its old jobs this week. On her desk is the closing report, which

says the programme is complete. Beside it is a list she wrote on Sunday evening of the firm's last three improvement programmes and what became of each. Two of them she can no longer find in any report.

She is a composite, drawn from the way these weeks are described in the research the earlier chapters read and in the house's own practice, and no firm is meant. This chapter is written to her, and to anyone who has just been told that a change is finished.[37] It describes the first ninety days after done in order, with who is in the room, what each step needs, roughly how long it takes, the decisions that change the result, the mistakes that are made at each step and how to see them early, how to read what comes back, and what to do on the first Monday. The working pages it refers to are gathered in Chapter 7.

Two things should be said before the plan. The first is that nothing here is a new programme. The ninety days after done are the programme's last stage, carried on in a lighter form by the people who will own the work from now on, and they should never be announced as an initiative of their own. The canon names why programmes so often leave an organisation unchanged: "Because most change initiatives operate at the level of structure and behavior while leaving the deeper levels of collective emotion, somatic patterning, and meaning-making untouched." The ninety days are spent at those deeper levels, in quiet ways: the record of what happened before, the objections nobody voiced, the cues in the work, the time and credit the practice needs, and the people who carry it.

The second is that urgency is the wrong fuel. The Luminous 100's reading of Kotter's eight steps replaces the first of them, the creation of urgency, with something gentler, on the ground that "the most sustainable change energy comes not from fear of what we'll lose but from the pull of what we're becoming." A change that has to be kept alive by alarm will be lost the first month the alarm is turned down.

Why this order

The five practices in this book are the holding read (Chapter 1), the protected hour and the quiet ledger (Chapter 2), the routine walk (Chapter 3), the objection conversation (Chapter 4) and the rehearsal of absence (Chapter 5). In the ninety days after done they run in a different sequence: read the record, hear the objections, walk the routine, protect the time, move the carrier's work, and read the holding line throughout.

The reasoning follows the way changes are lost. A change is most at risk from the forces that undid the last one, so the first ten days are spent finding out what those were. The people most able to say how this one will come undone are those who objected, or stayed silent, so they are heard next, while the design can still move. Only then does it make sense to walk the routine, because the walk is guided by what the objectors said and goes better with them in it. Protecting improvement time comes after the walk, because the walk shows how much time the new routine actually needs. Moving the champion's work into the organisation comes last, because it depends on knowing what the practice now is. And the holding read starts on day eleven and never stops, because it is the instrument that tells the director whether any of the rest is working.

Who is in the room

Four roles carry the ninety days, and they should be named before anything else is done.

The sponsor is the most senior person who will be asked, a year from now, whether the change held. Often that is the director who sponsored the programme; sometimes it is the person who runs the operation day to day. Her job is to protect the time the other roles need, to attend the drift conversations, and to keep the improvement on the first page of whatever report she reads. Expect two to three hours a week.

The keeper owns the holding read. She runs the work the change touched and was not on the programme team, for the reason Chapter 1 gives: a project lead reading her own result is reading her own trophy. Expect an hour a week, more in the months a drift rule is met.

The champion is the person who carried the change: the programme lead or, more often, the team leader or analyst who made it work in practice. For ninety days her job reverses. She stops doing the change and starts handing it over, which is harder.

The convenor keeps the record: the record of changes, the objection pages, the walk sheets, the record of cuts, the quiet ledger, the carrier's inventory, the holding chart. About two hours a week.

Around them sits a small group of four to six: the keeper, one or two people from the front line of the work, one person with a long memory of the organisation's earlier changes, and one recent joiner. The canon, writing about any practice that depends on a few committed people, is plain about why a group is needed and not a single owner: "The community of practice is not a luxury." Without it, it goes on, "the practice dies of isolation."

One decision changes the result more than any other at this stage. The sponsor must decide whether the programme is still open. If the closing report has been signed and the programme team released, the ninety days will have no standing and will be treated as optional. The better course is to tell the organisation, plainly, that the programme closes in ninety days, and that the last stage is about keeping what it found.

Days one to ten: reading the record

The first ten days change nothing visible. They gather four inputs, and the sponsor and the convenor do most of the gathering.

The first is the record of changes: the last three improvements the organisation made to work of the same kind, what each was meant to do, what it is doing now, and when anyone last looked. The convenor finds the numbers where they exist. The person with the long memory supplies the rest. The page usually takes a few hours and is usually sobering, and it should be read without blame, because Chapter 1's argument is that most fading is a mechanism, not a decision.

The second is a short list of the practices that produced this change's result: the specific things people now do that they did not do before. The champion writes it, and the front-line members correct it. These become the practice measures of the holding read.

The third is the history of the result. Finance or the analyst copies the last one to two years of the result measure, with the programme period marked, dates the copy and files it unaltered. It is the history against which the holding line will be read.

The fourth is the list of people to hear: those with the longest memory of the work, those the programme team described as resistant, and those who were silent at the launch briefings. Chapter 4 explains why each.

At the end of the ten days the group meets for the first time and writes, on a single page, its first guess at how this change is most likely to be lost: which force from the record of changes is most likely to repeat, which practice is most fragile, who is carrying most of it. The page is labelled a guess and kept for day ninety.

What goes wrong at this stage. The record of changes is skipped because it feels like dwelling on failure. The programme team writes the practice list alone, and it describes the change as designed rather than as performed. And the sponsor treats the first ten days as a formality before the real work, which teaches the group the same.



Days eleven to thirty: hearing the objections

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Days eleven to thirty: hearing the objections

In the third week the sponsor or the keeper holds the objection conversations of Chapter 4, one to one, on the other person's ground and at her hours. Four to six, an hour each. The three questions, in order: what will this break, what happened last time, and what does the old way do that the new one must also do.

On the same days the holding read begins. The keeper and finance agree, on one page, what *done* means, the result measure and its history, the practice measure, the period, and the drift rule, and they sign it before the first monthly figure is read.

The decision that changes the result is what is done with what the objectors said. Some of it will require changing the new way, after the programme team thought the design was finished. If the changes are made, and visibly credited to the people who raised them, the rest of the ninety days run on goodwill. If they are not, the objectors' forecasts will come true, and on schedule.

What goes wrong. The conversations become persuasion. The forecasts are noted and filed. The holding agreement is written by the programme team, which wants to close, rather than the keeper, who has to live with it. The early signs are easy to read: an objector who agreed to talk and then becomes quieter, and a holding agreement whose period happens to end before the change's first hard season.

How to read what comes back. By day thirty the convenor's record should show a handful of specific forecasts, each with what was done about it, and a signed holding agreement. The forecasts are the most valuable thing the ninety days will produce, because they are the organisation's own account of how this change will be lost.

Days twenty-one to fifty: walking the routine

Overlapping with the conversations, the group walks the routine at its hardest hour, as Chapter 3 describes: Monday morning, month-end, shift change, whatever the front-line members name. One walk per site or team, with an objector from the conversations in the walk wherever one agreed. Each walk records what was done, what prompted it, and whether it was the new routine or the old.

The walks feed the artefact inventory: the defaults, sort orders, forms, reports, rooms, first moves and forms of praise that the performance answers to. The group changes the cheapest cue first and walks again in four weeks.

The decision that changes the result is whether the team's adaptations are welcomed. The new routine will already have changed in the weeks since launch. If the walk treats each change as a deviation, the team learns to hide its adjustments, and the routine on paper and the routine performed begin to drift apart. If the walk records each change and decides with the team, within a week, which to keep, the routine becomes the team's.

What goes wrong. The walk is done on a quiet afternoon. The cues are listed and the training is repeated. A default that needs another department to change it is left because the request is awkward. The early sign is a second walk that finds the same old steps for the same reasons.

Days thirty-one to seventy: protecting the time and the credit

By the fifth week the walks will have shown how much time the new routine needs to be kept and improved: the planned stops, the review hour, the weekly look at what recurred. The sponsor agrees that time

with whoever owns output, as a standing fixture in the plan the operation already runs to, as Chapter 2 describes, and with a warning of the dip it will cause and roughly for how long.

The convenor opens the record of cuts. The keeper opens the quiet ledger and reads it, once a month, at the review where rescues are discussed.

The decision that changes the result is the first cut. There will be a busy week in which the protected time is wanted for output, and someone will decide. If the cut is written down with a date for restoring the time, and the time is restored on that date, the practice has survived its hardest case. If not, the second cut will be easier.

What goes wrong. The protected time is held but not used. The ledger fills with imagined disasters. The stand-up goes on praising only the rescues. The early sign is the share of planned against reactive work, which Chapter 2 suggests as a simple measure; if it falls for two months running, something is being cut that the record has not caught.

Days fifty-one to eighty: moving the carrier's work

In the eighth week the champion runs the carrier's inventory of Chapter 5: a week's diary of every action she takes for the change, and the team's answer to what they would notice if she stopped. Each task is matched to a structure that will remain, a team calendar, a standing booking, a rota, a fixture in the plan, a line in a report, a sentence in a role description, a page in induction, and moved, with the date.

The relational part of her work is shared by leading, co-leading and sitting beside. Then, between days seventy and eighty, she is absent from the change for two weeks while still in post, and not consulted. The team keeps a short record of what ran, what stopped and what was done differently.

The decision that changes the result is whether the absence really happens. It is easy to postpone, because it feels like a vote of no confidence and because the change is working. An absence that is postponed beyond the ninety days rarely happens at all, and the real departure becomes the first test.

What goes wrong. The tasks are moved on paper and the champion goes on doing them. The team messages her during the absence and she answers. The early sign is an inventory that contains no relational tasks, which means it was written from memory and has missed the work that matters most.



Days sixty-one to ninety: the holding line and the absence review

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Days sixty-one to ninety: the holding line and the absence review

In the last month the holding read has its first real test. By now there are two or three monthly figures since launch on the holding chart, beside the practice measure. If the drift rule has been met, the keeper holds the drift conversation of Chapter 1 within a fortnight: what has changed in the conditions, is the practice still being done, does the change need adjusting, and who will do what by when. If it has not been met, the keeper says so, briefly, at the monthly review, and reads the practice line aloud.

In the week the champion returns, the group holds the absence review: what ran without her, what stopped and why, what was done differently and whether it is better, and what is still hers that should not be.

What this step does not settle is how a gain that has been kept is then shared with the people who produced it: the proportions, the timing, the thresholds and the terms. Those depend on the organisation, its people and its history, and they are decided with the people who will be covered; for an organisation working with Luminous Prosperity they are the substance of the engagement, not of a book. What the ninety days can do is make that later decision honest. A gain that fades in its seventh month is not one both sides can sign, and the measurement conversation of *Where the Flow Stops* assumes a gain that has been held long enough to be read.

What goes wrong. The holding line is read and not discussed. The first drift is met with a relaunch. The absence review is cancelled because the change survived. The canon describes the most deceptive failure of all, and it is the one to watch for in the last month: a practice that continues in name after its purpose has drained away. "The form may persist, but the life has gone out of it." The sign is a meeting that is still held and no longer changes anything.

Day ninety: reading what you have

The group meets on day ninety with seven things on the table: the record of changes, the first-guess page from day ten, the objection pages with what was done about each forecast, the walk sheets and the artefact inventory, the record of cuts and the quiet ledger, the carrier's inventory with the absence review, and the holding chart.

It asks a short list of questions, in order. Where was the first guess right, and where wrong? Which forecasts from the objection conversations have already come true, and were they caught? Is the new routine performed at the hardest hour, and what still prompts the old one? Has the protected time been cut, and was it restored? What ran without the champion, and what is still hers? What does the holding line show, beside the practice line? And then the question that matters most for the next ninety days: which force from the record of changes is still present?

What not to conclude is as important. Ninety days cannot show that a change has held; they can show whether the conditions for holding it are in place. The holding read continues, usually for the rest of the year, until the change has met each of the pressures named at the start. The canon puts the test in a sentence that fits this day exactly. The question, it says, is whether the organisation "has developed enough capacity, enough practice, enough somatic grounding in the new way of being, to recognize the old pattern when it arises and choose differently."

The programme can now be closed, and the closing report should say so plainly: what was found, what is being held, by whom, how it is read, and when the holding read ends.

What to do on Monday

If the whole of this chapter is too much to begin with, three things can be done on the first Monday after a change is declared done, and none of them needs anyone's permission.

Write down the last three changes your part of the organisation made to work like this one, and what each is doing now. If you do not know, find out for one of them.

Choose one practice that produced this change's result, and find a way to count, each week, whether it is still being done. Put the count beside the result.

And ask the person who carried the change what she does for it that nobody else would notice if she stopped. Write the answer down.

The canon says of the small practices that hold a culture together what could be said of all five in this book: "These are not extraordinary practices. They are small, ordinary, and profoundly consequential." Kept for ninety days, and then for the ninety after that, they are how a change becomes the way things are done.

Monday, day ninety-one

It is a quarter to eight on a Monday in late summer, and the operations director is at her desk before anyone else on the floor. The closing report she signed on Friday is in the tray. It says the programme is closed and names a keeper at each site. On the wall by her door the holding chart has five monthly points on it since launch, and beneath them a second line, the share of orders scheduled by the new rule, which dipped in July when one site's planner was on leave and came back the week after.

Her Sunday list of the firm's last three programmes is still on the desk. She adds a fourth line to it, with today's date, and leaves the rest of the line blank.

References

1. Sources for this chapter: The practices and their sources are those of Chapters 1 to 5: Lewin (1947), Cummings, Bridgman and Brown (2016), Hughes (2011), Buchanan and colleagues (2005), Scheirer (2005) and Wiltsey Stirman and colleagues (2012) on sustaining change; Repenning and Sterman (2001, 2002) and Perlow (1999) on improvement time; Feldman and Pentland (2003), Wood and Neal (2007), Lally and colleagues (2010) and the two surgical checklist studies on routines; Ford, Ford and D'Amelio (2008), Piderit (2000) and Oreg, Vakola and Armenakis (2011) on resistance; Miech and colleagues (2018) and Greenhalgh and colleagues (2004) on champions and routinisation; Kotter (1995) throughout. Full references are in those chapters' notes; Santa Anna, A. *Organizational Soul Work*, "Why Most Change Initiatives Fail to Restore Soul". The Luminous Developmental Canon; Santa Anna, A. *The Luminous 100*, "Kotter's 8-Step Change Model". Luminous Prosperity Inc.; Santa Anna, A. *Conscious Governance Models*, "Sustaining the Practice: What Conscious Governance Requires" ("A Community of Practice" and "Ongoing Development"). The Luminous Developmental Canon; Santa Anna, A. *Hero's Journey Organizational Mapping*, "Stage 12: The Resurrection — Integration and Renewal". The Luminous Developmental Canon; Santa Anna, A. *Psychological Safety Architecture*, "The Leader's Daily Practice". The Luminous Developmental Canon; The time estimates in this chapter are planning guides from practice, not findings of a study; adjust them to the organisation.

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