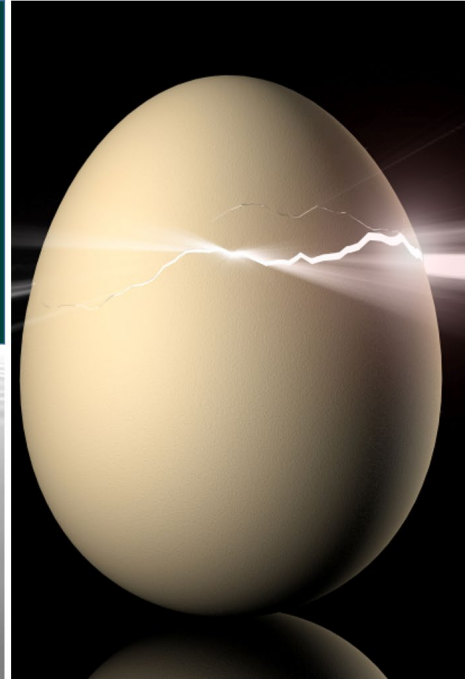


CAN PRACTITIONERS AT THE ADEQUATE LEVEL ADVANCE TO HIGH IMPACT?



When sharing my observations and findings about the Inept (25%), Adequate (65%), and High Impact (10%) categories at gatherings of change professionals, I tend to get similar responses regardless of what discipline is represented (e.g., change management, business relationship management, organizational development, HR, strategic planning, IT, project management, etc.) or where (what country) the meeting is taking place.

- The categories and percentages are generally verified as accurate.
- People seldom see themselves as part of the Inept group (though recognizing colleagues or competitors who fit the description doesn't seem to pose a problem).
- Many who identify with the Adequate designation are attracted to High Impact work but feel they are prevented from functioning this way because of the "circumstances" they operate in, such as:
 - Their organizations have a history of using change professionals in only tactical, peripheral ways.
 - Bosses/clients/business partners they work with aren't as responsive to their observations and recommendations as they'd like.
 - The practitioners themselves have personal constraints (e.g., "I'm not a risk taker" or "I don't like conflict or making people uncomfortable").
- Some people in each audience feel they match the High Impact description, but usually report that this is not by conscious design. They tend to believe that they gravitated in this direction due to intuition rather than through overt volition. I have found that when 10%ers are introduced to the three categories for the first time, they often report feeling "unconsciously competent" about functioning in the High Impact zone: *I didn't have words for it before, but now that I understand what you mean by being a 10%er, I believe I operate this way much of the time...and it's frustrating when I don't.*

Change professionals who self-identify in the Adequate category often ask me some version of the following question: *If I'm in the Adequate category, what can I do to shift my profile to have*

the influence and standing with leaders that High Impact practitioners enjoy? My answer is usually not well-received; while they grudgingly admit that it's true, they clearly wish it weren't.

What can practitioners seen as Adequate do to be viewed as exceptionally influential?
Generally speaking, not much.

The most important difference between Adequate and High Impact change professionals isn't how proficient they are in *what they do* (concepts and techniques). Admittedly, High Impact practitioners are usually more effective at creating value from whatever approach or methodology they apply than their Adequate counterparts, but this is a gap that, with hard work, can be closed. No, what differentiates High Impact change professionals is how authentic they are when bringing forward their character and presence—in essence, *who they are* is the main differentiator.

The problem is that High Impact change professionals are the way they are, in large part, because of being predisposed in that direction. I don't want to downplay the courage and tenacity it takes to operate in the 10% zone, but most change agents functioning at this level are actualizing what their instincts are telling them to do. High Impact practitioners don't necessarily have greater access to change implementation frameworks or tools, nor do they always have more impressive credentials. They are simply more effective at creating value from whatever approach or methodology they apply.

For example, 10%ers can use the same survey to collect diagnostic data or the same grid to explain a concept as their 65% counterparts, yet they will foster dramatically more influence with their clients. However, this influence has at least as much, if not more, to do with how they carry themselves and interact with the clients than anything they actually do.

Adequate change practitioners can learn to be just as technically effective as High Impact practitioners: with focus, diligence, and enough accumulated experience, methodological gaps can be closed. Gaps related to the *who you are* side of the equation, on the other hand, are nearly impossible to close. The big differentiator between the Adequate and High Impact categories is how authentic the practitioners are when bringing forward their character and presence.

The Unwelcome Truth

Ultimately, without a preexisting natural tendency toward the mindsets and behaviors of High Impact practitioners, the vast majority of change professionals who operate in the Adequate range will never venture very far into—or stay very long in—the High Impact zone.

I can tell you from firsthand experience, this isn't what people want to be true, particularly those who are mired in Adequate-land. It would be much more palatable if I said there was a magic formula that, if properly followed, would allow any Adequate player to evolve into a High Impact resource if he/she applied themselves. I agree that this would be a more agreeable, even uplifting scenario, but the problem is that there is little evidence to support this as anything other than wishful thinking.

Based on my observations, practitioners who lack much of the instinctual foundation for performing as highly effective trusted advisers just aren't able to close the gaps standing between their current performance and their aspirations. Their desire to be seen as a 10%er by clients, even when bolstered by a willingness to learn, usually isn't enough. It is disappointing (if not irritating) to most 65%ers when I explain that being perceived as a High Impact practitioner isn't about learning to add something that doesn't already exist; it's about uncovering and

unleashing what is at the core of your true professional nature, and bringing it forward as part of the value you provide to clients.

Without realizing it, what these Adequate practitioners are asking for are techniques or mental gymnastics that will allow them to be more influential than their basic nature is geared to accommodate. It's the same as wanting to duplicate what "winners" do or say and expecting that those things alone will yield the same success. However, 10%ers aren't exceptionally influential because they've learned how to simulate certain attributes that correlate with High Impact client relationships. They work hard, but not at attempting to add what's not there or amputating what they don't like about themselves. What they do is strengthen their capability to influence by expanding on their penchant for seeing the mechanics of change execution as an art form and by more boldly bringing forward the uniqueness they alone have to offer.

Aspiring to be something you're not isn't a bad thing; it just doesn't work. Those in the Adequate category who try to become High Impact almost always fail, except for brief, superficial forays that ultimately generate unnecessary self-criticism and added vexation when they inevitably fall back into their natural set point.

I'm not saying change professionals in the Adequate category can't extend their capabilities to be more respected and valued. 65%ers can absolutely achieve more than they thought they were capable of! If they put in the work, they can most certainly strengthen their influence with clients beyond current limits. What I am saying is that these outcomes usually don't result in crossing the threshold into the kind of influence that High Impact professionals enjoy. I haven't seen many Adequate practitioners move into and stay within the upper tier of influence unless they were on the cusp of doing so anyway. Without some evidence of at least periodically crossing over and displaying High Impact characteristics, the odds are against Adequate practitioners making the leap and consistently operating as successful trusted advisors.

I understand that this is an unpopular position to take; however, after more than 40 years of observing change facilitators in all three categories, I can draw no other conclusion. The unwelcomed truth is, once patterns of thought and behavior are well formed and frequently reinforced, it is difficult to break out of those orbits. While the Inept have a hard enough challenge to become Adequate, the chasm between Adequate and High Impact is even more difficult to bridge.

Exceptions to the Rule

But, haven't some practitioners beaten the odds?

Yes, and for this reason, I don't want to dissuade anyone from pursuing their dream of one day being a High Impact trusted advisor.

That said, it does our profession a disservice to pretend that desire and determination are all that is required to rise to the top of the influence ladder. I can want to win the lottery more than anyone else and even purchase more tickets than anyone, but my chances of winning are still incredibly slim. Granted, someone is going to win, and it might be me, but if I do, it won't be because of how badly I wanted to win or how hard I worked at it. I've simply gotten lucky.

When it comes to migrating from Adequate to High Impact, predisposition, not luck, is the answer. Practitioners who successfully transition were already on the upper end of the 65% range and thus already exhibiting tendencies toward 10% mindsets. Whether or not they were acting on their 10%er impulses, they had an instinct for seeing what should be said and done, and were frustrated when inhibited from moving forward as they believed they should. It is when

this frustration reaches a boiling point and the person can no longer contain themselves in the Adequate category that the possibility for a shift can occur.

The change facilitators I know who have recalibrated themselves from Adequate to High Impact have two things in common: a strong intuition for what is required, and an agonizing frustration with practicing their craft in the 65% range. When their exasperation at not being in alignment with their inclinations becomes too much to bear, they do whatever is necessary to bring forward their true nature. This might look like they are adding a new skillset to their portfolio of capabilities, but what they are actually doing is emancipating abilities that were already there.

Think of it this way: you don't "become" a High Impact trusted advisor—you stop inhibiting yourself from thinking and acting like one. You don't "develop" 10%er abilities that didn't exist before—you liberate what has been lying dormant.

The bottom line is that practitioners who aspire to operate at the High impact level need to recognize who they are and then fully embrace and leverage their inherent capabilities. Feigning what is not within you or thwarting what is—both actions result in squandering what you can and should accomplish. To join or remain in the ranks of the 10%, act authentically and with confidence in *who you are*...it's the only way to successfully live up to your true potential.