

CHAPTER ONE

THE SKINNY

We were standing outside Queen Elizabeth Conference Center in London in May 2009, after our 100th or so daylong workshop in the past year—this time with 200 school and district leaders from four local boroughs. Claudia Cuttress, my manager; Alan Boyle, our U.K. and Ireland agent; and I began to discuss life beyond the workshop. As we looked up at Big Ben and took in the Westminster aura, we talked about the limitations of conducting session after session, day after day. As successful as these workshops were in terms of participant ratings (usually 4.6 on a 5-point scale), the impact did not seem to add up (“You can’t workshop the world!”).

Books were fine at spreading the ideas at an awareness level, but how could we reach more people in a deeper fashion? Making a DVD did not seem to be the answer either—just another passive medium. We had flirted over the years with online production but were never satisfied with either the quality of video technology or the pedagogical design and depth. But now we knew that technology was no longer an issue—we used increasingly high-quality and sophisticated technology in our workshops.

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So we revisited the online question and within five minutes came up with the concept we wanted—*Motion Leadership*. It seemed like no one of us had the idea. It was as if we mouthed it simultaneously. What we were doing in our work was helping leaders “move” individuals, institutions, and whole systems forward. We knew a great deal about positive motion and how to deal with the frustrations of lack of movement. We then began to discuss the notion of how to build a series of movielike experiences that could be accessed online with dynamic footage and tools to help any leader move forward. We call this *Motion Leadership the Movie* (MLM)—a product that will be available in 2010. It is not a movie in the Hollywood sense, but rather uses motion, visuals, video streams, tools, instruments, and ideas to bring change alive and enable the participant to become immersed in action. We want to capture in a multisensory way what it means and what it feels like to “move” forward in a way that excites and motivates people.

What we have written here is not MLM but its precursor. It contains basic ideas and insights about change. We call it the *skinny* on

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change savvy. “What’s the *skinny* on change” perfectly fits what we want to convey. This is an expression that apparently arose in World War II when a leader demanded “the *skinny* naked truth.” Literally, *the skinny* is about the naked

unadorned facts—the core unobscured essence of the matter. The *skinny* on *Motion Leadership* change can be best expressed around eight elements: change problems, change itself, connecting peers with purpose, capacity building trumps judgmentalism, learning is the work, transparency rules, love, trust and resistance, and leadership for all.

How complex is bringing about positive change on a large scale? Damn so—judging from the history of failed attempts over the past half century. Getting at the skinny is to make change less complex and more powerful in its impact. Let's use the Food Channel as an example because we will be focusing along the way on Jamie Oliver. Being able to prepare good and great food consistently used to be extremely complex. If you went to the recipes of the great French chefs, you could get lost in the sauces by the time you got to step three (not to mention that you needed a whole day to do the preparation). Or anyone who has seen an Italian mama at work in the kitchen will marvel at the outcome—and at the fact that nothing seems to be written down. What the Food Network has done is to get to the skinny (no pun intended) of good cooking. These days, anyone—with a little persistent effort—can become a very good cook. The complex has become simple while the result has dramatically improved—a perfect recipe for powerful change.

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Jeff Kluger (2008) was getting at this phenomenon in his book *Simplicity: Why Simple Things Become Complex (and How Complex Things Can Be Made Simple)*. He shows, for example, how we pursue too many targets including many of the wrong ones, how we fail to come up with a clear sense of where to focus our efforts, how governments waste money on the wrong strategies, and so on (a warning though—you won't get the skinny on motion change in *Simplicity*).

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The skinny boils down and names the key insights that leaders need to know about understanding and working with change.

Reading this booklet will increase your knowledge and insight about change but not your skills and competencies. For the latter, you need also to learn about action ideas from other practitioners, apply them in your own situation, and debrief in order to keep

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on learning. MLM is designed so that people can build skills and competencies as they work with the insights. Our whole effort is not about discussing change but about getting into it. It is a “let’s

get going” proposition in which insights and strategies are going to have the appearance of simplicity while at the same time unleashing powerful and in many ways marvelously complex processes. The skinny takes the mystery out of complexity.

It is revealing to observe that our practical theory was not developed out of research and then applied. Indeed, the opposite is

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closer to the truth. We tried to bring about positive change in larger and larger settings—classrooms, schools, districts, whole states, provinces, and countries. We also

brought motion leadership to the big arena—how to make “all systems go,” in which system leaders cause positive motion of the whole system, achieving remarkable results (Fullan, 2010).

What we learned along the way has made the theories stronger and sharper. Stated another way, we moved from practice to theory with ever increasing refinement. In fact, my personal indicator of whether we are being successful is when scores of practitioners using the ideas come to internalize them in a way that they can articulate the theory of action better than the best

academics—something you will see in MLM as practitioners illustrate and talk about how they get positive motion.

Our team in one sense is very large. There is a small core of regulars, but also a larger set of people who mix and match on applied projects around the world. In addition to Claudia and Alan, Joanne Quinn and Eleanor Adam are master capacity-building designers and deliverers. Nancy Watson is a great critical decipherer, analyst, and writer. The “Saint,” Clif Saint Germain, is a deeply committed and skilled change agent on the ground. Bill Hogarth and Lyn Sharratt are able to lead the transformation of a very large urban school district. Peter Hill and Carmel Crévola are the best policy-practice duo anywhere. Carol Rolheiser, Professor Pedagogy Plus, is leading the improvement of teaching across the University of Toronto with over 50,000 students, faculty, and teaching assistants.

In the big policy and political picture there is Ben Levin, variously fabulous deputy minister and academic; leadership guru Ken Leithwood; Sir Michael Barber, the globe-trotting transformer of the systems; Tony Mackay, one of the world’s best facilitators (call him “Motion Mackay”); David Hopkins, equally skilled at mountain climbing and change agency; Andy Hargreaves, brother in arms, always incisive; and even a politician, premier Dalton McGuinty, the best education premier anywhere. And it is not just K–12 education. More recently, we have linked forces with Charles Pascal in Ontario on early learning and Geoff Scott in Australia on the small matter of turning around higher education.

What all of us have in common is the moral commitment and ongoing immersion in addressing real change problems, striving for positive impact. It is all large scale. Not a few schools here and there,

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but whole districts, whole states, whole countries. If it sounds exciting, it is. But it is also humbling. None of us for a moment think we can bring about change in the next situation without partnering with hordes of others—teaming up to work through the vicissitudes of each new culture. We go by Pfeffer and Sutton’s (2008) definition of wisdom, “the ability to act with knowledge while doubting what you know” (p. 174). You get smarter, but you are also more acutely aware of what you don’t know.

In *Motion Leadership*, we have also partnered with two entrepreneurial organizations who themselves have joined up for this purpose: Corwin and the School Improvement Network (SINet). It is a dream to work with Leigh Peake, the dynamic new president of Corwin; the streetwise editor Arnis Burvikovs; and Curtis Linton, the creative vice president of SINet—all committed to pushing

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the frontiers of online motion learning. Curtis trekked over to England on the spur of the moment to film our workshops in London and Derby in order to get a personal feel for the nature of the work and its possibilities.

When MLM is completed, it will feature named situations and people as they grapple with motion leadership. We will see change through their eyes as well as through the filter of what we know about how change does move successfully. Our goal with MLM—a movie supplemented with interactive tools and other supports—is to get people immersed in “real change,” their own and others’ change situations. The notion is to create an experience that is tantamount to watching and being in a movie at the same time.

In the meantime, the skinny is designed so that it can be read on its own. It is a stand-alone book. It gives the essentials about change knowledge, intending to be practically insightful. We hope that reading this short book will further your basic change knowledge in a way that helps you grapple with change situations right away. For those who wish to become more immersed, and to work on developing the knowledge, skills, and dispositions of becoming change savvy, MLM is intended to be a deeper experiential source of learning, led in many ways by practitioners.

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One more thing about the skinny: to master it is to accelerate the speed of quality change. Effective change cannot be accomplished overnight, but skinny change agents can accomplish quality implementation with high impact in remarkable short time frames—much shorter than we hitherto thought possible.

So, jump onboard. We are going to take you on a journey. No need to bring your trunks. We are going “skinny dipping.”