

PREFACE



Give me the skinny naked truth” was a phrase apparently uttered by a frustrated Colonel in World War II when he couldn’t get a straight answer from one of his men. Later it became “What’s the skinny?” It means give me the essence of something, the inside dope, not some convoluted or contrived explanation. You need the skinny when something is complex. The skinny is about rendering the complex actionable.

In 2009, when we were immersed in workshops around the world on how to lead change effectively, we realized that what we were trying to get at was just that—the skinny on becoming change savvy. That’s what we used as the subtitle of the 2010 book. The main title was *Motion Leadership*—a second powerful concept. It means what it says—what kind of leadership is going to cause positive movement forward in individuals, organizations, and systems. Put another way, how do you motivate the masses, including the gold standard of motivating the unmotivated (and having them thank you afterward)?

A third related concept I borrowed from Jeff Kluger, namely, *simplicity*. As I use it simplicity means that there are a small number of key things you need to know and be good at (the simple part) and then be able to create the chemistry and coherence with large numbers of people that make for effective outcomes (the complex part).

Since the 2010 book our work on leading change continues apace. As usual, I get the best insights from working with and

observing practitioners in action. Skinny insights by definition must be sticky, actionable, memorable, and gobsmacking. Such insights have a kind of “why didn’t I think of it” and “it seems so right” quality. They give you a blissful sense of clarity, only to be colored by the feeling that I almost have it but maybe not quite. When it comes to dynamic change, shifting conditions, and diverse evolving personalities, the truth is that one can never get settled clarity. The skinny is about working on your clarity and skills on an ongoing basis that gets you as close as humanly possible to leading change effectively. Skinny leaders maximize clarity of action in the face of complex situations while, as we shall see, never being totally sure that they got it right. But never mind, they are learners and get it right more times than not.

A few hundred change stories later, we have more insights on leading change, especially about changing whole systems. You have to be close to the action to pick up these instances of change savvy and to test them against other situations. So now we have *Motion Leadership in Action: More Skinny on Becoming Change Savvy*.

This book builds on work we have been doing in the past decade on “whole-system reform”—how to improve classrooms and schools on a systemwide basis. Over the course of this work I have identified four “wrong” and four “right” policy drivers. By drivers I mean policies and strategies that are supposed to cause wide-scale improvement. The four wrong ones (in the sense that they do not move the system forward) are punitive accountability, individualistic solutions, technology, and ad hoc policies. The corresponding right ones are capacity building, teamwork, pedagogy, and systemic policies. It is not that the wrong drivers have no role to play, but rather that they should not have a front-end dominant

role as they do in many jurisdictions, such as the United States. You might ask why a politician would consciously promote an ineffective policy. The short answer is that the policies in question appear to offer a quick fix, and they can be legislated.

By contrast the motion leaders that I feature in this book have mastered the use of right drivers. They all operate in complex environments that contain mixtures of ineffective and effective drivers. They are able to contend with the set, maximize the use of the more powerful drivers, and incorporate the merits of the wrong drivers to support movement in a positive direction. Thus we will be able to see up close how effective motion leaders work in difficult circumstances. The lessons to be learned are clear and substantial.

This book is an invitation and a journey to sharpen your own skinny skills. This is a diet that you are going to like. As we said the first time, no need to bring your trunks or swimming suits, we are going “skinny dipping” once more. Skinny dipping connotes thrill and risk in the service of doing something deeply worthwhile. Jump in!