**Essence of Proactive Life Series**

# Moving Forward in Your Organization and Community

# Herbert A. Shepard

**Management of Change
and Life and Career Planning
Practical Essays Edited by**

# Alain Paul Martin

**Fellow. Advanced Leadership
Harvard University**

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# Abstract

This second essay, in the "**Management of Change and Life and Career Planning"** series is an invaluable guide for leaders, professionals and all change makers. It offers eight principles based on the author's experience in working with decision-makers and coaching change agents. These principles range from avoiding self-sacrifice to building experiments for success. Other topics explored include retaining optimism, capturing the moment and recommending the ingredients for successful innovation.

Herbert Shepard's first essay titled "**Charting the Life of Your Choice"** is available from herbertShepard.org. It helps readers build a life worth living and addresses such profound questions as "Who am I?" and "Who should I be?"

It invites us to a candid self-examination which results in discovering those moments when we rejoice in life and find sources of fulfillment. The essay covers the three prerequisites for a deep gratification in life. When these prerequisites are in harmony we rejoice.

"**Charting the Life of Your Choice"** establishes a basis for living a meaningful life. It develops the awareness that we are responsible for the quality of our lives and that

living fully means investing thoroughly in the creation of our experience. This investment involves risk and joy, two subjects thoroughly discussed in the last section of the essay.

# About the Author
# Herbert Allen Shepard

HERB SHEPARD was a pioneering thinker in the Organization Development movement, an engaging teacher and mentor of exceptional depth, scope and humility with a gift for recognizing and nurturing the potential of others. His unselfishness, utter sincerity, compassion and unwavering commitment touched lives, forged lasting friendships and helped shape the careers of a generation of leaders and social scientists. He held faculty posts at several universities including M.I.T., where he received his doctorate in Industrial Economics. He founded and directed the first doctoral program in Organization Development at Case Western; developed a residency in administrative psychiatry at Yale University School of Medicine, and was also President of The Gestalt Institute of Cleveland.

Herb conducted the first large-scale experiments in Organization Development, while at Esso in the late fifties, and served as principal consultant to TRW Systems in its pioneering work in the application of behavioral science to organizations and teams. He has published widely in this field[1,2,3] and was chairman of the Douglas

Memorial Award Committee of the Journal of Applied Behavioral Science. His research and pragmatic work made a significant contribution to our understanding of human behavior and social systems from dyads (doctor-patient or consultant-client) to organizations (synergy, alternative dispute resolution, structure, building consensus and caring about the powerless). It opened the way for further developments in the psychology of teams, leadership and interpersonal compatibility; cognitive behavior therapy, social cognitive theory (educational psychology); choice theory; principled negotiation, positive psychology and organization development.

In management consulting, Herb's clients included Bell-Northern Research, Syncrude, Esso, TRW, Connecticut General Life Insurance Company, Union Carbide, USAID and most of the departments of the federal governments of the U.S.A. and Canada.

Herb advised clients of The Professional Development Institute and led executive seminars and workshops including "Managing in Turbulent Environment", since 1975. He accepted the honorary title of President Emeritus for the Professional Development Institute which he held from 1977 till his death August 2, 1985. With his death, we have lost not only a mentor, but a warm person whose friendship, authenticity and values have been precious to us and are felt all the more deeply now.

<div align="right">Alain Paul Martin</div>

Second Essay

# Moving Forward in Your Organization and Community

The following aphorisms are not so much bits of advice as things to think about when you are being a change agent, a consultant, an organization or community development specialist - or when you are just being yourself trying to bring about something that involves other people.

## RULE I: Stay alive.

This rule counsels against self-sacrifice on behalf of a cause that you do not wish to be your last.

Two exceptionally talented doctoral students came to the conclusion that the routines they had to go through to get their degrees were absurd, and decided they would be untrue to themselves to conform to an absurd system. That sort of reasoning is almost always self-destructive. Besides, their noble gesture in quitting would be unlikely to have any impact on the system they were taking a stand against.

This is not to say that one should never take a stand, or a survival risk. But such risks should be taken as part of a purposeful strategy of change, and appropriately timed and hedged. When they are taken under such circumstances, one is very much alive.

But Rule I is much more than a survival rule. The rule means that you should let your whole being be involved in the undertaking. Since most of us have never been in touch with our whole beings, it means a lot of putting together of parts that have been divided, of using internal communication channels that have been closed or were never opened.

Staying alive means loving yourself. Self-disparagement leads to the suppression of potentials, to a win-lose formulation of the world, and to wasting life in defensive maneuvering.

Staying alive means staying in touch with your purpose. It means using your skills, your emotions, your labels and positions, rather than being used by them. It means not being trapped in other people's games. It means turning yourself on and off, rather than being dependent on the situation. It means choosing with a view to the consequences as well as the impulse. It means going with the flow even while swimming against it. It means living in several worlds without being swallowed up in any. It means seeing dilemmas as opportunities for creativity. It means greeting absurdity with laughter while trying to unscramble it. It means capturing the moment in the light

of the future. It means seeing the environment through the eyes of your purpose.

## RULE II: Start where the system is.

This is such ancient wisdom that one might expect its meaning had been fully explored and apprehended. Yet, in practice the rule - and the system - are often violated.

The rule implies that one should begin by diagnosing the system. But systems do not necessarily like being diagnosed. Even the term diagnosis may be offensive. And the system may be even less ready for someone who calls himself or herself a change agent. It is easy for the practitioner to forget that the use of jargon that prevents laymen from understanding the professional mysteries is a hostile act.

Starting where the system is can be called the Empathy Rule. To communicate effectively, to obtain a basis for building sound strategy, you need to understand how clients see themselves and their situation, and you need to understand the culture of the system. Establishing the required rapport does not mean that the change agent who wants to work in a traditional industrial setting should refrain from growing a beard. It does mean that, if he has a beard, the beard is likely to determine where the client is when they first meet, and the client's curiosity needs to be dealt with. Similarly, the rule does not mean that a female

change agent in a male organization should try to act like one of the boys, or that a young change agent should try to act like a senior executive.

One thing it does mean is that sometimes where the client is, is wondering where the change agent is. Rarely is the client in anyone place at anyone time. That is, he/she may be ready to pursue any of several paths. The task is to walk together on the most promising path.

Even unwitting or accidental violations of the empathy rule can destroy the situation... Sometimes starting where the client is, which sounds both ethically and technically virtuous, can lead to some ethically puzzling situations. Robert Frost described a situation in which a consultant was so empathic with a king who was unfit to rule that the king discovered his own unfitness and had himself shot, whereupon the consultant became king.

Empathy permits the development of a mutual attachment between client and consultant. The resulting relationship may be one in which their creativities are joined, a mutual growth relationship. But it can also become one in which the client becomes dependent and is manipulated by the consultant. The ethical issues are not associated with starting where the system is, but with how one moves with it.

## RULE III: Never work uphill.

This is a comprehensive rule, and a number of other rules are corollaries or examples of it. It is an appeal for an organic rather than a mechanistic approach to change, for a collaborative approach to change, for building strength and building on strength. It has a number of implications that bear on the choices change agents make about how to use themselves, and it says something about life.

- **Corollary I: Don't build hills as you go.**

This corollary cautions against working in a way that builds resistance to movement in the direction you have chosen as desirable. For example, a program which has a favorable effect on one group may have the opposite effect on another…

- **Corollary 2: Work in the most promising arena.**

The physician-patient relationship is often regarded as analogous to the consultant-client relationship. The results for system change can be unfortunate. For example, the organization development consultant is likely to be greeted with delight by executives who see in his/her specialty the solution to a hopeless situation in an outlying plant. Some organization development consultants have disappeared for years because of the irresistibility of such challenges. Others have whiled away their time trying to counteract the Peter principle by shoring up incompetent managers.

- **Corollary 3: Build resources.**

Don't do anything alone that could be accomplished more easily or more certainly by a team. Don Quixote is not the only change agent whose effectiveness was handicapped by ignoring this rule. The change agent's task is a heroic one, but the need to be a hero does not facilitate team building. As a result, many change agents lose effectiveness by becoming spread too thin. Effectiveness can be enhanced by investing in the development of partners.

- **Corollary 4: Don't over-organize.**

The democratic ideology and theories of participative management that many change agents possess can sometimes interfere with common sense. Two years ago, I offered a course, to be taught by graduate students. The course was over subscribed. It seemed that a data-based process for deciding whom to admit would be desirable, and that participation of the graduate students in the decision would also be desirable. So I sought data from the candidates about themselves, and shared their responses with the graduate students. Then the graduate students and I held a series of meetings. Then the candidates were informed of the decision. In this way we wasted a great deal of time and everyone felt a little worse than if we had used a commonsense or arbitrary decision rule.

- **Corollary 5: Don't argue if you can't win.**

Win-lose strategies are to be avoided because they deepen conflict instead of resolving it. But change agents should build their support constituency as large and deep and strong as possible so that they can continue to risk.

- **Corollary 6: Play God a little.**

If the change agent doesn't make the critical value decisions, someone else will be happy to do so. Will a given situation contribute to your fulfillment? Are you creating a better world for yourself and others, or are you keeping a system in operation that should be allowed to die? For example, the public education system is a mess. Does that mean that the change agent is morally obligated to try to improve it, destroy it, or develop a substitute for it? No, not even if he or she knows how. But the change agent does need a value perspective for making choices like that.

## RULE IV: Innovation requires a good idea, initiative and a few friends.

Little can be accomplished alone, and the effects of social and cultural forces on individual perception are so distorting that the change agent needs a partner, if only to maintain' perspective and purpose.

The quality of the partner is as important as the quality of the idea. Like the change agent, partners must be relatively autonomous people. Persons who are authority-oriented - who need to rebel or to submit - are not reliable partners; the rebels take the wrong risks and the good soldiers don't take any. And rarely do they command the respect and trust from others that is needed if an innovation is to be supported. The partners need not be numerous. For example, the engineering staff of a chemical company designed a new process plant using state-of-the-art technology. The design departed radically from the experience of top management, and they were about to reject it. The engineering chief suggested that the design be reviewed by a distinguished engineering professor... who told the management that it was brilliantly conceived and executed. Thus the engineers not only implemented their innovation, but also grew in the esteem of their management.

An alternative statement of Rule IV is as follows: find the people who are ready and able to work, introduce them to one another, and work with them. Perhaps because many change agents have been trained in the helping professions, or because we have all been trained to think bureaucratically, concepts like organization position, representativeness or need are likely to guide the change agent's selection of those he or she works with. A more powerful beginning can sometimes be made by finding those persons in the system whose values are congruent with those of the change agent, who possess vitality and imagination, and who are eager to learn. Such people are

usually glad to have someone like the change agent join in getting something important accomplished, and a careful search is likely to turn up quite a few. In fact, there may be enough of them to accomplish a general system change, if they can team up in appropriate ways. In building such teamwork the change agent's abilities will be fully challenged, as he/she joins them in establishing conditions for trust and creativity, dealing with their anxieties about being seen as subversive, enhancing their leadership, consulting, problem-solving, diagnosing and innovating skills, and developing appropriate group norms and policies.

## RULE V: Load experiments for success.

This sounds like counsel to avoid risk taking. But the decision to experiment always entails risk. After that decision has been made, take all precautions.

The rule also sounds scientifically immoral. But whether an experiment produces the expected results depends upon the experimenter's depth of insight into the conditions and processes involved. Of course, what is experimental is what is new to the system; it may or may not be new to the change agent.

Use the Hawthorne effect. Even poorly conceived experiments are often made to succeed when the participants feel ownership. And conversely, one of the

obstacles to the spread of useful innovations is that the groups to which they are offered do not feel ownership of them.

For example, if you hope to use experience-based learning as part of your strategy, the first persons to be invited should be those who consistently turn all their experiences into constructive learning. Similarly, in introducing team development processes into a system, begin with the best functioning team.

Maintain voluntarism. This is not easy to do in systems where invitations are understood to be commands, but nothing vital can be built on such motives as duty, obedience, security-seeking or responsiveness to social pressure.

### RULE VI: Light many fires.

Not only does a large, monolithic development or change program have high visibility and other qualities of a good target, it also tends to prevent subsystems from feeling ownership of, and consequent commitment to the program.

The meaning of this rule is more orderly than the random prescription - light many fires - suggests. Any part of a system is the way it is partly because of the way the rest of the system is. To work towards change in one subsystem is to become one more determinant of its

performance. Not only are you working uphill, but as soon as you turn your back, other forces in the system will press the subsystem back towards its previous performance mode.

If many interdependent subsystems are catalyzed, and the change agent brings them together to facilitate one another's efforts, the entire system can begin to move.

Understanding patterns of interdependency among subsystems can lead to a strategy of fire-setting. For example, in public school systems it requires collaboration among politicians, administrators, teachers, parents and students to bring about significant innovation, and active opposition on the part of only one of these groups to prevent it. In parochial school systems, on the other hand, collaboration between the administration and the church can provide a powerful impetus for change in the other groups.

**RULE VII: Keep an optimistic bias.**

Our society grinds along with much polarization and cruelty, and even the helping professions compose their world of grim problems to be worked through. The change agent is usually flooded with the destructive aspects of the situations he/she enters. People in most systems are impressed by one another's weaknesses, and stereotype each other with such incompetency as they can discover.

This rule does not advise ignoring destructive forces. But its positive prescription is that the change agent be especially alert to the constructive forces which are often masked and suppressed in a problem-oriented, envious culture.

People have as great an innate capacity for joy as for resentment, but resentment causes them to overlook opportunities for joy. In a workshop for married couples, a husband and wife were discussing their sexual problem and how hard they were working to solve it. They were not making much progress, since they didn't realize that sex is not a problem but an opportunity.

Individuals and groups locked in destructive kinds of conflict focus on their differences. The change agent's job is to help them discover and build on their commonalities, so that they will have a foundation of respect and trust which will permit them to use their differences as a source of creativity. The unhappy partners focus on past hurts, and continue to destroy the present and future with them. The change agent's job is to help them change the present so that they will have a new past on which to create a better future.

## RULE VIII: Capture the moment.

A good sense of relevance and timing is often treated as though it were a gift or intuition rather than something that can be learned, something spontaneous rather than something planned. The opposite is nearer the truth. One is more likely to capture the moment when everything one has learned is readily available.

Perhaps it's our training in linear cause-and-effect thinking and the neglect of our capacities for imagery that makes us so often unable to see the multiple potential of the moment. Entering the situation blank is not the answer. One needs to have as many frameworks for seeing and as many strategies for acting as possible. But it's not enough to involve only one's head in the situation; one's heart has to get involved too. Cornelia Skinner once said that the first law of the stage is to love your audience. You can love your audience only if you love yourself. If you have relatively full access to your organized experience, to yourself and to the situation, you will capture the moment more often.

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