



Make It Happen

Turning Good
Ideas Into
Great Results
PETER SHEAHAN

So you have a great idea. Now what?

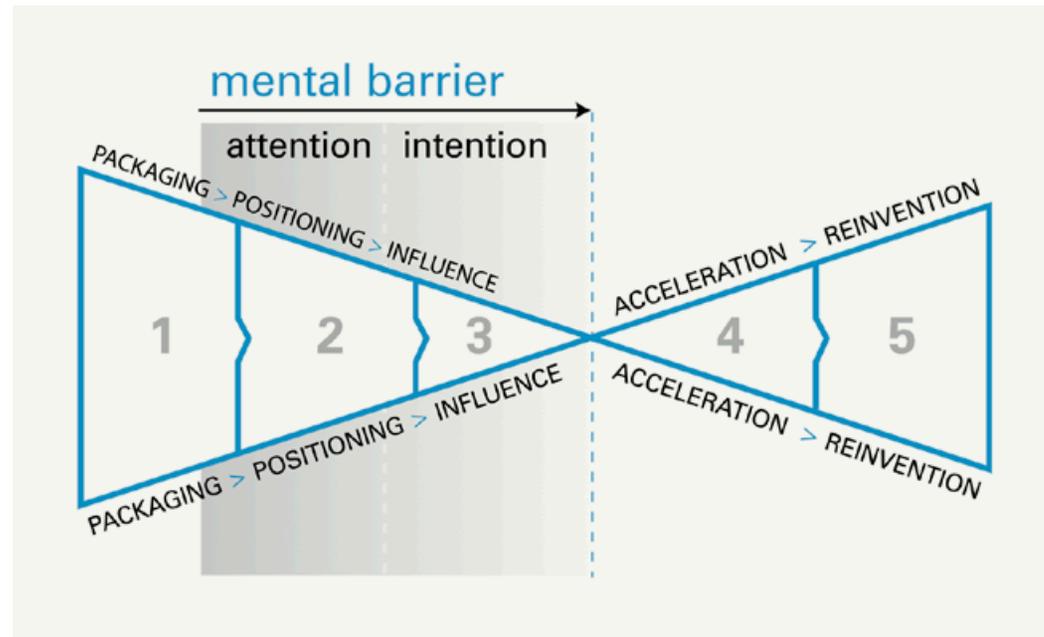
The world is not short of ideas. It's not. It is short of people who can execute them. It is short of people who know how to take their aspirations and make a real impact on the world with them.

What differentiates the great ideas that end up on the cutting room floor from those that wind up changing the world? There are five steps, or rather five competencies you can build that separate the haves from the have-nots, the doers from the talkers:

- **Packaging:** Taking your idea and transforming it into something you can sell, something you can offer to the marketplace.
- **Positioning:** Aligning your offer to a market need, even if you have to move the market.
- **Influence:** Convincing the buyer that he or she needs it from you, then persuading them to part with precious time, money and energy.
- **Acceleration:** Getting the most out of the opportunity you have created and increasing the demand for what you have to offer.
- **Reinvention:** Taking your brand and expertise and opening up entirely new opportunities.

They are not a mantra for meditation, they are not positive affirmations that you chant to yourself in the mirror, they are actions.

You do them in the sequence laid out in the master diagram.



Though there is much to say about each step, let's focus for the moment on the one that will take you to the right side of the mental barrier: **Influence**. This is what it takes to close the deal: the ability to mobilize people is the key. Put simply, Influence is about what it takes to convince the buyer that he or she needs to get whatever “it” is from you.

Your primary goal as the seller is to make it as easy as possible for the most buyers to justify their purchase to themselves and to their bosses. To do that well is to speak “the code”—the language and descriptors of your product or service that makes it easy for the buyer to justify buying your stuff. Understanding your clients’ code and packaging your proposition in a manner that appeals to their code is vital: do this right, and you can remove many of the hurdles of the selling process.

“Coaching” versus “Counseling”

I used to have a great client who was one of the most senior executives at what is one of the biggest professional-service firms in the world. He had traveled the world, made plenty of money and in my opinion was about as nice and as centered a man as I'd ever met. In some ways, I aspired to be like him.

And then, out of nowhere, he was gone. Six months passed without hearing a word from him, until one day he called me out of the blue. It turns out that he had experienced something like a breakdown; he was so unhappy and unfulfilled in his work that it had almost destroyed him. He then informed me that in response to what he had been through he was starting a new business working with executives who had dealt with these same issues. He had done some preliminary research that indicated that more than half of all senior managers exhibit some signs of depression. He was emphatic that his anecdotal experience—and he had plenty—supported this notion.

I asked, “Surely something would have to be done about this, if it is as widespread as you say?” He responded, “Something *is* being done about it. It is called executive coaching.” Note that it's not called counseling. Coaching is a much more positive term and has been one of the fastest-growing professional services for executives over the last few decades. Thousands of new businesses have sprung up, and surveys abound suggesting that more than three-quarters of all executives have had some form of mentoring and coaching.

Why “coaching” and not “counseling?” The answer is that it is quite simply not appropriate, or should I say not acceptable, to admit your flaws in the cutthroat world of business and government. Saying “I am depressed” could be a career-limiting move. And that is why we never book “counseling” for our people; we always book “coaching.” It is also why book titles are generally positive. It is called the train test. If someone was to see you reading your book on a train, would you be tempted to cover it with a brown paper bag?

So, if you are selling counseling to businesses, as my friend wanted to, you certainly would not call it that. You would call it executive coaching. Consider these other examples: Instead of teaching new graduates to *manage-up*, we teach them *reputation management*. Instead of telling people they are dreadful and that we want them to leave, we put them through *performance management*. Behind closed doors, we say we are performance managing them out of the business. We don't talk about *weaknesses*, we talk about *areas for improvement*. These are all instances of coded language.

Every market has its own very specific code, and if we are to be successful, it is imperative that we understand it and speak it fluently. That says to the potential buyer that you have taken the time to understand their business or organization, and it says that you're on their wavelength. That seems like a small sacrifice to make. If you are going to ask people to exchange something they value with you, the very least you can do is make an effort to understand their world.

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Let me share two more examples with you, one from the business world and one from the world of charitable donations to drive the point home.

“Diet” versus “Zero”

What is the difference between Coke Zero and Diet Coke? Or between Pepsi Max and Diet Pepsi? As it turns out, not a lot. It is simply in the sweetener that is used to replace the sugar in the regular versions of the mother brands.

So why the two different products that are so similar? Different buyers, that's why! Men don't drink diet products; women do. Pepsi Max, and all its advertising around extreme sports, is an attempt to attract more health-conscious men who would not want to be seen drinking diet anything. You see, with the health trend that has helped catapult companies such as Subway and 24-Hour Fitness to massive success and spawned more dietary-supplements companies than people in China, men were becoming as health conscious as women. However, drinking diet products was not seen as socially acceptable for men. Put differently, the “diet” proposition threatened men's personal identity and their drive to bond.

The success of Coke Zero is evidence of how powerful knowing the code and the drives of the buyer can be. Coke Zero was Coca-Cola's biggest product launch in 22 years. Due to the attempt to attract young males, the edginess of the various campaigns attracted a certain amount of criticism, but this boldness only further cemented the relevance of the Coke Zero brand in the minds of the male market it was seeking. And the evidence is in the result. There were 350 sparkling-soda-product launches between 2001 and 2008, and only six have managed to get a market share of above one per cent. Coke Zero is one of them—all because of code. Sure money helps, but New Coke had plenty of money behind it and look how that turned out.

The Psychology of Charity—Making a Difference

One of the major trends I have seen in my life is that of getting behind much more narrow causes and charities as opposed to simply giving to your church or supporting the Salvation Army or the Red Cross. The competition for donor money is fierce, and charities employ some very powerful tools of influence to get people to buy. One of these is most certainly code. The offering of a charity is heavily coded in order to find the intersection between its offering and what the donor is really looking for. Remember here that what the donor is looking for and what the donor says he or she is looking for might be very different things.

The psychology of charity has been discussed at great length in other places. At the risk of oversimplifying, there are three reasonable explanations for why people donate to charity:

- They are just good people who are committed to making a difference.
- They want to make themselves feel that they are making a difference in order to assuage their guilt so they can sleep at night.
- They want to show the rest of the world how good and generous they are.

Those last two points may seem a little cynical at first, and you are free to believe that everyone donates because it is the right thing to do. However, you may be interested to know that the act of giving stimulates the same part of the brain that responds to food and sex. In an experiment at the National Institutes of Health, the participants were given a sum of money and the choice to either donate it to a charity or keep it for themselves. When the participant chose an act of generosity and gave the money to a charity, it stimulated the primitive part of the brain that is hard-wired to pleasure.

In other words, acts of kindness may be no more than the basic human disposition to do things that are pleasurable. Better than sex, drugs and rock 'n' roll, wouldn't you say? Well, maybe not all the time.

Consider World Vision and the heart-wrenching ads it runs about starving children in the Third World. It doesn't run ads that say you should feel ashamed at the abundance you have and give more money. It runs ads that talk about the plight of children, uses high-impact imagery and make simple comparisons such as "for \$1 a day you could save a child from starvation." This does make you feel a little guilty about your abundance, but without ever saying it explicitly. And it makes you feel some compassion as your mirror neurons are firing in empathy for the plight of these children. Then, whether it is your guilt or your humanity or even your desire for a greater sense of personal well-being, you will call the number and sponsor a child.

It's a little bit of an odd twist, isn't it? World Vision needs to make you realize that giving the money will make you feel good and at the same time suppress the drive to defend what makes you want to keep the money in fear that you will lose your status and wealth if you don't protect your finances.

If you are going to ask people to exchange something they value with you, the very least you can do is make an effort to understand their world.

The code in charity—the publicly tolerable and acceptable offering—is that you are making a difference. So charities position themselves publicly as making a difference. They position the problem they are solving for the child instead of the problem they are solving for the buyer, knowing full well that this will make you very aware of the need you have to feel better, to do the right thing and to help humanity.

Where I believe they get really smart is in showing you specifically what your donation will buy. I have even seen advertisements that show you three levels of donation. Ten dollars will buy schoolbooks for a year; twenty dollars will feed them for a week; and a hundred dollars will give them clean water for a year. How could you not give the hundred dollars, right?

So, do your homework. Read as many industry publications as you can and brush up on your code.

If you do, you'll be a long way toward making it happen. 📖



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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

As founder and CEO of [ChangeLabs™](#), a global consultancy delivering large-scale behavioral change projects for clients such as Apple and IBM, Peter Sheahan has worked with some of the world's leading brands in the area of innovation and change. With operations in 3 countries and 9 cities, Peter knows first-hand the pressures of growing and leading a business in the rapidly changing world. The author of 6 books, including international bestsellers *Flip* and *Generation Y*, Peter focuses on teaching leaders and companies how to flip their thinking, make money in the cracks and find opportunity where others cannot. His newest book *Making It Happen* unpacks his insights on how the best leaders and entrepreneurs execute on their good ideas, and turn them into profitable results.

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