

THINK IT, SEE IT, DO IT

SEEING RED CARS

Driving Yourself, Your Team, and Your
Organization to a Positive Future

LAURA GOODRICH

An Excerpt From

*Seeing Red Cars:
Driving Yourself, Your Team, and Your Organization to a Positive
Future*

by Laura Goodrich

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Preface

A Note to Plan Ahead: If you plan to read this book while traveling, please *download the Seeing Red Cars Toolkit PDF before you leave* from www.seeingredcarsbook.com so you'll be prepared to complete the Red Cars exercises as you go.

Seeing Red Cars is a metaphor for focusing on what you want. It acts as a visual trigger to remind you of the positive outcomes you are striving for and, when you stray off the track, to jog your memory back into the present and refocus on what you want personally and professionally. This book is based on more than 15 years of lessons learned from working with people, teams, and organizations that struggled as they were living and working in times of dynamic change. To help these and other companies better deal with the challenges, my partner Greg Stiever and I produced the powerful film *Seeing Red Cars* that already, at the time I am writing, is being used by more than 500 trainers, coaches, and consultants worldwide as part of their existing training curriculums or to establish employees' positive focus and engagement when they are launching important change initiatives. This book digs deeper into the *Seeing Red Cars* positive outcomes mind-set and guides you in making intentional changes that will have an impact on your life.

Breaking the Pattern of Focusing on “I Don’t Wants”

My name is Laura Goodrich, and I love working with individuals, teams, and organizations to create cultures grounded in effective workplace dynamics. Many of the companies I have worked with were undergoing significant change, and I loved helping people get past the reactionary phase and ultimately begin seeing themselves as part of the solution. I loved helping employees craft the go-forward direction and establish the strategy to support it.

Through these experiences and through the process of training and coaching hundreds of executives and other people around the world, I witnessed a phenomenon that played itself out repeatedly: People’s natural inclination is to focus on what they do *not* want to have happen, not on what they *do* want to have happen. It happened so often that I started recognizing the pattern. When I asked people what they want, without hesitation they would say, “What I don’t want is this: I don’t want people to be gone that day, I don’t want to be stood up at meetings, I don’t want to waste my time.” Even after I repeatedly pointed out that their statements began with “I don’t want” and I specifically asked them to rephrase their statements as “I wants,” they quickly returned to expressing what they didn’t want or what they were trying to avoid.

When people intentionally change their focus to what they *do* want, phenomenal events start happening in their business and personal lives. And when a group of employees or an entire team or organization gets on board and focuses on what they *do* want, positive outcomes replicate, and achieving corporate objectives becomes even more possible.

What puzzled me for some time was how to cause that shift from focusing on what you don’t want and are trying to avoid to a positive mind-set. I longed to help people understand how to:

1. Resist the natural inclination to focus on negative thoughts, concerns, and fears.

2. Create a sense of awareness around their individual interests, passions, strengths, and values.
3. Make the connection between their personal and professional “I wants” and those of their team and organization to create individual and collective positive outcomes.

I had seen what can happen when people choose to concentrate on positive outcomes and ultimately succeed in influencing the collective goals and objectives of teams and organizations.

While I was pondering this question, my business partner, Greg Stiever, was telling wonderful and emotional stories through his video camera. When we met, Greg had 25 years of experience as a digital storyteller and Emmy Award–winning producer. I had spent my life in front of the camera, and Greg was the pro behind the camera. When we began collaborating in 2007 and formed On Impact, we discovered how to blend our talents in a powerful way by using digital storytelling to help companies and organizations influence positive change. The first result of our collaboration is the *Seeing Red Cars* metaphor with support materials, a film, and now a book with a toolkit of activities that turn insight into action and action into outcomes. We are excited to offer this book to help individuals, teams, and organizations grasp these concepts and put them to work toward their own personal and professional successes.

The tremendous response to the *Seeing Red Cars* film was the impetus for writing this book. On www.seeingredcarsbook.com are the Red Cars Toolkit and a variety of additional supplemental Red Cars items and activities to build individual understanding and clarity and to engage people at all levels. They can be used to develop a long-term program to drive your organization’s positive change. They contribute to the effort to extend the experience and keep Red Cars in focus for meaningful change to occur.

Who *Seeing Red Cars* Is For

Individuals, teams, and organizations seeking to improve their personal and professional lives and to take actions to put their passions, interests, strengths, and values to work will benefit from reading this book. We'll describe step-by-step how people can pinpoint their greatest strengths and values and align them with the right organizational vision, mission, and values. Sometimes that will be with their current employer, and sometimes not. The most important factor is to be courageous enough to ask the right questions, talk to the right people, and figure out for yourself what environment is best for you.

Many have advanced the cause of focusing on your goals. *Seeing Red Cars* takes this cause from the personal perspective, "It starts with you," and makes frequent and meaningful tie-ins to corporate America through the wonderful use of stories—real-life stories (some with made-up names to protect the identities of former clients) that help you visualize and internalize the messages and meanings. Many of the stories are also available as short videos and audios on www.seeingredcarsbook.com so you can incorporate them into your company's programs.

Where the Journey Will Take You

We start by introducing the concept of focusing on what you want and the difference it can make when you choose this positive outcomes mind-set. Chapter 1, "Why We Focus on What We Don't Want," discusses how the brain works and why this unconscious natural tendency is so ghastly hard to change. Chapter 2, "Rewire Your Brain for Better Outcomes," introduces strategies you can use to literally rewire your brain and create better outcomes. "Play to Your Strengths and Control What You Can," Chapter 3, helps you identify your top passions or interests and personal strengths

and stresses the importance of focusing on what you *can* control. Chapter 4, “Tune in and Take Charge,” addresses how to be keenly aware of and curious about marketplace dynamics and trends so you can steer your thoughts, actions, and learning. In “Craft Personal ‘I Wants’” and “Craft Professional ‘I Wants,’” Chapters 5 and 6, you’ll roll up your sleeves and complete the Red Cars Toolkit to clarify your personal and professional “I wants.” In Chapter 7, “Turn Actions into Outcomes,” you’ll create an action traction plan to record and track action steps so you will *stick with it* for the long haul. The final chapter, “Drive Red Cars to Critical Mass,” tells the culminating story of an organization that built a culture of people focused on their wants and the marked difference it has made to the company’s success.

How to Use This Book

Follow the process described in this book if you truly want to build a positive future for yourself and a *Seeing Red Cars* culture in your team and organization. If your company is reeling from the economic downturn and you want to forge a path back to prosperity, you as an individual, your team, and your organization must embrace a positive outcomes mind-set. *Seeing Red Cars* is a powerful metaphor with supporting materials, videos, and activities around which you can build impactful and sustaining change. Start by reading the book yourself, completing the Red Cars activities, and plotting your own course. Then spread the word to others and encourage them to do the same. Thoughtful planning and actions toward your individual and collective “I wants” and driving with intention and your high beams on will position you, your team, and your organization for achieving success.

A note to leaders: This book offers a powerful toolkit and methodology to influence positive outcomes in your organization. Change is the new norm, and innovations are accelerating. The

companies that ultimately survive and thrive will enable their employees to focus on their passions, interests, strengths, and values and to align these with the vision and values of the company. The *Seeing Red Cars* mind-set can guide employees in the development of personal and professional “I wants” that are recorded as monthly, weekly, and daily actions. When an entire organization of individuals is *Seeing Red Cars* and finally hits critical mass with this positive outcomes mind-set, great things happen.

Prepare for an awesome trip.

Why We Focus on What We Don't Want

When I introduce the concept of *Seeing Red Cars*, people immediately understand it from two perspectives.

1. They understand that it's really important to focus on what we want because the more we focus on and take action toward what we want, the more we're going to get back. They understand that intuitively. They understand that logically.
2. When it's brought to their attention, they also understand the natural inclination to focus on what we don't want. I can explain this concept to an 8-year-old or an 80-year-old, and everyone understands it. They recognize that if you're going to play a game, you're going to focus on winning that game. They recognize that race car drivers focus on the track, not on the walls they're trying to avoid.

There are two predominant reasons why it is so ghastly hard to change behaviors:

1. It is estimated that we have 12,000 to 50,000 thoughts coursing through our brains each day, and 70% of them are focused on what we don't want and what we'd like to avoid.
2. When people encounter important new information, there are three typical reactions: 20% are very open and excited

about it, 50% are cautious and not forthcoming with their support, and 30% are openly opposed.

Insights from Brain Research

As I've been working with corporations on workforce behaviors and dealing with change, my desire grew to understand why we focus on what we don't want. I am a thought leader in workplace dynamics, change, and the future of work. I am not a neuroscientist. Therefore, I sought answers from the scientific community.

Over the years, I have been fortunate to collaborate with a number of people who have dedicated their careers to brain research. I'll share enough about what I've learned about the brain to provide understanding and awareness, without causing overload, because the brain is a very, very complex entity. We still have so much to learn about the quadrillions of synapses that occur in the brain. (A synapse is a gap between two nerve cells. Neurons are cells that pass signals to individual target cells, and synapses are the means by which they do so.)

Ellen Weber is CEO of the MITA Brain Institute. Brain research is her business. Specifically, she translates brain research into human behavior, in particular, human behavior within organizations. When I asked Dr. Weber what causes us to focus on what we don't want, she explained that it is a combination of social conditioning and life experiences. We develop a fear-based response that begins with our unique genes and is socially conditioned within our families. Well-intentioned parents say things to their kids like "Don't run!" "Don't get hurt!" and "Don't act out!" Their good intentions are to protect their children, but in reality, they create a fear-based reaction. Sometimes it's real; sometimes it's perceived. For instance, you might come from a family that has a tendency to worry or that has a kind of victim mentality (always thinking someone is "after them").

Our genetic makeup partially determines our reactions, and families are the first place that social conditioning begins. Influence continues with our schools and includes the people we hang around with, the work we do, and the environment with which we surround ourselves. In a recent presentation, I discussed social conditioning and family influence. Afterward, a mother told me, “You spoke to me today. Before I left home this morning I said to my son David, ‘Don’t act out. Don’t overreact.’ Now that you bring this up, it makes perfect sense that I should give him direction he can actually act on in a positive way. It would have been better to say, ‘Have good listening ears today and remember to pay attention to your teacher’s directions. Try standing by Joey. He makes good decisions.’” I told her that she’s right and can take it one step further by coaching David to focus on what he wants. She could say, “David, how would you like gym class to go today? What will you need to do for that to happen?” She can ask David questions that prompt him to think of specific things he can do. “Which classmates are doing well in the class and could help you do these things?” I told her she might think that David is too young to respond positively to coaching like this, but no matter what their age, kids are capable of focusing on what they want, and the sooner you help them pave pathways toward what they want, the better. This is perhaps the most compelling reason to adopt the *Seeing Red Cars* mind-set and teach it to your kids. It’s one of the best ways to help our children accomplish what they want.

Early social conditioning is what starts to create a sense of fear or concern with things like the unknown, failure, loss of social stature, and new and different things. Coaching children early on, like the example of David, steers social conditioning toward positive rather than negative outcomes.

Another reason we focus on what we don’t want is that we do not think we are capable or deserving. Again, this comes from social conditioning. If you come from a background of humble means, you and your family members may think, “People like us

don't get a PhD." This can be a powerful mental block that prevents you from even trying. Robert Fritz, an expert in developing creative capacities, says that two common beliefs get in the way of accomplishing what we want. Number one is the common belief in our powerlessness, our inability to bring into being all the things we really care about. Number two is unworthiness, that we do not deserve to have what we truly desire. Self-talk like this causes inaction and reverting to autopilot. The key to overcoming this threat is awareness. With self-realization that negative social conditioning can get in the way, you can turn on your relentless intention to root out the ways your thoughts are limiting or deceiving you. Challenge those thoughts and forge new pathways of thinking and taking actions toward your wants.

In *The Fifth Discipline*, Peter Senge discusses the powerful tension between where you are now and what you want by using an illustration with rubber bands to symbolize the tension. Picture yourself in the middle, facing right. Behind you, on the left, is a pole, and in front of you, on the right, is a large hand. You're in the middle with two rubber bands around your waist—one rubber band stretched around your waist and the pole on the left and the other rubber band stretched around your waist and the hand on the right. Both rubber bands are taut.

Opposite forces exist at all times when you are not content with the way things are today and you have specific "I wants" you are striving for. These forces act like rubber bands pulling you in opposite directions. The key is to acknowledge these forces and to plan and take purposeful actions so that you remain in control. Inaction pulls you toward the "I don't want" mind-set, on the left side, while intentional actions pull you toward the positive outcomes you want, on the right.

Another factor is real-life experiences. For instance, if you've had a car accident, it is only natural to focus on what you don't want: another car accident. This is especially true if you have a natural proclivity toward introspection. Years ago, my friend

accidentally fell into the music pit at a concert and broke her leg. It's only natural that she does not want to fall into a music pit again. Even though the possibility of this ever happening again is remote, her eyes are wide open to situations in which she could reinjure herself.

Fear and Concern Trigger Negative Emotional Reactions

The brain plays a major role in the tendency to focus on what we don't want. In our brains, the amygdala controls the automatic responses associated with fear and concern. Think of it as the brain's place to store all our reactions to good and bad situations over a lifetime. It's the seat of our emotional responses. When we encounter something that we're afraid of or concerned about, the amygdala is good. As Dr. Weber says, "Panic reactions stored in the amygdala can cause us to get off the road when a Mack truck is barreling around the corner." That is good. That is helpful. Without the amygdala's familiar and learned reactions, we might show up to a meeting without clothes, if at all. This, too, is helpful. The trouble is that, due to our genetics, social conditioning, and life experiences, the amygdala has a difficult time distinguishing the difference between the threat of being hit by a Mack truck, the anxiety of asking for a raise, and the emotion of a challenging conversation. You may not be paralyzed with fear, but the brain is reacting very similarly. Whenever the amygdala reacts with fear or anxiety, it causes the release of harmful chemicals such as cortisol. The chemical reaction from cortisol has some limited redeeming qualities, but the first and last items on the list are certainly not desirable: high blood pressure and belly fat. If those reasons aren't enough to avoid it, here are some others: inability to focus, lack of creativity, and lack of innovation and resourcefulness. Fortunately, we can detour around the amygdala's negative reactions by storing reactions that lead us to more delightful goals, so that our brain doesn't land in the "I'm freaked" zone.

The amygdala creates a damaging pattern of reactions, which we can avoid. We can guide the amygdala to work in our favor by storing responses we'd like others to see in us—and we in ourselves—so that these responses emerge when we need them most. It is not easy, given our social conditioning and life experiences, but with the right intention and discipline, we can react well to tough situations and thereby alter our brain's chemical and electrical circuitry to move us toward what we want in any given situation. This is important: Take it one small step at a time. When you attempt too big a change, you trigger fear and avoidance. Take small, steady, incremental steps.

Creating New Roads Triggers Positive Responses

Instead of cortisol, you can choose to rewrite the typical responses stored in the amygdala to produce an opposite chemical reaction and release serotonin, which lends itself to creativity, innovation, and focus. It's why some people are just a lot more fun to be around. These are the people others like to work with and who are often asked to be part of projects. They have a natural tendency to come up with important solutions and responses to challenges.

Many wonderful benefits await people who act on what recent research suggests: Axons and dendrites can regenerate, regardless of your age, through the process of neuroplasticity, which means fresh rewiring. It is the secret to change and the answer to how we can reroute our brain's natural inclination to focus on what we don't want. We can grow, regenerate, and pave new neuron pathways toward our goals.

Neuroplasticity is defined as the brain's natural ability to form new connections to compensate for injury or environmental changes. A neuron is a nerve cell. Our brains have 100 billion of them, and you can march yours in your favor with carefully crafted activity. Neurons have extensions that are called dendrite brain cells. These extensions connect and reconnect. Axons, in contrast,

relay information from the body back to the brain. In a complex electrochemical process, neurons communicate with each other in synapse, and the connection creates chemicals called neural transmitters. Each synapse begins creating a neural pathway.

The brain cells you obliterated in college or at the New Year's bash are gone for good, but luckily our brains can rebuild cells, strengthen remaining cells, and build new connections that compensate for those lost each day. Brains use the outside world to shape and reshape themselves physically and mentally. This means we can alter bad habits and add new approaches, such as focusing on what we want and aligning our thoughts, actions, and behaviors toward desired outcomes. It's like building a new road for your neurons and then acting on the desired changes. Your brain restructures to facilitate the process.

The reason it is hard to form those new pathways is that we have those estimated 12,000 to 50,000 thoughts coursing through our brains each day, and 70% of them are focused on what we don't want and what we'd like to avoid. Since a large percentage of our thoughts, actions, and behaviors are repetitive, inadvertently we create deep neural ruts that are hard to get out of and hard to change. It reminds me of driving on long stretches of freeway in South Dakota in the winter. The accumulation of ice on the well-traveled roadways creates deep ruts. It's much easier to let the tires roll in those ruts than to try to get out of them.

Awareness, Expectation, and Intention Drive Positive Outcomes

When you're consciously aware and you act on what you want to have happen, your brain responds by creating a road in. Change comes to the human brain with intention and consciously repetitive, step-by-step action toward future change. Whichever direction our prominent thoughts lean—either positively or negatively—our brains produce chemical reactions that attract more of those outcomes. The following story illustrates this reality.

I put myself through college working in a medical clinic. Carol and Rebecca worked at the front desk. They were similar in many ways: cheerful, helpful, and committed to doing the job well. As similar as they were, their daily experiences could not have been more different.

Rebecca seemed to attract the disgruntled patient. Scarcely a day went by when she didn't get berated and publicly challenged by a frustrated patient. Carol, on the other hand, rarely had such an encounter. When she did, she was able to turn the tide quickly. I often imagined their dinner conversations—Rebecca lamenting the crabby, mean-spirited patients and stressful work environment, and Carol commenting about the current trends of the flu.

What differentiated their experiences? Largely, expectation, a state of mind! Carol expected a fluid day at the clinic, and it often was. Before things got off track, Carol's expectations for the day would propel her into action. She'd quickly smooth slightly ruffled feathers before things got totally disheveled. She'd extend a confident smile and self-assured demeanor that left people feeling secure that they were in good hands.

Rebecca, on the other hand, focused on what she didn't want and got more of it. She didn't want to be yelled at, and she got yelled at. She didn't want charts to get misplaced, and they often did, especially charts of regular patients we knew had short fuses. Rebecca was focused on what she didn't want. For that reason, anticipating situations before they happened wasn't even on Rebecca's radar. She reacted in the moment; she reacted with fear. Often you could see her posture anticipating the blow before a word was uttered.

Larry Dressler, author of *Standing in the Fire*, says that in these moments of high heat, two kinds of energies ignite within us. One is the energy of reactivity and defensiveness, and the other is the energy of calm and deliberate choice.

Carol operated with calm and deliberate choice. She took pride in her ability to sense the wants and needs of the patients. I remember looking out into a filled waiting room with her. She gave a swift and accurate assessment of the emotional energy of the room with specific insight as to the patients' emotional and medical needs. Carol and Rebecca encountered the same tense situations every day. The difference was that Rebecca mentally set herself up for negative outcomes, and Carol poised herself for positive outcomes. You get more of whatever you focus on.

Now that you have awareness, you, too, can choose to be like Carol. Being clear about what you want affects others and allows you to anticipate situations and take appropriate action to ultimately get what you want.

A few years back, I was working with an executive who was really stuck in a negative pattern of thinking and behaving. It took three months of hard work, reminders, and reinforcement for him to get out of the ruts and create more productive neural pathways. It was not easy, but he would confirm that it was well worth it. The improvements in morale, productivity, and results were reasons enough, but he also experienced improvement in his personal relationships, especially with his kids. He says this is perhaps the most compelling reason to choose to make the change. Note the pivotal word here: "Choose." But choice does not equate to easy.

Why Is It So Hard?

Many internal factors can usurp our ability to maintain focus on what we want. And while these challenges are all going on inside, many outside factors poke and prod and clamor for our attention. Some we can control, and some we can't.

Here are nine primary factors that get in the way and make it difficult to change behavior.

Ruts in the Brain

It's hard to get out of ruts. I talked about driving in the winter on the interstate in South Dakota. The accumulated ice on the well-traveled roadways creates ruts that my car's tires always seem to settle into as I drive, almost like I'm operating on autopilot. Well-traveled pathways like these are also created in our brains. It is very difficult to get out of the path that is most traveled and the easiest to tread.

Unproductive Repetitive Behavior

What causes those ruts is the repetitive nature of our thoughts, actions, and behaviors. We like the sense of assurance that we know what's going to happen. We develop traditions such as holiday celebrations and habits such as driving the same route to work each day. But there are lots of things we do repetitively that are unproductive, such as nagging our kids to do chores or procrastinating on important projects.

Comfort Zone

We seek comfort, and familiarity breeds comfort. Even when we honestly reflect and recognize that certain actions and behaviors are not positive and are not serving us well, we continue to behave in the same way because we've been there. We feel a level of comfort with what is known and familiar. It is difficult to push outside that comfort zone.

Lack of Neuropathways

Most of us have limited neuropathways, or roadways, in our minds. Our experiences have programmed our brains with a small number of options for dealing with situations, and we handle them the same way or with only slight variations. What we need are multiple pathways that allow us to be far more flexible and agile. Without

multiple pathways, our brains slide into familiar and well-traveled ruts. When we have multiple pathways in our brains, the process of changing and making changes is significantly easier.

Fear

We all have fears, and the most important thing we can do is acknowledge them. Fear is kind of like a virus on a computer. You can't really see it, and you often don't know what's causing it, but it's problematic. It's important to recognize what makes you fearful so you can deal with those fears. Important caveat: The advice here addresses typical fears that may be addressed with acknowledgment and actions, not psychological issues such as phobias, for which professional intervention is recommended.

Lack of Clarity

When people are not crystal clear about what they want, they do not know what they're aiming for. There is a tendency to say, "I want to be successful" or "I want to do well" or "I want this to work." These are vague statements that do not lend themselves to identifying specific action steps. Vague desires result in lack of direction and inaction.

Lack of Agility

Being stuck in ruts and trapped in repetitive activity greatly reduces agility. We're just letting things go along. It has never been more dangerous to allow this to keep happening. It hampers our ability to move and capture opportunities as they reveal themselves because we are so often on autopilot. We miss opportunities because we are asleep at the wheel.

Unproductive Relationship Habits

It is not uncommon that we hang around with people who make it a lot easier for us to stay with that old behavior and resist change. There is a powerful reason for very carefully selecting the people

you hang around with. Conversing with others creates neuropathways in your brain. Synaptic connections may occur whether you are talking *or listening and observing*. A scientific experiment of mirror neurons demonstrated this fact: A device was attached to a monkey's brain. When the monkey picked up a peanut, there was an audible sound indicating that a neuroplastic connection (pathway between nerve cells) had occurred. Scientists repeated the experiment, and every time the monkey picked up the peanut, the audible sound was triggered. One day, one of the scientists reached over and picked up the peanut. When the monkey observed this, the audible sound occurred. This was a very interesting finding to the scientists. The monkey did not actually have to grab the peanut to create a synaptic connection. Just watching someone else grab it enabled a new neural pathway to form.

VUCA

This is an acronym borrowed from the Army War College. VUCA stands for volatility, uncertainty, complexity, and ambiguity. Bob Johansen, from the prestigious Institute for the Future, uses the acronym to describe the world in which we live and recommends ways we can proactively deal with these challenges. At the time this book is written, our current VUCA environment exacerbates people's natural tendency to remain safe and stick with what's familiar. But what we need is the opposite. This is a time when people need to be open to change and to take charge of their own behaviors—that is, operate with a *Seeing Red Cars* mind-set.

How Does This Apply to the Business World?

In times of dynamic change, as in the current marketplace, people tend to focus on what they don't want even more than normal because there are so many unknowns. People question how change will affect them and focus even more on what they don't want to have happen.

The way people respond to new information has a huge influence on the success of change initiatives in the workplace. As I mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, when people encounter important new information, they typically react in one of three ways: 20% are very open and excited about it, 50% are cautious and not forthcoming with their support, and 30% are openly opposed. Let's look at each:

20% I call this group the ambassadors. It doesn't matter whether it's a business or a church group or a student association, 20% of the group will say, "Oh, my gosh, I have felt this. I have believed it, and I have personally developed this discipline. I didn't consciously know what it was, but now that you point out that this is a discipline, I recognize that it's a choice I have made. I'm so grateful. I want to be a part of it. I want to influence others. I want to help people, teams, and organizations not only be clear about what they want personally but also align with what we want for our team and for our organization."

50% I call this group the fence-sitters. They can really understand it and intuitively recognize that it's there, but they're cautious and sensitive. They are more inclined to sit on the fence and observe. "Is there anything here? Is it really a big deal? Does it really matter?" They are not negative. They are not positive. They are neutral.

30% This group is the detractors. They will say, "You've got to be kidding me." They'll find every reason why their thought process is valid and worthy. They will openly resist change.

When the ambassadors are interacting with the detractors, in reality they are talking "at" one another, not "with" one another.

They both work very hard at stating their case, but neither one truly listens. What commonly happens is that organizations focus a great deal of effort on convincing the detractors to change. Why? Because 30% is a lot of people and they are *vocal*. Frankly, the vast majority of the effort to sway the detractors is absolutely fruitless. Instead, the majority of the focus should be one-to-one conversations with the fence-sitters. When I'm working with organizations, I always ask, "Who are your ambassadors? Who are the most influential and trustworthy people within your organization who really want to be part of shifting the organizational culture?" Ask those ambassadors to reach out to the fence-sitters and begin the process of talking about how to align their personal wants with the organization's wants. These conversations are more about asking questions to alleviate concerns rather than telling people to just accept the new direction. Fence-sitters need to be invited to engage in the process and be part of the solution. Ambassadors can talk about the value of focusing on wants. It's all about questions. It's definitely not about telling. The power of engaging the 70%, the ambassadors and the fence-sitters, is where the greatest influence lies.

All the while, recognize that the detractors will be openly vocal while the organization is focusing on the 70%. To the detractors, the sheer notion of focusing on what we want and aligning our wants with the organization's vision, values, and desired outcomes is ludicrous. It sends them into a process of finding every reason why these things can't happen at this time. They will try to forge conversations with the ambassadors, which they quickly learn is a waste of time, and will actively try to convince the fence-sitters to join their team. As they say, misery loves company. Because the detractors are so vocal, organizations often fall into the trap of focusing on them (the squeaky wheel gets the grease). Don't do it. They are in the minority, and many of them will eventually come around. Continually feed positive messages and encouragement to the detractors, but don't openly engage in combat.

Another factor that is powerful and daunting during a time of change is that many people are simply unaware that their thinking is negative. Price Pritchett, a noted author and advisor to Fortune 500 companies, says, “Any time there is a major change, our first scan is for danger. That’s just the way we’re wired as a human being. It’s a survival instinct. But too often people get hung up with what we call the five C’s: complaining about the situation, criticizing management, commiserating with their colleagues, expressing their concern, and sometimes full-blown catastrophizing.” And since about 70% of our thoughts are negative and “cruise through our consciousness undetected,” he says people are in a poor position to correct the situation when only 30% of their thoughts are positive. That’s where the *Seeing Red Cars* mind-set, if you have made it an intentional way that you operate, will spring into action and come to your aid. *Seeing Red Cars* is as much about focusing on what you want as it is about eliminating negative thoughts. Drive your actions toward positive outcomes by purposefully focusing on what you want instead of on what you are afraid of and trying to avoid. You get more of *whatever* you focus on.

The following story of two employees in the same organization beautifully illustrates the power of focusing on the 70% (ambassadors and fence-sitters). Carla was in the 50% group (fence-sitter), and George was in the 30% group (detractor) at an advanced biomedical company I was working with some years ago. The company established a very clear vision. I advised them to give their people a sight line to what is most important and to keep it visible and actionable. We developed a 12-week process to help people focus on the outcomes they were looking for. Every meeting began with “Here is where we are going, and here is where we are at. Where are each of you in this journey, and what steps are you going to take to close that gap?” That was their mode of operation.

Carla was an assembly-line worker and started out as a fence-sitter. She was very curious about the concepts, and frankly, they were a little unnerving to her. She cautiously began thinking to

herself about her true passions, strengths, and values. When we were close to the end of the 12-week program, I noticed Carla wanted to speak to me after class. She hung back and waited to have a chance to talk. She finally approached me after everyone had left the room and told me her story. She found the *Seeing Red Cars* concept (focusing on what you want) intriguing, but it really scared her in the beginning. That was because she realized through the process that she really loves finance and numbers and she wanted to move into the accounting department. She gradually started talking about the idea with her colleagues and manager, and they encouraged her and gave her the confidence to focus on her true interests and values. She finally worked up the courage to apply for the accounting program at a local college. I had the opportunity to follow up with Carla over the years. She completed her accounting education and moved into the accounting department. Eventually, she moved into a leadership role in accounting before she moved to another organization when she married—you see, she had also identified the type of person she wanted to spend her life with during the original 12-week course and ultimately met that person and moved to another city, where she continued her journey as an accountant.

Now I'll tell you about George, in the same organization and going through the same 12-week program. He was the classic detractor. He squawked on and on. George talked about how it was ridiculous that focusing on outcomes could really have an impact on things and that being aware of the challenges and difficulties was far more important. He was absolutely resistant. Well, we didn't focus on George. We didn't leave him out, but we didn't focus on him. Over the course of three years, we created this thought process where it went from being cumbersome and uncomfortable in the beginning, like new things often are, to becoming very fluid and comfortable, where people were absolutely marching not only to their own personal "I want" statements but also to the statements, vision, and values of the organization.

I'll never forget the day when George, who had been defiant for so long, was leading a tour of the manufacturing facility. As George was standing in the hallway, I heard him saying, "The way that we operate here—the things that compel us, that get us up every morning, that have us wanting to get better day after day—is that we are truly guided by our vision. . . . That's not only the organization's vision, but each of us has clearly defined what we want to accomplish, and we are taking daily, weekly, and monthly actions to move toward those goals." That was three years into the project. When we heard George utter those words, we finally knew that we had made significant movement. I would venture to say that we had finally hit critical mass. But let me once again reinforce this point. We didn't push George. Early efforts, early conversations, were absolutely futile. Instead, we put our energies and our effort into the 20% who were really aligned with the thought process, the ambassadors, and into the 50% who were more cautious, the fence-sitters. And lo and behold, we were able to really influence everyone down to the most vocal detractors and to create a culture that absolutely supported focusing on the desired outcomes.

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