



QI Top Tip: Change and its role in Quality Improvement

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Anyone who has spent time with the QI team, knows that we love a good quote. One of our particular favourites is:

“While all changes do not lead to improvement, all improvement requires change”.

There is so much to take from this one simple line, but I want to focus on how some cockroach stickers encapsulates the sentiment at the heart of this quote.

Roger Dooley has applied himself to the problem of handwashing and cross contamination and how to fundamentally change behaviour to encourage safer actions. (<https://www.neurosciencemarketing.com/blog/articles/reduce-virus.htm>)



He notes that you must make a conscious decision to wash your hands – it doesn’t just happen by accident. Traditional campaigns to increase handwashing have appealed to conscious decision-making processes. They appeal to the rationale part of the brain to think about and decide to get going with some soap and water. These work to a certain extent – but as pre coronavirus data showed that just 31% of men wash their hands after using the bathroom, there is clearly room for improvement.

Dooley’s change idea is to completely flip this on its head, ignore the rationale brain completely, and trigger behaviour change using stickers of cockroaches, bugs, and germs. By placing the stickers on toilet handles, door handles and frequent touch points, it will trigger a deep seated and immediate disgust response, that will make most people feel like they need to wash their hands immediately. It bypasses sensible thought and creates a sense of revulsion that will lead to behaviour change- and cleaner hands.

Now while there are lots of reasons why Dooley’s idea is a terrible one, he has fundamentally understood that “all improvement requires change”. Doing nothing different and staying on the same track will not bring you changed behaviours. Improvement in hand washing behaviour needed something to be different to nudge behaviour in a new way. It required a fundamental change in approach. He completely flipped his thinking on its head and came at the idea from a brand-new vantage point.



This is the central tenant of the third question in the model for improvement. Which is “what change can we make that will lead to improvement”. No-one sets out at the beginning of their day to not do the things they need to do. But there are a million nudges and barriers that prevent things going as smoothly or as well as we would want. We must introduce a fundamentally different way of doing



things to flip the script and achieve a different outcome. Improvement needs a change idea that's coming from whole new direction.

This principle can be applied both in everyday situations and in quality improvement projects. To create a better outcome, you will need to identify change ideas that are more than just tinkering around the edges, and you need lots of them. Of course, if you get stuck, then come along to our bronze masterclass on changes. We will introduce a range of exercises that you can use to generate new ideas that are fresh, bold, and innovative. Just don't come near me with a cockroach sticker.