THE DRAGONFLY EFFECT

QUICK, EFFECTIVE, AND POWERFUL WAYS TO USE SOCIAL MEDIA TO DRIVE SOCIAL CHANGE

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FOREWORD BY CHIP HEATH, AUTHOR OF MADE TO STICK
AFTERWORD BY DAN ARIELY, AUTHOR OF PREDICTABLY IRRATIONAL
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Everybody feels tremendous pressure today to master social media, but most people haven’t quite figured out how to do so. Nonprofit directors are told they need a social media strategy for engaging volunteers. Journalists are encouraged to blog, tweet, and whirl. Marketers feel they’re required to have a Facebook strategy. That’s unfair to the poor marketers—heck, Facebook doesn’t really have a Facebook strategy.

People who face serious problems have a long history of grasping for a technological fix. The 8-millimeter film was going to revitalize education . . . then the IBM PC. The Internet was going to usher in an era of political transparency. And for sure, positively, the magazine industry is going to be saved by the iPad. And today everyone feels that social media tools are a solution to the problems they are facing. (Except for those who are worried that someone else will figure out how to use them first and gain an enduring competitive advantage.)

So suppose you really could do something with social media. Well, *The Dragonfly Effect* points the way.

Full disclosure: Jennifer Aaker is one of my colleagues at Stanford. Her office is two doors down. I respect her research work, and I know this book is based on a class that has won rave reviews from our students. So I’m predisposed to like this book because I know it’s based on serious research, ideas, and thought. (I don’t really know her husband and coauthor,
Andy, but I suspect I’d like him too. I predict that one pressing question Jennifer and Andy will face when they speak about this book is, “How did you manage to write a book with your spouse?” Perhaps for their next project they’ll consider a marriage guide.)

Disclosures noted, I think you’ll like this book for the same reason our Stanford MBAs have loved Jennifer’s class. In a confusing domain, where people haven’t yet figured out how to use a new technology, Jennifer and Andy provide a simple road map to follow if you want to accomplish something with social media.

The book is filled with inspiring stories. A group of friends who rallied to save the life of a friend who had leukemia, and turned a one-in-twenty-thousand chance of finding a bone marrow donor into a virtual certainty. Two students who created a fashion business for an audience that hates fashion—guys—and managed to break even their first year and profit the second. The former nightclub promoter who, by telling riveting stories, created a movement that’s brought clean water to eight hundred thousand people. And more important, there’s a simple framework that highlights what these success stories have in common.

If you want to accomplish something with social media, you can start here. Just turn the page.
Small actions create big change. The goal of this book is simple: to help you harness social technology to achieve a single, focused, concrete goal.

In the past ten years, social networking technologies have revolutionized the way we communicate and collaborate online. Each day, over 175 million of us log on to Facebook. Each minute, twenty hours of video are uploaded to YouTube. Each second, over 600 tweets are “tweeted” out onto the Web, to a worldwide audience. And these numbers are growing exponentially.

If we used these avenues for social change, what kind of difference could we make? How many people could we get involved? What kind of impact could we have on an individual, a corporation—or the world? Our mission over the following pages is to show you how to harness the power of social media for social good, by blending the theory underlying social change and the applications of social media. Our approach, which we call the Dragonfly Effect, coalesces the focal points of our distinct careers—research and insights on consumer psychology and happiness (what really makes people happy as opposed to what they think makes them happy)—with the practical approaches necessary to capture these effects.

Over the past several years, we have each benefited from the other’s very different perspective. (Let’s just say one of us didn’t “get” Twitter and the other doubted the place of “feelings” in organizations.) By joining forces, we have been
able to provide individuals and corporations with insights into social technology, tools to spur the spreading of ideas, and the ability to incite infectious action. Our capacity to predict seemingly irrational responses has improved both brands and bottom lines.

Most recently, our blended perspectives culminated in a course, the Power of Social Technology (PoST), at the Stanford Graduate School of Business. In the class, students adopted design thinking mind-sets and creative processes with the help of an ecosystem of collaborators, including top Silicon Valley entrepreneurs, investors, and the Hasso Plattner Institute of Design at Stanford. The class proved more successful and inspirational than we could have anticipated. Not only did it demonstrate that people are clamoring for ways to use social media for social good, but it confirmed our belief that there is a replicable framework that will allow them to execute their goals efficiently and effectively and to achieve meaningful change.

Most of us have experienced how social technologies are changing the way people relate to each other. They allow us to connect with old friends (and make new ones), share our interests with a broad network of people, and communicate efficiently—often instantaneously. But we are only beginning to understand how these same technologies can fundamentally shift how we engage with and inspire all these networked people and empower them to participate in global movements for change. This book will tell these emerging stories and give you the tools to use social media to make an impact.

Regardless of the change you seek to effect in the world—whether it is to inspire others to join your social movement, mobilize political change, or simply satisfy an individual need—consider this your playbook for moving your cause from awareness to action.
A dizzying number of people have written about the mechanics of Facebook, Twitter, email, and YouTube, yet few have addressed one of our strongest motivations: how to leverage the power of the new social media to do something that really matters.

The dragonfly is the only insect able to propel itself in any direction—with tremendous speed and force—when its four wings are working in concert. This ancient, exotic, and benign creature illuminates the importance of integrated effort. It also demonstrates that small actions can create big movements. To us, what we call the Dragonfly Effect is the elegance and efficacy of people who, through the passionate pursuit of their goals, discover that they can make a positive impact disproportionate to their resources. We have been lucky enough to learn from such people and to profile their efforts here.

Most of us are inundated daily with articles, emails, videos, and blog posts. Invitations to participate in compelling social campaigns have become ubiquitous—from Avon’s Walk for Breast Cancer, to Pepsi’s Refresh campaign, to general appeals to help “save our planet.” Yet we glaze over and ignore many, if not most, of these pleas. Or perhaps we join a group, but take no real action on behalf of the cause. Anyone who has ever created a YouTube video, written a blog, or tried to get someone to join a cause on Facebook knows that simply sending out a request doesn’t guarantee results.
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Yet the power of social technology, when fully engaged, can be nothing short of revolutionary. Just this year, the Red Cross raised more than $40 million for Haiti relief through text message donations. The same technologies that enable us to “poke” our friends or “retweet” an interesting article are the ones that can connect and mobilize us to bring about change. So, what differentiates those who are harnessing social media for something more powerful than fun or procrastination?

It is clear from our research that, in contrast to what you may think, promoting a personal goal is inherently social. To be successful, you must translate your passion into a powerful story and tell it in a way that generates “contagious energy,” so that your audience reflects on your tweet, blog post, or email, long after they leave their computers.¹

By doing this, you generate participation, networking, growth, and ripple effects—forces that combine to form a movement that people feel they are a part of. Your personal goal then becomes collective.

Drawing on underlying truths found in psychological research, The Dragonfly Effect provides a framework to show you how to do this. In these pages, we will teach you four key skills—Focus, Grab Attention, Engage, and Take Action—which you will use to produce your own colossal results. And we will reveal the secret to cultivating “stickiness,” so that your goal is not relegated to Internet oblivion but instead reaches an audience of people who will help propel it forward.

The other reason to read this book is that it might help you become a happier person. Research on happiness makes it clear that happiness, in and of itself, is a bogus conceit. What people
think makes them happy (moving to sunny California, getting a promotion at work, taking a trip to Disneyland) does not. In fact, the happiest people are those who have stopped chasing happiness and instead search for meaningfulness, a change in direction that leads to more sustainable happiness—the kind that enriches their lives, provides purpose, and creates impact.

Why is happiness so elusive? One reason is that the definition of happiness changes every three to five years throughout one’s life. The meaning of happiness is not idiosyncratic, individualistic, or random—nor is it singular and stable. Happiness has a clear pattern, indicating that people are pursuing different things across their lifespans. For example, for people roughly ages twenty-five to thirty, money is linked to happiness. After that, meaningfulness starts to outshine it in importance. No matter what age you are now, or what your current priority might be, it’s fairly certain that you will at some point be looking for meaningfulness.

Although most people still believe that creating meaning or greater good in the world doesn’t align with profit making, we have seen many people and organizations that have created a golden quadrant of “purposeful profit.” By aligning the work they love with a profit-oriented business model, they have evolved the organization into something that is much stronger, much more sustainable, and much more effective at generating greater social good.

This is accounted for by a concept known as the ripple effect. In economics, the ripple effect is used to show how an individual’s increase in spending increases the incomes of others and their subsequent ability to spend. In sociology, it describes how social interactions can affect situations indirectly. In charitable activities, the ripple effect explains how information can
be disseminated and passed from community to community to broaden its impact. In this book, we describe it as the simple idea that small acts can create big change.

Research shows that ripple effects result from small actions that have a positive significant impact on others and over time.

**Gap’s Give & Get Program**

Gap Inc. was one of the first retailers to extend discount privileges to employees’ friends and families on special occasions throughout the year. Although originally a fresh idea, these “friends and family days” soon became ubiquitous throughout the industry. Gap wanted to stand out. It also wanted to get back to its roots as an involved and caring member of the communities in which it did business. In the words of founder Doris Fisher, Gap should be “a store with a heart.”

This was the impetus for Give & Get, an innovative Web-based cause marketing program that offers customers 30 percent discounts on Gap merchandise—with 5 percent of each sale donated to a designated charity. During this semiannual promotion, employees and customers can download a coupon, which can be redeemed online or at any Gap brick-and-mortar retail store, including Gap, Old Navy, Banana Republic, outlet stores, and Piperlime.

Donations are tracked through unique bar codes in the invitation. One of the key features of the program is that its direction is determined by the employees and customers. They choose which of several designated nonprofit partners they want to support, and in turn their friends and family members, who can share their coupon, are shopping to support their cause. This has resulted in a tremendous commitment and loyalty to the program. The results are impressive. Gap estimates that since it began the Give & Get program in 2008, it has raised $10 million for its nonprofit partners, including such organizations as Teach for America and the Leukemia and Lymphoma Society.
When the action at the epicenter of the ripple effect is based on deep meaning (or something that you believe will make you happy in both a profound and long-lasting way), a multiplier effect can occur.4

In such conditions, others around you feel the emotion that you’re feeling, and can therefore become more strongly mobilized. This phenomenon whereby emotions you feel infect others is called emotional contagion. One view, developed by the psychologist John Cacioppo and his colleagues, is that emotional contagion can be physically manifested by someone’s tendency to unconsciously mimic and synchronize facial expressions, postures, and movements with those of another person and, consequently, for the people to converge emotionally.5 Research has shown that babies often mimic the behaviors of their mothers. People who live with each other for a long period of time grow physically similar in their facial features (by virtue of repeated empathic mimicry).6 A leader’s emotional state can impact the rapport, morale, and even performance of a team or organization.7 In fact, something as innocuous as the emotional tonality of someone’s voice (happy versus sad) can affect how much listeners like a message.8

Even more interestingly, in a study of more than forty-seven hundred people who were followed over twenty years, researchers reveal that happiness really is contagious: people who are happy (or become happy) significantly boost the chances that their friends will become happy; and the power of happiness
can span up to two more degrees of separation, improving the mood of that person’s husband, wife, brother, sister, friend, and even friend’s friends. Further, these contagious effects have a lasting impact. One individual’s happiness can affect another’s for as much as a year. That happiness is more sustained than that which comes from a momentary financial gain. As James Fowler, coauthor of the study, explains, “If your friend’s friend becomes happy, that has a bigger impact on your being happy than putting an extra $5,000 in your pocket.”

Understanding emotional contagion is important for two reasons. First, that your feelings of happiness or meaning can actually infect others helps explain why some initiatives work and others don’t. How did Barack Obama mobilize so many young people in the last U.S. presidential election, even as John McCain had a significantly muted effect (despite running-mate Sarah Palin’s brief interjection of high-energy drama)? Why does Kiva, a revolutionary marketplace for microfinance lending to entrepreneurs, successfully empower so many, whereas a similarly spirited (but considerably more rational) product, MicroPlace, hasn’t cultivated nearly as large a community, or inspired similar brand recognition? Emotional
contagion ripples through social networks, and it’s important to understand how the contagion of positive emotions can lead others to help.

Second, emotional contagion is pivotal because it underscores the importance of cultivating social good, which is often most resonant with happiness and meaning. And although the idea is not (yet) conventionally accepted, people don’t have to give something away for free to do good; they can instead create a business that does good. (Type “social entrepreneur” into Google, and the 15 million hits reveal that this concept has garnered significant attention.) The for-profit and nonprofit worlds are merging, creating an opportunity for masses of people who drive more profits and create greater good.

One example is the for-profit technology company salesforce.com and its innovative integrated philanthropic 1-1-1 model, a vehicle through which the company contributes 1 percent of profits, 1 percent of equity, and 1 percent of employee hours back to the communities it serves. CEO Marc Benioff often talks about the program’s secondary gain. “It has made our employees more fulfilled, more productive, and more loyal,” he says. “Our customers also have greater appreciation for us because of our philanthropic work. This is not why we do it, but the opportunity to work on something bigger together has positively affected our bottom line.”

Before we delve deeper into the blending of for-profit and nonprofit goals, the relationship between happiness and money merits special attention. Our society’s prevalent belief is that money will make us happy. However, the reality is that the link between happiness and money is tenuous. Take the striking evidence that although income has steadily increased over
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roughly the past fifty years in the United States, life satisfaction has remained virtually flat (a similar pattern is seen in data from other countries). Yet we continue to overestimate the impact of income on life satisfaction, and spend our time and energy trying to grow our wealth. Why is it that the search for money almost always lets us down? The answer might lie in the fact that human beings are said to have at least three basic needs in terms of their sense of self-worth: competence (feeling that we are effective and able), autonomy (feeling that we are able to dictate our own behavior), and relatedness (feeling that we are connected to others). To the extent that a personal or professional goal does not address these basic needs, the rewards of achieving that goal might be perceived as transient or lacking. In other words, getting what we want is disappointing when we aren’t wanting what will actually make us happy.

People frequently create wildly inaccurate forecasts of what will make them happy because they mistakenly associate happiness with short and shallow rewards (as opposed to long-lasting and deeper rewards). Increasingly, however, research suggests that individuals become consumers with the goal of “becoming happy” or “getting happier,” but that they rarely attain that goal through their purchases.

It turns out that the adage “money can’t buy happiness” isn’t antiquated or false. The results of a recent experiment showed that spending money on others has a positive impact on happiness—much more so than spending money on oneself. This was striking given that the participants thought personal spending would make them happier than spending on someone else. Eudemonia, or fundamental happiness, is the result of an active life governed by intrinsic meaning, self-sacrifice, and self-improvement. Although it all sounds a little
sanctimonious (and conjures images of Gandhi and Mother Teresa), the rewards of bettering the welfare of others have been illustrated by research too many times to simply ignore.

The good news is that all of this research is simple to put into practice. Increasing (and sustaining) your happiness is possible—even easy—if you focus on others (rather than yourself) and on time (rather than money). Research has shown that even thinking about money can have a negative impact on happiness, but that focusing on time increases happiness because it increases interactions and connections with others.\(^\text{18}\) Not convinced? Consider the National Institutes of Health study that found that when people are encouraged to think of giving money to a charity, the brain areas usually associated with selfish pleasures are activated.\(^\text{19}\) Evolutionarily wired to be prosocial beings, we actually relish giving.

The Dragonfly Effect binds us to others, to larger communities, and to social causes. There really is no better way to strengthen the connection between ourselves and our surroundings, fulfill our psychological and emotional needs, and, above all, create meaning in our lives than by cultivating social good.

The Dragonfly Effect is your road map to doing something purposeful, thoughtful, and well designed. Operating as “social change in a box,” it illustrates how synchronized ideas have been used effectively to create rapid transformations—and unveils the secrets to doing just that, step by step, so you can try it too. We’ll share how to effectively tap into human behavior, and we’ll explain how the four key principles—Focus, Grab Attention, Engage, and Take Action—work. Each of these principles is explored in its own chapter, or wing.
The heart of this book draws on studies on behavior change and the stories of individuals determined to make a difference. You’ll gain insight from the founders of eBay’s World of Good; storytellers from Pixar; leaders from Facebook, Twitter, and Google; as well as from social entrepreneurs, social media experts, and founders of nonprofit organizations—all of whom use the tools of social media to deliver positive change. We’ll study efforts by individual social entrepreneurs who are tapping strategies like viral marketing to empower others to act on their behalf—as well as larger movements, such as how the Obama campaign created political change by leveraging social technology; how the organization Kiva encourages economic justice by making microloans easily available; and how Nike deploys Web tools to harness the volunteer efforts of their thirty-four thousand employees. We’ll witness how people like you can achieve a specific goal by using social technologies in ways you may have previously thought to be impossible. Tweeting isn’t just sharing about what you ate for breakfast this morning; Facebook isn’t just for poking friends. You can leverage these social technologies, strategically and integratively, toward a specific goal that deeply matters to you.

To unpack the information in the text, we offer the Dragonfly Toolkit to provide social media cheat sheets, flowcharts, and boot camps specifically designed for people whose other skills rank ahead of technical proficiency. Dragonfly Frameworks include new models that will help you implement your goal, and Dragonfly Tips are simple, and sometimes unconventional, ideas inspired by consumer marketing research. Expert Insights offer the wisdom of leaders in social media, entrepreneurship, filmmaking, technology, and more, showing how they have uniquely used social media to achieve
spectacular results. Throughout you’ll find examples of how individuals and groups—on their own or on behalf of corporations—have used specific tools to create impact.

Finally, throughout The Dragonfly Effect we will apply concepts from design thinking. Design thinking takes a methodical approach to program and product development. It’s taught as a way to create things that are better for the people who will ultimately use them, and helps the creators get over their unintentional biases and misconceptions. Design thinking encourages a human-centric orientation, hypotheses testing, and frequent, rapid prototyping. Time and again, initiatives falter because they’re developed with the brand, organization, or cause—rather than individuals’ needs—foremost in mind. People often tackle a challenge using preconceived notions of individuals’ needs and solutions, but deep empathy doesn’t guide their decision making, and rapid prototyping is rarely used to solicit feedback. This flawed approach remains the norm in both the business and social sectors. We’ll explore compelling examples of where design thinking is implemented throughout this book—and we hope it will inspire you to embrace this way of thinking in your own work.

The Dragonfly Effect is for anyone motivated to act on, propel, and accomplish social good. Whether you’re an entrepreneur, an employee of a for-profit company, a volunteer at a non-profit, or simply an individual trying to improve someone else’s life, you can learn about the world of possibility available to you when you leverage social media appropriately. Ultimately, this book demonstrates that you don’t need money or power to cause seismic social change. With energy, focus, and a strong wireless signal, anything is possible.
Yes, really.

I want to try design thinking.

Know what Design Thinking is?

It’s a process that gets you close to your user so that you can rapidly solve his or her problems.

Do you deeply know the needs of your user?

Really?

Yes, really.

Apply your observations and develop your unique POV.

Ideate and Prototype (product, service, message, etc.).

Test

Do the results support your POV?

Yes

Template and scale your results (keeping your user deeply in mind).

No

Iterate

Review and revise.

Observe and Interview. Capture complex field data. Distill stories for POV.

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Published by Jossey-Bass, a Wiley imprint.
Create Lasting Impact

An integral part of this book is our website www.dragonflyeffect.com, where you'll find a community of people like you, who are harnessing social media to make remarkable impact and sharing their stories, tools, and resources. Via the website, we'll keep you updated on new ways to use the power of social technology to spark social change. The dragonfly has long been a symbol of happiness, new beginnings, and change across cultures. With your help, the Dragonfly Effect will continue to evolve, with ideas, stories, and achievements that it inspires and enables.
Sameer Bhatia was always good with numbers—and he approached them, as he did everything in his life, from a unique perspective. When the Stanford grad was in his twenties, he came up with an innovative algorithm that formed the foundation of his popular consumer barter marketplace, MonkeyBin. By age thirty-one, the Silicon Valley entrepreneur was running a hot mobile gaming company and was newly married. His friends, who called him Samba, adored his energy, optimism, and passion for pranks. Sameer had an ability to bring out the best in people. With an unrestrained zest for life, he had everything going for him.

Then, on a routine business trip to Mumbai, Sameer, who worked out regularly and always kept himself in peak condition, started to feel under the weather. He lost his appetite and had trouble breathing. He wanted to blame the nausea, fatigue, and racing heartbeat on the humid hundred-degree monsoon weather, but deep inside, he knew something else was wrong.

Sameer visited a doctor at one of Mumbai’s leading hospitals, where his blood tests showed that his white blood cell count was wildly out of whack, and there were “blasts” in his...
cells. His doctor instructed him to leave the country as soon as possible to seek medical treatment closer to home. Immediately upon entering the United States—before he could even make it back to his hometown of Seattle—Sameer was admitted to the Robert Wood Johnson University Hospital in New Jersey. He was diagnosed with acute myelogenous leukemia (AML), a cancer that starts in the bone marrow and is characterized by the rapid growth of abnormal white blood cells that interfere with the production of normal blood cells. AML is the most common acute leukemia affecting adults; it’s also very aggressive.

Sameer was facing the toughest challenge of his life. Half of all new cases of leukemia result in death (both in 2008 and today). But Sameer was determined to beat the odds and get better. After Sameer underwent a few months of chemotherapy and other pharmacological treatment, doctors told him that his only remaining treatment option would be a bone marrow transplant—a procedure that requires finding a donor with marrow having the same human leukocyte antigens as the recipient.

Because tissue types are inherited, about 25 to 30 percent of patients are able to find a perfect match with a sibling. The remaining 70 percent must turn to the National Marrow Donor Program (NMDP), a national database with over eight million registered individuals. Patients requiring a transplant are most likely to match a donor of their own ethnicity. That wasn’t a promising scenario for Sameer, however. He had a rare gene from his father’s side of the family that proved extremely difficult to match. His brother, parents, and all of his cousins were tested, but no one proved to be a close match. Even more worrisome was that of the millions of registered donors in the
NMDP, only 1.4 percent were South Asian. As a result, the odds of Sameer finding a perfect match were only one in twenty thousand. (A Caucasian person has a one-in-fifteen chance.) Worse, there were few other places to look. One would think that a match could easily be found in India, Sameer’s family’s country of origin. After all, India is the world’s second-most populous country with nearly 1.2 billion people. But India did not have a comprehensive bone marrow registry. Not a single match surfaced anywhere.

People often ask what they can do to help in harrowing times. The answer is hard to find. Do you offer to drop off a meal? Lend an empathic ear? Such overtures are well intentioned, but rarely satiate the person who wants to help or the person who needs the help.

Sameer’s circle of friends, a group of young and driven entrepreneurs and professionals, reacted to the news of Sameer’s diagnosis with an unconventional approach. “We realized our choices were between doing something, anything, and doing something seismic,” says Robert Chatwani, Sameer’s best friend and business partner. Collectively, they decided they would attack Sameer’s sickness as they would any business challenge. It came down to running the numbers. If they campaigned for Sameer and held bone marrow drives throughout the country, they could increase the number of South Asians in the registry. The only challenge was that to play the odds and find a match that would save his life, they had to register twenty thousand South Asians. The only problem: doctors told them that they had a matter of weeks to do so.
Sameer’s friends and family needed to work fast, and they needed to scale. Their strategy: tap the power of the Internet and focus on the tight-knit South Asian community to get twenty thousand South Asians into the bone marrow registry, immediately. One of Robert’s first steps was to write an email, detailing their challenge and ending with a clear call to action. In the message, he did not ask for help; he simply told people what was needed of them. Because this was the first outbound message broadcasting Sameer’s situation, Robert spent hours crafting the email, ensuring that every word was perfect and that the email itself was personal, informative, and direct. Finally, he was ready to send it out to a few hundred people in Sameer’s network of friends and professional colleagues.

Dear Friends,

Please take a moment to read this e-mail. My friend, Sameer Bhatia, has been diagnosed with Acute Myelogenous Leukemia (AML), which is a cancer of the blood. He is in urgent need of a bone marrow transplant. Sameer is a Silicon Valley entrepreneur, is 31 years old, and got married last year. His diagnosis was confirmed just weeks ago and caught us all by surprise given that he has always been in peak condition.

Sameer, a Stanford alum, is known to many for his efforts in launching the American India Foundation, Project DOSTI, TiE (Chicago), a microfinance fund, and other causes focused on helping others. Now he urgently needs our help in giving him a new lease on life. He is undergoing chemotherapy at present but needs a bone marrow transplant to sustain beyond the next few months.

Fortunately, you can help. Let’s use the power of the Net to save a life.
Three Things You Can Do

1. **Please get registered.** Getting registered is quick and requires a simple cheek swab (2 minutes of your time) and filling out some forms (5 minutes of your time). Registering and even donating if you’re ever selected is VERY simple. Please see the list of locations here: http://www.helpvinay.org/dp/index.php?q=event.

2. **Spread the word.** Please share this e-mail message with at least 10 people (particularly South Asians), and ask them to do the same. Please point your friends to the local drives and ask them to get registered. If you can, sponsor a drive at your company or in your community. *Drives need to take place in the next 2–3 weeks to be of help to Sameer.* Please use the power of your address book and the web to spread this message—today more than ever before, we can achieve broad scale and be part of a large online movement to save lives.

3. **Learn more.** To learn more, please visit http://www.nickmyers.com/helpsameer. The site includes more details on how to organize your own drive, valuable information about AML, plus FAQs on registering. Please visit http://www.helpvinay.org/dp/index.php?q=node/108 for more information on the cities where more help is needed. Another past success story from our community is that of Pia Awal; please read about her successful fight against AML at www.matchpia.org.

    Thank you for getting registered to help Sameer and others win their fight against leukemia—and for helping others who may face blood cancers in the future.

    Truly, Robert¹

Robert sent the email to Sameer’s closest friends and business colleagues—about four hundred to five hundred members of their “ecosystem,” including fellow entrepreneurs, investors, South Asian relatives, and college friends. And that set
of friends forwarded the email to their personal networks, and on the message spread virally from there. Within forty-eight hours, the email had reached 35,000 people and the Help Sameer campaign had begun.

Sameer’s friends soon learned that yet another man in their ecosystem had recently been diagnosed with the same disease: Vinay Chakravarthy, a Boston-based twenty-eight-year-old physician. Sameer’s friends immediately partnered with Team Vinay, an inspiring group of people who shared the same goal as Team Sameer. Together, they harnessed Web 2.0 social media platforms and services like Facebook, Google Apps, and YouTube to collectively campaign and hold bone marrow drives all over the country.

Their goal was clear, and their campaign was under way. Within weeks, in addition to the national drives, Team Sameer

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## How to Write an Email That Inspires Action and Spurs Change

Emails must be specific and action-oriented: informing people about the situation, telling them what they can do, and asking them to spread the message even further.

- **Make it personal.** Include accessible and specific details about the person or cause you’re trying to help. Give someone a reason to care.

- **Make it informative.** Use email as an opportunity to educate your audience.

- **Make it direct.** Specifically ask the recipients for help, tell them what you want them to do, and give them all the tools they need to do it easily.
and Team Vinay coordinated bone marrow drives at over fifteen Bay Area companies, including Cisco, Google, Intel, Oracle, eBay, PayPal, Yahoo!, and Genentech. Volunteers on the East Coast started using the documents and collateral that the teams developed. After eleven weeks of focused efforts that included 480 bone marrow drives, 24,611 new people were registered. The teams recruited thirty-five hundred volunteers, achieved more than one million media impressions, and garnered 150,000 visitors to the websites. “This is the biggest campaign we’ve ever been involved with,” said Asia Blume of the Asian American Donor Program. “Other patients might register maybe a thousand donors. We never imagined that this campaign would blow up to this extent.” Nor did anyone imagine that this campaign would change the way future bone marrow drives are conducted.

Perhaps the most critical result associated with the campaign, however, was the discovery of two matches: one for Vinay, one for Sameer. In August 2007—only a few months after the kick-off of the campaign—Vinay found a close match. Two weeks later, Sameer was notified of the discovery of a perfect (10 of 10) match. Given the timing of when the donors entered the database, it’s believed that both Vinay’s and Sameer’s matches were direct results of the campaigns. Furthermore, it was clear that Sameer and Vinay would not have found matches the traditional way. It takes four to six weeks for a new registrant from a drive to show up in the national database, so they would have needed many more than twenty thousand new registrants to have a statistical chance at a match in such a short time. As Sameer wrote on his blog, “Finding a match through this process in the time required would be nearly impossible. Yet many hundreds of hands and hearts around the nation united
behind this cause. . . . You all have given me a new lease on life and for that I don’t have adequate words to thank you.”

Perhaps even more incredible, however, was that the impact of Team Sameer and Team Vinay did not stop with just Sameer and Vinay. Ultimately, they educated a population about the value of becoming registered donors while also changing the way registries work. Above all, they came up with a blueprint for saving lives—one that could be replicated.

**The Dragonfly Effect at Work**

How did Team Sameer achieve, in the words of Robert Chattwani, “something seismic”? They didn’t set out to help design a system that could be easily, efficiently, and effectively repeated. They just wanted to save their friend’s life. But in exceeding the goal by registering 24,611 South Asians into the NMDP registry in eleven weeks, Robert and the team uncovered a process that can be applied to achieve any goal. The effectiveness of the effort can be traced to four steps or principles—Focus, Grab Attention, Engage, and Take Action. To keep it simple, think of the mnemonic Focus + GET.
The Dragonfly Body

The Dragonfly Model

Focus + GET
The Dragonfly Effect relies on four distinct wings; when working together, they achieve remarkable results.

Focus. Identify a single concrete and measurable goal.

Grab Attention. Make someone look. Cut through the noise of social media with something personal, unexpected, visceral, and visual.

Engage. Create a personal connection, accessing higher emotions through deep empathy, authenticity, and telling a story. Engaging is about empowering the audience to care enough to want to do something themselves.

Take Action. Enable and empower others to take action. To make action easy, you must prototype, deploy, and continuously tweak tools, templates, and programs designed to move audience members from being customers to becoming team members—in other words, furthering the cause and the change beyond themselves.

A dragonfly travels with speed and directionality only when all four of its wings are moving in harmony. Metaphorically, then, the central body of the dragonfly should embody the heart and soul of the concept or person you are aiming to help.

To understand how Team Sameer was so effective, consider each of these principles: Focus, Grab Attention, Engage, and Take Action. First, the team focused sharply by concentrating exclusively on a single goal. It wasn’t hard. The doctors were clear. The chances of finding a bone marrow match were one in twenty thousand. The team needed to get at least twenty thousand South Asians in the bone marrow registry within weeks.

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But they didn’t get lost in the size of the challenge. They didn’t try to sign up every single South Asian in the Bay Area. Instead they focused on those who were well connected to others (for network effects), those who were parents (who could envision their children battling a similar challenge), and those who could relate to Sameer and his story. Those types of individuals were easy to identify, and the scope of the challenge quickly came into focus.

Second, Team Sameer grabbed attention by empathizing with their donor audience, relying on photos, making the messages compelling and personal. They also mixed media, employing social media (blogs, video, viral email, Facebook, widgets, pledge lists) as well as traditional media (public relations, television, magazine, telemarketing, posters, and newspapers) and leveraged relationships with celebrities and luminaries. (Then-senator Barack Obama wrote a note in support of the cause, simply because a friend of Vinay’s asked him.)

Third, Team Sameer engaged deeply with others by making Sameer knowable, telling his story authentically and vividly through video and blog entries, so his story became personally meaningful—even to strangers. The team used targeted messaging to help audiences see themselves in Sameer. Some messages focused on Sameer’s South Asian background; others highlighted his youth, newlywed status, or his professional pursuits as a technology entrepreneur.

Team Sameer and Vinay built out a website that acted as a repository for stories, updates, information, and feedback (http://www.helpsameer.org/strategy/). Here volunteers could download materials from a menu including Fliers, Literature, or How to Create a Video. There was even a downloadable how-to guide called “Hosting a Bone Marrow Drive at Work,” a Word document with simple instructions and sample emails.
Harnessing the Power of Blogging

Sameer and Vinay both blogged throughout the course of their illnesses, and this served as a critical brand-building force for both teams. The blogs created a human connection and proved to be an easy, efficient, and authentic way to circulate the message.

Get the person you are trying to help to write. Successful blogs rest on the personality the author presents and the information that is shared. Sameer was a prolific, passionate, and spirited blogger. “Initially it took some convincing to get Sameer to blog, but when he started to write, his personal story truly emerged. It was a whole new sort of thrust to the campaign, because people could hear his voice,” says Robert. “That was powerful.” If your subject isn’t a single individual or isn’t available to blog, embody or act as proxy for the cause in the posts, using “I” statements as much as possible.

Be authentic. Take advantage of authentic characteristics of your cause as they present themselves. Your audience will be drawn to people and personalities that they identify with or that complement them. Vinay and Sameer had different blogging styles and stayed true to what felt natural to them personally. Vinay was more reserved, laid back, and so his team consciously made his site more of an “everyman” brand, “so everyone who read his blog could identify with him,” according to Priti Radhakrishnan, Vinay’s childhood best friend. “Sameer was more open, and said, ‘Put me out there, talk about me, tell me what you need me to do,’” says Robert.

Use the blog as a platform to take a stand and incite action. Sameer wrote on his blog, “South Asians who have taken the trouble to register as donors only step up 30 to 40 percent of the time when called upon as a match. I hope we can all reflect on that number for a second and realize how despicable it is. . . . Our enemy here is part fear, part ignorance, and partly this remnant survivalist desi [a colloquial name for people of South Asian descent] instinct where us Indians will only help our own flesh and blood.”3
that could be customized by others as needed. The team provided links to downloadable PDFs of the family’s appeal, a Tell-a-Friend link that led to Vinay’s website, email templates that people could send to their friends, footer templates that people could add to their email signatures, banners to put on blogs or websites, and videos that people could add to their own Facebook pages. Team Vinay worked with Team Sameer to leverage each of these assets by linking and feeding communication across teams, essentially creating one big campaign.

Fourth, Team Sameer enabled others to take action by creating a clear and easy-to-execute “call to action” in all communication materials. For example, the call to action was abundantly clear on the website. An online calendar listed donor drives while the text on the welcome page nudged, “Hey visitor, have you already registered?” The site also hosted content that walked people through each step of holding a bone marrow drive, or even what individuals could expect when they attended a drive as a donor. Team Sameer further fueled its call by tracking metrics and collective impact and then feeding those results back to its members, a community of friends, family members, and strangers.

Although certain tasks needed to be coordinated “top down,” many did not. The leaders broke off anything that didn’t require top-down leadership and empowered (and encouraged) individuals to take action on their own. Communications across the team to share best practices were also important, and using tools such as Google Groups to facilitate those communications proved critical—allowing both groups to move ahead with agility and speed.

“We often tried to think of the traditional way to do something and considered what would happen if we did the exact
opposite—reversing the rules,” says Robert. “We weren’t wedded to a right way of moving ahead. We just moved ahead. And we empowered others to move ahead just as quickly.” As Team Sameer member Sundeep Ahuja explains, “We believed in ‘act first, then think.’” When one of their ideas was successful, they would focus on putting more energy and time into that winning idea. For example, once they saw that corporate workplace drives were effective, they continued with that and didn’t think of much else. They put some banners on their site and soon noticed that they weren’t yielding registrations, so they didn’t invest further in that effort. “Our motto was try, abandon, move on, try, abandon, move on . . .”

Although each wing was important individually, it was the integrated impact of the four wings working in concert that led to Team Sameer’s disproportionate results. None of these methods would have been effective without the prior, contributing impact of the other steps driving the audience toward becoming active participants.

Sameer’s transplant was completed in fall 2007. One day before getting his transplant, Sameer’s blog reflected optimism and his usual sense of humor (plus his love of emoticons): “I consider myself to be extremely lucky. I’ve had near normal energy levels and no pain or discomfort. . . . Until then, we are enjoying the hospital food, trying to return phone calls from friends, and continuing to get some work done. Oh, and in case you were wondering, the reason cancer patients are bald is to maximize their Kissable Surface Area (KSA)! Isn’t that obvious??”

Sameer also posted pictures and videos of his bone marrow transplant on YouTube. The videos consisted of small bits
of different parts of the procedure, with the first clip showing him anxiously looking at the bag of bone marrow and touching it while looking for his name. Sameer’s father tells him not to move it around too much, to which Sameer laughs and responds, “Don’t move it around too much? These cells were just shipped across the country and made it through baggage claim!” Another part shows Sameer holding the tube and watching as the bone marrow cells find their way into his body.

Three months after the transplant, just a few days before Christmas 2007, Sameer relapsed. In typical Sameer fashion, he was back to blogging by December 26. “I don’t believe in setbacks,” he wrote. “We must grow from this experience, whatever pains—physical and emotional—it brings us. What else, after all, is the process of life if not growth?”

After several additional setbacks and a valiant fight, Sameer passed away in March 2008. Friends and family mourned with a memorial service, delivered via a live webcast, which was attended by more than five hundred people throughout the world, some of whom knew Sameer and some of whom did not—all of whom were touched by his story.

The service was recorded and posted on Google Video. Several thousand people viewed the memorial in the first seven weeks after his passing. Sameer’s memorial photo slideshow, which joyfully depicts his commitment to his culture, family, and friends (and his penchant for costumes, including plaid skirts) was viewed over 6,000 times as well. “We knew that there were thousands of people around the world that couldn’t be with us, so we put everything online,” says Robert. “The idea that we could use technology to break down barriers and
boundaries was very powerful. It was our way of connecting Sameer’s friends and family from around the world to his memorial, which was a celebration of his life.”

The week that Sameer died, Vinay, who had received his transplant and made it to the hundred-day mark (what patients aim for so as to be in the clear), was admitted to the ICU. Vinay fought for several months, undergoing chemotherapy and alternative drug treatments. Despite his courage, and the global effort to save his life, Vinay passed away in June 2008.

That’s not the end of their stories, though. Their legacy, and their movement, continued to grow worldwide.

Through an integrated strategy that leveraged technology, passion, and persistence, as well as an understanding that they couldn’t succeed without the help of others, Team Sameer and Team Vinay together reached their goals of registering more than twenty thousand donors and finding a match for both men. Beyond the teams’ success in rapidly registering mass numbers of donors, they would ultimately inspire many others and save many other lives. From the base of seventy-five hundred people who registered in the Bay Area, where Sameer lived, eighty additional matches for other leukemia patients were discovered within a year. In 2008 alone, through the efforts of the two teams, 266 other individuals surfaced as matches and donated bone marrow.

Further, the campaign nearly doubled the number of South Asians registered with the NMDP, and retention rates for South Asians have improved to 50 percent, according to Asia Blume of the Asian American Donor Program. Moreover, the campaigns inspired others to change their perception about
donating, and that alone has changed lives. Pharmacy student Rina Mehta heard about Team Sameer and Team Vinay from a friend who sent her an invitation through Facebook along with information about a drive in Fremont, California. “It was so easy to register that I decided to do it, and I told everyone I knew to do the same, including my parents,” says Rina. Within six months, she received a phone call from the donor program requesting that she come in for more testing, as she was a potential match for another patient. Rina became a peripheral blood stem cell donor to an eighteen-year-old male leukemia patient. “I decided to donate because my fear and any inconvenience it might cause me paled in comparison to what he was going through.”

Perhaps the greatest legacy, however, spans far beyond leukemia and marrow donation. The story of Sameer and Vinay is one with a remarkable impact: it shows how the technologies we have at our fingertips can enable us to share stories, mobilize support, and take action to change lives. The two teams started a revolution that can be passed on to others who face similar situations. “We want to give people everything that we did so they can just plug into it, use it, and add onto it,” says Dayal Gaitonde, one of Sameer’s closest friends and a key member of Team Sameer. “We’re looking to open source everything that we did to help others in similar situations.”

Big revolutions start with simple ideas and ordinary people. “The notion that there are constraints becomes irrelevant. The biggest asset you have is the ability to think clearly, then take a very big idea and run with it,” says Robert.
Now that you’ve seen the Dragonfly Effect in action, it’s time to break it down and show you how to make it work for you. In the next chapter, we’ll start with the first wing (skill): Focus.

Lessons from Team Sameer and Team Vinay

How to Do Something Seismic—and Create a Movement

By Robert Chatwani

1. Stay focused; develop a single goal.
2. Tell your story.
3. Act, then think.
4. Design for collaboration.
5. Employ empowerment marketing.
6. Measure one metric.
7. Try, fail, try again, succeed.
8. Don’t ask for help; require it.
Jennifer Aaker

A social psychologist and marketer, Jennifer Aaker is the General Atlantic Professor of Marketing at Stanford University’s Graduate School of Business. Her research spans time, money, and happiness. She focuses on questions such as What actually makes people happy, as opposed to what they think makes them happy? How do small acts create significant change? and How can those effects be fueled by social media? She is widely published in the leading scholarly journals in psychology and marketing, and her work has been featured in a variety of media including The Economist, The New York Times, Wall Street Journal, Washington Post, BusinessWeek, Forbes, CBS MoneyWatch, NPR, Science, Inc., and Cosmopolitan.

A sought-after teacher in the field of marketing, Professor Aaker teaches in many of Stanford’s Executive Education programs, as well as MBA electives including Building Innovative Brands, How to Tell a Story, and The Power of Social Technology. Recipient of the Distinguished Teaching Award, Citibank Best Teacher Award, George Robbins Best Teacher Award, and both the Spence and Fletcher Jones Faculty Scholar Awards, she has also taught at UC Berkeley, UCLA, and Columbia.

A homegrown Californian, Jennifer has studied at the Sorbonne, and counts winning a dance-off in the early 1980s among her most impressive accomplishments.
Andy Smith

An economist and tech marketer by training, Andy Smith is a principal of Vonavona Ventures, where he advises and bootstraps technical and social ventures with guidance in marketing, customer strategy, and operations. Over the past twenty years, he has served as an executive in the high tech industry leading teams at Dolby Labs, BIGWORDS, LiquidWit, Intel, Analysis Group, Polaroid, Integral Inc., and PriceWaterhouseCoopers.

As a guest lecturer at Stanford’s Graduate School of Business, Andy speaks on social technology, engineering virality, and brand building, with a focus on applying technology to address real problems. He is a contributor to GOOD Magazine, where he writes on businesses that embrace and integrate a social mission. He has also spoken at World 50, Marketing Week, Intel, TechCore, and Interbrand, and is on the boards of 140 Proof, ProFounder, LIF Brands, Everywun, and One Family One Meal. Andy earned his MBA at UCLA’s Anderson School and holds an economics degree from Pomona College.

A gardener, gadgeteer, and serious tech geek, Andy is the creator of “The No Cookie Diet” (which he’s still on two years later). Once bumped from a flight that tragically crashed, he has since learned to accept travel mishaps, and most everything else, with equanimity.

Spouses and coauthors, Jennifer and Andy live in Lafayette, California, with their two little dudes and a princess.