Dear Student,

Since its 2009 publication, *Immunity to Change: How to Overcome It and Unlock the Potential in Yourself and Your Organization*, by Robert Kegan and Lisa Laskow Lahey, has changed the lives of individuals and organizations across the globe. The enclosed excerpts—selected as required reading for this course—are pulled directly from this powerful and provocative book.

In *Immunity to Change*, the authors show how our individual beliefs combined with the collective mind-sets in our organizations create a natural and commanding immunity to change. By explaining how this mechanism holds us back, Kegan and Lahey give us the keys to unlock our potential and finally move forward. And by pinpointing and uprooting our own immunities to change, we can bring our organizations forward with us.

In addition to the enclosed readings, the full book includes hands-on assessments, tools, and compelling case studies to help all of us overcome forces of inertia to transform work and life.

People who reviewed the book (on Amazon.com) had this to say:

> "Not simply a book about organizational transformation, *Immunity to Change* is a challenging analysis of how our well-developed methods of processing information and experience become barriers that hinder our attempts to achieve adaptive change."

> "This is one of the most useful, applicable books for helping people change behavior."

> "It made me feel empowered and motivated."

> "A must read for anyone who has ever tried or wanted to implement change at a personal or organizational level."

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8

UNLOCKING POTENTIAL

Three Necessary Ingredients

PEOPLE OFTEN ASK US, "Do you find that some people are better suited than others to make progress using your method?" Often this question comes with some tentative (or not so tentative) hypotheses—"I'll bet this is much more likely to work with women," they'll say (or "people from the United States and Europe rather than Asia," or "people in the social sector"). As we hope our examples throughout this book have made clear, all of these hypotheses are wonderfully unsupported.

But we have noticed that some people *are* better suited to overcoming their immunities. The body of evidence suggests that the more people are connected to three ingredients—which for shorthand purposes we'll designate as "gut," "head and heart," and "hand"—the more significant their changes will be. We'll look at each of these metaphors in turn.

INGREDIENT #1: THE GUT—A VITAL SOURCE OF MOTIVATION FOR CHANGE

To start and stay the course of doing genuinely developmental work, a person must really, *really* want to accomplish his or her first-column goal. It is almost never enough to have a goal that just "makes sense," not even one with compelling, logical reasons behind it. Reasons can help fuel our motivation to change, but they aren't enough to help us cross the critical thresholds. Reasons tap into the "ought" and "should" realm of inner talk. We must also experience sufficient need or desire, visceral feelings—which is why we say they come from the gut.

We have seen people who described their self-improvement goals in column 1 as "important" or "extremely important" to them to accomplish (a 4 or 5 on a 1–5 scale), yet they end up deciding not to pursue them. Why? They probably wouldn't say it this way, but it is almost as if they didn't have the stomach to endure what they imagine will be the unpleasantness of changing. These people were so alarmed when they saw (via their immunity map) that accomplishing their goal depended on altering their self-protective countercommitment, that they immediately reassessed the importance of their goal. A goal that felt, just an hour ago, like it was a 4 or 5 in importance to achieve, suddenly was no longer as critical. This is one way people resolve the dissonance. The way to countering it comes from a powerful enough gut feeling that the *cost* of this self-protection—the impossibility of making progress on a deeply desired goal—has just become too big a price to continue paying.

David and Cathy, whose success stories we explored in part 2, experienced their goals as more than "very important" to accomplish; they felt it was *absolutely necessary* to address them. Putting it the other way, they came to feel it was no longer tolerable *not* to address the goal. Relenting was not a viable option. They had reached some sort of limit as to how much they could bear. They were aware of and loaded down by the high price they were paying for the status quo.

A prime source of this fire in the belly comes from feeling that if we don't change, we are putting someone we love or something we care about at risk. As we write this book, we are working with a successful business leader who created a four-column map initially for professional purposes alone, starting with the improvement goal to be a better listener. But when he realized, weeks later, that his poor listening was harming his daughter and their relationship, it transformed his motivation to overturn his immunity. It broke his heart to hear his daughter's therapist suggest that her acting-out behavior could be related to him and his emotional unavailability. Seeing for the first time how he was failing his daughter, he tapped into a bigger reservoir of desire to deal with his immunity to change.

So a gut-level urgency to lessen distress—one's own or another person's—is one common driving force for individual change. Self-efficacy, including having a notion of what we can do to accomplish our desired change, is another. We may have a goal we care about (be it to stretch ourselves, follow a passion, address a shortcoming, or build our competencies), but if we don't feel in our gut we can do anything about it, or we aren't sure what we can do that will make enough of a difference, we don't act on it. For some people, seeing a picture of their immune system in front of them gives them exactly this direction and hope for what they can do to accomplish their goal.

For these people, readiness to change is often triggered by a sudden inspirational understanding of a truth about themselves. As they uncover their immune system, a door they did not see before opens and reveals how they have been holding themselves back. Even if their initial reaction is to be upset, many also feel a promise and opportunity in finally understanding the source of their undermining behaviors.

That was exactly how a woman we worked with described the turning point for success in meeting her change challenge. A tenured faculty member and associate chair of her department, Anna responded this way when we asked her to reflect on her process:

> The mapping session helped me liberate myself from doing other people's work so I could do my own. I had been on too many committees, taking on roles with responsibility and little authority,

picking up the pieces that my colleagues always seemed to be dropping, being pressured into research collaborations peripheral to my own interests. The four-column exercise provided the spark—an epiphany, really—for me to step out into relatively uncharted waters, on my own. This meant having the confidence to set, and work toward achieving, my own goals. When I think back on the session, it opened my eyes and it empowered me. I got permission from myself to pursue a different path.

Anna's epiphany about how she was inadvertently making herself miserable by doing everyone else's work happened, not surprisingly, when she thought about her hidden commitments. Here's how she talked about her self-discovery:

It started when I got to the third column. I wrote down my fears—that my work might not be good enough, that I'm fallible and imperfect—and when I actually said it aloud, I said to myself "Oh my god," and I got this sinking feeling. These worries were real! I knew I would have to put my own work up for scrutiny. Peer review is the whole world here. You have to go into a peer-review situation either naive, and you do that only once, or you have to have a shield of armor built. I think people think of me as tough, resistant, and unstoppable. But I don't see myself that way.

So here I was, on the one hand saying I was frustrated with work because I was giving too much of myself up to others when I had all these things I wanted to do, and then seeing that the real reason I serve on so many committees and say "yes" to everyone is that it's easier to do their work than my own! And that's because I'm afraid mine isn't good enough!

Drawing on her new insight, Anna had already worked out a plan before she left the mapping session for how she would tackle her goal of pursuing her own work: "At the close of that session, I decided I needed to be more confident. I needed to create more time and mechanisms to do my work to get it out there. I figured that if I can make the time and do the work, I will gain more validation that it is good."

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It's hard for us to resist telling you what her results were—so here they are:

I am this year in [a prestigious fellows program]. I am negotiating a book contract with a major textbook publisher for innovative learning materials in genetics. I have submitted a National Science Foundation grant related to this project, and the grant reviewed well so I am optimistic regarding its success; and I am writing several papers about this new method and its consequences for understanding genetics. If you knew me even a few years ago you'd understand this is a complete turnaround. Instead of being miserable and grumpy all the time, I am excited. And it has a positive impact on the rest of my life. I eat better, I exercise. Everything has fallen into place.

So gut feelings can prepare us to take action either because the cost of the status quo (to ourselves or others) has become intolerably high, or because we've experienced a burst of hope from seeing a way forward that was never clear before. A third source of gut motivation can be the personal experience of deep discrepancy.

In these cases, people feel the need to resolve a glaring gap they see in themselves. The gap can be cognitive, affective, and/or behavioral. It can be a mismatch that leads one person to feel badly about herself (e.g., "I want to stop smoking but I am smoking as much as ever") and another to feel excited about becoming more of the person he aspires to be (like the Welsh cell-phone salesman, Paul Potts, who clung to his dream of being an opera singer and ended up performing for the queen). The column 1 goal might be to correct a deficit ("becoming a better delegator") or to realize a fuller self-expansion (we worked with a highly accomplished senior executive nearing retirement who nonetheless, for his own fulfillment, deeply wanted to get better at mentoring and "leading from behind").

In either case, for many people, seeing themselves operate so contradictorily—a foot on the gas, a foot on the brake—activates the gut. As the psychologist William Perry observed, "Organisms *organize*. Human organisms organize *reality*." When you put before people a

stark picture of highly discrepant self-organization, it is often a powerful recruiter of their attention.

Our gut is the source of what moves us—our deepest appetites give us the motivation and energy—to take on adaptive change challenges. Once people have taken the first step of committing to change, they still need resources to sustain the journey. These come from the next two ingredients, and are generated as we begin to experience the rewards of the change itself.

INGREDIENT #2—HEAD AND HEART:
THE WORK MUST SIMULTANEOUSLY
ENGAGE THINKING AND FEELING

In every adaptive challenge, the problem space lies above *and* below our necks. Because an immunity to change expresses the thinking and feeling dimensions of a given level of mental complexity, we need to work on both dimensions to achieve real, adaptive change (as illustrated in "Engaging Feelings and Thinking Together"). No amount of thinking or effort alone will be sufficient to solve an adaptive problem, since how we feel is inherent in the problem itself. And because how we feel is intricately tied to how we know, we cannot feel differently if we don't know differently. We need a bigger emotional and cognitive space, one in which we experience that the internal conflicts and inconsistencies of our adaptive challenge are not inevitable and intractable.

Engaging Feelings and Thinking Together

Remember David, from chapter 5? His goal was "to become a better delegator and to better focus on a few critical things." On the face of it, this goal seems relatively straightforward and nonemotional. Nonetheless, in looking at his immunity map, we can see that David's goal was an

adaptive one essentially because delegating was tied to his identity and his beliefs about effective leadership. Recall his big assumption: "I believe that leadership without doing is 'overhead' and worthless. I'd walk away from my roots if I was not doing the work itself. I would be selfish, lazy, and spoiled, and lose my self respect."

Becoming consciously released from this assumption required David to redefine effective leadership—not just intellectually, but in his heart—so that he could continue to respect and feel good about himself, be true to his roots, and be a good delegator.

Put another way, for David to change his mindset regarding leadership, he had to deal with the feelings—in this case of disloyalty and self-contempt—that immediately emerged when he even thought about walking away from the picture of good leadership with which he had long identified.

The mindset reflected in an immunity to change is not simply a cognitive phenomenon. As we have said, it is also a brilliant anxiety-management system. Tampering with it means tampering with a well-tuned, highly serviceable, long-possessed instrument for keeping dangerous dread at bay. We said earlier that every immune system is an intelligent force that seeks to protect you, even to save your life as you know it. You can hear in that definition how the head and heart are furiously working in tandem.

When people see their own X-ray, they are inevitably looking at two realities at once—the benefits of the way they have come to take care of themselves, and the costs they are paying for doing so in exactly this way. Working through an adaptive challenge is a head-and-heart consideration of an alternative cost-benefit equation. Learning whether it is possible to think and feel that we can still be safe while pursuing a change is the essential change challenge. This is what we mean by working through anxiety: We come out on the other side with a new understanding that the world works differently than we had imagined, that we can still be safe—and even experience more expansive benefits—doing things we never thought possible before. We discover not only that we can survive, but thrive. This

discovery—a kind of recalculating of our risks and benefits—entails a simultaneous "thinking about our feelings" and "feeling our way into new ways of thinking."

To make this more concrete, let's see how Cathy (from chapter 6) experienced this shift. Figure 8-1 shows the benefits Cathy got from

FIGURE 8-1

Cathy's benefits: Before and after

Benefits	When captive of her immunity	When released from her immunity
What Cathy gets from others	I get to be seen as the go-to person, the teammate people can count on to get it done and done right all the time. I am viewed by my teammates as dependable. I get to be seen by others as up to the team's bar of a good team member (110% effort and making sure everything is perfect).	I continue to be seen as dependable by my teammates. I am respected not so much for what I "do" as for who I "am." I get ongoing feedback about when they think I may be heading toward a high-strung state. I get frequent and specific feedback about my work and an appreciation for my contributions to the team.
What Cathy gets from herself	I avoid feeling that I may not be capable, and keep others from taking away the work I love. I know that I can deliver the perfect end product. I know that I am always giving my absolute best and therefore can't or won't let down my team of myself. I successfully hide from others the truth of my defectiveness.	I have confidence. The satisfaction of really understanding my value added. No longer living the possibility that something precious can be taken. No longer feeling that the deep-down truth is that I am inadequate. Feeling that my worth is more intrinsic than extrinsic. (Before I was always "doing" things, and now it's about "being" myself, trusting and using my unique insights, given my experiences and education, in order to produce an excellent end product.) I have the satisfaction of being able to take care of myself by acting on my understanding to make good decisions about what work I should do and how to do it. I don't worry about burning out. I ask myself, "What is in my control here and what isn't?" and make choices based on what's in my control.

others and herself when she was unconsciously captive to her intact immune system ("before"), and when she overturned it to be consciously released ("after"). In both cases she benefits, but a critical difference is that the latter gains are *not* keeping her from being able to deliver on her aspiration to better control her emotions. These descriptions parallel Cathy's shift from reacting emotionally, not asking for help, not saying no, and operating in overdrive, on the one hand, to effectively managing her emotions, prioritizing and pacing her work, and saying no to herself and others, on the other.

Let's look at the shifts in David's experience of risks and benefits. Recall that David initially felt rewarded by being a "doer" and not asking people for help. Over time, though, he discovered greater benefits from doing things selectively and focusing on core priorities. He learned that he could actively enjoy and feel good about himself operating in a world he had formerly dismissed. Figure 8-2 offers a snapshot of his shift.

As people experience the emergence of options where before there were none, they begin to feel new energy and hope. Tasting the possibility of living in a no-less-safe, but significantly larger space is intoxicating and a source of continued motivation to stay in the work and carry it through. New ways of thinking permit new ways of feeling, and new ways of feeling encourage and validate new ways of thinking. Energy that had been trapped in the immune system is now released and can be redirected to feeling increasing competence and control in our lives. New energy leads to new action, and a particular kind of action furthers the process of adaptation. This brings us to the third ingredient of successful change.

INGREDIENT #3: HAND—THE WORK IS SIMULTANEOUSLY ABOUT MINDSET AND BEHAVIOR

We can't merely think or feel our way out of an immune system no matter how high our motivation is to accomplish our goal. Kant said "perception without conception is blind," and we don't disagree: the mindset does create what we see. But it is also true that conception

FIGURE 8-2

David's benefits: Before and after

Benefits	When captive of his immunity	When released from his immunity
What David gets from others	They see me as smart and a good problem solver, someone who can do what they do better than they do it. I get their respect for that.	People appreciate knowing what's going on—what our direction is and that they understand why we're trying to get there. They also think it's great that I'm letting them make decisions themselves. Best, people are coming to me to tell me ideas about how we could move ahead differently. That's been very fulfilling. More so than getting an individual task done myself.
What David gets from himself	I avoid feeling selfish, lazy, spoiled, and like overhead. I feel important and valuable by doing individual tasks myself, which makes me highly productive. It connects me to people. And I'm doing a "kick-ass" job. I feel good about being a star. I feel aligned with my working-class roots, continuing as a guy who can get his hands dirty (and do the job on the ground better than anyone else) even if I am also now the boss in the "suit."	I feel important and valuable by spending my time finding ways to help my people be more effective. (I find myself looking more at what my people are accomplishing.) I have a new conception of productivity that keeps me feeling still loyal to my roots. (I'm not being selfish, but am helping others.) I have deeper self-respect for being a leader who is able to direct the work and optimize resources for doing it (people and $). I have a clearer and more satisfying leadership practice, where I see that I don't have to do in order to know what's going on, but that I do need to know what's going on in order to direct the work. I don't have to be better than the people I hire, and, in fact, if I am, I am not doing my job well.

without inception is paralysis. We must set out. We must begin to take new action. Success follows from taking intentional, specific actions—the reaching hand—that are *inconsistent* with our immunity so that we can test our mindset.

We start this work with what may seem the most modest sort of action. At first, we simply observe the behaviors listed in our column 2, Doing and Not Doing (behaviors that work against our improvement

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goal). These observations lead us to see our hidden commitments and big assumptions in real time, which can expand access to additional facets of our mindset. Such observations can also lead us to see additional realms in which our big assumptions operate, which can in turn further motivate us to change as we see greater costs than we first realized. David's earliest self-observations did just this, as we see in "Observing One's Big Assumption in Action."

The next "doing" step involves enacting new behaviors—ones that our big assumptions would tell us *not* to do—in order to get information about the validity of our mindset. We need to be as purposeful about which actions we will take as we are about what information we will collect. Testing our mindset through intentional

Observing One's Big Assumption in Action

RECALL THAT DAVID began by consciously observing himself as he continued to accept more tasks and refrain from asking people to help him. These behaviors clearly ran counter to his intent to better delegate so that he could focus on what was most critical. By being alert to when he said yes and didn't ask for help, he recognized that he got more goodies from doing so than he realized when drafting his first immunity map. Watching his behavior and then tuning in to his internal experience, he was able to know that he felt "important and valuable by doing individual tasks myself. It connects me to people. And I'm doing a kick-ass job. I feel good about being a star." He also gained his team's positive regard: "They see me as smart and a good problem solver. I get their respect for that." These were rich additions to his column 3 commitments to protect the self he wanted to be—that is, important, valuable, and a star.

Self-observations also led David to see that not delegating was a big issue in his personal life as well. Beyond seeing how not delegating at work meant carving into his home time, he realized that he never hired anyone to do household chores either. He told us, laughingly, "I have trouble delegating mowing the lawn!" He also told us he didn't feel okay about asking someone to do his ironing.

action, data collecting, and interpreting the data are the core means we use to mine the gap between our intentions and current ability to deliver on them.

Our entire purpose in acting differently is to generate relevant data to test our big assumptions. Our immediate purpose is *not* to improve or get better, but to get information. In doing so, we are again working within the sweet spot of an adaptive challenge, discovering whether it is possible to replace the safety born of limiting ourselves with a safety informed by learning that the expected bad outcomes don't materialize when we suspend self-imposed limits. Not only that, we may discover the benefits of an increased repertoire of behavioral options and the sense of excitement, accomplishment, and mastery that comes from making progress on our change goal. This is precisely what David learned, as described in "Running a Test of One's Big Assumption."

Keeping both mindset and behavior on the change agenda is not easy. Two common tendencies—to favor change on only one or the other dimension—highlight the difficulty. Let's look at the action tendency first. Some people find it difficult to keep clear on the purpose of enacting new behaviors. We have seen people act for a host of

Running a Test of One's Big Assumption

L ET'S RETURN TO DAVID to see how his adaptive work combined mindset and behavior. A few weeks into the follow-up process, David chose to stop doing some of the tasks he had always done himself and instead asked others on his team to handle them. Before asking for this help, David used his knowledge of people's strengths and preferences to decide whom to ask; in doing so, he increased the likelihood that people would succeed with the task.

Recall that a key reason David wanted to delegate better was so he could focus on select, critical issues. He clarified his top three priorities and started to work on them.

So far, David's change work has been behavioral. Without a next step, his new behaviors would constitute a technical solution to his adaptive challenge—that is, actions taken "to get better" versus "to get information." But when he uses new behaviors to test his mindset, gathering data about himself as a leader and his ability to still add value when he stops trying to do all tasks and instead pursues his priorities, he shifts into adaptively working on his goals. For this to be a good test, he can't know, in advance, how he will feel. The data he gathers may reinforce his conception of the problem and his continued need to protect himself, or it may begin to lead him to reformulate the problem and reduce or dissolve its either/or quality.

He collects a variety of data by surveying his team and observing what happens over time when he delegates: When he gives people a chance to shine, they complete tasks better than he would have; he has mixed feelings about their success (loving that people are flourishing but also feeling a "bit of a blow" himself); people appreciate his intention to be more open to others' ways of doing things; he feels proud that he has figured out that giving starting and end points and providing context enable people to succeed; and he sees himself adding value by "giving the lines."

He simultaneously collects data about what happens when he works on his priorities over time: He feels that his work is not big enough or personal enough at first, but then discovers new and deeper ways to connect to people, more energy and better outcomes. All of these fuel his excitement and belief in the even greater value he now adds by letting go of "doing the details" and instead thinking and planning around the right work.

His initial assumption was this: "I believe that leadership without doing is 'overhead' and worthless. I'd walk away from my roots if I was not doing the work itself. I would be selfish, lazy, and spoiled, and lose my self respect." After testing this mindset with new behaviors and collecting data about the outcomes of these behaviors, his revised assumption was this: "It's not that I need to do it, but I need to know it. I need to understand how the parts fit together in order to do the big-picture work effectively. Maybe it's not even having the skill to do the work, but it's having the detailed information."

other reasons, including wanting to prove to themselves that they could do "it" (whatever their behavior challenge was), to get something done, or to be brave and get "it" over with. Problem solved. (This happens even for people who understand and accept the premise of the four-column map—that behavior is symptomatic of a system, and any lasting change will require the *system* to change.) Like a patient who prematurely discontinues a course of penicillin because the painful symptoms have been eliminated, many people confuse short-term alteration of specific behaviors with the actual accomplishment of their goal.

It's a completely understandable confusion. If you have wanted to lose ten pounds for ten years and a diet finally helps you do it, you might well assume you have accomplished your goal. But your goal actually isn't to lose ten pounds. Many people (even you?) have lost ten pounds *many times*! The goal is to lose ten pounds *and keep the weight off*. Dieting doesn't lead to weight loss that endures. For this we must join a change in behavior with a change in the way we think and feel—and in order to change the way we think and feel, we need to change our mindsets. When we are working on truly adaptive goals—ones that require us to *develop* our mindsets—we must continually convert what we learn from behavioral changes into changes in our mindsets.

Nor is the work accomplished by just seeking "insights," as empowering or clarifying as those insights might feel. This is the other common tendency we see: People are struck by the self-understanding their 4-column map affords, but then they get mired in their thinking, analyzing and reflecting, with little inclination to act. Those who take this route may be operating on their personal, often tacit, theory of change, which champions self-awareness of one's internal world. The presumption might be that understanding more and more deeply what motivates us is the means to change, or that untangling our thinking is key. But reflection without action is ultimately as unproductive as action without reflection.

Interestingly, as diametrically opposite as the two unproductive approaches are, they share an identically flawed theory of action. "If I can just accomplish *one more* (one more behavior, or one more insight), it will finally unlock the key to why I cannot change."

ACHIEVING ADAPTIVE CHANGE:
THE COMMON THREADS

Our discussion so far has focused on what a David or a Cathy needs from within—guts, head and heart, and hand—to work adaptively. But in both their cases, it is not coincidental that the social milieu also plays an important role. We are not just referring to the relationship each had with a coach, either. More importantly, we are flagging the contributions of people who were a seamless part of each person's change narrative, be they team members, a spouse, a best friend, or a colleague.

Without such an environment, it is very difficult to see ourselves fully. Inevitably, we are limited by our own perspectives. In one of our favorite cartoons, Gary Larson shows us an earnest artist at work. His model sits before him in perfect repose, but on the canvas her likeness is obliterated by a giant insect. It can take us a while to make sense of the cartoon—until we see a tiny fly on one lens of the artist's glasses. If he never shows anyone his work, the artist can be quite pleased with his rendition of reality! At the same time, he is missing any predictable outside source for challenging his flawed world view. Without such a challenge, it becomes too easy for him to drift out of the zone for transformation, and stay stuck in his current mindset.

It is easier to stay in the zone and make progress when there is a social dimension to our learning. We let someone know we are working on becoming, for example, a better listener (maybe we ask them to be a survey respondent). Once they know our intent, we can turn to them at any point to ask for input. Or they may spontaneously tell us how much they appreciated our listening to them during yesterday's meeting. They might even be so bold as to let us know what we did or did not do concerning our intent to be better listeners. Sometimes just seeing someone in the hall or hearing another's voice on the phone reminds us what we are working on. These cues can quickly and effectively get us back into the zone. Additionally, simply knowing that others know what we are working on can provide a form of social accountability; in this way, we count on others to help hold us to our own goals.

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What we have described so far are the key features of working adaptively: working from the gut, linking head to heart, and taking a specific kind of action (the hand), all within a social context. When we see all these ingredients in place, we see people change. What is common across all the people we have helped to accomplish adaptive challenges?

- They all succeed at changing both their mindset (the meaning-making system that shapes thoughts and feelings) *and* their behavior; rather than changing only mindset *or* behavior, and hoping the other will eventually follow.

- They all become keen and focused observers of their own thoughts, emotions, and behaviors, and they learn to use these as information. They see the agenda that is driving them, not just the agenda they are driving.

- Changes to their mindsets are always in the direction of seeing and feeling more possibilities: Spaces people had previously thought they could not or should not enter (because they were out of reach or too dangerous) are now fully accessible.

- They take focused risks and build a new set of muscles and metrics around assumptions based on actual, rather than imagined, data about the consequences of their new actions. Their anxiety around the initial adaptive challenge is reduced, if not eliminated, while their experiences of pleasure significantly increase.

- They experience increased mastery, more options, wider control, and greater degrees of freedom. They make progress on, or even accomplish, their column 1 commitment, and, more often than not, their accomplishments extend considerably beyond the initial aspiration. Because they have developed new mental capabilities—not just a new solution to a single problem—they can bring these capabilities to other challenges and other venues, in their work and in their personal lives.

Are you ready to start unlocking potential in yourself, your colleagues, your work group, or your organization? Are you interested in seeing what happens, for you or others, when once-countervailing energies are made available for other purposes? If so, what might be your own best next step? Our recommendation is that you have a first-hand experience of your own immunity-to-change. What would your own X-ray look like? What does an improvement goal of your own become when you convert it into what we would call a "good problem"? What would it really mean for you personally to work on your own "good problem" by letting it first "solve you"? If any of these questions are of interest to you we invite you to turn to the chapters that follow.

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DIAGNOSING YOUR OWN
IMMUNITY TO CHANGE

I N THE YEARS SINCE *How the Way We Talk Can Change the Way We Work* was published, we have guided literally thousands of professionals through the process of constructing their own X-ray, or immunity map, and trained more than a hundred practitioners to guide others through the process. We noticed early in the work that while most people reported having a powerful experience, as many as 30 to 40 percent did not. Many of these people said it was "interesting" or even "worthwhile," but they clearly had not had as valuable a learning experience as their colleagues.

So we set out to identify and strengthen those places in the process where some people's maps lost compression. As a result of these revisions, we have greatly reduced our "failure rate." It is not uncommon now for nearly everyone who undertakes the process to develop an immunity map that feels powerful or intriguing (a 4 or 5 on a scale of 1–5).

If you have never gone through the process of constructing your own immunity map, you are about to be the beneficiary of these enhancements. If you read *How the Way We Talk Can Change the Way We Work* and went through the map-making process described there, we strongly encourage you *not* to skip this chapter. We believe

you are likely to create a more powerful version this time through, as we help you to avoid the most common pitfalls along the way.

GETTING STARTED

We can't emphasize enough the importance of defining a good column 1 improvement goal. As an example, let us tell you the two different ways we got people started when we worked with Peter Donovan's senior team, which we introduced in chapter 2. The first way led to a perfectly interesting three-hour experience with absolutely no impact. The second method initiated a process that, over time, as you heard from Peter, positively altered the DNA of the leadership team of the company.

On the first occasion, we were given an afternoon of a three-day leadership retreat for the executive staff (eighteen members, including all the C-level leaders and their direct reports). The first time any of these people considered a first-column improvement goal was the very moment we stood in front of them at the offsite. We gave them a few minutes to think about three or four of the most important and challenging aspects of their job, and then we asked, "What would be most important for you to get better at—in order to perform any or all of these aspects *significantly better*?"

Each person easily came up with something, and each then proceeded gradually to build an X-ray showing how and why they systematically were preventing themselves from accomplishing this very thing. Many people found the experience of creating the map an especially intriguing way of spending a few reflective hours together. They remarked, as people often do, that they "couldn't see it coming," and appreciated the surprise of being "hit in the face" with something they hadn't seen in themselves. They thought the whole concept of an immunity to change was stimulating and illuminating. Peter thanked us for a productive session and assured us he thought the work would be valuable for the team.

But it wasn't.

We talked with Peter a year later and he concluded that what we had done had had absolutely no effect on anyone or anything in the

company. His interpretation was something we have since heard from many leaders who have gotten involved with our process:

> It's one thing if the purpose of the exercise is just to demonstrate the immunity to change as an interesting concept. Having people use their own experience is a clever way of getting them personally involved with a set of ideas. But if the purpose is really to bring about significant change in individuals—and, in our case, if the goal is to bring about significant change in a whole team—then *everything depends* on what people put in that first column! After all, even if you carry on the work after the diagnostic [the subject of our next chapter], it ends up being an investment in dramatic change only *along the lines of whatever is in that first column,* and if what is in that first column is not the absolutely optimal goal, then no matter how good the technology, it is being applied to the wrong thing!
>
> You can't just let people choose all by themselves what they put in that first column. We all need input. One of the big messages of your work is that we fool ourselves, right? So, since this is true, how can any of us be expected to be the best source of information on what it is we should really work at improving?

Peter and his two top lieutenants were intrigued enough to try again with a different approach. They saw that, like many organizations, they spent a lot of time evaluating their personnel, giving people feedback, identifying improvement goals—and then, a year later, they didn't notice much change. They had two thoughts:

- Perhaps the immunity-to-change process can "unstick" this familiar story, and ratchet up the ROI on all this assessment and feedback.

- People come out of our evaluation sessions with too many personal improvement goals. What if we identify just "one big thing" and focus all our attention relentlessly on that?

So energetically did they then draw people into the process of identifying their improvement goals that the term "one-big-thing," as

you saw in chapter 3, became a lasting part of the lexicon of the company. Every executive was asked to identify a single goal that "would excite you personally if you were able to make big gains on this goal" and "would clearly enable you to add more value to the company." The goal should not be something technical that you could accomplish by learning some new skill. Rather it should clearly involve your own growth as a person. At the same time, the goal should not be something that would require a complete personality transplant.

Before the next executive team retreat, every member got one-on-one feedback from several sources:

- The person to whom they report: "Here's the improvement goal that is going to make the biggest difference to me in evaluating you this year for bonus [or promotion, or whatever]."

- Peers: "Here's the thing I think would make you a better team member."

- At least one person who reported to them: "Here's what would enable me to serve you better."

The top leaders shared with each other what particular one-big-thing was shaping up for each of their direct reports, and then they pushed each other: "Are we each honestly excited about each person's goal? Do we all feel that each of these one-big-things would make a big difference for the company?" They also challenged each other regarding *their own* one-big-thing. In addition to each other, they consulted their executive coaches and, in some cases, they asked ownership and people from ownership's office, to make sure they had good improvement goals themselves. And they didn't stop with purely in-office canvassing. As Peter has described, they went home and checked to see whether family members also felt they would see big benefits were the person to make real improvement on the chosen goal.

A colleague of ours—an expert on research methodology—says, "You can't solve by brilliant analysis later on what you screwed up at the start in the original design." So how can we help you not to screw up your original design? Our first tip is this: don't expect to complete this chapter in a single sitting. You will need to get a little external

input even before you make your first-column entry. Talk to the people around you, at work and at home, and find out if the prospect of achieving your proposed goal brings a shine to their eyes. Ask them if they have an alternative goal to propose, something they think would be even more valuable for you; something they personally would be even happier to see. Don't enter your first-column goal until you are certain its accomplishment would be a big deal not just to you, but to people around you.

COLUMN 1: YOUR IMPROVEMENT GOAL

Once you have completed this prework, start to create your map using the template shown in figure 9-1. To help us guide you through your own X-ray, we are going to introduce Fred, a real executive, whose unfolding map will provide examples for your own. (Fred is the fellow we referred to in chapter 8, whose goal to be a better listener was made more urgent when he learned of its importance to his relationship with his daughter.)

FIGURE 9-1

Create your own immunity X-ray

1 Commitment (improvement goal)	2 Doing/not doing instead	3 Hidden competing commitments	4 Big assumptions
		Worry box:	

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So you've gotten some internal input and you have now entered your own first-column goal, right? (Okay, we know you haven't! You're just reading on from the prior pages. But c'mon! Your whole understanding of what the immunity to change really is will be much deeper if you have a direct experience of it as it applies to *you*! Take your time. Do your homework; then, and only then, enter your first draft of an improvement goal, your commitment, in column 1.)

Figure 9-2 shows Fred's original first-column entry. Fred was able to affirm all of the following about his goal, and, as you look at yours, you should be able to do the same:

- It's important to him. It would be a big deal for him if he could get dramatically better at this. He very much *wants* to get better at it; he even feels some urgency about getting better at it. It's not just that it would be *nice* if he could; he feels the *need* to, for whatever reason.

- It's important to someone around him. He knows that others would value it highly if he could get better at this.

FIGURE 9-2

Fred's first-draft column 1 improvement goals

1 Commitment (improvement goal)	2 Doing /not doing instead	3 Hidden compet-ing commitments	4 Big assumptions
To be a better listener (to not let my mind wander), to not get so impatient		Worry box:	

- He is clear that accomplishing this goal primarily implicates *him*. His focus for improvement in this area is on *himself,* changes *he* will have to make. (After all, it is possible for someone with his goal to feel otherwise, as in, "If only people didn't waste my time with boring or insignificant communications I would in fact *be* a much better listener.")

If your current draft of your first-column entry falls short in any of these respects, don't worry. That is a common shortcoming with first drafts of this exercise. However, if it *does* fall short, you should not just continue to your second column. That is another common mistake. The power and utility of your ultimate map will be maximized if you take the time to revise your entry until it meets all of the above criteria.

Although Fred's entry may meet all these criteria, we can see another that it does not meet, and this will give us a chance to illustrate what we mean by revising your first draft. He tends to elaborate on his goal in the negative—by saying what he does *not* want to do ("to not let my attention wander, to not get so impatient"). We have found that people tend to end up with maps they experience as more powerful when they start out by saying affirmatively what they want to *become* rather than what they want to *stop* being. Accordingly, Fred revised his first-column entry as shown in figure 9-3, and if you notice this tendency in your own entry, we suggest you do the same.

COLUMN 2: THE FEARLESS INVENTORY

From the sample X-rays you have seen throughout the book, you know that the next step is to take a fearless inventory of all the things you are doing (or not doing) that work *against* your first-column goal.

We will turn you loose to make these entries in your own second column in a moment, but first, some further clarification:

- The more concrete behaviors you can list (what you actually do or fail to do), the better. Fred, for example, initially wrote in his second column, "I get impatient." Similarly, someone

FIGURE 9-3

Fred's revised column 1 improvement goals

1 Commitment (improvement goal)	2 Doing /not doing instead	3 Hidden compet- ing commitments	4 Big assumptions
To be a better listener (especially better at staying in the present, staying focused, being more patient)		Worry box:	

whose goal is to be better with difficult conversations might have initially entered, "I am uncomfortable with conflict." Neither of these are optimal entries because these are states of mind, not external behaviors. We would ask that person, "But what do you actually *do* or *fail to do* as a result of your impatience, discomfort, or other unpleasant feelings?" Before you create your own list, have a look at Fred's second-column entries in figure 9-4.

- The more items you enter here, and the more honest you are, the greater the eventual diagnostic power of your map will be. Keep in mind that no one need ever see what you enter, so take a deep dive, and tell on yourself. The purpose is not to shame or embarrass you, or assign fault. You will see shortly that the richer you make this column, the bigger the eventual payoff.

- Make sure that *everything* you enter provides a picture of you working *against* your own goal in column 1. (No doubt you are also doing things *on behalf of* your column 1 goal. Good for you, but that is not the nature of the column 2 assignment. We aren't looking for balance here. The best information for revealing your immunity will eventually be found in the things you do, or fail to do, that have the unintentional effect of *undermining* your improvement goal.)

- You should also be clear we are not asking *why* you are doing these things, or for ideas or plans about how you can stop doing these things and get better. The urge to explain our own ineffectiveness and/or to devise strategies to cure ourselves of our wicked ways is often very strong at this point in the process. It's understandable, since for many of us it is uncomfortable to look at a list of our foibles staring back at us in black and white, and we want to do something to make this go away. Try to resist these impulses. For now, you are just trying to go for descriptive depth and honesty. Just the behaviors themselves in all their embarrassing glory.

If you need further clarity or inspiration look at Fred's entries in figure 9-4.

If you get regular feedback, supervision, or evaluation, you may want to consider that input as an additional source of column 2 entries. If not, and if for any reason you are unable to create a rich list of your own counterproductive behaviors, we have a final suggestion, if you have the stomach for it: seek out a few people whom you trust and feel are on your side and just ask them if they can identify any behaviors (or avoidances) in your repertoire that tend to work against your goal. We guarantee you, *they have things to add to your list!* Thank them, and enter their observations in your second column.

Okay, over to you.

When you have finished making your entries, take another glance at the four criteria for column 2 entries, and check to see that your list squares with these. Don't read the next section until you have completed your second column and made any necessary revisions.

FIGURE 9-4

Fred's column 2 entries

1 Commitment (improvement goal)	2 Doing/not doing instead	3 Hidden competing commitments	4 Big assumptions
To be a better listener (especially better at staying in the present, staying focused, being more patient)	I allow my attention to wander off. I start looking at my BlackBerry. I make to-do lists in my mind, or even literally on a slip of paper. If I'm trying to listen to a client, I'll often start thinking of what would be an impressive response and stop listening to what he is saying. If it's my daughter, I'll often start thinking of what she should do differently, and stop listening to what she is saying. If it's my wife, I'll often feel "this is not urgent" and my attention will shift to something that I think is urgent.	Worry box:	

COLUMN 3: HIDDEN COMPETING COMMITMENTS

Have you been wondering about the empty square at the top of column 3 in figure 9-1? It's what we call the worry box, and it will help you develop raw material for your column 3 entries.

Step 1: Filling Your Worry Box

When you look at the X-rays throughout this book, it should become obvious that the column 3 commitments produce something unexpected for their authors. It is not until we complete the third column, after all, that we begin to see the hidden dynamic, the immunity to change, emerge. We begin to see a whole different set of competing commitments that live alongside the improvement goals of column 1. In chapter 2, for instance, we understood that Peter genuinely wanted to:

- Be more receptive to new ideas

- Be more flexible in his responses, especially regarding new definitions of roles and responsibilities

- Be more open to delegating and supporting new lines of authority

But when we got to the third column in his map, we learned that he also had commitments (or, more properly, these commitments also *had him*):

- To have things done *my* way!

- To experience myself as having a direct impact

- To feel the pride of ownership; to see my stamp on things

- To preserve my sense of myself as the super problem solver, the one who knows best— yesterday, today, and tomorrow

In looking at the third column of the various X-rays we've shown, you may have wondered, "However did they get people to see these things?" The hard work we hope you have been doing on the first two columns should now help you complete your own third column. The result, across the three columns, should be a picture— you will see in a moment—that intrigues you and can serve as a platform for eventually meeting your own adaptive challenge.

The first step in creating good entries for column 3 is to generate the raw material that will eventually get you there. Have a look at

your column 2 list and answer the following question about each of those entries: If I imagine myself trying to do the *opposite* of this, what is the most uncomfortable or worrisome or outright scary feeling that comes up for me?

Peter thought about what would be the most uncomfortable, unpleasant, or scary thing for him if he tried to actually share more of the authority and shaping of the company, and what he got to was, "Eeech. I'd feel less important; I'd *be* less important; I could be displaced, become a marginal player in my own company. Yuk!"

The "Eeech" and the "Yuk" are important. The goal is to locate an actual loathsome *feeling,* not just a thought or an idea about an unpleasant feeling. The goal is to let yourself vicariously experience a little of this feeling, and only then to put that feeling into words.

Go ahead and look at each of your column 2 entries and, in the worry box in column 3, jot down the biggest worry, discomfort, or outright fear that comes up when you think of trying to do the opposite of the behavior you wrote down.

We are at another critical point here, a place where, if you do not take this to sufficient depth, the map you come up with will not have enough power. If you haven't located a genuine "oh, shit" kind of feeling, you are probably not there yet. You have to really reach some fear, and if you haven't gotten there yet, you might ask yourself, "and what would be the worst about *that* for me?" *You need to get to a place where you feel yourself at risk in some way; where you are unprotected from something that feels dangerous to you.*

Many of you have probably gotten to this point all on your own. But since we want to increase the chance that nearly *all* of you will have a powerful map at the end of this chapter, let's take a look at a typical not-yet-there entry, and what you can do about it.

Fred took a first shot at this in his quest to become a better listener:

> If I think of not allowing my attention to wander off, what's the worst feeling that comes up for me? The first thing that comes up is just boredom and the next is impatience. I just hate the feeling of being bored, that what I am doing has no important point. I'm not engaged. It's like the feeling of waiting for a plane

to land. I'm waiting for life to happen, but life is not happening. I'm having to listen to a lot of stuff that frankly doesn't matter, or that I already know, or that I got from the person in the first two minutes and now he is saying it all over again in some slightly different way. I hate that. The boredom often runs quickly into impatience. I haven't time for this. There are a lot of balls in the air, things that need attending to, and I've got to get moving. So, boredom and impatience. Two awful feelings, and those are the feelings that come up.

This is a very common example of not yet going quite deep enough in this step, not yet identifying what is really the anxiety in the wings here. We have learned that some people quickly identify certain kinds of negative feelings that are like valuable "book covers"— they've drawn the right volume from the shelf, but now they need to open the cover and read what is inside.

Boredom is one of these common covers. We get bored because we have disengaged. But often we back off for a very good reason! Often we have disengaged because of something awful we didn't want to feel. Something happened, very quickly, *before* the disengagement that led to the feeling of boredom. What is that awful something? When we asked Fred about this, he quickly got to a deeper place: "If I don't disengage with my teenagers, I'm left feeling like whatever I say, they are going to roll their eyes; I am going to feel humiliated by their disdain. That is actually a very awful feeling for me. If I don't disconnect with my wife, I often have a feeling of helplessness that the situations she is talking about are out of my control. There is nothing I can do about it. I hate that feeling."

Now we are getting to the self really being at risk!

The same is true of impatience. Again, this is a good start; a cover to a valuable book. But what is the text underneath the cover? Am I impatient because I feel I must be somewhere other than where I currently am? How come? What is the danger? Impatience, too, signals some risk to me, but what? Listen again to Fred:

The impatience comes up in a variety of ways. I'll be listening to someone and something they say reminds me of something that

needs doing. If I don't allow myself to go there in my mind, I feel terror that one of the balls I am juggling is going to drop. I have a lot going on in my life, and the truth is that I'm not a very well-organized person. If I don't attend to the worry that has come up for me, I could forget about it, and something bad could happen.

Sometimes, with my kids, or with junior people in the company, the impatience has to do with an alarm that *they* are going to screw up. When I think of just continuing to listen, and stifling my urge to start giving my wonderful advice, I worry, for example, that my daughter is going to take a big wrong turn in her life.

So what was originally boredom and impatience we now see is:

- The fear of looking stupid

- The fear of being humiliated

- The fear of helplessness

- The fear of being out of control

- The fear of making a big mistake

- The fear of allowing someone else to make a big mistake (especially someone for whom I am responsible)

This is what went into Fred's worry box in column 3.

Now take a look at what *you* have generated for this step, as you considered doing the opposite of what you wrote in column 2, and see if you have reached this level of fear—feelings of being unprotected in some way against a danger or a risk you absolutely do not want to run.

Step 2: Generating Possible Competing Commitments

The actual entries for column 3, however—the hidden competing commitments—are not these fears in the worry box themselves. The fears, we said, are the raw material for generating third-column

commitments. The idea behind the immunity to change is that we do not merely have these fears; we sensibly, even artfully, protect ourselves from them. We create ways of dealing with the anxiety these fears provoke. We are not only afraid; we take action to combat our fears. We defend ourselves from what terrifies us. We are actively (but not necessarily consciously) committed to making sure the things we are afraid of do not happen.

This is the heart of a third-column commitment. It is a commitment to keep the thing we are afraid of from happening. Fred not only fears looking stupid; without his realizing it, he may also have a commitment *to not looking stupid*. (Or, more precisely, a commitment to not looking stupid *has him*.)

He does not merely passively "have a fear" of looking stupid; he actively behaves in ways that very effectively, even brilliantly, protect him from looking stupid to his teenagers. How does he do this? He disengages when they speak, makes himself bored, finds something else that needs doing in his mind. He worries that if he really stays present to them and listens, and tries to respond out of his listening, they are going to be disdainful and roll their eyes, and he is going to feel humiliated, a feeling that is almost unbearable for him. And so, he does a very intelligent thing—he withdraws.

His withdrawing is now perfectly understandable, to us and to him. It is perfectly sensible. On behalf of his commitment to protect himself from humiliation, we could say he should withdraw even more than he currently does! His behavior is highly effective. It just has one drawback: It will prevent him from making any progress on his improvement goal, a goal that is very important for him to accomplish. He can see here an expression of how he systematically prevents progress on his own goal. He is captive of a mental system that is working to protect him, to save his life as he knows it—a perfectly effective immune system.

Fred can now go ahead and convert *each* of the fears he identified into a possible third-column commitment (which he holds alongside the goal to be more present and be a better listener). As he fills in his third column, he will see taking shape the dynamic equilibrium that the arrows stretching across the first three columns are meant to suggest. In figure 9-5 he can see a picture of himself with one foot on the

FIGURE 9-5

Fred's column 3 commitments: The immune system comes to light

1 Commitment (improvement goal)	2 Doing/not doing instead	3 Hidden competing commitments	4 Big assumptions
To be a better listener (especially better at staying in the present, staying focused, being more patient)	I allow my attention to wander off. I start looking at my Blackberry. I make to-do lists in my mind, or even literally on a slip of paper. If I'm trying to listen to a client, I'll often start thinking of what would be an impressive response and stop listening to what he is saying. If it's my daughter, I'll often start thinking of what she should do differently, and stop listening to what he is saying. If it's my wife, I'll often feel "this is not urgent" and my attention will shift to something that I think is urgent.	I worry I will: Look stupid Be humiliated Be helpless Be out of control Make a big mistake Allow someone else to make a big mistake (especially someone for whom I am responsible) To not looking stupid To not being humiliated To not feeling helpless To not feeling or being out of control To not making a big mistake To not allowing someone else to make a big mistake (especially someone for whom I am responsible)	

gas (his genuine, even urgent, interest in being a better listener) and one foot on the brake (all those countercommitments).

We invite you to go ahead and generate some possible third-column commitments of your own. Each of them will be a commitment to *not* having the things you'd fear most (from step 1) occur. If your worry box holds something like "I'm afraid I will lose credibility" or "People will dislike me; see me as one of Them," then you might enter third-column commitments such as, "I am committed to not losing credibility" or "I am committed to not running the risk I will lose credibility"; "I am committed to not having people dislike me, to not having people think I have gone over to the 'dark side.'"

There is no sense in reading further until you have actually entered your third-column commitments. Have you done this? Do you now have a picture of your own version of the phenomenon of the immunity to change? Does your picture intrigue you? Do you find it interesting? Notice the questions we are not asking you. We are not asking if you feel you have solved anything. You should not feel that you have. We are not asking whether you are happy to see this picture. Is it an altogether pleasant experience to see your own immunity? Often it is not.

You will remember Einstein's injunction that it can be as important to see the problem clearly as to see the solution. All we are going for right now is a more adequate grasp of "the problem," the problem of your genuinely wanting to succeed with your first-column goal but not being able to do so. You should see the way you have a foot on the gas and a foot on the brake. And that picture, however temporarily unnerving, should at least feel interesting, should draw you in with the power of seeing something you did not know before. But it is also possible that you have long been aware of the personal issue that appears in your third column (you always knew that pleasing others was too big a thing for you, or that you were a control freak, or that you worried you were not smart enough), yet the new discovery may come from seeing, in a new way, how tightly this familiar issue is tied to your inability to succeed on the goal in your first column.

In whatever way the map, or X-ray, feels powerful, the important thing is that it does. What if it doesn't? Fred's map felt powerful to

him after writing his third-column entries because all of the following were true. See if these conditions are true for you, as well:

- Each of Fred's third-column commitments is clearly a commitment to *self-protection.* Each is tightly tied to a particular fear. If he noted in his worry box that he had a fear he would destroy his marriage by overworking, he wouldn't bleach out the self-protection by writing his third-column commitment as, "I am committed to a better work/family balance." We wouldn't see the danger from which he is committed to protecting himself if he framed it that way. Rather, he would write, "I am committed to not having my wife abandon me and my children hate me, and becoming a miserable, lonely workaholic."

- Each commitment makes some (or all) of the obstructive behaviors in column 2 perfectly sensible; he can see how, given X commitment, Y behavior is just exactly what anyone might do.

- He sees exactly why trying to succeed merely by eliminating his second-column behaviors won't work, because those behaviors are serving a very important purpose.

- He feels stuck because he sees that he is moving in two opposite directions at the same time.

We have learned that if your map does not yet feel powerful or intriguing at this point in the process, it is likely because your entries do not match these criteria in some way. Try to revise them so that they do, and see if your picture gets more compelling to you. Remember, the power or intrigue we are going for here is not yet one of solution or even a road to solution. The experience is not yet one of liberation.

So just what kind of power or intrigue are we talking about? This might best be illustrated with a story about a university provost who participated in one of our institutes. The program was expressly for university presidents, provosts, and the like. It was a summer

program at Harvard, and, as with all of our summer programs, we tell the participants to dress casually. There are always a few people who do not dress casually on the first day (probably because they are uncertain whether their definition of casual is someone else's definition of being a slob). This particular participant, a middle-aged woman, wore a beautiful power suit the first day and an elegant string of pearls around her neck. Every day, as the others became more and more informal in their dress and demeanor, she sat in the middle of the case conference room, with one lovely business suit after another. She sat with a dignified and erect bearing. And always with the pearls.

When we came to filling out the third column, we explained the criteria and what we were really asking them to go for in their entries. We said something like, "And if you get good entries in your third column, your map should stop looking like a collection of notes in response to a bunch of separate questions. Rather, you should begin to see a single, whole thing, across those three columns. You should begin to see a coherent picture. You should begin to see—"

And before we could finish the sentence, it was obvious that she had already gone ahead and made her third-column entries, and the wholeness, the "singleness," the coherence of her picture had hit her square in the face. This dignified, formal, erect woman with the pearls blurted out, to everyone's surprise and delight, "I can tell you what you'll see, all right. You'll see how you are—how you are *screwed*!!"

That succinctly sums up our aim at this point in the process—namely, that you now see more clearly how your own important goal is "screwed" by your core contradictions. That is, there is no way for you to move forward since every genuine, sincere, earnest step in the right direction is countered by an equal force in the opposite direction.

If your map offers you similar insight, then you have reached a paradoxical place in the process—namely, that it may only be by seeing more deeply how you are systematically preventing your own change that you put yourself in a dramatically better position to bring about that change! You will have succeeded in taking the first big step toward converting your change goal into a *good problem*.

Now what's the next step? You need to create a tool for adaptively (rather than technically) working on your change challenge. This tool is what completes the four-column exercise.

COLUMN 4: THE BIG ASSUMPTIONS

The intent of an immunity map is to support a way to treat adaptive challenges adaptively, rather than technically. This begins, we said in chapter 2, by creating an adaptive formulation, one that shows us how our first-column goal brings us to the current limits of our development.

We said an adaptive formulation will register on both the *thinking* and *feeling* levels. If we have succeeded in helping you make a powerful map so far, you have a glimpse of your own immunity to change as it involves the improvement goal you identified in column 1. You should now be able to see your own change-prevention system (how you systematically generate the very behaviors that prevent progress on your goal) and an anxiety-management system (how generating these behaviors helps to ward off some of your worst fears, which are associated with your actually making the progress you hope for).

One sign that you have come up with an adaptive formulation of your challenge is when you can see clearly why a technical approach—going straight to the obstructive behaviors in column 2 and trying to eliminate or reduce them—is not a winning plan. Given how well these same behaviors serve the commitments of column 3, you would be inclined to keep generating them (or their cousins)—unless you were able to reconstruct the immune system as a whole.

The most reliable route to ultimately disrupting the immune system begins by identifying the core assumptions that sustain it. We use the concept of big assumptions to signal that there are some ways we understand ourselves and the world (and the relationship between the world and ourselves) that we do not see as mental constructions. Rather, we see them as truths, incontrovertible facts, accurate representations of how we and the world *are*.

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These constructions of reality are actually assumptions; they may well be true, but they also may not be. When we treat an assumption as if it is a truth, we have made it what we call a big assumption.

Some of our big assumptions are inevitably brittle and necessarily short-lived. There won't be too many more romantic nights for the dinosaurs in figure 9-6.

We are reminded of a Gary Larson cartoon: two airborne pilots are looking out through their windshield. We see an animal ahead of them enshrouded in fog. "Hey," says the pilot to his co-pilot, "what's a mountain goat doing way up here in a cloud bank?!" These pilots won't be able to hold their distorted assumption much longer. Unavoidable countervailing evidence is about to hit them in the face.

Interestingly though, there is a whole other class of distorted assumptions that is much more problematic, because we are so talented at holding the countervailing evidence at bay. In these instances we may be able to keep ignoring the evidence that our assumption is a distortion. We may continue to fly the airplanes of our lives, so to

FIGURE 9-6
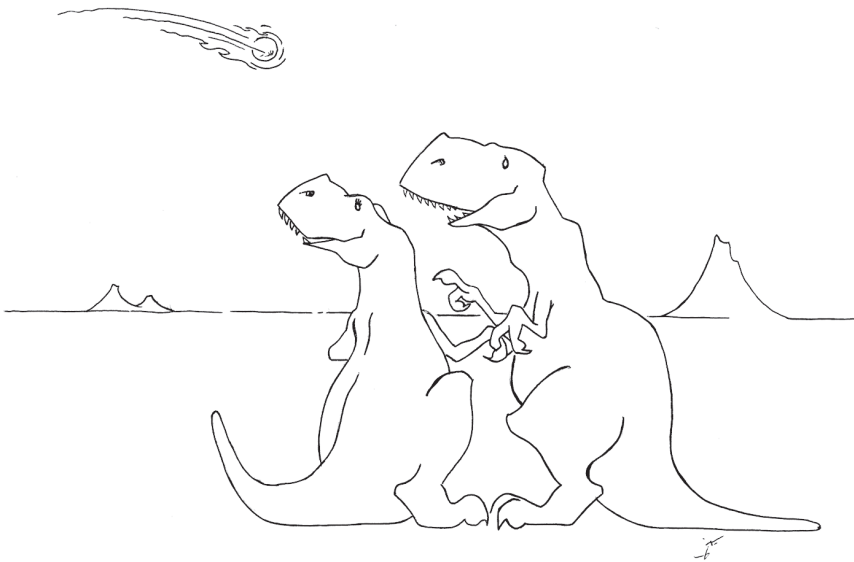
Oh, look honey! Make a wish!

speak, with an inaccurate picture of reality. We can use our genius to compensate continuously for all the aerodynamic inefficiencies of our distorted mental model. We are able to keep the plane aloft—but at some cost.

In short, any mindset or way of constructing reality will inevitably contain some blind spot. An adaptive challenge is a *challenge* because of our blind spot, and our *adaptation* will involve some recognition of, and correction of, our blindness.

Thus big assumptions, like competing commitments, normally are out of sight. Making an assumption apparent involves bringing it from "subject" (where we cannot see it because we are so attached to it, so identified with or subject to it) to "object" (where we can now take a perspective on it from outside of ourselves). This is the underlying motion by which *greater complexity* gets created.

Once you have begun to surface some possible big assumptions underlying your own immunity to change, you will be in a much better position to work on your immune system, rather than being captive of it. While this would be very difficult to do "from scratch," the hard work you have already done in creating a picture of your immune system and, in particular, identifying your hidden commitments makes it much less difficult than you might think.

We asked Fred to take a good look at the third-column entries he finally made emerge. Then we asked him to brainstorm all the possible assumptions a person who had such commitments might hold. This was slow going initially, but once he got started, the possible assumptions began to flow. Figure 9-7 shows what he came up with.

In a moment we'll ask you to generate possible big assumptions underlying your own third-column commitments. Before you do, it may be helpful to consider the criteria by which Fred judged the robustness of his entries. All of the following were true for him and his entries, and you should be able to say the same:

- Some of the big assumptions you may regard as true ("What do you mean I *assume* some bad thing will happen? Believe me, some bad thing *will* happen!"); some of them you may see right away are not really true ("I can see that it is clearly not true, but I act and feel as if it *were* true"); and some of

FIGURE 9-7

Fred's full map

1 Commitment (improvement goal)	2 Doing/not doing instead	3 Hidden competing commitments	4 Big assumptions
To be a better listener (especially better at staying in the present, staying focused, being more patient)	I allow my attention to wander off. I start looking at my BlackBerry. I make to-do lists in my mind, or even literally on a slip of paper. If I'm trying to listen to a client, I'll often start thinking of what would be an impressive response and stop listening to what he is saying. If it's my daughter, I'll often start thinking of what she should do differently, and stop listening to what he is saying. If it's my wife, I'll often feel "this is not urgent" and my attention will shift to something that I think is urgent.	To not looking stupid To not being humiliated To not feeling helpless To not feeling or being out of control To not making a big mistake To not allowing someone else to make a big mistake (especially someone for whom I am responsible)	I assume there is a limited number of "chances" I get with my teenagers (that if they see me as "stupid" too many times, they will just stop listening to me entirely). I assume there is absolutely nothing positive in an interaction with my kids in which they dismiss and ridicule what I have to say; that such an interaction is clearly worse than no interaction at all. I assume my wife *expects me* to be able to help her solve the difficult problems she shares with me. I assume that "helping" is always a matter of helping someone *take a next step* in the right direction. I assume if I feel helpless there is no way I can be a good listener. I assume if I cannot be in control of the situation things are likely going to get worse.

Fred's full map

			I assume if I make a big mistake I will not be able to recover from it. I assume if I do not help my kids or junior colleagues to avoid mistakes I am being irresponsible, letting them down, letting my family or company down, and that bad things are going to happen to them.

them you may be quite unsure about ("Part of me feels this *is* true, or true most of the time, but another part of me is not so sure"). However, there is some way in which you have felt, or continue to feel, that every big assumption you list is true. And you might be right. We reiterate, we are not saying all our big assumptions are false. What we are saying is that we can't explore how true or false they are until we have surfaced and tested them.

- It is clear how each of the big assumptions, if taken as true, makes one or more of the third-column commitments inevitable (e.g., if it is absolutely certain that I cannot recover from a big mistake, it then makes all the sense in the world that I would be committed to never making a big mistake). Taken as a whole, the set of big assumptions collectively makes the third-column commitments inevitable, and thus it is clear how they sustain the immune system: The third-column commitments clearly follow from the big assumptions and generate the behaviors in column 2; these behaviors clearly undermine the goal in column 1.

- The big assumptions make visible a bigger world that, until now, you have not allowed yourself to venture into. You see

how your big assumptions constitute a "Danger! Do Not Enter!" sign in front of this wider world (e.g., "I could, at least theoretically, step out into a world where I am not always in control, even where I feel helpless. I could enter a world where I do not give advice when it is not asked for, where I consider that my children are more forgiving than I imagine," and so on). It is possible that all these warning signs are completely appropriate and should be heeded, but it is also possible that your big assumptions are evidence that you are limiting yourself to only a few of the rooms in the mansion of your life.

Please generate as many possible big assumptions as you can. Check them against the above criteria. This last step in developing your X-ray may inspire its own "ahas," but that is not necessary at this point. The critical threshold in creating a good map is that once you have completed the third column, you can see and feel your own version of the immunity-to-change dynamic. Having completed this step, your map should feel intriguing, illuminating, or at least interesting to you.

"Okay, okay," you might feel, after seeing your own systematic prevention of the progress you desire, "This captures my attention. Who wants to have a foot on the gas and a foot on the brake at the same time!? But now, what can I do about it?" We are about to take up that very question in the next chapter of this book. In it you will see how identifying the big assumptions, which reinforce your immune system, actually puts you in a position to disrupt it.

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OVERCOMING YOUR
IMMUNITY TO CHANGE

Seeing how our self-protective motivations systematically prevent us from achieving exactly what we most most desire is necessary. Insights can be powerful, even exciting, but they do not necessarily lead to transformation. Most people need a structure to help them channel their aspiration, test and gain distance from their big assumptions, and steadily build a new set of ways to bridge the gap between intentions and behavior. That is precisely what our immunity-to-change follow-up process is designed to do.

We begin this chapter with our own assumption—that you now have in front of you, from your work in chapter 9, a picture of your own immunity to change that intrigues you. It commands your attention and your interest. You can see yourself with a foot on the gas (genuinely and urgently wanting more success with the goal you have entered in column 1) and a foot on the brake (actively and continually producing exactly those behaviors most likely to *prevent* any progress on that goal). And you can see the very good reason *why* you are holding yourself back: You want to save your life as you know it. You can see, in your third and fourth columns, the reasons why every one of those obstructive behaviors feels necessary for your self-protection.

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So, how might you proceed if you want to do something about this—if you want to overcome your own immunity to change? Before you begin you should:

- Be ready to devote a few months to this process and not expect it to happen overnight

- Choose what form of support for the journey will work best for you

- Consider the variety of tasks and activities we have developed over time that may help you, steadily and progressively, to overcome your own personal version of the immunity to change

A quick word about each of these.

First, the overcoming-immunity work will not take years. Nor will you need to devote enormous amounts of time to it over the next few months. But we do find that you need to be willing to give it your attention consistently for about thirty minutes a week, and that most people notice significant and encouraging changes in about twelve weeks. This means you should obviously not expect to make your way through this chapter in a single sitting. You may choose to read it through, just to get a sense of the road map. But if you actually want to take the trip, you will need to regularly put the book down and *do things* before you can return and carry on.

Second, it's important to decide whether you want to take the trip alone or with company. You might prefer to work through your immunity on your own (using this chapter as a guide), but you have other options. You might find a partner—best of all, someone else who wants to overturn his or her immunity to change—and debrief together as you work your way through the process. Or you may choose to work with a coach who has experience with the full "coaching arc" and can both guide you and help you stick with it. (If you want to pursue this option, let us know and we can put you in touch with one of the many people we have trained.)

Finally, whether you do this on your own, with a partner, or with a coach, you can find your own best combination of exercises from the basic set of activities people have found useful for overturning the

immunity to change. We list these below in three phases, with a simple statement of the purpose of each. You have already seen many of these illustrated in prior chapters. And since each person's immune system is unique, not everyone needs to undertake every exercise.

OPENING MOVES: SETTING THE STAGE

Honing your map: Review and revise your immunity map as needed, so that it feels powerful to you and you have testable big assumptions.

Initial survey: Get external input on the importance and value of your column 1 goal, and create a baseline of how well you are doing on the goal at the start of the process.

MIDDLE GAME: DIGGING INTO THE WORK

Continuum of progress: Envision what full success looks like in achieving your column 1 goal.

Self-observations: Tune in to the big assumptions in action and stay alert to counterexamples. Recognize when and where your big assumptions are activated, and when they are inaccurate.

Biography of the big assumptions: For each assumption, ask: When did it get started? What is its history? What is its current validity?

Testing the big assumptions: Intentionally behave counter to how a big assumption would have you act, see what happens, and then reflect on what those results tell you about the certainty of your assumption. Do this process several times, running tests of bigger scope each time.

END GAME: CONSOLIDATING YOUR LEARNING

Follow-up survey: Get input (from the same people who completed your initial survey) on your column 1 goal. Compare your self-assessment of progress with what they see. Learn about the effect of your changes on others.

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Identifying hooks and releases: Take stock of the current status of your big assumptions; consider how to maintain progress, guard against future slippage (the "hooks"), and recover when you do (the "releases").

Future progress: Once you are "unconsciously released" from your current big assumption, you may want to reengage the immunities process, especially around any unmet goals or areas in which you currently feel stuck or discouraged.

THE HEART OF THE PROCESS: DESIGNING, RUNNING, AND INTERPRETING TESTS OF THE BIG ASSUMPTIONS

You have seen illustrations of most of these steps in prior chapters—especially chapters 5 and 6, with the cases of David and Cathy. So we are going to devote this chapter to the heart of the process, the activities that are most iterative, take the most time, and serve as the biggest lever for overcoming the immune system—namely, designing, running, and interpreting tests of your big assumptions.

Designing Tests of Your Big Assumption

The purpose of each test you run is to see what happens when you intentionally alter your usual conduct and then reflect upon the meaning of the results for your big assumption. The purpose of a test is *not* to try immediately to improve or get better. Rather it is to get information—a very particular kind of information: "What does this say about my big assumption?" Our experience tells us that it can be hard to keep this intention front and center, so before we put you to work, we want to share with you the most common challenge in designing a test.

Remember the overly enthusiastic tendency to act (without any attention to our mindset) that we mentioned in chapter 8? It's this tendency that leads us, mistakenly, to an event-focused approach to testing the big assumption, where we assume that there is some

important action that, if we were able to take it, would "solve" the big assumption and neutralize its effects.[1] A common example is having a long-delayed, difficult conversation with a boss or coworker, surviving it, and moving on.

An event-focused approach views the successful completion of the test as the *concluding* step, the hurdle overcome or the obstacle removed. Once we conduct that test (especially if it seems like a successful experience), we can feel the relief and sense of accomplishment of having completed an important task. We can savor and appreciate the work that's been done. This is all well and good, *but it is not learning*. For purposes of adaptive learning, it's important to understand that the goal in conducting the test *is not just to perform the activity specified in the test*. We need to collect data about what happens as a consequence of that action, and then *interpret those outcomes to confirm or revise our big assumption*. In other words, the test has not actually been successful until its result is connected to our work on the big assumption.

With that as a backdrop, let's put you to work. First, this exercise requires that you know exactly which big assumption you want to test. If you unearthed several big assumptions, now is the time to choose one. The two criteria for selecting are, first, that it's a powerful assumption (it has a strong hold on you and it clearly limits what you experience as "in bounds" in order to feel safe); and second, that it is testable. If you aren't immediately clear which of your big assumptions meets those criteria, see if the following questions help:

- Which big assumption jumps out at you as the one that most gets in your way?

- If you could change any single big assumption, which one would make the biggest, most positive difference for you?

- Is the big assumption so catastrophic that you could never test it? Hint: a big assumption with words like *die*, *be fired*, or *have a nervous breakdown* isn't ripe for testing quite yet. (But don't abandon that assumption; it probably has the advantage of mattering a lot. To make it testable, you may have to back up and unearth a prior assumption in the sequence that

leads up to the catastrophe. For example, "I assume if I disagree with the boss I'll be fired" becomes "I assume if I say X, my boss will get angry" and/or "I assume if my boss does get angry that he will find no value in my input" and/or "I assume if my boss finds no value in my input on one occasion, he will permanently end his support of me.")

- Can you imagine some kind of information or data that would cast doubt on the big assumption? Is your assumption falsifiable?

Perhaps you are not yet sure whether your big assumption meets the "testable" criterion. To help you think this through, we are going to bring in a few real clients to serve as examples for your own comparison. We begin with Sue, the chief of staff in a large social services agency.

Sue's Test, Part 1

Sue's original big assumption was this: "If I am not accepted, then people wouldn't like me and I wouldn't have value." She turned this into a testable assumption by identifying what she thought led to her not being accepted: "If I say no, others will see me as cold and uncaring." She chose to focus her first test on the assumption that saying no would lead to damaging relationships.

Now you try it. Write down your assumption as in figure 10-1.

FIGURE 10-1

Write out a testable version of your big assumption

> I assume that if . . .

Once you've chosen a big assumption to test, the next step is to design your first experiment to challenge it. Start by asking yourself: what behavior changes would give me good information about the accuracy of my big assumption? Then plan what you will actually do and/or say to make sure you have a fair test. For example, deciding *that* you will say no when asked to take on another task doesn't address *how* you will say it. You could, for instance, bark out an immediate "no," or you could say something like, "I wish I could help you, but I have an overflowing plate right now." One of these ways of saying no is clearly a better test of your assumption that the receiver will be angry at you.

Next, plan for data collection: what information should you gather when you enact that behavior? Data can be external (others' reactions to the new behavior), internal (your own reactions, cognitive and affective), or both. This is the time to consider, in advance, what outcomes would lead you to question the validity of your big assumption. This is a crucial step. If you can't think of any data that could challenge or cast doubt on your assumption, that's a sign that you don't yet have a good test. In that case, you need to go back to the drawing board.

Sue's Test, Part 2

Here's how Sue planned for testing her assumption that "if I say no, others will see me as cold and uncaring."

First, she observed that the situation that most frequently activated her big assumption was when team members confided in her about other team members.

Next, she decided to whom she would be willing to take the risk of saying no.

She then practiced what she would say. (E.g., "This is important. I feel for you; I'm disturbed to hear this. But you're looking at the wrong person. You need to take this directly to this person. How can I help you to talk directly to this person, given I know this person?" Or "I hear your concerns; this is important; I want to listen without having to feel the need to fix." Or "I can't

touch this—this is not about me. Our relationship is important, our agency's relationship is important. You need to make a decision to talk directly to the person, or to go to her boss.")

Regarding data, Sue planned to pay attention to how she felt when she said no, and also see what the recipient did or said in response. If she ended up feeling insecure, or thought that the other person saw her as cold or uncaring, or if the relationship suffered, those would all be signs that her big assumption was accurate. But if she didn't feel those things, she would question the absolute truth of her assumption.

In reality, however, we know that not everyone plans their tests.

Claus's Test, Part 1

Claus provides an example of someone who did not plan his first test. This might well have been a plus for him, given that his big assumption is that he needs to be overprepared in order to be effective. When the very assumption the person wants to test risks getting activated by the planning process, test "planning" can be paradoxical. We have worked with many people whose assumptions are like this. For them, the task is to design an effective test without being controlling, overpreparing, attending to every detail in the process, and so on. In Claus's case, it would have been counterproductive to overprepare a test to see if he could be effective with less preparation!

Here is his test: over vacation, Claus decided he needed to talk with a staff member about a reassignment. He hadn't yet thought through how he would approach this person, but when he ran into him during his first morning back at the office, Claus, uncharacteristically, talked with him. "I had so much to do to catch up and I thought to myself, 'if I don't talk to him about this now, when will I?' So I talked with him right then."

What makes this a test, not just an event, is that Claus was attentive to what happened as a consequence of his acting on the spur of the moment. We will take a look at that data and

how he made sense of it when we turn to the interpretation dimension of testing.

Had he not acted spontaneously, we would have encouraged Claus to focus less on preparing a test per se and more on thinking through what he deemed "safe" conditions for a test. These would be situations (certain people, topics, meetings) where he would not pay a high price if it turned out that he was ineffective when less prepared.

Having read about the purpose, common pitfalls, and features of a good test, we hope you have gained a good sense of what we are going for in this step and are ready to create your own test.

Here is the exercise. You'll find a guide sheet for completing it in figure 10-2. In this step, we ask you to create a safe, modest experiment testing your big assumption. Your test should lead you to do something different from what you ordinarily would do when routinely holding your big assumption as true. This design is *preparation* for actually running your first formal test of this assumption.

A good test conforms to the following S-M-A-R-T criteria:

- S-M: It is important that your experiment be both *safe* and *modest*. You might ask yourself, "What can I risk doing, or resist doing, *on a small scale* that might seem inadvisable if I held my big assumption as true, in order to learn what the results would actually be?"

- A: A good test will be *actionable* in the near term. This means that the test is relatively easy to carry out (ideally, it doesn't require you to go out of your way at all, but rather is an opportunity to do something different in your normal day) and can be conducted within the next week or so.

- R-T: Finally, you are clear that you are taking a *research* stance (not a self-improvement stance); you are running a *test* of your big assumption. A good test will allow you to collect data related to your big assumption (including data that would qualify your assumption or call it into doubt).

Guide sheet for designing a good test of the big assumption

1a. Write below what you are going to do. (Make sure you are doing something different from what your big assumption would normally have you do.)

1b. Jot down how you think your test (1a) will get you information about your big assumption.

2a. Next, what data do you want to collect? In addition to how people react to you, *your feelings* can be a very rich data source.

2b. How will that data help you to confirm or disconfirm your big assumption (BA)? (What results would lead you to believe your BA is correct? What results would lead you to question the validity of your BA?)

2c. Is there anyone you'd like to give a "heads-up" to or ask to serve as an observer who can give you feedback after the fact?

3. Finally, review your test on these criteria:

—Is it safe? (If the worst case were to happen, you could live with the results.)

—Is the data relevant to your BA? (See question 2b.)

—Is it valid? (The test actually tests your big assumption; see question 1b.)

—Are the data sources valid? (Choose sources who are neither out to get you nor trying to protect or save you.)

—Might it actually reinforce your big assumption? (Is it designed so that it surely will lead to bad consequences, just as your BA tells you? Are you setting yourself up to fail? Is there any data you could collect that could disconfirm your BA?)

—Can it be done soon? (The person or situation you need in order to enact the test is available, you are reasonably certain you know how to do what you plan, and you can run the test within the next week or so.)

As a first step, consider what behavior you could change (start or stop doing) that would yield useful information about your big assumption. Here are some options:

- Alter a behavior from column 2.

- Perform an action that runs counter to a column 3 commitment.

- Start directly from your big assumption (column 4): "What experiment would tell me whether the if-then sequence built into the assumption is valid?"

- Go to your continuum of progress (see chapters 5 and 6 for illustrations) and enact a version of a next recognizable step.

If you've completed the exercise, including question 3, terrific— you have a high-quality design for the first test of your big assumption. Now is a good time to do whatever is needed to increase the likelihood that your test goes well. At a nuts-and-bolts level, remember to contact someone from whom you want feedback. You may want to let this person in on the bigger context of your request as well as the particular kinds of data you hope he or she can give you. The clearer you are up front about what you need, the more likely this person will be able to gather valuable data. Make a plan to debrief with this person as soon as possible after the test.

Here are some things you might find helpful to do before actually running the test to get yourself in the right frame of mind.[2] Practicing what you want to do increases the likelihood you will actually feel prepared to do something that you have little, if any, experience doing.

For example:

- Prepare notes for your test.

- Practice techniques for reducing or eliminating negative "mind chatter."

You may want to imagine different ways the upcoming interaction could unfold and how you might respond and/or assert yourself according to each imagined scenario:

- Consider the implications of tone of voice, body language, choice of words.

- Anticipate how your typical ways of saying things might lead to a foregone conclusion and consider whether there is a more productive approach you could take. Role-play in your head (or with someone you trust) if at all possible.

- Be prepared with alternative strategies for handling things that are often negative triggers for you.

Finally, anticipate things that might make it hard to collect quality data. Here are a few tips to consider:

- You may experience many feelings all at once. Your feelings may change throughout your test, so try to tune in to your emotional channel frequently.

- The more a person is under the grip of his big assumption, the less skillful he is at observing other people (their behavior and their inner states). One of the most essential skills for engaging in adaptive change is the ability to see and hear what is occurring with as little judgment as possible. Seeing and hearing more clearly is where the potential for change starts.

- It is very easy to slip from noticing into interpreting another person's reactions. That invalidates a test. Try to stay attuned to what the person said or did (e.g., he said, "This makes me mad" versus "He was mad at me"). Quality data are directly observable—words and actions, including nonverbal behavior, that could be captured by an audio- or videotape.

Running Tests of Your Big Assumption

Finally, you get to take action. Go ahead and run your test! Remember to collect your data (both what you actually did and what happened as a result). If you don't end up running the exact test you planned, that's okay. Just make sure the actual test you ran still meets the criteria for an effective test (question 3 in the preceding section). If you conclude that your test was flawed, that's not a fatal problem, and it's not unusual. Just remember that you haven't yet generated data that's

relevant to testing your big assumption (so whatever happened doesn't confirm or disconfirm your assumption). Your next step should be to see whether you can still do the test you originally hoped to run or you need to design a new test.

Use the form in figure 10-3 to describe your actions and the consequences. Be as neutral a self-reporter as possible. In the next section, we will turn to making sense of, or interpreting, the data.

Before moving to the next step, double check that you have assessed the quality of the actual test you ran (versus what you planned) and the quality of your data, and concluded that both are valid. Once you've done that, you're ready to interpret what happened.

FIGURE 10-3

Guide sheet for running tests of the big assumption

1. What did you actually do?

2a. What happened? What did people actually say or do when you ran your test? If you asked someone for feedback, what did she or he say? What were your thoughts and feelings at the time? (These are your data points.)

2b. Check the quality of your data to make sure it is valid. Is the data about other people's responses to you directly observable, or have you snuck in an interpretation? Would someone else in the room agree with your description? Were there any unusual circumstances in your test?

Interpreting Tests of Your Big Assumption

Designing an effective test of your big assumption is one step. Running it is a next step. Now the challenge is to look at your data for the sole purpose of understanding what it suggests about your big assumption. Remember, the purpose of running a good test is not to see whether you improved, whether your behavior change "worked" (although this is not unimportant!), but rather to use the test results to reconsider your big assumption. You will know you are on track with this exercise if you can see what aspect of your big assumption, if any, is confirmed by the data, and what aspect, if any, is disproved.

The best way to illustrate this step is to pick up where we left off with Sue and Claus so that you can see what they did, what data they collected, and how they made sense of it. After that, we will invite you to interpret your data.

Sue's Test, Part 3

This is the test Sue ran: When one of the two people she felt safe running her test with started telling her he was upset with another team member, Sue told him that she didn't want to get involved and thought it was better for him to talk directly to the other person.

Here's the data she collected. First, her inner thoughts and feelings: "I did it without feeling badly. And I didn't let it worry me that I hated the interaction because it was short and charged. It was what it was and I didn't worry about it throughout the day." The external data? This fellow later called Sue to apologize for dragging her into the issue, saying "I just wanted to tell someone what was happening."

Sue saw these results as initial disconfirmations of her big assumption. While she didn't like saying no, she didn't beat herself up for doing so, and she was glad not to be drawn into the conflict. More important, her colleague's apology led her to see that setting a limit (at least that time) was perfectly acceptable.

Claus's Test, Part 2

And what about Claus?

Here's what happened when he spontaneously talked with his employee:

He recognized the moment as "a real breakthough for me," including that he felt out of his comfort zone. As for the external data, the other person expanded on the topic, which was unusual and a surprise to Claus, given that he thought this would be a touchy issue. Claus also noticed that they were having a real conversation, with back-and-forth between them. Finally, he also was aware that he liked "that I had the guts to do this and not fear failing, even though I tested without thinking about it."

What did the data tell him about his big assumption? In his own words, "This one single experience tells me to not analyze things to death. I can more clearly articulate that I perceive wrongly that by spending more time on it or waiting, it will ripen. But it doesn't, and then I start feeling bad that I haven't done it. Lesson learned? Follow my instincts. Make sure that my head doesn't get in the way of my stomach." He sees how his big assumption creates the false sense that overpreparation is required, when the reality is that it makes him increasingly anxious. He now knows that at least in this situation, his gut feelings were sufficient preparation.

Here are a few tips to keep in mind when you start interpreting your data as in figure 10-4.

- What makes a "big assumption" more than merely an assumption is the belief, implicit or explicit, that what we assume is *always and completely* right. A big assumption automatically informs how we see reality; that is, it is "behind" the eyes, so to speak, rather than in front of the eyes.

FIGURE 10-4

Guide sheet for interpreting tests of the big assumption

1. Take a look at the data you collected. What is your interpretation of what happened?

2. What alternate interpretation can you think of for that same data? When our big assumptions have a powerful hold on us, they direct us to predictable interpretations—ones that keep the big assumption alive and well. An antidote to this tendency is to push yourself to generate at least one additional interpretation of the data.

3. What does your interpretation tell you about the big assumption you tested? What aspects of your big assumption do you believe the data confirm? Which do the data disconfirm? Did any new assumptions emerge?

4. What are your thoughts about a next test of your big assumption? Pick up on what you've learned about your big assumption. What next test could you design to learn more? If you have additional big assumptions, you might want to test those too.

- A single big assumption is rarely completely and always right or wrong. The problem more often is that we tend to overuse big assumptions and overgeneralize their applicability far beyond their scope.

- The point of a test is rarely to reject a big assumption outright, but rather to help sharpen its contours so you have a realistic, data-based version of when, where, and with whom your big assumption is relevant. Even relatively modest changes to a big assumption can overturn an immunity to change.

- It is possible to run a valuable and complete test (for this step) without having been "successful" in some action. For

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example, we may not have been able to hold the difficult conversation, but we gathered data that allowed us to learn something new about what holds us back, and this leads to a further refinement of our big assumption.

- No single experiment is likely to be conclusive by itself about a big assumption.

The final question in this exercise points to the iterative nature of testing big assumptions. Once we run a test and take stock of its implications for our big assumption, we design another test, one that will provide data on what we next want to learn about our assumption. David and Cathy, whom you met in chapters 5 and 6, and Sue and Claus from this chapter all conducted several tests, with each one leading the person to progressively revise the assumption. Often, the second and third tests are successive versions of the first one. What differs are the players, circumstance, or level of risk. It is the cumulative weight of several tests that, in most cases, begins to overturn the person's immunity to change—the whole purpose, let us not forget, of these exercises. Once the big assumption no longer has its force, the self-protective third-column commitment is no longer necessary, and we stop needing to generate the obstructive second-column behaviors.

Sue's Test, Part 4

Let's continue to follow Sue's next test of her big assumption, "If I say no, others will see me as cold and uncaring."

Sue heard about a blowup between two of her colleagues. She prepared herself for what she would say if one of them came to her to complain about the other. She rehearsed her lines, including saying to herself, "I know I can't fix this, it's much bigger than I am," and she primed herself to be the reflective listener she wanted to be in that situation. When one of her two colleagues, Kati, walked into her office, Sue was ready.

What did Sue do? She reminded Kati of her four-column work and her commitment to not be in the middle these sorts

of conversations. "I was careful not to join her in bashing Vicki. And I was careful not to tell her what to do, but instead was a good listener."

What about the data? She paid attention to her feelings, including her comfort and anxiety levels, as well as Kati's reactions to her. She found herself feeling good during the discussion, both because she was able to act and be present in the way she wanted, and because the conversation went in an unanticipated, but very productive direction, where Sue felt that she could raise an issue with Kati. Sue felt good about making herself vulnerable and having a quality conversation that led them both to feel they got something valuable out of their talk.

Sue saw this data as contradicting her big assumption; by setting certain limits, she actually experienced a closer relationship with Kati.

As our self-observing skills get better developed, further tests of our big assumptions can occur quite fluidly. On these occasions we spontaneously act in ways contraindicated by our big assumption, but we become aware of this (at the moment or later) and use it as an occasion to ask, "What happened and what does that tell me about my big assumption?"

Sue's Test, Part 5

Sue had many "spontaneous" tests. A significant one occurred when she had an altercation with her boss, in her view the highest-stakes person to be in conflict with. The event took place in a lead team meeting, when Sue said something that led her boss, Sam, to shout angrily at her. She was bewildered about how her statement led to such an extreme and negative reaction. Imagining that he didn't hear what she said, she found herself asking what her responsibility was in the miscommunication. "I had to check in with the rest of the group—'what did I say?' They told me I was being very clear." In a follow-up

conversation with her boss, Sam acknowledged that he had stopped listening.

Her conclusions: "For me personally, I hung with that conflict. I didn't freak out about it, and didn't carry it with me the whole next day. I didn't obsess with it the way I would have six months ago. I now know my relationship with Sam can withstand conflict and that I could hang with him in his clear anger that day."

Very often, future tests reflect our wish to learn about further aspects of our big assumption that revealed themselves only through earlier testing.

Sue's Test, Part 6

Again, let's follow Sue's testing to see a perfect example of testing deeper grounds. Once Sue realized that saying no was not risking relationships, she discovered a whole new learning curve: Could she say what she was really thinking without risking relationships? Could she, in other words, risk *creating* conflict?

"I did say 'I don't agree' to Beth. That was a risk. Internally, I felt that I was pushing. For me it was a risk in the relationship; I took the risk . . . and the good thing is that the relationship stayed intact. I think I can continue to say when I don't agree. But I want to be articulate in my disagreement and not just emotional! I don't think I am as articulate as I'd like to be. A bigger risk would have been to say that I thought that we were avoiding the real issue."

Now it's your turn to develop a second test. Return to the guide sheets provided earlier for the three dimensions of testing (designing, running, and interpreting).

If after a few rounds of testing, you wonder, "How do I know when I am finished?" and "How do I sustain my progress?" you are

most likely ready for the following exercise, "Identifying Hooks and Releases."

CONSOLIDATE YOUR LEARNING: IDENTIFYING HOOKS AND RELEASES

Figure 10-5 shows a developmental sequence in overturning an immunity. Take a moment to think about where you are in your journey by using the descriptions of "consciously released" and "unconsciously released"—and we assume that if you are this far into this chapter, you are surely past being "consciously immune."

Which of these two descriptions speaks to you? If your self-assessment is that you are "unconsciously released," then you may find this next exercise useful for simply confirming your sense of where you are. If "consciously released" better describes your current relationship to your big assumption, then one of the following two choices will be most relevant if you want to fully overturn your immune system and succeed with your column 1 commitment.

First, consider continuing with further tests of your big assumption. This is a good choice especially if you are aware that your big assumption grabs hold of you frequently. As we said earlier, the testing process is iterative and there is no set number of tests that will overturn an immune system. If you have been working solo, you might consider finding a trusted friend or colleague to partner with you in your next test design and interpretation. Having someone to talk with can be an enormous help.

A second option is to complete another exercise, which we call "Identifying Hooks and Releases." Designed to increase the likelihood of your continued success, it asks you to take stock of the current status of your big assumption, assess your risk of getting pulled back, and plan for how to guard against slippage. It also leads you to generate the equivalent of a personalized tip sheet (see the italicized portion of "Cathy's Completed 'Identifying Hooks and Releases' Exercise").

So that you can see the potential in this exercise and get a clear answer to the question, "How do I know if I am done?" we want to remind you of the example Cathy gave us in chapter 6. As you read it

FIGURE 10-5

From unconsciously immune to unconsciously released

Unconsciously
immune

↓

Consciously
immune

↓

Consciously
released

↓

Unconsciously
released

Consciously released: Testing your big assumption(s) and discovering the conditions under which it is and is not valid is a crucial part of this development phase. This may include discovering that the big assumption is not warranted in any situation. Often people learn new behaviors and new "self-talk" scripts as a part of this testing process. When you can act on your newly discovered knowledge to interrupt the big assumption (and the old behavior and self-talk patterns associated with it) in those situations where it is not valid, you are demonstrating the new capacity to be "consciously released" from your big assumption. This takes mindful practice. The journey is not necessarily straight or free of bumps. It is normal to fall back into old patterns associated with the big assumption. Still, knowing that you're falling back, and knowing how you can get yourself unstuck, are all signs of development. You should also see that you have made progress toward meeting your column 1 goal.

Unconsciously released: When you no longer need to stop, think, and plan in order to interrupt your big assumption, you have developed the capacity to be "unconsciously released" from it. At this point, you automatically act and think in ways that run counter to your previously held big assumption in those situations where it is not valid. New beliefs and understandings, informed and developed mindfully throughout the process, have taken the place of the big assumption. You have likely made significant progress, if not full success, toward meeting your column 1 goal.

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this time, we direct your attention to the way it illustrates the benefits of identifying what *hooks* us into a big assumption, and what we can do to *release* ourselves from those hooks.

Cathy's Completed 'Identifying Hooks and Releases' Exercise

Comment on where you now see yourself on the developmental sequence.

I am somewhere between "consciously released" and "unconsciously released." I have significantly revised my biggest "big assumptions" and no longer feel run by them. Instead, I have developed new understandings about myself and my value based on my "Houston event" and continued testing over the past months. I have every reason to believe these new views about myself will keep me from falling back into the old way I thought of myself and others.

I now have a lot of ways to reduce my stress levels, including how not to get stressed to begin with. I use these tools and beliefs regularly, sometimes consciously, and others times, upon reflection, quite unconsciously.

Have you reached any conclusions or developed any hunches about conditions under which your big assumption is valid? Think about particular situations—who, what, where, and when.

I no longer see any time when my big assumption is valid.

Have you reached any conclusions or developed any hunches about conditions under which your big assumption is invalid? Think about particular situations—who, what, where, and when.

Yes. In all of my work. And even in my relationship with my husband.

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Do you find your big assumption asserting itself in situations you know it shouldn't? If so, can you generalize about the conditions under which you are likely (more or less) to find yourself being sucked into the old patterns associated with the big assumption? What still sometimes hooks you?

No, my "Houston event" blasted my big assumption. And since then, I have been learning how to help myself not get pulled back into that kind of thinking and acting.

Have you developed key "releases" (i.e., self-talk that unhooks you) that you can readily use when facing your big assumption in real time?

I had a plan with some of my team members, which was that I would use a code word or signal to indicate that I had entered into a high-strung state. But I haven't needed my code word, because my earlier steps to interrupt the emotions have been working.

Have you developed new behaviors or ways of talking to your-self in situations that used to activate your big assumption?

Yes. Overall, I am more self-aware and more self-regulating. I am better attuned to what sends me down the path to becoming high strung, and also when I'm on the path. I now have a robust set of effective ways I use to interrupt the cycle before it even starts or to interrupt it once it starts before I become overly emotional.

> *I use my mantra "I have calm."*

> *I use de-stress balls.*

> *When I feel high-strung emotionally, I take a breath both internally and externally to reflect before acting.*

When I am in a situation where someone is saying something that gets me agitated, I tell myself, "Be respectful and calm. This is not the end of the world. You are in control of this situation. You can listen respectfully and then politely disagree."

When I feel something is wrong, I ask myself, "Is it me? Or is it something in the environment?"

When I am aware that I'm getting stressed, I ask myself, "What is in my control here and what isn't?" And then look to make choices based on what's in my control.

I ask myself: "Is this important enough to get hospitalized?"

I make more choices about what I can and can't do with my time.

When I have a timeline, I will tell the person that I don't think I can meet the deadline, or I tell them what I think I can and can't have done by that time. Or I will ask them about whether there is any flex in the timeline given what is on my plate and other commitments I have agreed to meet.

I'll say to myself, "This is what I can't make happen in order to get my priority item taken care of."

Around deadlines, I ask myself, "What will have to give, in order for me to meet this deadline?"

I conduct a process check re: my calendar. I make myself go home by a certain hour on most days and keep that promise to myself. When there are back-to-back meetings, I ask myself, "Is it important to me to attend all of these?"

When I broke my rule of going home by a certain hour, I would call Deb and say that I wasn't going to be in the next day. She was fine about that.

"Is this so important that I should jeopardize my health?"

I pay attention to the value I am adding and what I'm contributing. (And I continue to see my value as not about the product.)

I pay attention to my feelings of confidence that have emerged through this process (letting go of the fear has helped me see what value I am adding).

To what extent/how often can you use these "releases" to help you from being pulled into old patterns?

Consistently.

Think about situations in which you think your big assumption is no longer accurate. What new beliefs or understandings do you hold about "how things work" or what will happen in these situations?

One of my original big assumptions was: If I were to let myself down, then I would feel like I'm not giving as much as I should be giving. That's now changed: my definition of letting down is now different. Before it was about doing, and now it's about being. Like if I didn't speak up or share my insights. It's the act of having the insights. I would be letting myself down if I no longer had the insights or didn't believe that they are of value.

Another of my original big assumptions was: I assume that a good team member—for everyone—is giving 110 percent. I still believe it. What's changed is that 110 percent is not about checking off tasks and making sure everything is perfect. Perfection isn't about crossing every t. *It's about perfection in concept, intent, and in thinking about it.*

Another original assumption was: I assume a good me is 150 percent. I still think that's true, I just define it differently. Even if it's three minutes. It's a sense that I determined the necessary energy and time that was appropriate. It's the amount of time and quality of thinking that makes for excellence.

My biggest big assumption was: I assume that it's worth the risk for me to burn out than to not go the 110 percent. That's simply not true now.

Any thoughts about what has enabled you to make the changes you have?

Most importantly, I realized that my original big assumptions came out of my operating from a sense of fear. I was afraid that something I loved would be taken away from me and I felt like I had to keep proving over and over to everyone that I was good at this so they should know not to take it away. My "aha" about how my not getting accepted to medical school has kept me worried and afraid all these years was also very important. I realized I believed my not getting in was a reflection on me, that something was wrong with me. And I never voiced that belief; I just kept doing *things to make sure that would never again happen to me. It's been a huge relief to unburden myself of that. Emotionally, it's exhausting to have carried that around. Now, I'm freed up from feeling that way.*

This whole experience helped me to see that I actually am very good at what I do, and not only because of what I "do," but because of who I am and the unique perspectives I bring to the work. And I recognized that others see that in me too.

The "Houston event" was the catalyst for my understanding this about myself. That Teresa succeeded was a test of my not having to "do" and a confirmation of my value as someone with the particular skills, knowledge, and views I hold. Teresa succeeded because I had set it up as I did, and because I did write the objectives so clearly. My unique value was in the planning process. That newfound confidence was an enormous boost to my change.

I'm very scientific—without proof I don't believe it. It was a forced experiment—Teresa succeeding—my goals and vision were able to be realized without me doing it!

> *Everything followed from my letting go of my fears*
> *and developing my confidence. I kept trying out ways*
> *to be planful so I could reduce my stress and in the process*
> *found different techniques and self-reminders that worked*
> *for me.*

At the very least, the answer to the question, "How do I know if I am done?" should be clear from this example. You are not "done," of course, if you have not realized significant progress on your column 1 goal. But neither are you done if you have *only* realized significant progress, and not forged a strong and continuing channel, as Cathy demonstrates, between behavioral changes and changes in your mindset—that is, changes in your big assumptions.

Now it's your turn to do this exercise using the guide sheet in figure 10-6.

Here's one last question for you if you have completed the hooks and releases exercise: How do you feel about yourself for making the gains you did on such a challenging goal?

FIGURE 10-6

Guide sheet for identifying hooks and releases

1. Comment on where you now see yourself on the developmental sequence.

2. Have you reached any conclusions or developed any hunches about conditions under which your big assumption is valid? Think about particular situations—who, what, where, and when.

3. Have you reached any conclusions or developed any hunches about conditions under which your big assumption is invalid? Think about particular situations—who, what, where, and when.

4. Do you find your big assumption asserting itself in situations you know it shouldn't? If so, can you generalize about the conditions under which you are likely (more or less) to find yourself being sucked into the old patterns associated with the big assumption? What still sometimes hooks you?

5. Have you developed key "releases" (e.g., self-talk that unhooks you) that you can readily use to help yourself when recaptured by your big assumption in real time?

6. Have you developed new behaviors or ways of talking to yourself in situations that used to activate your big assumption?

7. To what extent / how often can you use these "releases" to help you from being pulled into old patterns?

8. Consider situations in which you think your big assumption is no longer accurate. What new beliefs or understandings do you hold about "how things work" or what will happen in these situations?

9. Any thoughts about what has enabled you to make the changes you have?

FUTURE PROGRESS

Once you are "unconsciously released" from your big assumption, you may want to reengage the immunities process, especially around any unmet goals or areas in which you currently feel stuck or discouraged. All the exercises in the process are reusable. These tools can be a resource to a lifelong approach to transformative change by helping you see how you can achieve other commitments through identifying, testing, and altering additional big assumptions. Yes, the implication here is that if you look hard enough, you will find other areas in which you are unconsciously immune. Developing the capacity to identify such areas is a key to continued growth.

The very first step, of course, is to develop a new immunity map—and you can use figure 10-7 to do so as often as needed. Notice that this worksheet includes a column for generating ideas. This is where you can brainstorm goals around which you might still be unconsciously immune. Once you've done this, return to the earlier portions of your immunity work to remind yourself of the unfolding exercises and how to do them.

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FIGURE 10-7

Immunity map worksheet

Generating ideas	1 Commitment (improvement) goals	2 Doing/ not Doing	3 Hidden competing commitment	4 Big assumption	First S-M-A-R-T test
			Worry box:		

These last two chapters seek to provide you a direct experience of the immunity to change in your own life (in chapter 9), and to put you squarely behind the wheel in the journey of overcoming it (in this chapter). In working with leaders it has been our experience that there is no substitute for this first-person understanding of the results the practices can bring. No matter how compelling you may find the ideas from a distance, we have found that your personal experience of the phenomenon is what will enable you to shift from merely sponsoring the work (in your organization or on your team) to being able to *champion* it—to model your own participation in it, and to

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have an authentic place from which to stand when the inevitable push-back surfaces.

While our focus throughout chapter 9 and 10 has been on the *individual* at work on a personal improvement project, as you well know, *collectivities* (like work teams, departments, leadership groups, whole organizations) also have immunities to change. And, as you know from chapter 4, a number of such groups have benefited significantly from creating their collective X-ray. Remember, for example, the hospital clinic that was able to dramatically reduce prescriptions for drug-seeking patients, and to improve trust and confidence between the doctors and nurses in the unit—where earlier they could do neither. You or someone in your organization may want to help a group to safely and productively create a collective four-column map of its own. The next chapter will guide you in doing just that.

Praise for
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by Robert Kegan and Lisa Laskow Lahey

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