How can you catapult your organization to high performance when time and money are scarce? Police chief Bill Bratton has pulled that off again and again. Here’s what it takes.

Tipping Point Leadership

by W. Chan Kim and Renée Mauborgne

Included with this full-text Harvard Business Review article:

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The Idea in Brief

How can you overcome the hurdles facing any organization struggling to change: addiction to the status quo, limited resources, demotivated employees, and opposition from powerful vested interests?

Take lessons from police chief Bill Bratton, who’s pulled the trick off five times. Most dramatically, he transformed the U.S.’s most dangerous city—New York—into its safest. Bratton used tipping point leadership to make unarguable calls for change, concentrate resources on what really mattered, mobilize key players’ commitment, and silence naysayers.

Not every executive has Bratton’s personality, but most have his potential—if they follow his success formula.

The Idea in Practice

FOUR STEPS TO THE TIPPING POINT

1. Break through the cognitive hurdle. To make a compelling case for change, don’t just point at the numbers and demand better ones. Your abstract message won’t stick. Instead, make key managers experience your organization’s problems.

   ► Example:
   New Yorkers once viewed subways as the most dangerous places in their city. But the New York Transit Police’s senior staff pooh-poohed public fears—because none had ever ridden subways. To shatter their complacency, Bratton required all NYTP officers—including himself—to commute by subway. Seeing the jammed turnstiles, youth gangs, and derelicts, they grasped the need for change—and embraced responsibility for it.

2. Sidestep the resource hurdle. Rather than trimming your ambitions (dooming your company to mediocrity) or fighting for more resources (draining attention from the underlying problems), concentrate current resources on areas most needing change.

   ► Example:
   Since the majority of subway crimes occurred at only a few stations, Bratton focused manpower there—instead of putting a cop on every subway line, entrance, and exit.

3. Jump the motivational hurdle. To turn a mere strategy into a movement, people must recognize what needs to be done and yearn to do it themselves. But don’t try reforming your whole organization; that’s cumbersome and expensive. Instead, motivate key influencers—persuasive people with multiple connections. Like bowling kingpins hit straight on, they topple all the other pins. Most organizations have several key influencers who share common problems and concerns—making it easy to identify and motivate them.

   ► Example:
   Bratton put the NYPD’s key influencers—precinct commanders—under a spotlight during semiweekly crime strategy review meetings, where peers and superiors grilled commanders about precinct performance. Results? A culture of performance, accountability, and learning that commanders replicated down the ranks.

   Also make challenges attainable. Bratton exhorted staff to make NYC’s streets safe “block by block, precinct by precinct, and borough by borough.”

4. Knock over the political hurdle. Even when organizations reach their tipping points, powerful vested interests resist change. Identify and silence key naysayers early by putting a respected senior insider on your top team.

   ► Example:
   At the NYPD, Bratton appointed 20-year veteran cop John Timoney as his number two. Timoney knew the key players and how they played the political game. Early on, he identified likely saboteurs and resisters among top staff—prompting a changing of the guard.

   Also, silence opposition with indisputable facts. When Bratton proved his proposed crime-reporting system required less than 18 minutes a day, time-crunched precinct commanders adopted it.
How can you catapult your organization to high performance when time and money are scarce? Police chief Bill Bratton has pulled that off again and again. Here’s what it takes.

Tipping Point Leadership

by W. Chan Kim and Renée Mauborgne

In February 1994, William Bratton was appointed police commissioner of New York City. The odds were against him. The New York Police Department, with a $2 billion budget and a workforce of 35,000 police officers, was notoriously difficult to manage. Turf wars over jurisdiction and funding were rife. Officers were underpaid relative to their counterparts in neighboring communities, and promotion seemed to bear little relationship to performance. Crime had gotten so far out of control that the press referred to the Big Apple as the Rotten Apple. Indeed, many social scientists had concluded, after three decades of increases, that New York City crime was impervious to police intervention. The best the police could do was react to crimes once they were committed.

Yet in less than two years, and without an increase in his budget, Bill Bratton turned New York into the safest large city in the nation. Between 1994 and 1996, felony crime fell 39%; murders, 50%; and theft, 35%. Gallup polls reported that public confidence in the NYPD jumped from 37% to 73%, even as internal surveys showed job satisfaction in the police department reaching an all-time high. Not surprisingly, Bratton’s popularity soared, and in 1996, he was featured on the cover of Time. Perhaps most impressive, the changes have outlasted their instigator, implying a fundamental shift in the department’s organizational culture and strategy. Crime rates have continued to fall: Statistics released in December 2002 revealed that New York’s overall crime rate is the lowest among the 25 largest cities in the United States.

The NYPD turnaround would be impressive enough for any police chief. For Bratton, though, it is only the latest of no fewer than five successful turnarounds in a 20-year career in policing. In the hope that Bratton can repeat his New York and Boston successes, Los Angeles has recruited him to take on the challenge of turning around the LAPD. (For a summary of his achievements, see the exhibit “Bratton in Action.”)

So what makes Bill Bratton tick? As man-
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Management researchers, we have long been fascinated by what triggers high performance or suddenly brings an ailing organization back to life. In an effort to find the common elements underlying such leaps in performance, we have built a database of more than 125 business and nonbusiness organizations. Bratton first caught our attention in the early 1990s, when we heard about his turnaround of the New York Transit Police. Bratton was special for us because in all of his turnarounds, he succeeded in record time despite facing all four of the hurdles that managers consistently claim block high performance: an organization wedded to the status quo, limited resources, a demotivated staff, and opposition from powerful vested interests. If Bratton could succeed against these odds, other leaders, we reasoned, could learn a lot from him.

Over the years, through our professional and personal networks and the rich public information available on the police sector, we have systematically compared the strategic, managerial, and performance records of Bratton’s turnarounds. We have followed up by interviewing the key players, including Bratton himself, as well as many other people who for professional—or sometimes personal—reasons tracked the events.

Our research led us to conclude that all of Bratton’s turnarounds are textbook examples of what we call tipping point leadership. The theory of tipping points, which has its roots in epidemiology, is well known; it hinges on the insight that in any organization, once the beliefs and energies of a critical mass of people are engaged, conversion to a new idea will spread like an epidemic, bringing about fundamental change very quickly. The theory suggests that such a movement can be unleashed only by agents who make unforgettable and unarguable calls for change, who concentrate their resources on what really matters, who mobilize the commitment of the organization’s key players, and who succeed in silencing the most vocal naysayers. Bratton did all of these things in all of his turnarounds.

Most managers only dream of pulling off the kind of performance leaps Bratton delivered. Even Jack Welch needed some ten years and tens of millions of dollars of restructuring and training to turn GE into the powerhouse it is today. Few CEOs have the time and money that Welch had, and most—even those attempting relatively mild change—are soon daunted by the scale of the hurdles they face. Yet we have found that the dream can indeed become a reality. For what makes Bratton’s turnarounds especially exciting to us is that his approach to overcoming the hurdles standing in the way of high performance has been remarkably consistent. His successes, therefore, are not just a matter of personality but also of method, which suggests that they can be replicated. Tipping point leadership is learnable.

In the following pages, we’ll lay out the approach that has enabled Bratton to overcome the forces of inertia and reach the tipping point. We’ll show first how Bratton overcame the cognitive hurdles that block companies from recognizing the need for radical change. Then we’ll describe how he successfully managed around the public sector’s endemic constraints on resources, which he even turned to his advantage. In the third section, we’ll explain how Bratton overcame the motivational hurdles that had discouraged and demoralized even the most eager police officers. Finally, we’ll describe how Bratton neatly closed off potentially fatal resistance from vocal and powerful opponents. (For a graphic summary of the ideas expressed in this article, see the exhibit “Tipping Point Leadership at a Glance.”

Break Through the Cognitive Hurdle

In many turnarounds, the hardest battle is simply getting people to agree on the causes of current problems and the need for change. Most CEOs try to make the case for change simply by pointing to the numbers and insisting that the company achieve better ones. But messages communicated through numbers seldom stick. To the line managers—the very people the CEO needs to win over—the case for change seems abstract and remote. Those whose units are doing well feel that they have been put on notice—and people worried about job security are more likely to be scanning the job market than trying to solve the company’s problems.

For all these reasons, tipping point leaders
### Bratton in Action

The New York Police Department was not Bill Bratton’s first turnaround. The table describes his biggest challenges and achievements during his 20 years as a policy reformer.

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<td>Setting</td>
<td>Assaults, drug dealing, prostitution, public drinking, and graffiti were endemic to the area. The Boston public fled the city, fearing attacks and theft.</td>
<td>Subway crime had been on the rise for the past five years. The media dubbed the Boston subway the Terror Train. The Boston Globe published a series on police incompetence in the MBTA.</td>
<td>The Mets lacked modern equipment, procedures, and discipline. Physical facilities were crumbling. Accountability, discipline, and morale were low in the 600-person Mets workforce.</td>
<td>Crime had risen 25% per year in the past three years—twice the overall rate for the city. Subway use by the public had declined sharply, polls indicated that New Yorkers considered the subway the most dangerous place in the city. There were 170,000 fare evaders per day, costing the city $80 million annually. Aggressive panhandling and vandalism were endemic. More than 5,000 people were living in the subway system.</td>
<td>The middle class was fleeing to the suburbs in search of a better quality of life. There was public despair in the face of the high crime rate. Crime was seen as part of a breakdown of social norms. The budget for policing was shrinking. The NYPD budget (aside from personnel) was being cut by 35%. The staff was demoralized and relatively underpaid.</td>
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<td>Results</td>
<td>Crime throughout the Fenway area was dramatically reduced. Tourists, residents, and investment returned as an entire area of the city rebounded.</td>
<td>Crime on the MBTA decreased by 27%; arrests rose to 1,500 per year from 600. The MBTA police met more than 800 standards of excellence to be accredited by the National Commission on Accreditation for Police Agencies. It was only the 13th police department in the country to meet this standard. Equipment acquired during his tenure: 55 new midsize cars, new uniforms, and new logos. Ridership began to grow.</td>
<td>Employee morale rose as Bratton instilled accountability, protocol, and pride. In three years, the Metropolitan Police changed from a dispirited, do-nothing, reactive organization with a poor self-image and an even worse public image to a very proud, proactive department. Equipment acquired during his tenure: 100 new vehicles, a helicopter, and a state-of-the-art radio system.</td>
<td>In two years, Bratton reduced felony crime by 22%, with robberies down by 40%. Increased confidence in the subway led to increased ridership. Fare evasion was cut in half. Equipment acquired during his tenure: a state-of-the-art communication system, advanced handguns for officers, and new patrol cars (the number of cars doubled).</td>
<td>Overall crime fell by 17%. Felony crime fell by 39%. Murders fell by 50%. Theft fell by 35% (robberies were down by one-third, burglaries by one-quarter). There were 200,000 fewer victims a year than in 1990. By the end of Bratton’s tenure, the NYPD had a 73% positive rating, up from 37% four years earlier.</td>
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like Bratton do not rely on numbers to break through the organization’s cognitive hurdles. Instead, they put their key managers face-to-face with the operational problems so that the managers cannot evade reality. Poor performance becomes something they witness rather than hear about. Communicating in this way means that the message—performance is poor and needs to be fixed—sticks with people, which is essential if they are to be convinced not only that a turnaround is necessary but that it is something they can achieve.

When Bratton first went to New York to head the transit police in April 1990, he discovered that none of the senior staff officers rode the subway. They commuted to work and traveled around in cars provided by the city. Comfortably removed from the facts of underground life—and reassured by statistics showing that only 3% of the city’s major crimes were committed in the subway—the senior managers had little sensitivity to riders’ widespread concern about safety. In order to shatter the staff’s complacency, Bratton began requiring that all transit police officials—beginning with himself—ride the subway to work, to meetings, and at night. It was many staff officers’ first occasion in years to share the ordinary citizen’s subway experience and see the situation their subordinates were up against: jammed turnstiles, aggressive beggars, gangs of youths jumping turnstiles and jostling people on the platforms, winos and homeless people sprawled on benches. It was clear that even if few major crimes took place in the subway, the whole place reeked of fear and disorder. With that ugly reality staring them in the face, the transit force’s senior managers could no longer deny the need for a change in their policing methods.

Bratton uses a similar approach to help sensitize his superiors to his problems. For instance, when he was running the police divi-

Tipping Point Leadership at a Glance

Leaders like Bill Bratton use a four-step process to bring about rapid, dramatic, and lasting change with limited resources. The cognitive and resource hurdles shown here represent the obstacles that organizations face in reorienting and formulating strategy. The motivational and political hurdles prevent a strategy’s rapid execution. Tipping all four hurdles leads to rapid strategy reorientation and execution. Overcoming these hurdles is, of course, a continuous process because the innovation of today soon becomes the conventional norm of tomorrow.
In any organization, once the beliefs and energies of a critical mass of people are engaged, conversion to a new idea will spread like an epidemic.
The Strategy Canvas of Transit:
How Bratton Refocused Resources

In comparing strategies across companies, we like to use a tool we call the strategy canvas, which highlights differences in strategies and resource allocation. The strategy canvas shown here compares the strategy and allocation of resources of the New York Transit Police before and after Bill Bratton’s appointment as chief. The vertical axis shows the relative level of resource allocation. The horizontal axis shows the various elements of strategy in which the investments were made. Although a dramatic shift in resource allocation occurred and performance rose dramatically, overall investment of resources remained more or less constant. Bratton did this by de-emphasizing or virtually eliminating some traditional features of transit police work while increasing emphasis on others or creating new ones. For example, he was able to reduce the time police officers spent processing suspects by introducing mobile processing centers known as “bust buses.”
Leaders like Bratton do not need extra resources to reach the tipping point. They concentrate resources where the need and the likely payoffs are greatest.

They can achieve a great deal with the resources they have. What they do is concentrate their resources on the places that are most in need of change and that have the biggest possible payoffs. This idea, in fact, is at the heart of Bratton’s famous (and once hotly debated) philosophy of zero-tolerance policing.

Having won people over to the idea of change, Bratton must persuade them to take a cold look at what precisely is wrong with their operating practices. It is at this point that he turns to the numbers, which he is adept at using to force through major changes. Take the case of the New York narcotics unit. Bratton’s predecessors had treated it as secondary in importance, partly because they assumed that responding to 911 calls was the top priority. As a result, less than 5% of the NYPD’s manpower was dedicated to fighting narcotics crimes.

At an initial meeting with the NYPD’s chiefs, Bratton’s deputy commissioner of crime strategy, Jack Maple, asked people around the table for their estimates of the percentage of crimes attributable to narcotics use. Most said 50%; others, 70%; the lowest estimate was 30%. On that basis, a narcotics unit consisting of less than 5% of the police force was grossly understaffed, Maple pointed out. What’s more, it turned out that the narcotics squad largely worked Monday through Friday, even though drugs were sold in large quantities—and drug-related crimes persistently occurred—on the weekends. Why the weekday schedule? Because it had always been done that way; it was an unquestioned modus operandi. Once these facts were presented, Bratton’s call for a major reallocation of staff and resources within the NYPD was quickly accepted.

A careful examination of the facts can also reveal where changes in key policies can reduce the need for resources, as Bratton demonstrated during his tenure as chief of New York’s transit police. His predecessors had lobbied hard for the money to increase the number of subway cops, arguing that the only way to stop muggers was to have officers ride every subway line and patrol each of the system’s 700 exits and entrances. Bratton, by contrast, believed that subway crime could be resolved not by throwing more resources at the problem but by better targeting those resources. To prove the point, he had members of his staff analyze where subway crimes were being committed. They found that the vast majority occurred at only a few stations and on a couple of lines, which suggested that a targeted strategy would work well. At the same time, he shifted more of the force out of uniform and into plain clothes at the hot spots. Criminals soon realized that an absence of uniforms did not necessarily mean an absence of cops.

Distribution of officers was not the only problem. Bratton’s analysis revealed that an inordinate amount of police time was wasted in processing arrests. It took an officer up to 16 hours per arrest to book the suspect and file papers on the incident. What’s more, the officers so hated the bureaucratic process that they avoided making arrests in minor cases. Bratton realized that he could dramatically increase his available policing resources—not to mention the officers’ motivation—if he could somehow improvise around this problem. His solution was to park “bust buses”—old buses converted into arrest-processing centers—around the corner from targeted subway stations. Processing time was cut from 16 hours to just one. Innovations like that enabled Bratton to dramatically reduce subway crime—even without an increase in the number of officers on duty at any given time. (The exhibit “The Strategy Canvas of Transit: How Bratton Refocused Resources” illustrates how radically Bratton refocused the transit police’s resources.)

Bratton’s drive for data-driven policing solutions led to the creation of the famous Compstat crime database. The database, used to identify hot spots for intense police intervention, captures weekly crime and arrest activity—including times, locations, and associated enforcement activities—at the precinct, borough, and city levels. The Compstat reports allowed Bratton and the entire police department to easily discern established and emerging hot spots for efficient resource targeting and retargeting.

In addition to refocusing the resources he already controls, Bratton has proved adept at trading resources he doesn’t need for those he does. The chiefs of public-sector organizations are reluctant to advertise excess resources, let alone lend them to other agencies, because acknowledged excess resources tend to get reallocated. So over time, some organizations...
Influencers. They act like

When you hit them just right, all the pins topple over.

Bratton solves the motivation problem by singling out the key influencers. They act like kingpins in bowling: When you hit them just right, all the pins topple over.

Bratton’s approach to motivating his key influencers is to put them under a spotlight. Perhaps his most significant reform of the NYPD’s operating practices was instituting a semiweekly strategy review meeting that brought the top brass together with the city’s 76 precinct commanders. Bratton had identified the commanders as key influential people in the NYPD, because each one directly managed 200 to 400 officers. Attendance was mandatory for all senior staff, including three-star chiefs, deputy commissioners, and borough chiefs. Bratton was there as often as possible.

At the meetings, which took place in an auditorium at the police command center, a selected precinct commander was called before a panel of the senior staff (the selected officer was given only two days’ notice, in order to keep all the commanders on their toes). The commander in the spotlight was questioned by both the panel and other commanders about the precinct’s performance. He or she was responsible for explaining projected maps and charts that showed, based on the Compstat data, the precinct’s patterns of crimes and when and where the police responded. The commander would be required to provide a detailed explanation if police activity did not mirror crime spikes and would also be asked how officers were addressing the precinct’s issues and why performance was improving or deteriorating. The meetings allowed Bratton and his senior staff to carefully monitor and assess how well commanders were motivating and managing their people and how well they were focusing on strategic hot spots.

The meetings changed the NYPD’s culture in several ways. By making results and responsibilities clear to everyone, the meetings helped to introduce a culture of performance. Indeed, a photo of the commander who was about to be grilled appeared on the front page of the handout that each meeting participant received, emphasizing that the commander was accountable for the precinct’s results. An incompetent commander could no longer cover up his failings by blaming his precinct’s results on the shortcomings of neighboring precincts, because his neighbors were in the room and could respond. By the same token, the meetings gave high achievers a chance to be recognized both for making improvements in their own precincts and for...
helping other commanders. The meetings also allowed police leaders to compare notes on their experiences; before Bratton’s arrival, precinct commanders hardly ever got together as a group. Over time, this management style filtered down through the ranks, as the precinct commanders tried out their own versions of Bratton’s meetings. With the spotlight shining brightly on their performance, the commanders were highly motivated to get all the officers under their control marching to the new strategy.

The great challenges in applying this kind of motivational device, of course, are ensuring that people feel it is based on fair processes and seeing to it that they can draw lessons from both good and bad results. Doing so increases the organization’s collective strength and everyone’s chance of winning. Bratton addresses the issue of fair process by engaging all key influencers in the procedures, setting clear performance expectations, and explaining why these strategy meetings, for example, are essential for fast execution of policy. He addresses the issue of learning by insisting that the team of top brass play an active role in meetings and by being an active moderator himself. Precinct commanders can talk about their achievements or failures without feeling that they are showing off or being shown up. Successful commanders aren't seen as bragging, because it's clear to everyone that they were asked by Bratton’s top team to show, in detail, how they achieved their successes. And for commanders on the receiving end, the challenge was making their boroughs safe—no more. Borough heads also had a concrete goal within their capabilities: making their boroughs safe—no more. No matter what their positions, officers couldn’t say that what was being asked of them was too tough. Nor could they claim that achieving it was out of their hands. In this way, responsibility for the turnaround shifted from Bratton to each of the thousands of police officers on the force.

Knock Over the Political Hurdle
Organizational politics is an inescapable reality in public and corporate life, a lesson Bratton learned the hard way. In 1980, at age 34 one of the youngest lieutenants in Boston’s police department, he had proudly put up a plaque in his office that said: “Youth and skill will win out every time over age and treachery.” Within just a few months, having been shunted into a dead-end position due to a mixture of office politics and his own brashness, Bratton took the sign down. He never again forgot the importance of understanding the plotting, intrigue, and politics involved in pushing through change. Even if an organization has reached the tipping point, powerful vested interests will resist the impending reforms. The more likely change becomes, the more fiercely and vocally these negative influencers—both internal and external—will fight to protect their positions, and their resistance can seriously damage, even derail, the reform process.

Bratton anticipates these dangers by identifying and silencing powerful naysayers early on. To that end, he always ensures that he has a respected senior insider on the top team. At the NYPD, for instance, Bratton appointed John Timoney, now Miami’s police commissioner, as his number two. Timoney was a
Bratton’s alliance with the mayor’s office and the New York Times isolated the courts, which had opposed his zero-tolerance policing out of fear that it would clog court schedules.

cop’s cop, respected and feared for his dedication to the NYPD and for the more than 60 decorations he had received. Twenty years in the ranks had taught him who all the key players were and how they played the political game. One of the first tasks Timoney carried out was to report to Bratton on the likely attitudes of the top staff toward Bratton’s concept of zero-tolerance policing, identifying those who would fight or silently sabotage the new initiatives. This led to a dramatic changing of the guard.

Of course, not all naysayers should face the ultimate sanction—there might not be enough people left to man the barricades. In many cases, therefore, Bratton silences opposition by example and indisputable fact. For instance, when first asked to compile detailed crime maps and information packages for the strategy review meetings, most precinct commanders complained that the task would take too long and waste valuable police time that could be better spent fighting crime. Anticipating this argument, deputy commissioner Jack Maple set up a reporting system that covered the city’s most crime-ridden areas. Operating the system required no more than 18 minutes a day, which worked out, as he told the precinct commanders, to less than 1% of the average precinct’s workload. Try to argue with that.

Often the most serious opposition to reform comes from outside. In the public sector, as in business, an organization’s change of strategy has an impact on other organizations—partners and competitors alike. The change is likely to be resisted by those players if they are happy with the status quo and powerful enough to protest the changes. Bratton’s strategy for dealing with such opponents is to isolate them by building a broad coalition with the other independent powers in his realm. In New York, for example, one of the most serious threats to his reforms came from the city’s courts, which were concerned that zero-tolerance policing would result in an enormous number of small-crimes cases clogging the court schedule.

To get past the opposition of the courts, Bratton solicited the support of no less a personage than the mayor, Rudolph Giuliani, who had considerable influence over the district attorneys, the courts, and the city jail on Rikers Island. Bratton’s team demonstrated to the mayor that the court system had the capacity to handle minor “quality of life” crimes, even though doing so would presumably not be palatable for them.

The mayor decided to intervene. While conceding to the courts that a crackdown campaign would cause a short-term spike in court work, he also made clear that he and the NYPD believed it would eventually lead to a workload reduction for the courts. Working together in this way, Bratton and the mayor were able to maneuver the courts into processing quality-of-life crimes. Seeing that the mayor was aligned with Bratton, the courts appealed to the city’s legislators, advocating legislation to exempt them from handling minor-case on the grounds that such cases would clog the system and entail significant costs to the city. Bratton and the mayor, who were holding weekly strategy meetings, added another ally to their coalition by placing their case before the press, in particular the New York Times. Through a series of press conferences and articles and at every interview opportunity, the issue of zero tolerance was put at the front and center of public debate with a clear, simple message: If the courts did not help crack down on quality-of-life crimes, the city’s crime rates would not improve. It was a matter not of saving dollars but of saving the city.

Bratton’s alliance with the mayor’s office and the city’s leading media institution successfully isolated the courts. The courts could hardly be seen as publicly opposing an initiative that would not only make New York a more attractive place to live but would ultimately reduce the number of cases brought before them. With the mayor speaking aggressively in the press about the need to pursue quality-of-life crimes and the city’s most respected—and liberal—newspaper giving credence to the policy, the costs of fighting Bratton’s strategy were daunting. Thanks to this savvy politicking, one of Bratton’s biggest battles was won, and the legislation was not enacted. The courts would handle quality-of-life crimes. In due course, the crime rates did indeed come tumbling down.

...
collective effort. But the tipping point would not have been reached without him—or another leader like him. And while we recognize that not every executive has the personality to be a Bill Bratton, there are many who have that potential once they know the formula for success. It is that formula that we have tried to present, and we urge managers who wish to turn their companies around, but have limited time and resources, to take note. By addressing the hurdles to tipping point change described in these pages, they will stand a chance of achieving the same kind of results for their shareholders as Bratton has delivered to the citizens of New York.

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Tipping Point Leadership

Further Reading

ARTICLES

Cracking the Code of Change
by Michael Beer and Nitin Nohria
Harvard Business Review
May–June 2000
Product no. 651X

Beer and Nohria would describe Bratton’s tipping point leadership as a savvy blending of two different—but complementary—theories of change: “Theory E” emphasizes economic results through hard-nosed actions such as layoffs and restructuring. “Theory O” is a “softer” approach focusing on developing corporate culture and human capability, and patiently building trust and commitment to the company through teamwork and communication.

To achieve sustainable competitive advantage, Beer and Nohria recommend combining theories E and O on five change dimensions: goals, leadership, focus, process, and rewards. For example, set direction from above while also engaging people from below, and establish systems that encourage experimentation by setting up “risk-free” zones where employees can fail without penalty.

Leading Change: Why Transformation Efforts Fail
by John P. Kotter
Harvard Business Review
March–April 1995
Product no. 4231

Bratton’s change-leadership process in many ways reflects Kotter’s model. In Kotter’s view, successful transformations go through a series of eight distinct stages—which executives must work through in sequence. Skipping steps to try to accelerate the process—or making a critical mistake in any one stage—invariably spawns problems.

The stages are: establish a sense of urgency, form a powerful guiding coalition, create a compelling vision, communicate that vision through every possible means, empower others to act on the vision, score short-term wins, consolidate improvements to produce still more change, and institutionalize new approaches.

BOOK

The Heart of Change: Real-Life Stories of How People Change Their Organization
by John P. Kotter and Dan S. Cohen
Harvard Business School Press
2002
Product no. 2549

This book emphasizes cognitive and motivational strategies Bratton also uses: making a case for change in ways that spark people’s emotions and inspire them to seize ownership of the effort. The authors introduce the “see-feel-change” dynamic, which is based on Kotter’s eight-stage change model.

Kotter and Cohen maintain that the key to lasting change isn’t making people behave differently; it’s making them feel differently—by appealing to their hearts more than their minds. The key? Use concrete, visual elements. One manufacturer convinced division presidents that purchasing processes were out of control by bagging samples of the 424 kinds of welding gloves the company was buying and displaying the collection on the boardroom table. The bags included pricing information, so everyone saw that the company was buying gloves ranging from $3.22 to $10.55—though the items were nearly identical. The presidents gained a graphic sense of “this is how bad it is” and people still talk about the “glove story” today.