

Kotter's 8-Step Change Model  
and the Chicano Movement  
by David Marquiss

Professor John Kotter is one of the foremost experts on organizational change. A Professor at the Harvard Business School, he's written 17 books on leadership and organizational change, 12 of them bestsellers (Kotter International, 2012). He found over his thirty years of research that "70% of all major change efforts in organizations fail" (Kotter International, 2012).

In 1995, he published an article in the Harvard Business Review that became the basis of his book *Leading Change*. In it, he identified why change in organizations failed, and defined 8 steps needed for any organization to successfully affect lasting change that is rooted in everything the organization does. The steps are:

**Step 1:** Establish a Sense of Urgency – It's necessary to, through clear communication, create a sense that change is required now, and stakeholders have to *see* that successful change is needed.

**Step 2:** Form a Powerful Coalition – Bring together key people whose authority comes from different sources to build a coalition able to give the change a sense of strong support and momentum.

**Step 3:** Create a Vision for Change – Develop a summary to share with others that captures what you "see" as the future of your organization after the enactment of the changes. Create a strategy to execute the vision.

**Step 4:** Communicate the Vision – Effectively and clearly communicate your vision of what the change you’re trying to achieve will look like.

**Step 5:** Remove Obstacles – Identify those who have erected or supported barriers to the change, and see what can be done to achieve buy-in.

**Step 6:** Create Short-Term Wins – Set smaller goals to show a measure of success create more momentum.

**Step 7:** Build on the Change – Use each success as a basis for the next. Set goals that build on the previous ones.

**Step 8:** Anchor the Change in the Culture – The change must transcend itself to become an abstract, an idea woven into the fabric of your organization.

(Kotter, 1996)

While *Leading Change* was written principally for application in the private sector, the steps described within it can be adapted for any organization seeking change, whether internal or external. Organizations such as The Crusade for Justice, Los Cinco Candidatos, and La Raza Unida Party worked or continue to work for Chicano interests and to improve the quality of life for Chicanos.

Los Cinco Candidatos (Juan Cornejo, Manuel Maldonado, Antonio Cardenas, Reynaldo Mendoza, and Mario Hernandez) were candidates for city council in Crystal City (Cristal), Texas in 1963 who all won election to the council. During the campaign, they found that the “obvious campaign strategy was now simply to organize and mobilize the Chicano vote” for the candidates, since research had shown that a greater number of

Chicanos paid poll taxes than Anglos, so there were more Chicano voters available if they could be motivated to vote (Gutierrez, 1998).

Cristal was also the birthplace of La Raza Unida Party, founded in 1970 as a third political party focusing on the needs of the Chicano people. "From 1970 to 1980 the Partido was involved in electoral, labor and social issues," and later focused on the self-determination of the Chicano Mexicano people and the "Liberation of Aztlan," an area that includes California, Arizona, New Mexico, Texas and Colorado (Partido Nacional La Raza Unida, 2012).

The Crusade for Justice was founded in 1966 by Rodolfo "Corky" Gonzales, who had hoped that the Crusade would be "a national model for organizing urban Chicanos to resolve chronic problems and achieve self-determination" (Vigil, 1999).

These organizations enjoyed a number of successes, though Los Cinco Candidatos as a group only stayed in office for two years. I believe that an analysis of them will show that some of the means by which the organizations succeeded can be found within Kotter's 8 Steps.

**Step 1: *Establish a Sense of Urgency.*** To begin the process of change within even a small segment of society, the people behind the desired change have to establish a sense that "now is the time" to attract a core of followers. Sometimes, it only takes a small spark to help gather a group to begin mounting pressure and establishing momentum to instigate change.

In an *El Gallo* editorial written after a police shooting left Andrew Garcia critically wounded, Corky Gonzales railed against community apathy. “After seeing what is happening across the nation, the Denver Mexican Americans should start analyzing the situation. Police are not afraid of us. They can mistreat one Chicano, and a hundred looking on won’t make a move.” He concluded that the police “aren’t afraid of Mexican Americans and, until they are, they will never respect us” (Vigil, 1999).

On December 8<sup>th</sup>, 1969, Jose Angel Gutierrez and others planned a demonstration at the school board meeting after grievances and demands from Chicano students at the high school were ignored by school officials and the board. The leader of the students, Severita Lara, stirred the crowd outside the board meeting. “See how they treat us? See how they treat all of you, our parents and mothers” (Gutierrez, 1998)?

After seeing that their needs were being ignored, the urgency among Chicanos to change the system built into direct action. That action came the next morning, as students and parents began congregating across from the school. “By 10:00 A.M. over 500 people were across the street” (Gutierrez, 1998).

**Step 2: Form a Powerful Coalition** – It’s paramount to create a group supporting change that includes powerful stakeholders to give the change an air of legitimacy and strong support, allowing momentum to build and convincing others to join the cause.

The Crusade for Justice joined with the Black Panthers on occasion, including a joint march on July 23<sup>rd</sup>, 1967 to protest the killings of Louis Pinedo and Eugene Cook. The groups, working together, would be more effective than they would have been had they marched separately or if the Crusade had abided by the decision to deny them a permit.

Corky Gonzales also worked with the Southern Christian Leadership Conference to organize “the poor people’s campaign,” along with along with representatives from the Asian, White, and Native American communities. Simply making demands of the government wasn’t the main goal of the campaign, but there were opportunities to “develop ties with other activists and gain national visibility for Chicanos” (Vigil, 1999).

Organizing protests at Texas A & I, Jose Gutierrez wrote that he brought together disparate groups, “those interested in the fight against housing discrimination, those into radical antiwar politics, and those of us, who were militant Chicanos – under one umbrella for our next efforts,” including “small, quick, public demonstrations against the President and his administration” on the groups’ various interests (Gutierrez, 1998).

A coalition of groups with reach equal to or greater than your own will further the goals than would be possible alone. In the case of Los Cinco Candidatos, where campaign workers built their victory “one day at a time, one bloc of votes at a time, adjusting our get-out-the-vote strategy as needed” (Gutierrez, 1998).

Jose Gutierrez summarized coalitions this way: A coalition seldom is organized for support of a single group. It can be built around a single issue that transcends those of individual groups” (Gutierrez, 1998).

**Step 3: *Create a Vision for Change.*** The reestablishment of Aztlan has been the vision of La Raza Unida Party, and a rallying cry for Chicano activists. It’s an idea, though improbable, that guides their passion and gives them something to hold onto. Self-determination was a goal of both La Raza Unida and the Crusade for Justice. Like Aztlan, it’s something people can picture and explain when looking for support.

Supporters of Los Cinco Candidatos had a vision and a strategy for achieving their goals. There were two sets of utility books for whites and Chicanos, services were withheld from Hispanic customers, and they were unable to play on the golf course that sat on city property. That had to change. They wanted their “seat at the table.” So they ran five qualified candidates and worked the get-out-the-vote strategy for all they could. And they were elected.

**Step 4: *Communicate the Vision.*** In combating the institutional racism that Chicanos faced and to help mold future activists, they set up “freedom schools” which taught Chicano history, culture, and politics” with a goal to “instill ethnic pride” among youths (Vigil, 1999). This helped empower them to educate others, and expand the reach of the Chicano movement beyond their local neighborhoods.

Today, La Raza Unida uses their website, [www.pnlru.org](http://www.pnlru.org), to communicate their vision for Aztlan. They also engage in get-out-the-vote projects, and organize events including Chicano Liberation Day, Cesar Chavez Day, and Fiesta En El Barrio (Partido Nacional La Raza Unida, 2012).

**Step 5: *Remove Obstacles.*** In Cristal, voter apathy among Chicanos was a major concern leading up to the city council election. They targeted “neighborhoods, categories of people, age groups, worksites, and students” (Gutierrez, 1998). This allowed them to focus on groups that may not have felt enfranchised by the system and were willing to support candidates that could change it.

Self-interest led to some social and racial groups to segregate themselves from others, limiting each other’s ability to work at their highest potential. Working with the

Black Panthers and others, the Crusade for Justice was able to break down that barrier, at least within their own sphere of influence. Jose Gutierrez also broke down barriers, working across social lines to accomplish his goals. He also broke down Texas A & I's administration into negotiating with the groups he had brought together.

**Step 6: *Create Short-Term Wins.*** Each rally, each speech, each high-profile meeting that Corky Gonzales gave or attended was in and of themselves short-term wins for the Crusade for Justice. He was able to bring more attention to the cause and leading to other. This gave the public perception that they were succeeding and spreading their message, and a meeting with Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

“The second National Chicano Youth Conference was held in Denver in March 1970 and drew more participants than the 1969 conference” (Vigil, 1999), a major achievement for Chicano groups. The conference also served as a springboard for the birth of La Raza Unida Party, intended to be a third party alternative to the two-party system.

When Jose Gutierrez attended Texas A & I, he helped organize protests, working with fraternities, Young Democrats, and black activists. The protests led to marches, and a newsletter, *The Rag*, was printed weekly. Each success and achieved goal empowered them to continue their mission and grow as an organization, leading to the negotiations with college administrators.

**Step 7: *Build on the Change.*** This compliments Step 6. Each achievement should have the purpose of leading to bigger goals and achievements. For example, a protest against a racist teacher leads to more Chicano subjects in the curriculum and the hiring of more Hispanic teachers. This leads to outreach from the police, and the hiring of more

Chicano officers, which could lead to more Chicano youths to dream of being a teacher, a police officer, or more. The election of Los Cinco Candidatos, while only serving two years together, may have inspired other Chicanos to seek public office, leading to service in state or federal institutions or even in cabinet posts.

**Step 8: *Anchor the Change in the Culture.*** The name of Rodolfo “Corky” Gonzales is etched into the history and culture of Denver, especially in the Chicano community. He’s become more than a man, he’s become an ideal, a true urban legend. He left behind a great legacy. “Gonzales and other Chicanos established one of the most influential and controversial Chicano urban civil and human rights organizations, the Crusade for Justice, in 1966; a Chicano based school in 1969, La Escuela Tlatelolco, which lives today, 37 years after its founding. He also established La Raza Unida Party de Colorado in 1971” (Frasquez, 2006).

Chicano stridence became accepted by mainstream society thanks to the effort of activists like Corky Gonzales and Jose Angel Gutierrez, and a legacy of activism has been anchored in the Chicano culture, passed down to the next generations. The Chicano movement was a political, social movement, and cultural movement.

Though finding specific examples might prove difficult, Professor Kotter’s 8-step model for lasting change has been used inadvertently by Chicano activists to change the institutional systems that held them back and their culture with its richness and history, but disparate needs and interests.



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