

*Tom Peters' Manifestos 2002: The BRAWL WITH NO RULES Series*

# Design Mindfulness

Wellspring of "Corporate Soul" & No.1 Basis for Competitive Advantage?

Tom Peters

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**“We are in a brawl with no rules.”**

**– Paul Allaire, former CEO, Xerox**

**MANIFESTO.** The word suggests a pointed view. (Rodale’s *Synonym Finder*: Manifesto ... Proclamation. Declaration. Pronunciamento. Broadcast. Airing. Broadside.) And “Pointed View” is precisely the idea of this series of “booklets” – in what we call **The BRAWL WITH NO RULES Series**. Each booklet is an expanded chapter of my cornerstone day-long seminars. But I have chosen these topics for two particular reasons. First, I think they (1) are important and (2) present enormous opportunities and (3) are grossly neglected by most organizations. Second, I have a Radical Point of View about each one; you will find no half-way suggestions here!

# Design matters.

Design is (hugely) underrated as a “strategic tool.” Design is the essence of emotional attachment to a product or service or experience ... and therefore the wellspring of the corporate culture (or “soul”) and of the “brand proposition” itself. Hence, “design mindfulness,” as I label it, can be worth hundreds of billions of dollars ... to a single firm.

## Okay?

Hey, slow down, you retort. Basis for the brand proposition? Worth 100s of billions of \$\$\$\$\$ to a single firm? Not so fast.

Agreed. Here, then, is my story ...

I’m an engineer by training. Dropped out of architecture school in my freshman year, because I was certain (still am) that I had not a smidgen of artistic talent. Started collecting art in 1974. Not pricey stuff. Just stuff I love. (Still my strategy, with a far healthier bank balance.) That’s side #1 of the/my coin. The other: I’ve been fascinated by design – *as a business proposition* – for close to a decade now. It seems so conspicuously important to a few, like Apple and Deere and now Target. And so conspicuously unimportant to the great majority. I’ve written about it here and there. A chapter in this book or that. A dozen columns, when I was writing a syndicated weekly column. But “it” all came together in a couple of speeches that I gave in late 2000. In particular, a talk to the Design Management Institute, part of a congress titled “Design-Based Leadership in the 21st Century.” (This essay is derived from that talk.)

I gave an hour-and-a-half PowerPoint presentation. I worked – literally – for days on the first slide alone. And here’s what emerged on Slide #1:

***I am a design fanatic. Personally, I’m not artistic at all. But, I love cool stuff. I love what I love. I hate what I hate. But, it goes much farther than that, far beyond the personal. Design has become a professional obsession.***

***I simply believe design per se is the principal reason for emotional attachment (or detachment!) relative to a product or service or experience or brand proposition. Design, as I see it, is arguably the #1 determinant of whether a product-service-experience-brand proposition stands out ... or doesn’t. Has integrity ... or doesn’t. Connects ... or doesn’t. Furthermore, it’s “one of those things” that damn few companies put – consistently – on the front burner.***

I can’t summarize it any better. There’s sweat and tears all over that statement. So, let’s build the broader story.

# 1. Welcome to the Age of "Ohmygod!"

**2001. Y1M3.** (Year #1, 3<sup>rd</sup> Millennium.) **It's a purely nutty time.** The human genome has been mapped. A civilian tourist has gone into space. Greg Blonder, former top strategist at AT&T turned venture capitalist, says: "In 25 years, you'll probably be able to get the sum total of all human knowledge on a personal device." Two sober senior consultants from PricewaterhouseCoopers, David Schneider and Grady Means, claim in their book *MetaCapitalism*: "The period 2000-2002 will bring the single greatest change in worldwide economic and business conditions ever." And Peter Drucker, who has a nasty little habit of seeing farther into the future than almost anybody, chimes in with: "The corporation as we know it, which is now 120 years old, is not likely to survive the next 25 years. Legally and financially, yes, but not structurally and economically."

Staying ahead of the power curve is virtually impossible! Keeping up is virtually impossible! For the individual. Or the organization. Jack Welch, legendary GE chairman, made the theme of his last few years in office ... **DYB.com.** That is: **Destroy Your Business – dot-com.** Tear it up ... before somebody else does.

All of this is prelude. Simply to say that everybody is scrambling. Nobody's "got it right." We're looking for better business models. Better approaches to standing out. I'll subsequently argue that an obsession with design plays (DIRECTLY) into this emerging, gyrating, oh-my-God new world order.

# 2. The Problem: Better But Boring!

We were challenged vigorously by the Japanese in the '80s. In particular, they thumped us on quality. We answered the challenge, with amazing dispatch, given the size of our economy. We did it so well that the likes of quality and continuous improvement are now considered givens, merely a point of entry.

Paul Goldberger wrote the cover story in a special issue of *The New York Times Magazine* on retailing. His title: "The Sameness of Things." His opening line: "***While everything may be better, it is also increasingly the same.***" (Aargh.)

CEO Carly Fiorina is making a revolution at Hewlett-Packard. Why? She was unvarnished in her assessment of where the company was: "We make over three new product announcements a day.

Can you remember them? *Our customers can't!*" (Aargh II.) That's a mouthful, because if it's HP, you know the quality is terrific; and if you know the company's recent history, you're aware they've shortened time to market dramatically. That is ... everything better ... everything increasingly the same. The capstone to this idea is delivered by two Swedish business strategists, Kjell Nordström and Jonas Ridderstråle, in a marvelous book titled *Funky Business*. "The 'surplus society,' " the authors write, "has a surplus of similar companies, employing similar people, with similar educational backgrounds, working in similar jobs, coming up with similar ideas, producing similar things, with similar prices and similar quality." (Aargh III.)

(And, for good measure, Danish marketing phenom Jesper Kunde piles on in *Unique Now ... or Never*: "Companies have defined so much 'best practice' that they are now more or less identical." Aargh IV.)

Section #1: a world gone crazy. Section #2: a world in which quality is up, time to market is down ... and everything is looking "good" ... but increasingly the same. Margins are subsequently getting thinner, as de facto commoditization reaches every nook and cranny of the marketplace. (Headline, *Wall Street Journal*, 16 February 2001: "A boom in high-tech fakes is shifting into overdrive. These weren't old, tacky knock-offs that can be spotted a mile away, but a new breed of look-alikes born of high-tech manufacturing techniques and savvy packaging.") It's product after product, service after service, industry after industry.

Message: Good quality, respectable costs, constant improvement and rapid introduction of "new" products are everybody's game. So: Find a unique edge. Now. Somehow. Or else.

### **3. We Must Lead:** **Different or Doomed!**

I made a name for myself, almost two decades ago, by urging (make that begging!) companies to listen to their customers. A great idea. Hard to take too far. At the time. On the other hand, when everything is similar, when everyone is copying everyone else's best practices A.S.A.P. ... then perhaps another strategy is called for. "If you worship at the throne of the voice of the customer," says Joseph Morone, former Dean of RPI's business school and now President of Bentley College, "you'll get only incremental advances." "These days," says Doug Atkin, a partner at the marketing services firm Merkley Newman Harty, "you can't succeed as a company if you're consumer-led – because, in a world so full of so much constant change, consumers can't anticipate the next big thing. Companies should be idea-led and consumer-informed."

Am I really suggesting that we stop listening? No. (And yes.) Listening *is* critically important. (*But.*) One must also go one's own way, seeking and propounding *la difference*. "The 'good 10 percent' of American products," says design guru Bran Ferren, "comes out of big-ideas organizations that don't believe in talking to the customer. [They're run] by passionate maniacs

who make everybody's life miserable until they get what they want." The issue isn't simple. It isn't open and shut. But, when I think in particular about the technology industry, and the likes of Steve Jobs and Bill Gates and Jerry Yang and Michael Dell and Larry Ellison and Jeff Bezos: They are surely attuned to their customers, but they are also determined inventors. Leaders. Creating demand that was simply not there until their enterprises created products-services-experiences that few of us would have imagined possible.

At the very least, there's a halfway house. Perhaps listening to customers is fine ... *if* you choose the right customers! Leaders, that is. "Our strategies must be tied to leading-edge customers on the attack," says Nortel's CEO, John Roth. "If we focus on the defensive customers, we will also become defensive." "Future-defining customers may account for only two percent to three percent of your total," adds Adrian Slywotzky of Mercer Consultants, "but they represent a crucial window on the future."

Looking for differences isn't easy. Being different isn't easy. It means fighting the established wisdom. And even, perhaps, fighting your established customers. But, this is a unique moment when all the rules are being rewritten. Followers, even rather fast followers, will be beaten and battered and bruised. My take: You/me/we are paid to lead.

*So ... lead! (And what better "tool" to lead with than scintillating design!)*

## **4. Design: The No.1 Source of Passionate Attachment! (Or undying despair.)**

As I said at the outset, this "design thing" has captured my fancy – wormed its way into my analytical framework as well – for almost a decade. And the October 2000 speech was a sort of culmination. I provided that opening philosophical statement, offered above. And what follows in this brief section is a modest expansion of that. This is personal! Perhaps you're not interested. I have worried and worried about this issue for 10 years. Studied and studied and studied for 10 years. Listened and listened and listened for 10 years. And suddenly – that's exactly the right word – "it" came together for me one morning, at about 3 a.m., as I tried to figure out what it was that I meant ... slaving over my two days hence PowerPoint presentation. I ended up creating four slides. Each one of them contained but a single sentence. Add them all up – and you've got the gist of my message. In a way, my entire message.

Namely:

***Design is ... what and why I love. Love.***  
***Design is ... what and why I hate. Hate.***  
***Design is ... never neutral. Not Neutral.***  
***Design is ... the principal difference between love and hate. Principal Difference.***

I carry icons, *objets*, around with me. I love to touch them. They're cool. Simple things. A fat Swiss Army knife. An Oral-B CrossAction toothbrush. (23 patents on that I'll sucker!) A Zyliss garlic peeler. (Don't know about it? It's a miracle!) My sensual Dave Brown PLATYPUS Australian cricket ball. Ziploc bags. (I personally could write *5,001 Uses for Ziplocs!*) Duct Tape. (Don't leave home without it!) What are these things: Cool! Useful to the point of WOW! Yes, sensual. (It's all about love!)

And I feel the same exhilaration when I find a form to fill out that is ... well ... cool. Or, read a paragraph in an insurance policy that is ... clean, clear prose. (More on that later.) The point: There are no limits to this idea.

Yes, the stuff I love ... I love. And the stuff I hate ... I hate. My inability to record my wishes quickly, and with no muss and fuss, at a Website. Signage at the ridiculous Opryland Hotel in Nashville, that is impossibly, maliciously confusing ... even on your sixth or seventh visit. Plastic bags in grocery stores that you can't peel open, for the life of you. I could go on for pages. But, you get the idea, I'm sure. It's called Life's Little Miseries. Or, my point here: *Misery brought to us by thoughtless and uninspiring designers and their thoughtless and uninspiring bosses, who are, more importantly, flipping off an opportunity of stunning magnitude ... and foregoing the No.1 opportunity to make a brand statement.*

Design is a big deal. (The biggest deal?) About love. About hate. (And never neutral!) Steve Jobs gets my vote as shaper No.1 of the personal computer revolution. His original dream – and he is a Dreamer – was for Apple to create a ubiquitous tool to help us with darn near every mental task. (I believe he called the personal computer “a bicycle for the mind” in an early annual report.)

Jobs waxes philosophical on the issue of design writ large: “We don't have a good language to talk about this kind of thing. In most people's vocabularies, design means veneer. But, to me nothing could be further from the meaning of design. Design is the fundamental soul of a manmade creation.” ***Fundamental soul. I love that.***

Furthermore, the phrase hints at the size of the opportunity: limitless. *And*, it suggests the difficulty of the task: To get serious about design is to get serious about soul. Your soul. My soul. The soul of the product or service or experience that the enterprise provides – in every way, in every corner and department – to its extended family of vendors and customers and employees and communities. The soul of the enterprise. (Wimps call the latter the Brand Promise. Soul is a m-u-c-h better word.)

My advice: Think on this. That's all. (For now.) It took me 10 years to get to the point where I could write-realize that the design “dimension” is the primary source of love and hate. (And



never neutral!) And the location of soul. (Hey, 10 years isn't bad. The philosophers have been hunting for the locus of soul for, literally, ages.) Think about it in your own life. Think about it in enterprise.

\* \* \* \*

For starters: **Begin a notebook.** Now. (I did about nine years ago.) On the front cover write "Cool." (Or some such.) On the back cover write "crappy." (Or some such.) Start recording stuff that turns you on. And off. Big stuff. Little stuff. Save great junk mail. And awful junk mail. Great forms. And awful forms. Go on a shopping spree ... for seriously cool items ... that cost less than 10 bucks. Compare 10 order forms – data fields – at various Websites. Look at and record the differences.

That's the ticket: **Look.** Those of us with (very) limited artistic ability will hardly become artistic. But we definitely can become aware. We can train ourselves to pay attention to "all this."

## **5. Design is a Great Story!**

**Humans communicate via stories. Great leadership is great storytelling. Churchill. Gandhi. Lincoln. Reagan. Stories. Great design is ... a great story. Story ... a (VERY!) powerful word.**

"Car designers need to create a story," claims Freeman Thomas, co-designer of the new VW Beetle and designer of the Audi TT. "Every car provides an opportunity to create an adventure. The [Plymouth] Prowler makes you smile. Why? Because it's focused. It has a plot, a reason for being, a passion."

Wow! I love those words:

**Story.**  
**Adventure.**  
**Smile.**  
**Focus.**  
**Plot.**  
**Reason for being.**  
**Passion.**

But, I am especially enamored with ... ***plot***. Every training course has a ... *plot*. Every business process has a ... *plot*. Every form has a ... *plot*. As does every hard product and service. Plot suggests dynamics, Technicolor, coherence.

I tried out the plot idea at a seminar last year. I was talking to the execs of a catalog retailer about "brand position," and looking for a hook.

Every catalogue, I posited, has a plot. I offered some of my evaluations. I went so far as to quantify: A plot score of 1 = Dull as a doornail, scattered and pointless. 10 = WOW, what a story!

**Williams-Sonoma.** Was a clear “10.” Founder Chuck Williams redefined the American kitchen 20 or so years ago. Now? I’d give W-S a 5. The quality is still top-drawer, but the stories tend to re-runs. **Crate and Barrel.** A little bit bland for me. But, they have a mission. A point of view. A pretty decent plot. I give them a 7.

**The Sharper Image.** Love it or hate it, but when you open that Sharper Image catalog, you know what you’re going to get. They get a 9 in my scoring scheme. The same heights for **Garnet Hill.**

And then there’s **L.L.Bean.** Oh, how I used to anxiously await the arrival of the latest Bean catalogue! Gave them a 12. In 1960. Today? I have no idea what the hell Bean stands for. The quality, of course, remains pretty darn good. But, the “plot”? Indiscernible. In a kindly mood, I offered a grade of 4.

But forget my rankings. They’re personal. The point is that this little concoction – using the idea of plot to think about catalogs – turned out to be a grand-slam home run. (According to the client, my scorekeeper.) I’ve trotted out the exercise a dozen times since. Incredible (appropriate term) how a single word can transform the way you look at the world. Plot!

Let’s add a few related words. Try “**cheeky.**” A lovely word. Cheeky in business: Thank you, Richard Branson! The dynamic Virgin Group CEO says that every new product-service-experience his company creates must (1) be of the best quality, (2) provide good value, (3) be innovative, (4) challenge existing alternatives, and (5) add a sense of fun or cheekiness. Again: love that. Just using words like “cheeky” makes a difference.

Let the semantics fest continue. Now try “**experience.**” Joseph Pine and James Gilmore wrote a whole book on the topic: *The Experience Economy: Work is Theatre and Every Business a Stage.* “Experiences,” the authors assert, “are as distinct from services as services are from goods.”

Experiences. Starbucks. “We’ve identified a ‘third place,’ ” District Manager Nancy Orsolini told us. “And I really believe that sets us apart. The third place is that place that’s not work or home. It’s the place our customers come for refuge.” “What we sell,” says a Harley Davidson executive quoted in *Results-Based Leadership*, “is the ability for a 43-year-old accountant to dress in black leather, ride through small towns, and have people be afraid of him.”

Love that! Love those plots! Love those stories! Love that cheekiness! Love those experiences! Hint: Design is at the heart of “all this.” Design is the mother of all plot lines, you might say. (I do say.)

The question, then: ***What’s the story? What’s the plot? What’s the experience? Is it cheeky? Fun? Focused? Adventurous?*** For starters: Try my “plot exercise” on your current project – in finance, or IS, or purchasing, as well as in new-product development or marketing.

## 6. Design Defined.

Design. Defined. Finally.

“I wish that more money and time was spent on designing an exceptional product, and less on trying to psychologically manipulate perceptions through expensive advertising.” – Phil Kotler, marketing guru.

“Design is about demonstrating how beautiful something can be. It has a very profound quality. Design is a way of changing life and influencing the future.” – Sir Ernest Hall, Dean Clough.

“It was a revelation to discover how design could change people’s behavior. I learnt that simply by altering the graphic content of an exhibit you could double the number of people who visited.” – Gillian Thomas, The Science Museum (U.K.).

“The future will fascinate. A place where experience becomes more important than information, truth more important than technology, and ideas the only global currency.” – Ralph Ardill, Imagination.

***“What’s imperative is the creation of a style that becomes a culture linking you to the community. You can only do that through good design.” – Anita Roddick, Founder, The Body Shop.***

“Outstandingly good design in service industries is not an optional extra. It is an essential part of everything a company does, and what it stands for.” – Richard Dykes, Managing Director, Royal Mail.

“Design is one of the few tools that, for every dollar you spend, you actually say something about your business.” – Raymond Turner, BAA.

***“Designers are people who think with their hearts.” – James, age 10. “If there were no design, there would be nothing to do, and nothing would progress or get better. The world would fall apart.” – Anna, 11. “My favorite design is the Nike ‘tick’ because it makes me feel confident – even though I am not so good at sports.” – Raoul, 11.***

Nice. All the above, courtesy The Design Council, in the United Kingdom.

So ... design: **WHAT IS IT TO YOU?** Think about it. Talk about it. Write it down. Scribble about it.

\* \* \* \*

***In Search of Excellence.*** Sold a jillion copies. In retrospect, relative to the musings here, I think it was arguably a “design book.”

Huh?

Basic idea. By 1980, when we began the *ISOE* research, the by-the-numbers, strategic-planning-is-all mentality dominated business.

But a revision was gestating. On our part, we called attention to what had formerly been dismissed as the extraneous “soft stuff”: engaging the work force, listening intently to the customer, upgrading the stature of quality, understanding the pre-eminent role of “corporate culture,” supporting internal entrepreneurship.

Again, in retrospect, these are all “design ideas.” That is, I agree with Anita Roddick’s idea expressed above: *An abiding design sensibility* (of the sort that Roddick, Apple’s Jobs, Schwab’s Charles Schwab and Virgin Group’s Richard Branson espouse and embody) *is the premier agent for creating a vibrant culture that connects employees and suppliers and customers and communities in pursuit of a cause worth committing to.*

(In his magisterial book, *The Rise and Fall of Strategic Planning*, Henry Mintzberg points out that the planning mentality is all about breaking things down, reductionism as the scientists say. But breakthroughs that change the world are about exactly the opposite – synthesis and holistic visions of a world as it might be, based on bold leaps of imagination and usually concocted by people on determined missions. From the civil rights movement to Yahoo!)

There’s a problem, and I’m well aware of it. The possibility of design becoming everything. And thence nothing. I haven’t got a perfect answer to that. I’d say, “See Roddick, above,” or something like that. Design Mindfulness: I know it when I see it. Which is: When there’s a certain aesthetic sensibility that pervades an enterprise, from business process design to office settings to vendor relations to talent development to the creation of products and services and experiences that are offered for sale. When the “Religion of Numbers” is at least matched, and perhaps somewhat supplanted, by the “Religion of Work that WOWs and Products that Matter.” When no one, from receptionist to CEO, shies away from words and terms like beauty and grace and soul and integrity ... and (thanks, Steve Jobs) “Insanely Great.”

I guess it – design mindfulness – is some aesthetic of gracefulness and adventure and worthwhile causes. And, as I try to say throughout this essay, such “stuff” is of increasing economic value.

## **7. Great Design is Respectful.**

**“I sometimes have episodes of wild fury in rental cars,”** writes Susan Casey on *ecompany.com* [now *business2.com*]. **“It’s not road rage. It’s more like design rage.”**

Amen!

Don Norman, author of *The Design of Everyday Things*, exhorts all users: “STOP BLAMING YOURSELF!” When something doesn’t work ... it’s not your [user’s] fault. It’s the fault of the ... bloody designer.

Design is about cool. About WOW. It’s also about usability. Stuff that works. Stuff that’s easy to use. Stuff that’s friendly. Alarm clocks that don’t require jewelers’ tools to set. Web sites that don’t demand a full autobiography before allowing me to order something for \$8.95. Microwaves and TV controls that don’t necessitate an advanced degree in mechanical engineering to operate. Well, you know what I mean.

Mr. Norman has a bee in his bonnet, and can go too far at times. He’s so attuned to usability, that he places virtually no value on beauty and cool. And with that I disagree. Wholeheartedly. My “bottom line” take: *Is it too much to hope for cool & friendliness?* Anything less, in fact, is lousy design!

But I’d like to go further. A lot of this essay is about words that are underused in business – beauty, plot, etc. Hence, let’s make the topic of this section – *design that’s respectful of the user* – an occasion for another addition to our “big words” collection: grace. “My favorite word is grace,” writes designer Celeste Cooper, “whether it’s amazing grace, saving grace, grace under fire, Grace Kelly. How we live contributes to beauty – whether it’s how we treat other people or the environment.”

Love that word. Just love it. ***GRACE.***

**So how about this: Great Design = WOW! (plot, cool, beauty) + Grace (usability writ very large).**

It’s a bit of a paradox. One shouts, “Master the mundane” (usability). The other shouts, “Forget the mundane, let’s swing for the fences” (WOW). But perhaps Grace is the ... saving grace. Oh, dear, what a word. ***Grace.*** Grace: Isn’t that what an airline experience should be all about? A restaurant experience? An operatic experience? Booting up your new Dell laptop? Seeking to make a return to a retail store?

\* \* \* \*

**I KNOW I’M BEING A REPETITIVE PAIN ABOUT THIS, BUT I REITERATE THAT ALL THIS “WOW STUFF” AND “GRACE STUFF” AND “USABILITY STUFF” AND “BEAUTY STUFF” APPLY AS MUCH TO A SICK-LEAVE POLICY OR A SAFETY PROCEDURE AS TO THE LATEST JAR OF REVLON COSMETICS. IN FACT – SEE BELOW – THERE’S NO WAY THE OVERALL “BRAND POSITION” CAN BE GRACEFUL/DESIGN MINDFUL UNLESS ALL SUPPORTING INTERNAL SYSTEMS – LOGISTICS, HR, ETC. – ARE GRACEFUL!**

\* \* \* \*

## 8. Design is Not About Expensive Lumps!

Perhaps this section is unnecessary. Alas, I typically find some lingering design stereotypes. In particular: Say “Design” to many people, and the synonyms that come to mind are ... Tiffany’s ... BMW ... Rolex. Fine enough. But hardly the whole story. In fact, barely the start of it.

In 1999 *I.D.* [*International Design*] magazine published its first, and only, list of the 40 most design-driven companies in America. Some were predictable. Apple Computer. Caterpillar Tractor. Gillette. IBM. 3M. *But the most interesting attribute of the list to me was that fully half of the companies were from the service industries.* For example: Amazon.com. Bloomberg. CNN. Disney. FedEx. Martha Stewart. The New York Yankees. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

Design, that is, is as much about service firms as it is about manufacturers.

Likewise, design is as much about 79-cent items as 79,000-dollar items. Consider the Bic pen. Or the Sensor from Gillette. Or that favorite I mentioned before: Oral-B’s CrossAction toothbrush. (The CrossAction, a mere toothbrush, was the byproduct of a \$70 million dollar development project; moreover, it sports those 23 patents I mentioned before, including six on the packaging alone.)

And then ... *oh yes* ... Tar-zhay. Or ... TARGET. Target *was* a discounter. Target *is* a discounter. No change of philosophy has taken place. None whatsoever. Except that a half-dozen years ago, Target went design-bonkers. The result? Growth. Profits. And: Target in 2000 was declared “the champion of America’s new design democracy” by *Time* magazine. And winner of the prestigious “Marketer of the Year” award for 2000 by *Advertising Age*. I love it.

Message: Great design is not restricted to lump-dudes. Design applies to service companies. Design applies to 79-cent items. And, for that matter, design applies to departmental affairs in HR, IS, and even finance. (Hey, to me, a crystal-clear financial report is as much an act of design consciousness as is a great toothbrush.)

## 9. Design is the Web!

Case closed. *The web is a pure design medium.* Period. What else is there to say?

Well, quite a bit I suppose. “Most companies would do more business on the Internet,” says web usability guru Jakob Nielsen, “if they fired their entire marketing department and replaced it with people who could produce interactive content that actually made it easier for users to buy.” An

early 2000 piece of research, reported by *Red Herring*, declared that 75 percent of online shoppers don't complete their purchase. (Hint: Crappy design rules in cyberspace!) I'm not surprised. It's almost 2 years later, and I'm not sure it's that much better.

Nielsen's mantra: "Less 'cool,' more useful!" Perhaps I won't go quite that far (Nielsen is partners with Don Norman), but I will go most of the way down the road with him. Take, for example, my favorite site: **Southwest Airlines**. Southwest pulls in over 30 percent of its gross revenues from its own website, compared to 4% or 5% for the other major airlines. There are doubtless lots of reasons, but I can't think of any better than the pure, sweet simplicity of the site! I read that SWA's site was so easy to use that customers would sometimes finish their transaction, then call the airline ... because they couldn't believe it had been that painless. I thought that was absurd, so I tried the site myself. Logged on. Went to the URL. Ordered four tickets. Got my confirmation. Printed my confirmation. And my stopwatch said – yes, I had a stopwatch – that I'd been visiting SWA for less than two minutes! (A first-time user to boot!) I damn near called them.

Yes, site simplicity and usability is a b-i-g part of the issue. But, a larger point is the macro-idea of the encompassing nature of the Web itself. I stumbled across a quote from, of all places, *Alice in Wonderland*: "There's no use trying," said Alice. "One can't believe impossible things." "I daresay you haven't had much practice," said the Queen. "When I was your age, I always did it for half an hour a day. Why, sometimes I've believed as many as six impossible things before breakfast."

For some reason that very fictional exchange got way, way under my skin. Web and ecommerce design is hard work and high tech. Implementation is excruciatingly difficult. (It's all about challenging traditional power relationships in the organization.) But, above all – think of the eBay or Oracle or Amazon model – the Web allows you to dream dreams you could have never dreamed before! ***The Web is ultimately a dreamer's medium!*** It's ultimately about concocting new worlds, new universes. It is, as such, a pure design medium. (You know ... DESIGNERS OF THE WORLD, UNITE! THIS IS YOUR GOLDEN MOMENT. NO BULL.)

The Web at its full power – obliterating old internal business practices, re-inventing networks of business relationships, changing the dynamics of the relationship between customers and producers – is about taking an absolutely clean sheet of paper to the fundamental way we relate to one another to get the world's work done. And *the* issue – going back to earlier themes in this essay – is all about beauty, grace, plot, fundamental soul, etc.

Put simply (corporate bosses): If designers are not front and center, left and right, back and front of any Web project ... you are making a horrible mistake. The implications of the web are much too important to be left to the techies and their financial advisors.

**Think dream. Think clean sheet of paper. Think inspired design.** Think about those who are comfortable thinking about what has never been thought before. That's Larry Ellison. (Oracle.) That's Bill Gates. (Microsoft.) Steve Jobs. (Apple.) Michael Dell. (Dell Computer.) Steve Case. (AOL Time Warner.) Jeff Bezos. (Amazon.com.) Jerry Yang. (Yahoo.) That's Marc Andreessen. (Netscape, now Loudcloud.) And, for that matter, and despite their bruises and scars, that's their venture capitalists.

[**DESIGN MOMENT. FATAL EXCEPTION. FATAL EXCEPTION. FATAL EXCEPTION.** I have a new Dell Latitude laptop. Some consistent shit is happening. Figured out why. **THE DESIGNER OF THE KEYBOARD IS AN IDIOT.** The “Page Up” key is immediately to the right of the “Shift” key. It’s easy as can be to attempt to shift, move up a full page, and type away in the wrong place. **I AM PISSED. MAY RETURN THE \$4,000 COMPUTER.** Remember: DESIGN MATTERS.]

## **10. Caution: Beware “Look Alike ‘Cool.’”**

Sam Phillips, of Sun Records, says that presenting new talent really works, only if you preserve its *“glorious imperfections.”* “Our innate idiosyncrasies,” Veronique Vienne writes in *The Art of Imperfection*, “are actually more endearing to others than our most glorious personal achievements.” In the same (intriguing) vein, *Harper’s* magazine, in July 2000, ran a marvelous article titled “Against Smoothness.”

The idea: To some extent we have, indeed, “gone high design.” But, I, for one (among many, given my conversations), have increasingly observed that all “cool” stuff looks like all other “cool” stuff. It’s as if all designers are using the same Computer Aided Design (CAD) package. My automobile looks like my camera looks like my bathtub looks like my chair looks like the EKG machine I was just hooked up to. Notice, for example, the way that anybody and everybody relative to any and every product category instantly ripped off Steve Jobs’ “translucent” look from the iMac.

Perhaps this is simply a rant. But I don’t think so. We’ve been through Bauhaus and various other “design phases.” Now we seem to be on what I’ll call a “CAD Curves” jag. Bigger point: Same-same is always a problem. Replicated “cool” becomes un-cool. Fast.

To get a handle on this, for starters, go out and purchase Vienne’s *The Art of Imperfection*. It’s absolutely fabulous. Until it is replicated.

## **11. Design & Work: Screw Dilbert!**

My view of design is admittedly large. It’s about life. Soul. Joys. Sorrows. Glory. Grace. Beauty. Energy. Vitality. (And excellent/pathetic key location on a Dell Latitude keyboard!) Now, work. To me, creating WOW work and energizing-yet-friendly workplaces is high design. (Design = Wellspring of the “Brand Position.” Brand Position = Function of the Spirit & Soul of the Work, the Talent, the Workplace. Q.E.D.)



But, I get ahead of myself ...

There's a *practical* reason for associating work and design. We are in the opening moments of a White Collar Revolution. I confidently predict (and have written about this in dozens of places ... including one booklet in this series, *The Work Matters*) that 90 percent of white collar jobs will either disappear or be reconfigured beyond recognition ... within the next ten+ years. I'm sure of little. But, I'm sure of that. When you look at the transformation of an Old Economy Company like GE, which the press said may be announcing 80,000 layoffs thanks to absorbing the Internet into all business practices (and this was before the recession bit), you've got to believe ... **This Is The Big One.** Work gets shaken by a Richter 9.0!

Talent has never been more important. Work is being reinvented. And it is – I don't think I'm being too expansive here – another ... Big Design Issue. I think, for instance, that organizational architect-designers (whatever they are ... I'm one, but I've never figured out what it means) need the advice and consent and leadership of the beauty freaks, the grace freaks, the WOW Maniacs, the artists and poets and actors and singers. Creating this New World of Work is a very aesthetic affair. And the process of re-inventing work and organizations itself needs re-inventing.

Bottom line: I was in South Africa in August 2000. A reporter asked me to summarize (help!) the New Economy. I sketched a little two-column affair on a legal sheet. To wit:

<u>WAS</u>	<u>IS</u>
Pine-Paneled Office	Seat 9B, UA233
Address: 1 Big Man Plaza	Address: Anne@corp.com
Secretary	Typing 60WPM
Suit	Casual M-F (and S,S)
Formal	Approachable
Rank Conscious	We are a HOT Team.
Pretense ("Failures are for fools.")	Screwing up is as normal as breathing.
I love "Yes men."	I love Misfits.
Self-Contained	I love partners.

I don't own any rose-colored glasses. I'm an instinctive skeptic. But I see "all this" as a glorious opportunity. One will not survive as "Desk #23, Purchasing Department, 37th floor, Tall Tower, Chicago." To survive we will have to stand out ... pursue and do work that matters ... 100% of the time.

I have written two full books on this topic (*The Professional Service Firm50*, *The Project50*), so I'll summarize ever so briefly. I think one can discern the outline of the new work unit. And as so often is the case, it's Back to the Future. There is a class of organization that has done ... for pay and profit ... "staff services" work ... for decades and decades. Namely: the Professional Service Firm. So in my New World Order, the former Department Head (Finance, IS, Marketing, Engineering) is magically transformed into Managing Partner, Engineering (Finance, IS, etc.) Inc. She/he is the Big Boss of a no-bull PSF (Professional Service Firm).

I visited New Orleans in April 2000 to speak to several thousand members of NAPM, the National Association of Purchasing Management. I said I refused to think of them as "staffers." I

said ... ***“You are the Rock Stars of the B2B Age!”*** And I meant it. Some – many, to be truthful – eyes glazed over. But as I saw it, purchasing people and logistics people should/would/ought, assuming they wish to survive, join hands to become the champions-architects-dreamers-designers of the complete and total revolution-reformation-transformation of the purchasing & logistics & supply chain activity. And those who don’t see themselves in that role ... well, as they say (far too often) ... road kill on the Great Information Interstate.

While there’s a whole book on this, the bedrock idea is that the newly re-formulated department (transformed, remember, into a full-fledged Professional Service Firm ... and don’t forget the caps) will now turn 100% (no rounding error) of their work into High Value Added Projects. They will seek out and work with Pioneer Clients ... interested in co-designing nothing short of revolution. They will create within their department-turned-PSF a truly adventurous culture, have a Proprietary Point of View/Methodology (which could be worth billions!). Oh yes, and the department-turned-PSF will have a Scintillating Plot ... performed with Beauty and Grace and Wow and Revolutionary Zeal. (Why not?) (Beats Dilbert-world, where the highest “art” is bitchin’ ’round the water cooler.)

(I’ve been on this wicket for two or three years. But the enormity of it truly came home to me in September 2000, when Hewlett-Packard offered no less than ***\$18 billion*** for the consulting arm of PricewaterhouseCoopers. The deal didn’t go through, but the fact remains that HP decided it needed to go far beyond “selling boxes” world – even great HP boxes – and move into a project-based, services-added, experiences-and-revolutions-delivered world. And the company put a price tag on it. One whopping price tag! Now we have an inkling of what a “PSF” is worth! About \$600,000-per-head in this instance.)

For the designers who read this, and all other PSF denizens for that matter, I think there’s a “best way” to begin the department-to-PSF transition. Namely, get clear about your “products” (experiences, plot, Wow, etc.) and *sell* them on the outside. Now. I dogmatically believe that at least 25% of any internal service department’s efforts should be directed to for-profit business sold to Clients on the outside. (Hey, the manufacturers have gotten this, even in the typically stodgy automobile industry. The better parts plants, that belong to the likes of a GM, are producing products for their arch competitors.)

The essence of my desired Grand & Glorious & Bold & Piratical PSF is what we call ... **The WOW Project!** All work becomes WOW Projects. Or else. (24/7: All WOW All The Time???) Phil Daniels, a successful Australian executive, attended a seminar I presented in Sydney. In a Question & Answer session he said he’d always followed the simple philosophy: ***“Reward excellent failures. Punish mediocre successes.”*** It took a while for that to sink in. But it hit me hard when it did. To cut to the chase, I believe that every project – large or small – that the new “PSF” undertakes should be measured – quantitatively – on four dimensions. ***Dimension #1: WOW!*** We know what the word means ... when we’re talking about a ball game, a restaurant meal, a movie. Why not a work project? (Damn it.) ***Dimension #2: Beauty!*** Why not? We’ve talked about it before. And I contend it applies to e-v-e-r-y project. (Substitute Grace if you wish.) ***Dimension #3: Raving Fans!*** I’ve stolen this shamelessly from the book, with that exact title, by Ken Blanchard and Sheldon Bowles. They say we don’t want “satisfied” customers; we want Raving Fans. Again, I think it’s a great (quantitative) test. ***Dimension #4: Impact!*** Will it make a difference? *Will we be bragging about it five years from*

now? My experience – which now covers a couple of years – says that *every* project *can* be measured on these four dimensions ... *quantitatively*. **So what's keeping you?**

The big idea here, as asserted in the section title, is ... ***Screw Dilbert!*** I think Dilbert is funny. I laugh, often hysterically, 90% of the time. But there's also a problem. The Underlying Dilbertland Message: *My job stinks! My boss stinks! My company stinks!* Well, say I in a cavalier fashion, then *you* stink ... ***if*** you stick around. I do believe that the new technology tools will erase 90% of white collar jobs. And to survive, we must re-design ourselves ... and the flavor of the work we do. I think that cynicism won't help. I think that relentless pursuit of the WOW Project is the nugget of the re-design task. And I think that the organizational nugget is the Professional Service Firm. **What do you think?**

**For starters: If you buy this at all, examine today the project you're at work on. Measure it as described above. *IS IT WOW?????***

## **12. Get Over It, Designers:** **All You Need Is One!**

*"But what do I do ..."*

I've heard it a dozen times. Make that a hundred. Make that, probably, 500. "But how do I implement all this ... given that the CEO doesn't really have a deep appreciation for design [whatever]?" I've heard it from Chief Information Officers. From Chief Technology Officers. From Human Resource executives. And I've gotten it from designers. Many ... many ... many ... times.

I know it's arrogant, but I think I've got an answer. In fact, *I know* I've got an answer. Namely: **Forget the damn CEO!**

Talking about all this a while back, I found myself saying, "This is all I know in the world." I work hard to keep up. Study all sorts of things that I think I should study. But looking back over a 35-year career – from the U.S. Navy in Vietnam and the Pentagon, to McKinsey & Co. and my own company – this really is the only thing I'm sure about. The only thing that's worked – consistently – for me. It's a strategy that I call the "4Fs."

Or: **Find a Fellow Freak Faraway.**

It's simple. It's clear. The biggest waste – BIGGEST! – of an adult professional's time is selling an idea "up" the chain of command! Why: The "chain of command" are the Officially Appointed Protectors of the Status Quo. You tell me I'm insane? I don't think so! What I need is: *One person. One playmate. One playground. Somebody – call her a freak – who buys my strange act, sympathizes with my strange approach to life ... and will let me join her in her playpen.*

No kidding: It really *is* that simple: some [one] body ... who is a passion-mate, who wants to try out my promising-but-untested-idea. Another of our shorthands for all this is The **“F2F”/“K2K”/“1@T”/“R.F!A.”** approach. That is: *Freak to Freak. Kook to Kook. One at a Time. Ready. Fire! Aim.*

Find *one* friend in the boondocks. Some-*one*-body who runs a small division. Some-*one*-body who's got a new project under way. You meet him in a company meeting. You meet him in a company intranet chat room. You meet him at a health club. You meet him at the bar. I don't care where. But you get to chatting, and find you have the same sympathies. You agree to try the wacky idea out, on his turf. Great! You have just made the first [VERY IMPORTANT] step along the path to success.

To summarize:

- \* Recruit one passionate colleague, preferably in the boondocks, a long way from “headquarters.”
- \* Do some cool-real stuff! Fast!
- \* Broadcast, a little bit.
- \* Have your guinea pig recruit a friend, or you recruit a second friend.
- \* Do some more cool stuff! Fast!
- \* Etc.
- \* Etc.
- \* Surround the bastards (the current powers that be) with WOW Projects ... hard, action-based evidence that the new idea rocks.

You say I'm making it sound all too easy. Well I am. And I'm not. I am making it sound too easy, in that it's damned hard work, involves lots and lots of selling and recruiting and hand-holding and testing and frequent-flyer miles. I am not making it sound too easy, in that I'm dead-sure that this is the only way to play the “new idea” game (anathema to IPCCs ... Incumbent Protectors of the Corporate Culture ... a/k/a bosses). Again: Find some-one-body to do demos with. Start the community building process. (In our project management training, the primary book we use is radical union and civil rights organizer Saul Alinsky's 1971 *Rules for Radicals*. The message: **It's community organizing, stupid!**)

**1@T.** Brutally hard work. Finding “them” (FFs), one at a time. But, remember, that's the way that every revolution has begun. I assure you that Martin Luther King, Jr., did not start out speaking to 400,000 people on the Mall in Washington, D.C. His work started in back rooms and bingo halls and at pulpits in postage-stamp-sized churches. The famous speeches to hundreds of thousands, the Nobel Prize came later ... much, much, much later.

*Change Agents Unite! Forget the Chief Executive Officer! Quit whining! Find a Friend! Find a friendly customer! Find a friendly whatever! Identify a Playground! Start doing-testing something-anything ... now! Cobble together your “portfolio of demos”! Make a small success! And another! And another! And keep recruiting! And infecting!*

Okay?

There's an enemy in all this. An enemy I understand better than most of my readers, since I carry the advanced age of 58. That enemy? The epitaph that would scare me the most:

*Joe T. Jones  
1942-2001  
He would have done some  
Really cool stuff  
But  
His boss wouldn't let him*

And you ...

### **13. Design & the individual: Self-design! Oh, how I love design!**

I'm amazed at the way "design mindfulness" has come to permeate my life. I've been speaking for 25 years, but it's as if the scales were removed from my eyes about five years ago, and particularly in the last couple of years. I've come to so clearly appreciate how tiny changes in oral and visual presentation practices can have enormous impact on an audience. Of 10. Or 10,000. Remember, in the section on defining design, the surprised Science Museum director from the U.K.: just the smallest alteration in signage, say, can double the attendance at a particular exhibit.

Design! Oh, so powerful! Oh, so under-considered!

The topic of this section is not self-promotion. It's aesthetic awareness-design mindfulness. *Fact: If we're trying to get things done, we spend the day moving from audience to audience.* We make an impact on every audience – planned or not, like it or not. You, age 24, a junior accountant or engineer. And George W. Bush, leader of Earth's No.1 Superpower. The president is actor-in-chief and chief storyteller. His principal power is not the oath of office, but the license the oath gives him to have access to the oft-referred-to bully pulpit. The way he makes his case is a matter of ... very conscious design. (Think about it, the next time you watch an episode of "The West Wing." Spin doctor = Designer of Impressions/WOW Moments. Right?)

All this takes on much more relevance in the face of the White Collar Revolution – discussed briefly above – that will eliminate or cause the complete reconfiguration of 90 percent of our

jobs in the next ten or fifteen years. The software tools now being installed will do to the HR, IS, design, engineering, finance, purchasing, logistics departments precisely what the forklift did to the distribution center and containerization did dockside.

The employee for life, who survived by showing up ... not making waves ... and passing papers from the left to the right side of the desk ... is doomed. A recent M.I.T. study projects that full-time workers will be in the minority by 2010! Daniel Pink's superb new *Free Agent Nation* claims that, already, somewhere between 30 million and 50 million of us are working more or less independently, or in micro-businesses with less than five employees. (What a world: Manpower Inc. is the No.1 private-sector employer, in terms of bodies at work. And the Fortune 500, on the other hand, now employs less than one in ten of us.)

Michael Goldhaber, writing in *Wired* magazine, gets at the heart of all this with one of the most extraordinary "tough love" comments for adults I've ever read: "*If there is nothing very special about your work, no matter how hard you apply yourself, you won't get noticed, and that increasingly means you won't get paid much, either.*"

I've written a book to address this topic: *The Brand You50*. Some call it an endorsement for shameless self-promotion. I shout in response, "No!" The elementary idea behind a brand? It's clear: Shorthand for Distinction. And that's precisely the point here as well. "*You are the storyteller of your own life,*" writes Isabel Allende, "*and you can create your own legend or not.*" Saul Bellow's lead character in *The Adventures of Augie March* puts it this way: "*I am an American, Chicago born, and go at things as I have taught myself, free-style, and will make the record in my own way.*"

Both the Allende and the *Augie March*-Bellow statements are (1) directly responsive to the statistics that M.I.T. and Daniel Pink present and the editorial comment by Michael Goldhaber and (2) all about ... you guessed it ... DESIGN. This time: the Purposeful Design of You.

This is not the place to go into detail. (Hey, buy my book!) My point, in the context of this larger issue of design, is that we must all become self-designers to an unprecedented degree. Indeed, as I say in the book among many other things, consider joining Toastmasters. You don't have to be the next Ronald Reagan or Barbara Walters, but you must be able to present your point of view. (You'll no longer be protected by a stable hierarchy.) What do you stand for? Who are you? Why should I want you on my project team? From calling cards to speaking skills to conscious networking activities to selection and execution of projects that matter ... it's a matter ... I repeat ... of Conscious & Purposeful Self-Design.

(And there's no "Opt Out" button!)

In our training activities around this notion, the most powerful exercise we perform is the *Personal Yellow Pages Ad*. I.e.: Create a one-eighth-page ad for ... you. Sounds innocent. But it's the toughest assignment, our clients tell us, that many of them have ever performed. Capturing *Essence de You* ... in 50 words or less. Summarizing all that incredibly hard work, which started as captain of the field hockey team at age 16, into 25 words! But those who would make a difference ... from the Gandhis and Kings, to meager you and me in pursuit of our projects to change things around, must learn ... to have a story ... to tell it well ... and, even from a position of powerlessness, to compel others to join with us and play the game.

# 14. Design & the All-Out War for Talent!

*Why in the hell am I trying to throw every item in the kitchen sink and garage under the topic of design?* Simple. Because I think it belongs there.

To wit: Talent.

“When land was the productive asset,” write Stan Davis and Christopher Meyer in *futureWEALTH*, “nations battled over it. The same is happening now for talented people.” “The leaders of Great Groups,” write Warren Bennis and Patricia Ward Biederman in *Organizing Genius*, “love talent and know where to find it. They revel in the talent of others.”

We are in a war for talent. P-e-r-i-o-d. At Yahoo! At GE. At Mike and Mary’s Barbecue. At the car dealership. At the community bank. And the CIA and FBI. Wherever. In an age where value is based on intellectual capital, talent is everything. Yahoo! founder Jerry Yang, for one, says he considers each of his engineers to be the equivalent of “professional athletes.”

For the foreseeable future ... it’s a seller’s market. That is, those who are selling their excellent talents. Which leads to an obvious conclusion: Winners will attract Talent (capital “T”) by designing Great Places to Work. Again: P-e-r-i-o-d.

Great places to work pay well. No doubt of it. We certainly see that in the likes of Silicon Valley. But the pay doesn’t amount to all that much ... unless the opportunity structure is there. Unless the workplace is consciously constructed as the backdrop for an adventurous culture. A physical space that’s cool. An attitude that encourages everyone ... 100 percent of the time ... to Go Bonkers in Pursuit of WOW Projects that Make a Difference.

Design. My favorite topic. Creating such an “adventurous, boisterous, bonkers, cool, opportunity-laden WOW structure” is not a matter of chance. It’s an act of purposeful High Design. I lament the fact that so many HR folks I run into are caught up in the details. I know the details are important. I know “trivial” lapses can lead to unlawful dismissal lawsuits that can cost you millions of dollars.

Nonetheless, recall that I claimed the secret to the Web ... courtesy Alice in Wonderland ... is that it allows us to dream dreams we could never have dreamed before. Entirely new ways of relating to one another. Well, the workspace/place/culture is precisely the same idea. ***I want to turn every HR exec into a Great Dreamer & Grand Designer.*** An architect of exciting, adventurous cultures. Great Places to Work.

Think talent. Think design. The two go together. Intimately. This takes on added significance, because we will increasingly need people who are “hard to handle” ... who constantly challenge conventional wisdom. “Our business,” wrote the great ad man David Ogilvy, “needs a massive

transfusion of talent, and talent, I believe, is most likely to be found among non-conformists, dissenters, and rebels.” Think of it: A passel of non-conformists, dissenters, and rebels ... could/should make up your Incredible Adventurous Culture ... in finance ... or purchasing ... as well as marketing and design. Question No.1: Can you attract such cool people? Question No.2: Can you keep them? Think about it. Long. Hard.

One big piece of that human creativity puzzle is ... *duh!* ... diversity. “Diversity defines the health and wealth of nations in the new century,” writes Pascal Zachary, in his extraordinary *The Global Me: New Cosmopolitans and the Competitive Edge*. “Mighty is the mongrel. The hybrid is hip. The impure, the mélange, the adulterated, the blemished, the rough, the black-and-blue, the mix-and-match – these people are inheriting the earth. Mixing is the new norm. Mixing trumps isolation. It spawns creativity, nourishes the human spirit, spurs economic growth and empowers nations.”

What a (w-o-n-d-e-r-f-u-l) mouthful!

Henry Ford’s factory was all about standardizing things. (Including docile workers!) The white collar part of Ford-world, and every other big company-world, was just about the same. Remember those pictures from the fifties, with hundreds of people sitting in white collar bullpens, all processing papers. Silent. Subdued. Hey, has it really changed that much? Observe Dilbert’s description of Cubicle Slavery, and you surely wouldn’t think so!

But it *is* changing. And will change dramatically. Kooky folks. Diverse environments. Sparky projects. Workplaces-spaces that exude and broadcast energy and spunk and spirit and risk-taking and piracy and adventure. That’s the menu (for individual and organizational survival), as over the next ten or fifteen years we re-invent everything that has to do with work, and indeed human communication. Design: Conscious efforts to design, to think design, to think about design, to dream the grand and bold dreams ... that’s the ticket. The only ticket.

*(It occurs: Is “design” actually a mellow word that captures that amazing word ... dream? Dream. Dreaming: The essence of Creating Extraordinary Stuff. We need to dream more. We need to have dreams. Particularly now, at a time when everything is up for grabs. When everything will be reinvented. Completely. In the next ten or fifteen or twenty years. Maybe the importance of this design “wicket” of mine is that it permits people to “Think Dream.” Hmmmmm.)*

## **15. Design & the** **All-Out War for Talent:** **Women Rule!**

Here are the special strengths that women bring to the workplace/leadership table, according to Judy B. Rosener, in *America’s Competitive Secret*. Women link (rather than rank) workers; favor interactive-collaborative leadership style (empowerment is more important than



top-down decision making); sustain fruitful collaborations; comfortable with sharing information; see redistribution of power as victory, not surrender; favor multi-dimensional feedback; value interpersonal and technical skills, and group and individual contributions equally; readily accept ambiguity; honor intuition as well as pure “rationality”; inherently flexible; appreciate cultural diversity.

My view is quite simple. And you’ll never budge me. An inch. *The skills that are required to lead in the new, crazy, ambiguous, relationship-centric, hierarchy-less economy are a ... perfect match ... with women’s “central tendencies.”* (I’m careful to use that term, “central tendencies.” There are some guys who can do this, too. But, statistically speaking, these traits are more likely to be found in women.)

It wasn’t very equivocal – the title, that is – to a November 2000 *Business Week* Special Report: “AS LEADERS, WOMEN RULE: New studies find that female managers outshine their male counterparts in almost every measure.” Or, as Helen Fisher put it, in *The First Sex: The Natural Talents of Women and How They Are Changing the World*:

**“Tomorrow belongs to women.”**

Once more: Why the hell am I dragging *this one* under the design umbrella? The answer is simple. Very simple. And very important. Women honor intuition. Women deal better with ambiguity. Women focus on relationships and connections more than men. All these skills associated with women’s inherent strengths are, as I see it, needed to create stand-out products ... in a sea of increasing sameness. Of course there are great designers who are males! No doubt of it. *But generic “design sensibility” – and the appreciation thereof – is, I believe, more likely to be found in women than in men.* Women are more likely to bring these sorts of “soft” (which are now hard!!!) issues to the table.

There *is* a new economy. The strengths required to lead ambiguous (virtual, to use the popular term) organizations and create products and services long on emotional value and connection are associated with women’s strength as leaders. We need more women in leadership positions. Women are Source No.1 for leadership talent in the years ahead. Believe it. Act on it. And: It’s a (big) design-friendly message!

## **16. Design: Weird Wins!**

*It’s a weird world.* No one would deny that. Nobody who’s sane, anyway. Except that, in Y1M3 (2001), maybe only the insane are sane! Or something like that. (It’s a serious issue. Worth great contemplation.)

Weird wins. Success depends as much on destruction as anything else. The great economist Joseph Schumpeter spoke of the “gales of creative destruction.” That’s precisely what’s going on in Silicon Valley these days. And Austin. Seattle. Provo. San Antonio. The secret to today’s incredible record of economic growth: more crazies, screwing more things up, trying more insane things ... and ... upon (more or less rare) occasion ... succeeding. Wildly. Celera Genomics. Genentech. Yahoo! Amazon.com. Intel. Cisco Systems. Oracle. Apple. Microsoft. Wal\*Mart. Home Depot. (Hey, older folks: *none of these were around, except in inchoate form, 20 years ago.* Hard to believe, hey?)

Wayne Burkan wrote a marvelous book: *Wide Angle Vision*. He said the secret to success is to ... seek out the Weirdos! Or, in his terms: *disgruntled customers, fringe competitors, rogue employees, edge suppliers*. Now it’s true, we’ve often been told to listen to customers who were unhappy with us. And, indeed, it’s a fine idea. But Burkan goes far beyond that. He takes all this to High Strategy. That is, in a nutty world, it’s those on the fringe – customers, competitors, employees, suppliers – who hold within them the “secrets” that can lead to our success, or, at least, survival ... if only we would seek them out, listen to them, take them seriously ... AND BLOODY WELL ACT ON WHAT THEY SAY.

“Enormous sums of money are invested to reduce cycle time, improve quality, reengineer,” Burkan writes. “Much of this money is simply wasted. This waste is due to companies’ inability to develop wide-angle vision and tap into the power of the edge.”

I’ve developed an entire new riff on this (the subject of another booklet in this series), called *Getting Weird & Staying Weird: Creating & Maintaining the High Standard Deviation Enterprise*. Okay, the title includes an arcane statistical term ... standard deviation. Standard deviation = The average distance from the mean. (Think of it as a formal Weirdness Index.) Consider my world: Competition is intense. All kinds of genuinely crazy experiments are going on. I ***must*** be surrounded by ... an unfair share of ... Weird People. People who will push me. Test me. Drag me to places that I’ve never been before.

The (central) design part of this message? Great design is edgy. *Great design surprises. Great design fulfills needs that we didn’t know we had.* Designers are like any other group of people. Garbage men. Restaurant owners. Engineers. A few are awful. The great majority are ho-hums. And a handful are ... well ... awesome. “Awesome” is not the only criterion for good design. But awesome is what we need in far greater abundance than ever before. Why? It’s an Age of Awesome. Hey, how could you possibly disagree ... given that this was first drafted just a few weeks after the code for the entire human genome had been discovered? It’s that kind of a world. And we need “that kind of people.” **WEIRDOS.**

Hang with them. Hire them. Work with them on projects. Learn from them. Take them to lunch ... at least one of them ... today. **Good luck! Stay strange!**

# 17. Design & The “Corporate Structure”: How Does a Design Mindful Company Operate?

A “Design Mindful” Company:

Has a Credo:

*Design matters! Everywhere!*

*The Brand Promise Rules! Everywhere! (Including business systems design.)*

*ALL of us can readily answer: WHO ARE WE? HOW ARE WE DISTINCT-UNIQUE? WHY DOES WHAT WE DO MATTER?*

*Words such as Plot & Grace & Aesthetics & Beauty & Emotion & Connection & WOW & Adventure are acceptable.*

*Non-WOW doesn't cut it! Anywhere! (Accounting as well as Product Development.)*

*We aim to attract & retain Best-in-Planet TALENT; and we will create a crazy-rewarding-adventuresome-weird environment congenial to Best-in-Planet Talent. A large component of Best-in-Planet Talent comes from non-traditional hiring, with an emphasis on the arts (art, music, theater, etc.). Diversity-am-us!*

Has an Operating Philosophy:

*All work is the product of Hot Teams of peers.*

*Hierarchy is minimal, and usually a distraction.*

*We understand that “disrespect” is the ultimate in respect in crazy times.*

*The work matters. The work is our signature. The work is WOW. “Design Mindfulness” & The Brand Promise permeate every aspect of every piece of work. In every department. The work is worth paying for. All of it.*

*Promotion (more responsibilities) comes immediately if the work is WOW.*

*NO BULLSHIT. We keep our word, to our teammates and other partners.*

*We are a business. Results matter!*

This is not Holy Writ. It is a starting point ...

## 18. Design: Beautiful Systems Win!

**It's beautiful.** Yes, beautiful. (Beauty, remember. USE THE DAMN WORD. DAMN IT.) It's framed now. Framed in the headquarters. Of an incredibly profitable and shockingly admired corporation.

**It's a napkin.** On the napkin is a little triangle. The points thereof: Houston. Dallas. San Antonio. "It" is the napkin sketch that led Herb Kelleher to create Southwest Airlines. It's a system. It's architecture. It's beautiful. And it has a market capitalization of billions of dollars.

And then there was the fabled "thesis," the thesis that got the gentleman's "C." The one at the Yale School of Organization and Management submitted by Fred Smith. Just about as simple as Kelleher's napkin. The thesis suggested the idea of hub and spoke. Sounds inefficient. Works like a charm. What do we call it now? FedEx. A system. Beautiful. Graceful. Incredible. Awesome. Market cap: BILLIONS. (Redux.)

Think "systems," and you typically think of dull, dreary, drudgy sorts of stuff. A lot of details. Policy manuals that run to 1,000 pages, or 2,000 screens. No doubt, to run a nuclear plant requires a manual that fat. But that's not the essence of the idea here. The essence of the idea is ... beauty.

Insurance is not the place you expect to find madmen. (Or beauty.) Consider, however, Peter Lewis. He's the CEO of Progressive Insurance. He makes this extraordinary point: "*We don't sell insurance anymore. We sell speed.*"

Love that! Another beautiful system! Progressive – using the most advanced technology – digital cameras, wireless Net links, etc. – is able to get its agents into the field at the scene of an automobile accident, and literally pay the claim off ... sometimes within 20 minutes! (About ten months ahead of the industry norm, I'd judge. Well, at least six months.)

And then there's Jim Horan's *beautiful* book. Short. Sweet. And the topic is the same: short, sweet. The book's title: *The One Page Business Plan*. I was sent the book for a possible blurb. I didn't quite get around to it. But then I got involved in a start-up business. And I used the damn book. And took the new management team through an exercise that summarized all there was to life ... in one page. (Kin to that Yellow Pages exercise for individuals described above.) The process of boiling everything down to one page was just ... well ... incredible. It's a system. It's a "planning process."

And ... it's ... BEAUTIFUL.

Systems & Beauty: Handmaidens! Systems & Dreams: Handmaidens!

For starters: So here's what I want you to do, here's what I *insist* that you do. (Obviously I have no power to "insist upon" anything. But I do ... truly ... hope.) I want you to have a **Beauty Contest**. It works like this:

- Select one form or document: invoice, airbill, sick leave policy, customer returns-claim form, etc.
- Rank the selected document, on a scale of 1 to 10 [1 = Bureaucratica Obscuranta/Sucks; 10 = Work of Art], on 3 dimensions: ***Beauty, Grace, Clarity.***
- Re-invent!
- Repeat, with a new selection, every 15 working days.

This is cool. (Trust me. Please.) I've had people performing these intermittent Beauty Contests on forms and procedures now for a couple of years. I'm loath to say it "always works." Nothing does. But it's about as close to foolproof as one can get in this oddball world.

A couple of comments on the exercise. If you choose to do it, please (please!) use my three terms: ***Beauty, Grace, Clarity.*** These are words that all of us understand in "real life," but seldom use in business. And yet I contend, as a design maniac, that such words should apply ... to a sick-leave policy ... or a returns-claim form in the world of retail. Hey, shouldn't a Sick-Leave Policy be ... beautiful? We just went through the analysis that claimed we are in an Age of Talent. And that creating a Great Place to Work was the be all and end all for those who would succeed. Hence, shouldn't "stuff" like "sick-leave policies" be ... beautiful ... graceful ... models of clarity?

Bottom line: ***Systems are a pure design issue!*** Every business process reengineering team ought to be led by a ... designer! (Seriously.) (Let the techies do the mop-up work.) I love ...

**LOVE** ... Beautiful Systems. FedEx. Southwest Airlines. Progressive Insurance. How about you? Think systems ... and I beg you to start thinking BEAUTY ... GRACE ... CLARITY ... WOW ... DESIGN.

How about it?

(I shouldn't have to work very hard to make this case in 2001. Systems and design. Or, rather, Design Rules! In this case, literally! What was the Palm Beach County, Florida, ballot if not a ... pure ... unmitigated ... design issue? The leader of the free world was perhaps selected on the basis of ... faulty design ... of a "silly little form.")

## **19. Design & Marketing** **to Women: Opportunity** **Number One?!**

Fact. **Women buy stuff. Almost all the stuff.** Eighty-three percent of all consumer purchases, for example. Or: home furnishings ... 94 percent. Vacations ... 92 percent. Houses ... 91 percent. Consumer electronics ... 51 percent. Cars ... make 60 percent of purchases, significantly influence 90 percent. Choice of a new bank account ... 89 percent. Health care decisions ... 80 percent.

Speaking of 80 percent, it was my first speech of 2001. The fellow came up to me afterwards, said he'd attended a seminar of mine about three years ago, when I was just launching my women's riff. "I listened to it. Didn't think much of it, to be honest with you. But I thought, what the hey, we'll do a little quick and dirty market research." And then he almost got in my face, and shouted: "Eighty percent. D'ya hear me ... 80 percent!" "Yes," I said, backing off a little.

***"Women are eighty percent of our purchasers. You know what the product is? Riding lawn mowers."***

I love it.

In the United States, 48 percent of working wives bring home more than 50 percent of the family income. Women write 80 percent of the checks, pay 61 percent of the bills, own 53 percent of all stock (and almost single-handedly fueled the mutual fund boom), constitute 43 percent of Americans with a net worth of \$500K or more, make 75 percent of their families' financial decisions and make 29 percent of financial decisions single-handedly.

As of first quarter of 2000, women became the majority users of the Web. Six out of ten new users are women. And 80+ percent of wired women are the primary decision makers for family health care, finances and education.

Add it all up, and women in their role as purchasing agents for themselves and their families, and as professional purchasing officers in their work role, account for about five trillion dollars of the U.S. GDP. Over half. The "American Women's Economy" – by itself – is larger than the entire Japanese economy! And then there's that damned glass ceiling. Still there. Except women have been blowing it off in record numbers in the last decade or so, to the point that we now have ***nine million women-owned businesses***, employing 27.5 million of our fellow Americans (one out of every four employed people) and bringing in over three-and-a-half trillion dollars in revenue; which means that the American Women-owned Business Economy is larger ... than the entire German economy.

As I've accumulated these statistics over the last four+ years, I've been, well, shocked. For example, in 1970 just one percent of business travelers were women. If the current trend line continues for another year, that number will soar over the 50 percent mark in 2002.

Wow!

The point ... and here's where the design bit (largely ignored!) comes in. Men and women are different! (You heard it here first!) Carol Gilligan, in her landmark *In A Different Voice*, summarizes it this way: Men: want to get away from authority and family. Women: want to connect. Men: self-oriented. Women: other-oriented. Men: rights oriented. Women: responsibilities oriented. Trend-spotting guru Faith Popcorn takes this straight to the marketplace, commenting that, "Men and women don't communicate the same way, don't shop for the same things, don't buy for the same reasons. He's interested in completing the transaction. She's interested in establishing a relationship. Women make connections everywhere they go."

Ah, those differences. Consumer behavior guru Paco Underhill, in his marvelous *Why We Buy*, serves up a classic example: "Men seem like loose cannons. Men always move faster through a

store's aisles. Men spend less time looking. They usually don't like asking where things are. You'll see a man move impatiently through a store to the section he wants, pick something up, and then, almost abruptly, he's ready to buy. For a man, ignoring the price tag is almost a sign of virility."

For me it started with the women business owners' meeting back in December 1996. I listened, for half a day, to 30 incredibly powerful women talk about being invisible, dismissed, ignored, treated as brainless ... by doctors, financial advisers, bankers, insurers, auctioneers, automobile dealers, you name it. Somebody has finally chronicled these differences. Brilliantly. The book, by Popcorn and her research director, Lys Marigold, is a genuine original: *EVEolution: The Eight Truths of Marketing to Women*. Let me give you just one example. Truth number one: "Connecting your female consumers to each other connects them to your brand." "The 'Connection proclivity' in women starts early," Popcorn/Marigold write. "When asked 'How was school today?' a girl usually tells her mother every detail of what happened, while a boy might grunt, 'Fine.'" (Is there anyone reading this ... anyone ... who is a parent who disagrees? It surely fits my experience!)

Differences run deep. Very deep. "Women speak and hear a language of connection and intimacy, and men speak and hear a language of status and independence," writes Judy Rosener in *America's Competitive Secret*. "Men communicate to obtain information, establish their status, and show independence. Women communicate to create relationships, encourage interaction, and exchange feelings." Helen Fisher, writing in *The First Sex*, illustrates, again, the pervasiveness of this: "The Hollywood scripts that men write tend to be direct and linear, while women's compositions have many conflicts, many climaxes, and many endings."

In each of the eight sections in Popcorn/Marigold's book, the authors offer hypothetical advice to a possible client. "What if ExxonMobil, or Shell," they write, "dipped into their credit card data base to help commuting women interview and make a choice of car pool partners?" "What if American Express made a concerted effort to connect up female empty-nesters through on-line and off-line programs, geared to help women re-enter the work force with today's skills?"

Add all this up – re truth number one – and Popcorn & Marigold conclude: "***Women don't buy brands. They join them.***"

This little riff is a shorthand form of what I do in my seminars. (It's also the subject of a companion booklet in the series, *Women Roar*.) The whole topic, and four years' worth of listening and research, coagulated around a keynote speech I gave to the ***2000 California Governor's Conference for Women***. I began my remarks to 10,000 women with a summary slide:

***I am a businessperson. An analyst. A pragmatist. The enormous social good of increased women's power is clear to me; but it is not my bailiwick. My 'game' is haranguing business leaders about my fact-based conviction that women's increasing power – leadership skills and purchasing power – is the strongest and most dynamic force at work in the American economy today. Dare I say it as a long time resident of Palo Alto ... this is even bigger than the Internet!***

But perhaps there's even a better summary. It came in an email I received from a Shelly Rae Norbeck, after I'd given a speech on marketing to women. She wrote:

*“I make one-third more money than my husband does. I have as much financial ‘pull’ in the relationship as he does. I’d say this is also true of most of my women friends. Someone should wake up, smell the coffee, and kiss our asses long enough to sell us something! We have money to spend and nobody wants it!”*

You go, girl!

At the design conference that triggered this booklet-essay, I went through a version of this section on women's marketplace power. I concluded with a slide that ended up causing 75 percent of the buzz that my entire speech generated. The slide read like this:

**Message: Men cannot design for women's needs. Period.**

I don't really mean it. I do really mean it.

Of course there are *some* men who can design for women. But, in general, corporations – starting at the top – are not paying attention to women's needs. And after four years of intense study, I think I get it. No, I don't “get” women. But I do get the problem. *And the problem is that I have no ability, whatsoever, to truly identify with things like that “connection proclivity” Faith Popcorn writes passionately about.* I can “get it” intellectually. And I think I have, as I said, through damned hard work. But I can't really get it. And I can't deeply identify with having been treated dismissively, brainlessly, as so many women tell me they have.

The honest truth: I don't know what I mean by all this! But I do know ... that trillions of dollars are at stake. We need more women in design. We need more women at the top of corporations, particularly guiding product development activities. Anita Borg, head of the Institute for Women and Technology, headquartered in Palo Alto, launched a riff on the topic of pagers. She laughed outrageously (with ire in her voice!) at the fact that pagers are designed to be clipped onto belts. Talk about a guy thing! I suspect a psychologist might even look more deeply at that fact: The modern pager is the frustrated hunter-gatherer-cowboy male's modern-day substitute for the big, powerful belt and buckle ... carrying knife, sword, pistol, or at least an oversized Stetson wrench or Stanley hammer.

My goal here: Please. Please. *Think about this.* An enormous opportunity. Which goes untended. (And where ... ta-da ... Design Rules.)



## 20. Design & Aging: Opportunity 1A?!

“It” is almost as big as the “women’s thing.”

(Or is it bigger?)

Talk to the marketers. The message is clear. “It’s 18-44, stupid!”

But maybe that message ought to be changed. Maybe the new mantra ought to be:

**“18-44 is stupid, stupid!”**

The demographics are clear. Oh so clear. Over the next decade, the 18-44 component of the population will **decline**, in absolute terms, by one percent. On the other hand, the 55+ portion of the population will jump (and jump is the right word!) by fully ... 21 percent. And, yikes, the 55-64s will l-e-a-p by 47 percent.

As I said ... Yikes! There are 76,000,000 baby boomers. The front edge is now about 55. And they’re a brand new phenomenon. This is the first generation of “aging” folks who are saying, clearly: **“I’m in charge!”** It’s the Viagra phenomenon. It’s the extraordinary growth in number of cosmetic surgery procedures for ... men. Etc. Etc. Oh yes, there’s another interesting attribute of this group: They have the money. Damn near all of it.

The 50+ crowd: **\$7T (trillion!) in wealth.** 50% of all discretionary spending. 48% luxury (high-margin) car purchases. \$610B in healthcare spending (74% of prescription drug purchases). AND YET THE DIRECT TARGET OF JUST 5% OF ADVERTISING.

The aging, historically, have some of the same issues as women. In particular, they don’t get no respect! (My mother, 92, said to me just the other day, “Why do all these people treat me as if I don’t have a brain? Just because I’m old!” It broke my heart. Not just because she’s my mom, which of course is the main part of it, but because it is so nutty. My mom is a lot more energetic than most 92-year-olds, to be sure, but she is simply average in respect to one trait of the vast majority of the elderly: her brain is totally intact!)

The “aging/elderly” group, according to research I’ve reviewed, want several things that the marketplace has barely begun to understand or provide: *Experiences. Convenience. Comfort. Access.* And, as I said, but feel free to repeat ... *Respect!*

The bottom line: This is another multi-**trillion** dollar opportunity. Which, again, is going largely unserved. Bottom line as to the design implications: ***We really do a piss-poor job of designing those experiences, or products, or services, for the aging!*** There are exceptions, such as OXO. The Good Grip people have done brilliantly when they pursued that market. But, in fact, their success makes a mockery of the rest of us. No?

## 21. Design = Cornerstone of the Age of the Brand.

If “everybody” agrees, and it seems that’s almost the case, then the-brand-is-it. So ... this should be a/the glorious age for design and designers.

We’ll see.

I number myself among those who think the brand is it.

Products from the major competing companies around the world will become increasingly similar, writes Wally Olin in *Corporate Identity*. [Amen! – TP] “Inevitably this means that the whole of a company’s personality, its identity, will become the most significant factor in making a choice between one company and its products and the other.” Rolf Jensen, head of the Copenhagen Institute for Future Studies, chimes in with a similar message: “We are in the twilight of a society based on data. As information and intelligence become the domain of computers, society will place new value on the one human ability that can’t be automated: emotion. Imagination, myth, ritual – the language of emotion – will affect everything from our purchasing decisions to how well we work with others. ***Companies will thrive on the basis of their stories and myths.*** Companies will need to understand that their products are less important than their stories.” It’s becoming, says Danish marketing phenom Jesper Kunde, a “metaphysical world.”

And dealing with a metaphysical world is not something that companies do easily. “Most companies,” Kunde continues, “tend to equate branding with the company’s marketing. Design a new marketing campaign and, voilà, you’re on course. They’re wrong. The task is much bigger. It is about fulfilling our potential, not about a new logo, no matter how clever. **What is my mission in life? What do I want to convey to people? How do I make sure that what I have to offer the world is actually unique?** The brand has to give of itself, the company has to give of itself, and the management has to give of itself.”

Pretty heady stuff. Pretty damned high hurdles. But exactly right.

It was close to the end of 2000. I met with the top management of a huge corporation. I had studied and studied. Worked my tail off, to be honest. But I boiled my message down, and this happened only a couple of sleepless hours before the beginning of the presentation, to three words:

***“Who are you?”***

I told the client that I was, and remain, a great admirer. I was on their side. I had been with them from the start, 25 years ago. I had watched them make acquisitions over the last few years, and even though I'm often the enemy of major mergers, I couldn't disagree with the fundamental logic of any of their big acquisitions. But, I added, somewhere along the way, somehow or other, an inch at a time or a foot at a time, the "Who are we?" had gotten fuzzy. And then fuzzier and fuzzier.

**Who are you?** Wow, what a question! As one of my astute marketing colleagues said, the branding thing is really about "organizational psychotherapy," and I think he's exactly right. Tom Chappell, head of Tom's of Maine, brings it together nicely: "Success means never letting the competition define you. Instead, you have to define yourself based on a point of view you care deeply about."

I take my consulting clients through a "brand promise" exercise. It goes, in short, like this: (1) Who are we? (Start with one page, then reduce to 25 words.) (2) List three ways in which we are unique (B-I-G word) ... to our clients. (3) Who are they (competitors)? (Again, 25 words or less for each major competitor.) (4) List three compellingly distinct "us" versus "them" differences. (5) Try the results of all this on your teammates. (6) Try them on a friendly client. (7) The final test: try them on a skeptical client!

***Branding: Branding is personal. Branding is integrity. Branding is consistency. Branding is fresh. Branding is what I care about and why it matters. Branding is the answer to who we are and why we are here. Branding can't be faked. Branding is a systemic, 24/7, all departments, all hands affair.***

And for design and designers, this one ***is*** the Big Enchilada. The case logic goes like this:  
*(1) The brand is it. (2) Brand = The emotional connection. (3) Design is the key to emotional connection. (4) Designers are, then, "the key" to the strategic success of the enterprise. Q.E.D.*

I admit I'm obsessed-possessed by the branding idea. Again, do it right, and billions upon billions upon billions of dollars – and recognition – are the shockingly large rewards. But I also know damn well, reflected to some extent in the above, that it isn't about "market research." And though that logo of yours should be compelling, it isn't about a logo either. It ***is*** about ... *an attitude, a way of life, a determination to make a difference.* It is, primarily, about aesthetics and emotion and connection and care and energy and grace and plot and passion. And this, at its best, is the very essence of the "design attitude" ("design mindfulness") that I am openly trying my damndest to "sell" in this slim little booklet.

## **22. Design & Leadership: Passion and Technicolor Rule!**

My friend, the leadership guru Warren Bennis, is probably the only person alive who is extremely close to both me and Peter Drucker. A reporter asked him a time back to compare and contrast the two of us. His answer, and I paraphrase: “If Peter Drucker invented modern management, Tom Peters repainted it in Technicolor.” I was flattered as hell. He’s far too kind. But I will at least admit that that’s what I have been *trying* to do for the last 25 years.

*Effective leadership is a “Technicolor Proposition” – and thence a design proposition – in these clearly Technicolor Times. Period.*

“A leader is a dealer in hope,” Napoleon said. “Create a cause, not a business,” is strategic suggestion No.1 for these turbulent times from strategy guru No.1 (in my opinion) Gary Hamel.

Management guru and renowned symphonic conductor Ben Zander chimes in: ***“I am a dispenser of enthusiasm.”***

I love all that. Ah, yes ... love. Leadership, to me, is all about love. *Passion. Enthusiasms. Appetite for life. Engagement. Commitment. Great Causes and determination to Make a Damn Difference. Shared adventures. Bizarre failures. Growth. Insatiable appetite for change.* And that in turn adds up to why I am a design fanatic. Remember our discussion of **Words**. Grace. Beauty. Plot. Story. Soul.

Those words are so important. They are the essence of design mindfulness at its best and most pervasive. And, I fervently believe, truly under-attended to by nine out of ten, and perhaps 99 out of 100, organizations, private and public.

**It adds up to opportunity.** Enormous opportunity. I love this whole branding idea. I love the branding idea, as I said, because I think you can’t be in the least bit phony ... if you’re going to pull it off. Phil Knight of Nike really did want to do a better thing. As did Anita Roddick of The Body Shop. Larry Ellison of Oracle. Bill Gates, competitive business maestro that he is, of Microsoft. And Scott McNealy of Sun Microsystems. The information technology age – and the larger-than-life characters like Jobs and McNealy and Ellison who lead it and define it – is about Technicolor. Have no doubt.

Maybe design isn’t the right word. Maybe it’s design mindfulness. An attitude of design. (Or soulfulness.) Oh, well, I hope you get the drift by now. This booklet is not about technique. It is about nothing less than a way of life ... fully informed by the design emotion.

Give it a try. Good luck.

(And remember, as I exit, that this applies as much to a 6-person training or accounting department as it does to a 60,000-person consumer goods company.)

Tom Peters' MANIFESTOS2002: The BRAWL WITH NO RULES Series

**WE ARE IN A BRAWL WITH NO RULES.** We are RE-INVENTING THE WORLD ... from scratch! WHAT A THRILL! (And a thrill of the sort no one's had for centuries.) We are in a BRAWL WITH NO RULES. We get to make it up as we go along. I am so psyched to be around for "all this." Is it confusing? OF COURSE. Is it maddening? ABSOLUTELY. But how sweet *that* is!

**THE WORK MATTERS!** White Collar Work – 90+% of all work – will be totally reinvented in the next 10 or so years. GET WITH THE PROGRAM ... OR GET RUNOVER. Strategies: (1) Turn "Departments" into full-fledged, for-profit "PSFs" – Professional Service Firms. These "PSFs" become, in turn, the primary engines of company value added through the accumulation of intellectual capital. (2) Turn all "the work" into no-bull WOW! PROJECTS. Projects you'll be bragging about 10 years from now! (3) Encourage every "employee" to pursue a spicy Brand You strategy – creating a Unique & Valuable Identity that's worth a fortune to the employee & the company. (This booklet is the basis for our three book "Reinventing Work" series: *The Professional ServiceFirm50 ... The Project50 ... The Brand You50.*)

**IN SEARCH OF EXCELLENCE: A THREE-GENERATION REPORT CARD.** *In Search of Excellence* marks its 20th anniversary in 2002. I aim to "beat the press" in terms of commentary. My chosen vehicle: a three-generation look. That is, I look at 1982 (the book's pub date) ... and 20 years back (mgt. practice, circa 1962) ... and 20 years forward (mgt. 2002). It was fun to write – and I hope of some small use.

**THE DEATH KNEEL FOR "ORDINARY": PURSUING DIFFERENCE.** "We" have gotten (lots) better at everything. But so has "everybody .else." "Excellent" products & services are quickly becoming "ordinary" and thence "commoditized." This MANIFESTO summarizes 9 powerful strategies for combatting Creeping & Ultimately Fatal Commoditization. (Several of these strategies are the subject of separate MANIFESTOS below.)

**WOMEN ROAR: THE NEW ECONOMY'S HIDDEN IMPERATIVE.** The evidence is clear! (1) WOMEN ARE BETTER LEADERS THAN MEN (under the conditions of the New Economy). (2) WOMEN ARE THE WORLD'S BIGGEST MARKET OPPORTUNITY (BY FAR) ... and are wildly underserved. The stakes amount to TRILLIONS of dollars. ("The" answer, incidentally, is not "target marketing"; it is the much deeper Target Innovation.) Our story: WOMEN ROAR. WOMEN RULE. Believe it! (And ... Damn Few "Get It" ... even in 2001. WHADDAN OPPORTUNITY!)

**DESIGN MINDFULNESS.** “It” works (understatement) for SONY. And APPLE. And GILLETTE. And BMW. And WALT DISNEY. And BODY SHOP. And BLOOMBERG. “It” = An Abiding Passion for DESIGN. Design turns out to be the Principal Reason we LOVE or HATE something ... “product” or “service.” Hence, design is the Hidden Engine powering the Brand Promise. So ... WHY DO SO FEW PAY (OBSESSIVE) ATTENTION TO IT? Again, the potential payoff is humongous.

**GETTING WEIRD & STAYING WEIRD: CREATING & MAINTAINING THE HIGHSTANDARD DEVIATION ENTERPRISE.** Standard Deviation is a statistical measure of Weirdness. Companies that will thrive in Weird Times will systematically adopt Weird Practices. That is: Hang With Weird Customers & Suppliers. Recruit & Promote Weird Talent. Appoint Weird Boards. Etc. Etc. Innovation is “easy”: Force yourself/organization into Constant & Intimate Contact with The Weird Ones! (It is that EASY!)

**THE HEART OF BRANDING.** BRANDING IS EASY. (And, of course, impossible.) Forget clever marketing programs. And compelling logos. And Big Bucks Advertising. They’re all important, but the icing on the cake. The cake itself is an unswerving & crystal-clear answer to some “simple” questions: WHO ARE WE? HOW ARE WE (no bull) UNIQUE? WHY DOES IT MATTER? WHO CARES? IS IT COMPELLING ENOUGH TO VAULT 1000s OF EMPLOYEES OUT OF BED IN THE MORNING? Branding That Matters is difficult (KNOW THYSELF!) and simple (KNOW THYSELF!).

**THE CASE FOR “BRAND INSIDE”: IT’S THE “ORGANIZATION,” STUPID!** Brand Inside Rules! Few businesses fail for want of a Great Strategy. Or Soaring Vision. Most businesses that fail (99 percent ?) do so because of lousy execution. Any idiot can write a strategic plan. Pulling it off is an entirely different matter. You need Execution. That is, the PEOPLE. The politics. The systems. The culture. The character.

**TALENT!** There’s an All-out War for Talent. WINNING? Easy! Like Branding: Easy... and impossible. WINNING THE ALL-OUT WAR FOR TALENT DEMANDS ...FIRST AND FOREMOST ... AN ABIDING OBSESSION WITH TALENT! NFL Franchise-variety. Ballet Company-style. (TALENT-IS-ALL!) Provide Awesome OPPORTUNITIES. PAY Incredibly Well. Pursue DIVERSITY. Seek out THE STRANGE ONES. Honor YOUTH. Etc. Talent Am Us ... or We Ain’t Serious. PERIOD. (P.S.: Talent= The Brand ... over the long haul. OBVIOUS. Right?)

**BOSS-FREE IMPLEMENTATION OF STM/STUFF THAT MATTERS!** Forget the “power-less-ness” CRAP! (Try that Sob Story somewhere else! Gandhi ... and King ... and de Gaulle ... were NO SHIT POWERLESS ... and Changed the World!) THE Success Secret: Recruiting often “powerless” but always passionate allies ... who will play with you

and try out your seriously-cool-but-untested ideas. And “Sign Up.” I call it:F2F/K2K/1@T/R.F!A. That is: Freak to Freak. Kook to Kook. One at a Time. Ready.Fire!Aim. Enemy No.1: An epitaph that reads: HE WOULD DA DONE SOMEREALLY COOL STUFF ... BUT HIS BOSS WOULDN’T LET HIM. Our Hero? Michelangelo: THE PROBLEM IS NOT THAT OUR AIM IS TOO HIGH AND WE MISS IT, BUT THAT IT IS TOO LOW AND WE HIT IT. (Whoops.)

**WEB WORLD: THE 100% SOLUTION ... NOW!** Key term: 100%. Others know more than I about The Web. But I have developed an Unshakeable & Radical Point of View: THE WHOLE NINE YARDS. OR NOTHING. Taking lessons from Schwab, GE, Oracle, Cisco ... I assiduously believe that you must convert ... ALL ACTIVITIES TO THE WEB(internal & external affairs) ... or risk losing the business. Message: THE WEB AIN’T AHALF-WAY SORTA THING! (P.S.: Potential = UNLIMITED. For the BOLD.) (DREAM BIG. DREAM BOLD. Or, skulk off ... stage left!)

**PSF UNBOUND: THE (TOTAL) VICTORY OF THE PROFESSIONAL SERVICE FIRM.** I/we have written extensively about the “Professional Service Firm Model.” I/we have seen it as a way to save one’s soul (or at least one’s job) in the face of the Coming White Collar Tsunami. Fine. But ... there’s a Bigger Picture. Hewlett-Packard offered \$18 Billion for PricewaterhouseCoopers consultants. Making a “great box” was not enough. My contention is that the “internal” “professional services” will – quickly – become The Engine of Value Creation. In damn near any firm. To be sure, the Internal PSFs will have to join together to create value; but, still, it is their world. Period.

**EDUCATION AND THIRD MILLENNIUM WORK: WE’VE GOT IT DANGEROUSLY WRONG.** Education for the Third Millennium ... undoes everything we’ve done in education for the last 100 or so years. Our “system” works. Or, rather, worked. It turns out docile – sit in your seat, Tommy – “products” (humans) perfectly fit to spend 40 years in a Ford Model T plant. And perfectly unfit to be part of the new Brain & Productivity-based Economy!