

Sixty for Sixty: Tom's TIBs

Tom Peters

The architect Bill Caudill was a contrarian. He pioneered the idea of working intimately with clients to create spaces that met their needs; this flew in the face of conventional wisdom, which held that the architect was pure artist, barely deigning to make client contact. Caudill's approach was wildly successful—so much so that today it's become conventional wisdom.

Over the years Bill jotted notes on this and that, and began to organize them for his children. The title of his musings: This I Believe. After Caudill's death, his colleagues collected the notes and published them. That is, Bill Caudill's *TIBs*.

A sixtieth birthday is a monumental occasion, and I chose, among other things, to give myself a present to mark the/my date in November 2002. I sat on a hill overlooking my farm in Vermont, and scribbled down 60 thoughts, one for each year, that seemed to capture my professional and, to some extent, my personal journey. Those thoughts—*Tom's TIBs*—herewith:

1. **Technicolor rules!** Technicolor rules! Passion moves mountains! That's been the theme of my life's work. When my company re-branded itself a couple of years ago, we looked upon a red exclamation mark, Pantone PMS 032, as our logo. Smugly perhaps, I believe that logo captures me (and our aspirations) almost perfectly.

I do not think business a dry, dreary, by the numbers affair. I think business (at its best) is about adventures and quests and growth and gold medals and booby prizes and emotion and service and care and character. All of those are Technicolor words.

Warren Bennis has the peculiar distinction of being the only person who's close to both Peter Drucker and me. Asked about the two of us by a reporter some time back, Warren replied, "If Peter Drucker invented modern management, Tom Peters vivified it." I'm not ready for my tombstone yet, but when the time approaches I wouldn't mind imagining Warren's Technicolor encomium as my summa.

2. ***Audacity matters!*** All quests worth undertaking—a Girl Scout merit badge or a Nobel Prize—require audacity.

And willpower. (Of course.)

And persistence. (To be sure.)

But, frankly, a persistent *misreading* of the odds. The odds in 1940 of Charles de Gaulle at the head of a parade liberating Paris in 1944? The odds of Martin Luther King, Jr. emerging from Ebenezer Baptist Church in 1954 ... then speaking to 400,000 gathered on the Mall in Washington in 1963? The odds of Steve Jobs and Bill Gates humbling IBM, of Sam Walton sneaking out of Bentonville, Arkansas, and throwing the fear of God into the world's premier retailers?

The odds in each case were 100 times greater than the longest shot in horse track history. Yet each actor mentioned above had the sheer audacity to challenge conventional wisdom, accept the lumps upon lumps associated therewith—and persist until victory.

3. **Revolution now!** Of course I know “revolution” is a frighteningly strong word. Yet I also know (yes, know) that from warfare to commerce to education to health care, these are times of unprecedented change. Perhaps change of the once-a-millennium flavor. Hence it follows logically that such madcap times call for madcap initiatives—from the Pentagon to P.S. 9 in Oakland, CA, to the finance or purchasing department at XYZ Widgets. If you choke on the word revolution, I am fearful for your future. The future of your career. Your enterprise. Your children. Your nation. Our world.

4. **Question authority! (And hire disrespectful people.)** No assumption should go unchallenged! No strange idea should be dismissed or ignored! (And the stranger who presents it should be welcomed rather than scorned!) Our schools breed conformity. (Conforming students.) Our white-collar prisons, those insipid high rises that mark most big-city skylines, cherish conformity. (Conforming workers.) And yet history’s progress—from the dawn of civilization until today—is measured and marked by the assaults of non-conformists: from politics to science to enterprise. By definition, the history book is a Deviant’s Hall of Fame. (And indeed, upon occasion ... Hall of Shame.) A Museum of Misfits. My goal is to entrench the ethos of the history makers into our public and private institutions, small and large, as we face decades upon decades of unprecedented uncertainty and turmoil. Highest accolades should go to those who have the

guts to hire the Deviants. And Gold Stars for all who openly challenge the status quo—day after day after daunting day.

5. **Disorganization wins! (Love the mess!)** The difference-makers thrive on chaos that would intimidate others. Jefferson and Adams. Lewis and Clark. Lincoln and Grant. TR and FDR. Churchill and Thatcher and Giuliani. The best companies, I've discovered, are the most disorganized. (Take note that I didn't say *undisciplined*.) Their leaders assemble a bulging portfolio of mavericks ... and launch those mavericks on maverick initiatives. They know that what they know is small beer compared to what they don't know—and only a passel of passionate and peculiar pioneers will successfully sort through the mess. To be sure, most of those pioneers will fail ... but the successful remnant, alone, will vault the firm or public institution to its next performance plateau. Organization is needed to execute our daily chores; yet all progress (All. Big word.) depends on counterintuitive leaps into the unknown. Hence, it depends on those who cherish the mess.

6. **Think 3M: Markets Matter Most. (Only extreme competition staves off staleness.)** Do markets have glaring inefficiencies and dreadful side effects? Of course! Yet (only) the spur of a new rival (the kid who was drafted for the NFL team, and now aims to swipe your roster slot) leads us back to the practice field for a final 15 minutes of wind sprints. Cooperation is, of course, invaluable to the achievement of most any complex task, from the football field to the FBI; yet even within a largely cooperative effort, it is the maverick who questions yesterday's rituals and commits 168.2 percent of her energy to demonstrating the validity of a wildly different approach who lifts us to that next peak. Sins and flaws aside, I've come to

wholeheartedly believe that only Extreme Competition (and the creation of an organizational context which encourages such extreme competition) leads to sustained progress. (Note: the progress of those who do the best is seldom smooth. It consists of plateaus, pitfalls, deep chasms. Followed by breakthroughs that ratchet the enterprise to a level higher than one could have dreamed existed.)

7. **Three hearty cheers for weirdos!** I love the fifth grade student who leaps from his seat at the “wrong moment.” I love the 26-year-old who interrupts her boss. I love the heckler at a political event—even if it’s my candidate he’s heckling. It’s really quite simple: Hecklers alone (with incredible energy, persistence and luck) change the dimensions of the playing field. I had the privilege of living in Silicon Valley for 35 years. Lucky me! Ups? Many, many. Downs? Many, many. Accolades? Often. Derision? Constant. And yet the Jim Clarks and Scott McNealys and Jerry Yangs and Andy Groves and Steve Jobs and George Lucases actually changed the world’s rules—the way human affairs are conducted. I have an abiding passion for the Weird Ones. I honor their Purple Hearts (what a collection they have) as much as I admire their Medals of Honor. Not a one of them is close to normal. Not even close.

8. **Message 2003: Technology change (info-science, bio-science) is in its infancy. (Greatest understatement: We ain’t seen nothin’ yet!)** The Internet has already lived up to its hype—and will soon exceed it. Wildly. The bio-tech/life-sciences revolution is but gathering way. The new technologies change everything (love, war, commerce, what it means to be human); the turmoil will extend for decades and the fallout for centuries. While there will be further bumps in the

road, like the dot-com bust that marked the first couple of years of the new millennium, there is no going back. This genie is out of the bottle!

9. **Everything is up for grabs! Volatility is thy name! (Forever. And ever.) Re-imagine ... or perish.** I began my most recent book as follows: *“It is the foremost task—and responsibility—of this generation to re-imagine all of our institutions, private and public.”* “My God, sounds like a line from a presidential address,” one of my friends said. Well ... yes. That is, it could be. These are not times for the faint of heart. They call for the maximum from each and every one of us. For the sake of ourselves, our communities, our children, our world. No right answers or certain rules are on the horizon. We must make it up as we go along. As for a Blessed Hiatus ... forget about it. In short: We must *all* become ... Re-imaginiers.

10. **Big Stinks. (Mostly.)** We go through repeated waves of entrepreneurship (when waves of new stuff rush in) followed by consolidation (when the wave is past and the most absurd by-products of the irrational exuberance are weeded out). To some extent, such waves and tides will continue to ebb and flow. Yet the inherent volatility that surrounds us at the beginning of this new millennium suggests nothing less than a ... Long Wave of Entrepreneurial Energy. Upstarts will indeed become Establishment ... and will then be savagely attacked by the next round of Upstarts. Truth is, Big Company performance has always been more problematic than imagined; and most adventures in consolidation (Big Mergers) fail miserably. While the new technology seems to promise the possibility of “agile giants” or “dancing elephants” (the latter suggested by former IBM boss Lou Gerstner), my money lies with the next generation(s) of Gateses and Waltons and Venters.

11. **“Permanence” is a snare and a delusion. (Forget “built to last.” It’s yesterday’s idea, if**

that.) One serious study shows that but a single company on *Forbes’* first List of Giants (the 1917 Forbes100) outperformed the market between 1917 and 2003. The sole survivor, GE, is marked, not so incidentally, by a powerful, lingering spirit of independence and autonomy.

While I admire the instinct to pursue Eternal Glory, I believe the times are better suited for the

Ellisons’ and Gates’ ... pursuit of Temporal Glory. (Which may or may not last ... but which

changes the world permanently.) Put your all into surviving today’s tsunamis of change ... and let

the day after tomorrow take care of itself. Dream big? Absolutely! Aim to change the world?

Absolutely! The idea is setting in train events, which rattle every cage, from here to kingdom

come. But as to whether you and yours will be the engineers in charge of that train, circa 2053 ...

who cares?

12. **Kaizen (Continuous Improvement) is ... Very Dangerous Stuff.** Caught with our pants down

by vigorous Japanese competitors, we Americans quickly copied their essential competitive

ideas, such as Total Quality Management and Kaizen. Fair enough! Brilliant, in fact! Yet these

important notions are in part cornerstones of an earlier, industrial age ... when winning products

stayed on the shelves in showroom floors for years, even decades. Now excellence has become

transient (few teams win back-to-back championships in sports, the competition and rate of

improvement have become so intense); and the fact is that the Pursuit of Perfection (at today’s

“sport”) gets in the way of ferreting out the Next Big Thing. My de facto mentors in all this are

media guru Marshall McLuhan (“If it works, it’s obsolete”) and IT guru Nicholas Negroponte

(“Incrementalism is innovation’s worst enemy”).

13. ***Destruction rules!*** A surprising number of attendees at an end-of-millennium retreat I hosted left saying that their biggest “take-away”/“aha” could be captured by a single word. Namely: *Cortez*. That is, the great explorer ... Hernando Cortez. Upon landing in Vera Cruz, Mexico in 1519, Cortez headed inland to claim the nation for Spain. His soldiers faced a wily enemy and the ravages of disease. Fearing mutiny, Cortez resorted to an extreme strategy: He sent a lieutenant back to the sea ... to burn the boats! Our potent group’s conclusion: A little (or more) boat burning would do many enterprises a world of good. The exemplar here is Nokia. In the 1980s, the proud but hodge-podge Finnish conglomerate sold off all the crown jewels starting with Forest Products (what else is Finland?), and threw in its lot with wireless communications—an arena where the leadership had virtually no expertise. Likewise, upon coming to grips with the awesome power of the Internet, legendary GE CEO Jack Welch, though in his sixties and only having a few years left at the helm, labeled the new GE: dyb.com. For ... destroy your business dot.com. My advice: Re-title the Big Cheese! Drop CEO. Pick up ... CDO. Chief Destruction Officer. Cortez, anyone?

14. ***Forget it! (Message: Learning = Easy. Forgetting = Nigh-on-impossible.)*** Visa founder Dee Hock said it best: “The problem is never how to get new, innovative thoughts into your mind, but how to get the old ones out.” Burn the boats redux, eh? My take: Every enterprise (*and* every individual) needs a *formal* (written, for starters!) ... Forgetting Strategy. We must be as forceful and systematic about identifying and then dumping yesterday’s baggage as we are about acquiring new baggage.

15. **Innovation = Easy. (True.) (Message: Hang out with Freaks!)** It came to me in a flash: Innovation is a lark! (“That flash must have fried your brain,” you quickly respond.) Here’s my essential proposition: (1) Self-motivated change is virtually impossible, particularly if the individual or enterprise is, shall we say, mature. (Or, worse yet, successful.) (2) Thence the “answer” (only?) to change is to throw yourself violently in harm’s way. I.e.: Put yourself in a position where you have no option but to change. (3) Such a self-imposed precarious position comes from *managing* (carefully! quantitatively!) the *portfolio* of those you hang out with. (4) Acquire (hang out with) cool-weird-pioneering customers ... and they will drag you into the future. Acquire (hang out with) cool-weird-pioneering suppliers and they will drag you into the future. Ditto: employees. Ditto: board members. (5) Consider: *You are who you go to lunch with!* Break bread with cool ... and you will become more cool. Conversely: break bread with dull ... well, you can figure it out. I’m aware that the above might come across as simplistic. And perhaps that’s so. But then again, perhaps it’s not. My experience and evidence says that most big firms, in particular, are victims of dull, predictable, behind-the-times customers and suppliers and employees and board members. At least: Think about it. Okay? (And who *are* you lunching with today?)

16. **Boring begets boring. (Cool begets cool.)** Energy begets energy. Enthusiasm begets enthusiasm. Hustle begets hustle. And so on. The Big Idea here is an amplification of No. 15 above. Innovation = All. (In a wobbly world. We’re in a wobbly world.) One cannot expend too much ink on this topic. (See No. 17 below, while you’re at it.)

THE BIG IDEA. If we force ourselves into constant contact with Cool ... the odds are (sky)high that “cool” will rub off. And ... of course ... vice-versa.

This is personal, as well as professional. When I go too long without stimulation ... I can feel my edge dulling. No bull. (And just like the business of keeping physically fit ... the dullness sets in pretty quickly.) It’s those edgy times ... when I’m debating someone I respect but disagree with ... or speaking to high school kids who seldom let you escape with glibness ... or declaiming to a group that’s totally new to me ... that I feel most alive. Fully human. This is so central to personal growth (mine, at least) that I deliberately micro-manage my calendar to ensure sufficient contact with ... people and groups that ... Terrify ... me.

17. ***Think “Portfolio.” We are all VCs. (*Venture Capitalists.)*** I freely admit that I’m wildly, head-over-heels in love with the idea of *portfolios*, of *bell-shaped curves*. (The fabled “normal distribution.”) Portfolios and bell shaped curves suggest diversity. Measurable diversity, at that. An NFL “roster” is a classic “portfolio,” which ranges from the tried-and-true player to the super-long-shot, who will make the Hall of Fame ... or flame out. Likewise a Venture Capitalist’s “portfolio” = Roster of bets (investments).

I unabashedly want everyone to think about (damn near) everything in terms of ... portfolios. Your department’s “payroll” becomes a “roster”-“portfolio.” So ... do you have an appropriate share of those long shots, the wet-behind-the-ears, super-bright kids who will either alter the world ... or bomb? (We rarely do.) Portfolio-of-people = Roster. Young, old. Tried and true sources of recruitment, new (to you) sources of recruitment. Conventional backgrounds, (very)

unconventional backgrounds. Journeymen, risky high-priced superstars (yes, in HR and Finance). The same applies to your ... *customer* portfolio. Your ... *vendor* portfolio. Your ... *consultants* portfolio. Your ... *marketing initiatives* portfolio. (Etc.) (Etc.) (The great news: “It” can be measured!) (Must be measured!) E.g.: Upon evaluating your 26-person departmental “roster,” how many (*precisely*) score seven of ten or higher on the “weird”/“long-shot”/“odd background” scale?

Coaches-GMs (sports) “do” ... rosters ... portfolios. (Period.) VCs “do” ... rosters ... portfolios. (Period.) And you?

Measure! Damn it! (Innovation ... i.e. your life ... depends on it!)

18. **Perception is all there is. (“Insiders” ... always ... overestimate the radicalism of what they’re up to.)** I just begged you to ... Measure Weirdness by quantitatively evaluating your Portfolio/Roster of damn near everything. Now I’m going to go back on my word. (Partially.) Measure? Yes! But have an *outsider* do it, or at least have an outsider evaluate your evaluation.

My experience is all too clear. (And common.) I talk to a 25-year company veteran, at his firm’s executive level. He glows with excitement about, say, his new supply chain initiative. He barely notices that I’ve dozed off in the middle of his recitation. That is, his measuring rod was fashioned by 25 years of *internal* experience. Mine was fashioned by 25 years of *external* experience. I’m not diminishing at all the degree to which he’s stuck his neck out to champion this idea. It’s just that to me it’s quite timid by contrast with the most incredibly interesting stuff

I've stumbled across in industries far, far distant from his. The idea-concern holds on every parameter. His idea (perception, sculpted by his 25 years in one bureaucracy) of a "risky" candidate for a top job is my idea of a "ho-hum" candidate ... who should be discarded in a flash. And so on.

Think about it. (Are you really as "far out" as you think?)

19. **Action ... ALWAYS ... takes precedence.** Talk about not changing with the times! This was Idea No. 1 from *In Search of Excellence* in 1982. It remains in the Top Spot two decades later. Except that my plea is more strident than it was 20 years ago.

The idea from *Search*: We put too much emphasis on analysis, too little emphasis on "gettin' on with gettin' on."

I could extend this section, just one of 60 in this relatively brief paper, for pages upon pages. (Upon more pages.) Some people like to talk about stuff. Some (other) people like to try stuff. Some people lick their wounds after a setback. (Or worse yet, initiate the blame game.) Some (other) people "get back on the horse" (or find another horse) and go ridin' again. (As for the blame game thing, the issue for me is selfish. My energy is far too precious to waste a single droplet on emotionally draining acts of recrimination.)

It's almost funny. (If the stakes weren't so damned high.) The Action Faction is completely flummoxed by the Memo Maniacs. AFs (Action Factioneers) are unable to sit still, to stay off the

field, to delay the next step. (Sometimes their impatient rush to action causes problems. True. *But ... far fewer problems than the Ponder Partners' generic failure to act at all.*)

Innovation guru Michael Schrage gives brilliant intellectual cover to my Action Factioneers in his masterful book *Serious Play*. He claims (as I applaud) that all True Innovation comes as a *reaction to real action* (a trial, prototype, experiment). My mantra (personal, professional): Do ... NOW. Think ... later. At the least, you'll have *something* to think about since you've just done ... *something*.

20. **He who makes the Quickest & Coolest Prototypes Reigns! (Think: Demos. Stories. Heroes.)** Test! (Quick.) Prototype! (Quick.) Demo time! (Quick.) Cool Story! (Quick.) New Hero! (Quick.)

Message: Plans do *not* make the world go 'round. What does? *Demos! Heroes! Stories! Tests! Palpable examples! Experiments! Prototypes!*

Okay. You caught me out. It's action redux. So what? (It surely bears repeating. And then repeating again.)

Stories-Heroes-Demos ... not Plans ... make the world go 'round. Think Bob Stone. Bob actually re-invented a fair share of the federal government's practice. He had a simple (profound!) management mantra: "***Some people look for things that went wrong and try to fix them. I look for things that went right and try to build off them.***"

Amen. (As in: AMEN!)

Fact is, 90 percent of us “reason”-by-“vignette.” We’re all honorary “show me” Missourians. We need to see-it-to-believe-it. Or, early on, see-it-to-become-*inflamed-by-the-potential-of-it*. We don’t need a lecture on TQM. We need the palpable, compelling story-of-42-year-old-born-again-Charlie-the-distribution-center-boss-who-reluctantly-but-wholeheartedly-embraced-the-“quality-thing”-and-made-a-miracle-in-Padooka. To only partially coin a phrase, one snapshot of Reluctant Charlie-turned-Demo-Hero is worth a thousand CEO exhortations on videotape and a thousand pages of plans and policies.

Message: We (you, me) live by Demos-Heroes-Stories-Quick Prototypes-Experiments-Tests-Concrete “Stuff.” So: Get concrete! Fast! Gimme ... a Demo. Gimme a ... Hero. Gimme a ... Story. (Please.) (Now.)

21. **Haste makes waste. (So ... go waste!)** Failure is the mother (father, and uncle) of success. (Period.) A few years back the *Economist* revealed Silicon Valley’s “success secrets.” At the top of the list: *Embrace failure*. The magazine used as illustration a typical venture capitalist’s portfolio. Of 20 “bets” (investments), the following outcome set typically ensues: Six go bust. Nine hang in. Four do well. One goes (positively) berserk.

There are several significant messages here. Topping the list: Brilliant success = One in 20 batting average! Failures and ho-hums *far* outnumber successes. The first (MBAs? Planners?)

reaction is to dismiss all this as a “failure of analysis” on the part of those VCs. Baloney! The top VCs (in my extensive experience) are smarter than you and I ... and they still hit one in 20 ... and live in the house at the Top of the Hill. Fact: No “house at the top of the hill” unless you back a host of subsequent losers in pursuit of the winning lottery ticket for the ... Next Big Thing.

You could also try labeling all those “losses” as ... “waste.” But you’d be wrong. We needed a kajillion auto company start-ups in the first two decades of the 1900s ... to produce a (one!) Ford, a (one!) GM, a (one!) (more-or-less) Chrysler. Likewise, we actually (truly!) “needed” WorldCom-like fiascos to push the astounding telecoms advances we’ve all benefited from in the last 20 years. Of course, I decry the apparently fraudulent actions at WorldCom, and (literally) weep for the faithful employees who lost out in the process. But progress always claims victims. And *fast* progress, alas, claims numerous victims. While I pine for the evaporated WorldCom pensions (and hope that some form of restitution is possible), I hardly want to go back to the Telecom Cocoon called Ma Bell, circa 1980. I.e.: Three cheers for “waste.” (And three-*plus* cheers for “Hasty Waste.”)

22. **Screw-ups are ... The ... Mark of Excellence. (Corollary: “Do it right the first time” is an ... Obscenity.)** Richard Farson is a bum! He wrote the book I wanted to write! And got there first! With Ralph Keyes, he penned *Whoever Makes the Most Mistakes Wins: The Paradox of Success*. Also consider (1) from premier product developer David Kelley: “Fail Faster. Succeed sooner.” (2) From a Philadelphia area high-tech executive: “Fail. Forward. Fast.” (3) From successful Aussie businessman Phil Daniels: “Reward excellent failures. Punish mediocre successes.” Take your pick. I’ll take ’em all.

My resolve on this issue of the paramount importance of failure was locked into granite a dozen years ago, when I had a chance to introduce Wal*Mart founder Sam Walton at a prestigious awards banquet. I sought out Sam's long-time pal and successor as Wal*Mart CEO, David Glass, and asked him what single trait of Sam's stood out above the rest. He quickly replied, "Sam's not afraid to fail." "It's not," he continued, "that Sam tolerates less than a Herculean effort, or anything like that. To the contrary. It's just that his attitude is, 'Got that dumb one behind us. Let's try something else. Right now.'" Alas, such an attitude is ever so rare, in sizeable enterprises in particular—which seem to spend more time on backward-looking witch hunts than forward motion ... that all-important "next-quick-try."

23. ***Play hard! Right now! Cherish play!*** Michael Schrage's *Serious Play*, mentioned before, is my pick as best book on innovation. Well researched, its strategic message is captured in this opening statement: "You can't be a serious innovator unless and until you are ready, willing and able to seriously play. 'Serious play' is not an oxymoron; it's the essence of innovation."

Schrage essentially devotes 300 pages to the apparently second-order topic of quick prototyping, from tangible model building to processing thousands of iterations of a spreadsheet in a matter of hours.

"Play" is ... *one-of-those-words* ... that ... *dare-not-be-uttered-between-nine-and-five*. And yet each day we confront hopelessly complex circumstances in the marketplace or in the design of a new piece of software. Winners—I contend—have but one (yes, one!) consistent strategy: Try. Something. Fast. See what happens. Fast.

Four decades of observation (mine and Schrage's) say it *is* that clear cut: "Play" rules innovation's roost!

24. ***Talent Time! (He/She who has the ... Best Roster ... rules.)*** Oh how I love ... LOVE ... those two words. **TALENT. ROSTER.** Say "talent," say "roster" ... and the Yankees ... the Metropolitan Opera ... or a space shuttle crew ... or Microsoft's latest bet-the-company design team come to mind. Alas, say "Finance Department," "HR Department," "Personnel," "Human Resources" ... and neither the Yankees nor Talent necessarily come to mind.

It *is* a New Economy. It *is* an Age of Intellectual Capital ... or "creation intensification," as one Japanese researcher in the financial industry put it. *If* it's new economy/intellectual capital/creation intensification time ... then "it" is all about ... **He/She Who Has the Best Talent/Roster Wins.**

I simply contend that when you say/think Talent/Roster, your mind is transformed from the more pedestrian imagery that matches up with "employee," "worker," "human resource," or "department."

Talent is cool!

Talent gravitates to cool!

Talent attracts more Talent!

And: In Real Talent World (again, think Yankees, Metropolitan Opera) ... Boss Job One (*and 2 through 2,002*) is the ... Attraction & Development & Retention of Talent. For NFL GMs, a few of whom I've known, Talent per se is a 25/8/53 Obsession (and don't forget to capitalize the "O" in "Obsession.") McKinsey & Co.'s former Talent Guru, Ed Michaels, places GE, virtually alone, in the Yankees' league. The process of TA&D (Talent Acquisition and Development) at GE is intense, relentless, uncompromising, and played for keeps. Incidentally, I'm not talking about the "top fifty," or any such thin, stratospheric layer. I'm talking about the active/obsessed engagement with the top several *thousand* "roster" members. In short: *If talent rules ... then Talent Rules.* (In every nook and every cranny of the enterprise, 25/8/53.)

25. **Re-do education. Totally. (Foster creativity ... not uniformity.) (The noisiest classroom wins the gold.)** Read it and weep, from Jordan Ayan's book *Aha*: "My wife and I went to a kindergarten parent-teacher conference and were informed that our budding refrigerator artist, Christopher, would be receiving a grade of unsatisfactory in art. We were shocked. How could any child—let alone our child—receive a poor grade in art at such a young age? His teacher informed us that he had refused to 'color within the lines,' which is a state requirement for demonstrating 'grade-level motor skills.'"

The school system was crafted to deliver factory slaves to Henry Ford, and cubicle slaves to XYZ Insurers. Former Hallmark creative exec Gordon MacKenzie, who devoted his retirement to working with the school system, went so far as to say, "Every school I've visited was participating in the systematic suppression of creative genius." Maybe that was okay in the Age of Ford. But it is definitely *not* okay in the Age of the Smart Microprocessor and the Age of

Wholesale Outsourcing of Brain-Creative Jobs. To say the schools are not responding, let alone leading, the global economic transition process is a grotesque understatement. Tomorrow's "Requirement No. 1": Kids who color *outside* the lines! I, for one, am counting on Christopher Ayan as Secretary of Education by 2025! In the meantime ...

26. **Diversity's hour is now!** I'm a diversity fanatic. Political correctness has no place in my credo. Pursuit of rapid economic growth does. Hence I find myself applauding madly the words of Greg Zachary in *The Global Me*: "Diversity defines the health and wealth of nations in the new century. Mighty is the mongrel. The hybrid is hip. The impure, the *mélange*, the adulterated, the blemished, 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."

Strong words! And accurate ones, as I see it. Carnegie Mellon professor Richard Florida claims that in America a "creative class," already 38 million strong, is leading the way on just about any dimension you can name. He and Zachary sing from the same page of the same hymnal. "You cannot get a technologically innovative place," Florida insists, "unless it's open to weirdness, eccentricity and difference."

Message: Creative age = Creative rules = Mix and match = Diversity's Hour. Q.E.D.

27. **S-H-E is the best leader.** Women *will* rule. (Period.) And it's a great-necessary thing! Logic: Women bring to the workplace the perfect (big word!) skill set for the emergent new economy.

Judy Rosener lays it out brilliantly in *America's Competitive Secret: Women Managers*. Women, she enumerates, tend to: link rather than rank workers ... favor an interactive/collaborative leadership style, believing that empowerment beats top-down decision making ... sustain fruitful collaborations ... are comfortable sharing information ... see re-distribution of power as victory, not surrender ... favor multi-dimensional feedback ... value technical *and* interpersonal skills equally; individual *and* group contributions equally ... readily accept ambiguity ... honor intuition as well as pure rationality ... are inherently flexible ... and appreciate cultural diversity.

What a list! Of course not all men are hopeless on all these dimensions. Yet there is a clear “central tendency” which differs among men and women—and which will increasingly, especially in the mid-to-long-term, result in women’s accession to the top ranks of leadership. (Far beyond the pathetic statistic, circa 2003, that women occupy only 8 of 500 CEO jobs among the Fortune500.) Given the above, I have no trouble with the conclusion of a 2000 *BusinessWeek* Special Report: “*As leaders, women rule. New studies find that female managers outshine their male counterparts in almost every measure.*” More humbly, I simply suggest that women are the most underrated, under-attended answer to the always pressing question of “Where do we find more/better leaders?”

28. **Marketing mantra: Pocket Trillion\$\$\$. Embrace the Big Two: (1) She is the customer! (2) Boomers & geezers have all the loot!** I’d be thrilled if the last quarter of my career led to the following label: “The guy who discovered women and geezers.” Marketers get so caught up in *micro*-segmentation that they often miss the ... Main Game. In this case, two games ... yes ... YES! ... Two Trends worth Trillions, as in Trillion\$\$\$. Namely: (1) *Women buy All the Stuff!*

(2) *We're getting older!* I've written extensively on both topics, and won't repeat myself here. (Though I'm sorely tempted.) A raft of indisputable statistics make it clear that women, as purchasers of retail and professional goods and services, dominate virtually every market category you can name. And are blithely ignored by 99 percent of companies. Sure, most firms nod to the woman consumer. But only the rarest of Big Players (such as a Lowe's in DIY world) realign the enterprise *strategically* ... around the woman as consumer.

Likewise, 99 percent of firms blithely (that word again) ignore the Boomer-Geezer tsunami. And ... the Entirely New Brand of Oldster who is arriving on the scene ... wallet bulging ... aiming to ... live a lot longer ... and ... spend, spend, spend.

Let me briefly add, after seven years of intense study, I am convinced that as personal and professional consumers, men and women, geezers and non-geezers, have damn little in common. Hence to "take advantage" of these two trends requires ... Wholesale Enterprise Realignment. (Not some la-de-dah "initiative.")

29. **Re-boot health care.** Arguably, education and health care are our two most significant "industries." Both are almost hopelessly out of tune with tomorrow's times. I touched on education's need for a monumental re-alignment in item No. 25 above: Now it's time for health care's shellacking.

To begin with ... *everybody* is pissed off! Everybody is at fault! Consider: (1) We need to get quality conscious. Fact: As a result of physician arrogance and outdated procedures, our out of

control health care system unnecessarily (!) kills and maims millions per year. (No exaggeration.) (2) Spoiled patients “expect it all”—and take little responsibility for the rationing of health care. (3) The entire system is skewed (somebody help me find a stronger word!) toward fixing things (!) after they’re broken, rather than wellness and prevention. (4) Narrowing the focus to America, I believe it’s a criminal shame that a third of us are uninsured—in earth’s wealthiest (by far!) nation. Bottom line: There is an enormous opportunity to “get the health/health care quality/wellness/universal access/rationing ‘thing’ right.” One hopes it will streak to the top of the national agenda—especially as our 80 *million* cantankerous Boomers (see No. 28 above) experience the acceleration of aches and pains.

30. **Q: What are we selling? A: “Experiences” and “solutions,” far more than “top quality” and “satisfaction.” (Message: the traditional value-added equation is being set on its ear.)** The “M” in IBM, obviously, stands for “Machines.” But IBM makes damn few machines today. It mostly “makes” ... “experiences” and “solutions.” Under the guidance of CEOs Lou Gerstner and Sam Paladino, a single IBM division, IBM Global Services, rapidly grew from a pittance to about \$40 *billion*. IBM today is a *software-services-consulting-solutions* company. It has more in common with Cirque du Soleil than Caterpillar Tractor. (Whoops, CAT now sells services and solutions ... not to mention its licensed shoes and shirts and jackets!)

In short, the “bedrock” of “national economic excellence” (Japanese-style, German-style) has been crushed. Comfortable or not, welcome to (New) IBM World ... where “solutions” and “experiences” dominate. See too: Nike. Harley-Davidson. UPS (“What can brown do for you?”).

Ford (“A ‘brand experience provider,’ not a ‘carmaker,’” per one wag.) Home Depot (which wants to “own” the home services market). Etc. (Etc.) (Etc.) (Etc.)

The Big Deal: This ... *is* ... a ... BIG DEAL. As one marketing expert put it, tomorrow’s Skill/Requirement No. 1 is “metaphysical management” ... finding fundamental economic value in places long ignored, or dismissed out of hand. (Not so incidentally: One more b-i-g reason to champion a wholesale re-do of education and to welcome women in unprecedented numbers into the top ranks of leadership.)

31. **Design = New “Seat of the Soul.”** *If* there’s a sparkling new “value proposition” (I think there is—see immediately above) ... *then* there’s a spanking new “seat of the soul.” It’s *not* balance-sheet machinations. It’s *not* more (or even better) micro-segmentation analysis. It *is* ... design.

Design ... meaning stuff that “looks cool.” Sure. But a lot more. Sometimes I call it “design mindfulness” ... but I’ve really not concocted the right term. The right *idea*: an enterprise with a “total way of being” that is informed by design considerations. Where the aesthetic and emotional sensibilities of Body Shop and Nike and Nokia and Harley-Davidson and Starbucks and Apple and BMW and Southwest and, yes, the consultants McKinsey & Co. and (the old, at least) EDS and (the new) UPS *drive* the business. Drive it from HR (the pursuit and nurturing of top talent) to creating “aesthetically pleasing” business processes ... which offer zip and zing across the entire customer interface/experience.

Design, then, is the calculated construction of ... the total-persona-that-the-enterprise-presents (and present it does, every microsecond) to all of its stakeholders and constituents, internal and external, virtual and real.

Okay?

32. *Branding is for ... EVERYONE. Whoever has ... THE BEST STORY ... takes home the most marbles.* “Branding?” “Branding is a *character* issue. Next question?” It is almost that simple. And, thus, that *hard*.

I’m a branding fanatic. But not a branding “expert.” I acknowledge the power of a great logo. Brilliant ad campaigns. Coherent marketing material. A razor-sharp message. And so on. And on. Yet all the above misses the mark. “Brand” to me (personally) means: **What Tom ... stands for. Tom’s character ... behind his promise. Why I would want to ... hang out with Tom. Why what Tom does ... matters in the larger scheme of things. Tom’s ability to ... make a difference.**

Branding, then, at its best, is about the ... Big Questions. (Very Big Questions.) Call it/them: identity ... character ... raison d’etre. Or (personally again):

Tom’s ... Big & Compelling Story.

Consider:

“We are in the twilight of a society based on data. As information and intelligence become the domain of computers, society will place more value on the one human ability that cannot be automated: emotion. Imagination, myth, ritual—the language of emotion—will affect everything from our purchasing decisions to how 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.”—Rolf Jensen, Copenhagen Institute for Future Studies.

Howard Gardner, the renowned Harvard professor, insists that the primary key to leadership is storytelling skills, the ability to encase a mere “message” in a saga that moves dozens, or millions, to commitment and action. That’s what a Brand is, too: a great *story*, a *saga*, a case for *character* ... that makes me reach for Morton salt and the image of the little girl with the umbrella, rather than the store brand. Branding—the individual, the one-person consultancy, or the corporate megalith—is the pinnacle of enterprise accomplishment. *Brand = What Matters About Me/We*.

33. **“Dramatic Difference” = Only Difference worthy of the name**. Hanging in tough against the forces of conformity, from kindergarten to the grave, is the ultimate litmus test for the individual—and the obvious point of difference for everyone who makes it into the local or global, military or mercantile history books. In the business world, marketing and new products guru Doug Hall has put the calipers around this idea, which he labels “dramatic difference.”

Hall’s book *Jumpstart Your Business Brain* pivots around three “Laws of Marketing Physics,” the last of which is the Law of Dramatic Difference. When a firm is evaluating a potential

product, it often asks panels of prospective purchasers two key questions: (1) “Would you buy this?” (2) “How ‘different’/‘unique’ is it?” Hall notes that business decision makers, evaluating the results of such a survey, invariably pay far (FAR!) more attention to the pragmatic “Would you buy?” than to the more ephemeral “degree of difference.” Alas, our execs get it all wrong. The response to the “degree of difference” query is a far better predictor of subsequent marketplace success than the “Would you buy?” question.

Dramatic Difference in sports (think Joe Montana, Barry Bonds) leads to Canton and Cooperstown. And in the world of enterprise ... directly to the bank. Painful? To be sure. But why else get out of the bed in the morning?

34. ***Words matter. (A lot!)*** Churchill famously said, “We shape our buildings. Thereafter they shape us.” So, too, words. Most business language is: dry ... unemotional ... stilted ... formal. And yet ... business ... at its best ... is the opposite of all these things.

Consider customer service. “Exceeds expectations” is hardly an un-noteworthy goal. And yet it hardly vaults one to the heavens, either. Go to a great ballgame or theatrical performance or restaurant, and upon departing you’re hardly likely to say to your mate, “My, that dining experience certainly exceeded expectations.” Try: “Holy smoke! What a meal!” Or: “Could you believe that moussaka?” (Etc.) I wrote a whole book on what I call “Wow Projects.” I think the word “Wow” per se is important. Ask, “Is this business process overhaul a true ‘Wow’?” and you’ll launch a completely different discussion than if you talk about “providing useful deliverables.” Again, I hardly denigrate “useful deliverables.” (Just like my support of “exceeds

expectations.”) It’s just that there’s just so much more to life—especially in wild and wacky times.

Management guru Jim Collins coined the phrase BHAG, or ... Big Hairy Audacious Goal.

(Hurray.) Steve Jobs’ mantra is ... Insanely Great. (Hurray again.) I began this treatise (point

No. 1!) extolling ... Technicolor. Very near the heart of the Technicolor spirit is ... *Technicolor*

Language. Its conscious use makes an enormous difference in how we live and how we work.

35. **What matters is ... Stuff That Matters**. I was writing a long article on leadership some time back, and I felt some nagging discomfort. I had offered a decent enough list of leadership “tools” and “strategies.” And yet I felt as if something was missing. Finally, I had a ... Big Whoops Moment. “Everything” was there but “it.” *It = Why the Hell Are We Doing “It” in the First Place?*

Virgin Group boss Richard Branson sums “it” up brilliantly: “I never, ever thought of myself as a businessman. I was interested in creating things I would be proud of.”

Former Herman Miller chief Max DePree puts it this way: “Management has a lot to do with answers. Leadership is a function of questions. And the first question for a leader always is ‘*Who do we intend to be?*’”

Strategy guru Gary Hamel turns all this into a commandment for future enterprise success in today’s confusing and uncomfortable world. He argues that new success means “*creating a ‘cause,’ not a ‘business.’*”

Consider: “proud of” ... “intend to be” ... “cause.” (= Nice. Nice. Nice.)

One evening, after a desultory session with some very senior executives who I found most uninspiring, I went on to a meeting with high school and university students who had been picked to attend the affair on the basis of their leadership potential. What a time I had! Again and again they put me on the spot, asking irritating questions such as, “What’s your evidence that you’ve made the world a better place in the 20 years since *In Search of Excellence*?” Wow! Alas, it struck me (after being dumbstruck) that it is so rare for someone over, say, 25 or 35 to ask fundamental questions like that. We either lose our nerve, or politely sweep the True Basics under the carpet.

Perhaps every board needs 20-year-olds who ask embarrassing-but-fundamental questions. In any event, all of us need to constantly keep the “only stuff that matters” issue front and center.

36. **eALL. (IS/IT: Half-way = No-way.)** I’m no lad, not by a long shot. But I have a lad’s love. For the new technologies. They “change everything.” For the better? Not always, of course. Nothing with so monumental an impact comes without monumental baggage as well.

The IS/IT revolution was noisy in the ’90s. It’s mostly quiet in the ’00s. But this new-fangled ... Double-Os Stealth Revolution ... is of an enormity not easily described. While there’s more to the story, the potency of the Wal*Marts and eBays and Schwabs and Ciscos and Amazons ... and, yes, WTO-IMF protesters, and perhaps al Qaeda ... is a direct byproduct of the IS/IT Web (barely) unleashed. And what about the wee tots humbling the recording and video industries as I write?

And ...

And ...

The IS/IT/Web Revolution ... again: in its infancy ... changes ... **POSITIVELY
EVERYTHING.**

Some will embrace it. With a lover's passion. Some will deny it. With a Luddite's scorn. But none can *avoid* it or *undo* it or *derail* it.

The subtext of this item: *Half-way = No-way*. One either gets on this bus ... with full-bore vigor ... or misses the game. That's the way I see it.

So ...

37. **DREAM! Dream ... BIG! Dream ... ENORMOUS! Dream GARGANTUAN! (This is an XXXXL Time!)** I came across a wonderful quote from Lewis Carroll: “‘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.’”

While I want Bill Gates to live a long life, I think that would be a heck-of-a-Gatesian epitaph. I suspect Bill's garden-variety day amounts to at least six Impossible Dreams ... before Sunday brunch ... most of which are "executed" on or before the next Sunday's fare is laid out.

To deal with the metabolism of the times calls for 25-hour days. It also, at least as important, calls for daydreamers, for the ability to *routinely* imagine the *unimaginable*. Welcome to ... Gates World. Welcome to ... Whitewater World. Or: Jobs World. Or: Ellison World.

38. **Thanks Mike!** Okay, Michelangelo, to you, not ... Mike. I've seen it on postcards. And seen it on T-shirts. And yet somehow it's never hackneyed to me. Namely:

The greatest danger
for most of us
is not that our aim is
too high
and we miss it,
but that it is
too low
and we reach it.

Hackneyed or new to you, if that doesn't make one stop dead in one's tracks ... and ponder the meaning of life ... then nothing else will.

39. *There is (Perhaps?!) only ... One Big Issue. Crappy X-Functional Communications.* How silly, eh? But “one” ... Big Issue? One? Number 1?

I THINK I’M RIGHT. (Partial proof: This apparently secondary idea rates a full stand-alone chapter in my latest book.)

Consider this, from Frank Lekanne Deprez and René Tissen in *Zero Space: Moving Beyond Organizational Limits*: “The organizations we created have become tyrants. They have taken control, holding us fettered, creating barriers that hinder rather than help our businesses. The lines that we drew on our neat organizational diagrams have turned into walls that no one can scale or penetrate or even peer over.” Have you ever read a better description of our faulty response to terrorism (for instance), pre-9/11? Or Sears’ resistance to the reality of Wal*Mart? Or IBM’s inability to see the Gates Train coming?

Or ...

Or ...

Many decades ago, to deal with growing enterprise complexity, we invented (see the era of the First Transcontinental Railroad) “middle management.” “It” was invaluable. (There was nothing else ... literally nothing else ... able to deal with the unimaginably complex, integrative tasks of the time.)

And then ... “it” ... strangled us. And then ... circa 1980, or ’85, or ’90 ... the New Technology ... allowed a few upstarts (e.g. CNN) to flummox the Tired Old Ways of Doing Things. The horse was let out of the barn ... the genie escaped the bottle.

(Oh my.)

It’s early. (VERY EARLY.) The Philosopher-King of New Org World has yet to appear. (Fact: We are still in a ... State of Flux.) Yet the ... *idea* ... of pursuing ... “frictionless” organizations and frictionless families of organizations (e.g. the way life works at Wal*Mart or Dell) has taken firm root.

I suspect it will take the arrival of today’s ... Texting Youth ... into “enterprise” to bring this all to fruition. But make no mistake. (MAKE NO MISTAKE.) The New Age has (ALREADY) arrived among the ... seven-to-thirteen-year-olds. And it’s coming soon to your neighborhood mega-corp!

40. **Stop doing dumb stuff. (Systematize the process of un-dumbing.)** Systems are dumb!

Dumb! Necessary? Necessary! But dumb! Systems effectively provide *coarse* rules for processing information and channeling it appropriately. Such *coarse* rules, over time, are refined ... and refined then again. And that’s where dumb (coarse!) systems, turn into ... Truly Stupid Encumbrances.

Well, I have an answer. First ... do it right the first time. That is: Create ... elegant ... systems.

(See No. 41 below.) (Elegant = Great Word. As I said ... more below.) But that's not enough ...

I have a dream ...

And in my dream ... there are two executive offices ... on opposite sides of a corridor. A sign on the door of Office No. 1: "Chief Systems Engineer." (Grade 25, out of 30.) On Office No. 2: "Chief Systems Destroyer." (Grade 26, out of 30.)

Systems: Must have them!

Systems: Must hate them!

Systems: Must design them!

Systems: Must un-design them!

One growth company rightly turned toward developing systems appropriate to their New Scale. They subsequently (rather quickly) observed these very same (necessary) systems began to sap the ... Spirit of the Enterprise. The solution: Create, if you will, the anti-system system. In their case, an EVP/SOUB ... an Executive Vice-President/Stomping Out Unnecessary Bullshit.

Love it!

41. **Beautiful systems ... are ... b-e-a-u-t-i-f-u-l!** A big part of "the Problem" cited in the last few items is, alas, the character of most systems designers ... and systems departments.

Doubtless, the occupants thereof are: (1) smart, (2) organized, and (3) well-intentioned. But the mentality is, overall, what I call the ... Re-engineering Mentality. Absolutely necessary. Severely limiting.

FedEx. Southwest Airlines. E-Bay. Dell. All the product of an ... Ingenious *System*. But ... as I see it ... from the start so much more than “good wiring.” Try ... “Inspirational Wiring.” Or better yet, how about: “Beautiful Systems”? You see, I think “systems” that “sing” are ... Beautiful ... *Aesthetic Triumphs* ... Gorgeous ... Breathtaking ... Graceful ... even Divine.

That’s my gauntlet thrown down: Every-System-an-Aesthetic-Triumph ... or ... off with the Heads of the Systems’ Designers!

42. **The ... WHITE-COLLAR REVOLUTION ... will ... Devour ... Everything ... in Its Path.**

Think red tide. As in ... red tide of White-Collar Professional Blood. Current status: **THE DAWN HAS BARELY BROKEN. THE CUP HATH NOT YET RUN OVER.**

An unprecedented jobless recovery, circa 2002-2003. Productivity: Up (dramatically). Wages: Steady or Up. Economy: Growing. New jobs: Down. Manufacturing jobs: Way Down. (But that game has long been over.) Service jobs: Problems. High-pay service jobs: Emerging problems. Managerial jobs: Emerging problems.

The microprocessor-software-ERP-Internet-etc. revolution replaces jobs in two distinct ways: (1) The new, smart software-chips directly displace workers. And (2) The new, smart networks

make it easy to shift white-collar jobs offshore. Clerical jobs? (Of course.) Highly technical jobs? (Whoops.) (But it's happening.) Managerial jobs? (One study pegs US *managerial* job losses to offshore competitors at over 300,000 by 2010.) Jobs of every variety ... going ... going ... (perhaps) gone.

We've done it. Before. On (off!) the Farm. Into the Factory. Out of the factory and into the Tower. And now we're doing it. Again. Exiting the white-collar towers. It is an epic transformation. The scramble is on-out. The pace of technological change accelerates. There is no turning back.

43. **Take charge of your destiny. (No option.) It is a Brand New, Brand You World. (Distinct or ... Extinct.)** Some get it. And that's an understatement. Dan Pink, in his path-breaking *Free Agent Nation*, contends that already 30 million to 50 million of us Americans work in unconventional jobs. Unconventional, meaning not toiling in the Tall Towers of Fortune500 or Fortune1000 companies. E.g.: Some 20 million of us are freelancers in one form or another; there are about five million temps (Manpower Inc. is now our No. 1 private sector employer); almost another 20 million toil in "micro-businesses," with four or less employees.

The point: A *lot* of us have, in effect, traded dependence for independence. (Voluntarily or otherwise.) That Very Big Band of, say, 40 million of us inherently get the challenge laid down by *Wired*'s Michael Goldhaber: ***"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."*** (Or as I said immediately above ... you'll be part of today's or tomorrow's

Red Tide of White-Collar Professional Bloodbath.) So the good news: There's lots of good news! Lots of us "get it." And not just the Einsteins. The bad news: A helluva lot of us are quaking in our boots ... over the possibility of breaking out, breaking loose from what was a lifetime promise of "steady" employment.

The answer for the Boot Quakers? There's no guaranteed 12-step approach to shedding, say, three generations of dependence on GM or GE. But I do believe there's a counterintuitive first step.

That first step: Forget more effective "career planning"! Forget attending seminars or starting your own business! Instead, look much closer to home: *I.e., examine anew the project you are working on ... right now. Today's project is the movie you are producing, the story you'll add to your portfolio/CV.*

Axiom: Future success = Quality of Product/Project Portfolio. Stars have ... Great Portfolios. Also-rans merely have a collection of "completed assignments" ... worthy of survival in *yesterday's* world. Thence, to "take charge of your life" (the capital idea of this point) means first to take ... Immediate Charge of Your Current Project.

Turning the volume up a notch, I urge you on or about 12/31/03 to begin drafting your First Annual Report (Tom in 2003, complete with tag line: "The Year of Design," or some such). In my company's training for Brand You, our approach to this begins with a "Personal Brand Equity Evaluation," which consists of the following six items:

1. I am known for [two to three (?) things]; next year at this time I'll be known for [one more thing].
2. My current project is challenging me in the following [two ways].
3. New things I've learned in the last 90 days include [two items].
4. My public "recognition program" consists of [one item].
5. Important additions to my Rolodex in the last 90 days include [one to two names].
6. My resume is ... *discernibly different* ... from last year's at this time [in one or two ways].

Incidentally, another angle we take on this is more or less forcing people to imagine that the other shoe drops ... and to prepare a one-eighth or one-quarter page electronic Yellow Pages ad for ... themselves.

Bottom line: *You are a damn fool if you don't assume that 36 months from now you'll be looking for a job ... and given the nature of the change that surrounds us, you'll best have a beaut of a story to tell. The ... Story of You.*

44. **Powerlessness is a State of Mind! (Think King. Think Gandhi. Think de Gaulle.)** I have a clear belief: Powerlessness is an *advantage*, not a *disadvantage*. Why? Because "powerless" people work in nooks and crannies, and are invisible enough to be able to surreptitiously pursue contrarian strategies.

Basic idea: You've got a cool idea ... and you are formally "powerless." Worst approach: try and sell the idea "up the chain of command." It's the worst approach because (1) you *are* powerless; and (2) your "cool" idea, by definition, challenges the tenets that got the hierarchs promoted.

Alternative strategy: Model F4 (Find a Fellow Freak Faraway.) Or:

F2F!/K2K!/K2KK!/1@T/RF!A (Freak-to-Freak. Kook-to-Kook. Kook-to-Kooky-Kustomer.

One at a Time. Ready. Fire! Aim.)

Point: "Powerless" people need Friends. More precisely, *one* friend. *One* playmate. *One* person who will share his/her playpen ... so that you and she/he can test/pilot your kool-kooky idea.

Recall I said that step No. 1 on the Brand You Liberation Trail is re-conceiving today's project ... to turn it into an Implemented Gem. Same deal here. We need a ... Cool Test. And a ... Test Bed. Now.

Roseanne provides the Guiding Mantra for all this: "*Nobody gives you power. You just take it.*" I believe this is an/the idea for the ages. But more important in the context of these musings, such an approach has quickly become a ... Survival Imperative for the Double-Os.

45. **Pursue ... Adventures ... in every task.** My PowerPoint slides turn over at the rate of 25 percent every 90 to 120 days. Why? Mostly, to keep me from dying of boredom! My first professional obligation is to amuse myself. Sound absurd? I disagree. I "win" with my clients to

the extent that I am fresh, vital and provocative. Thence, first and foremost I must turn myself on ... by chasing ever new lions and wildebeests.

The bigger idea: (1) *Individuals* who succeed turn conventional “assignments” and “tasks” into **Adventures** and **Quests**. (2) *Bosses* who succeed (think Ferdinand and Isabella and Columbus) send employees on Quests & Adventures to places that surprise both boss and individual questor.

Quest! I *love* that word! As much as I *hate* the word “task” or “assignment.”

Quest (Adventure) is about ... Stuff That Matters! The world wobbles on its axis *solely* as a result of ... Quests & Adventures! Consequences: (1) Individual Rule No. 1: Win = Re-purpose your “task,” no matter how trivial, until it becomes a Quest. (Not so incidentally, if you are *comfortable* ... you are *not on a quest*. Quests are about imagining and pursuing alternative futures.) (2) Boss Rule No. 1: Can you honestly say that each & every employee who reports to you is on a Quest? That they in turn view their job as creating/executing Quests?

46. *Excellence is a state of mind. (Excellence takes but a ... Minute. No baloney.)* I don't believe in the tooth fairy. And I don't own a pair of rose-colored glasses. On the other hand, I *do* believe: I believe in the possibility of turning any task, assignment, project or job into a Gem-Mighty Quest. I believe in the *possibility* of widespread *excellence*. Note, I said ... *possibility*. Of Excellence.

There is, of course, a surpassing amount of pain and strife in the world. Always has been. Always will be. And there are, alas, at least as many lousy days as scintillating days. (Witness Dilbert's all too accurate portrayal of Cubicle Slavery.)

That said, the evolving white-collar world described above will leave little or no room for "ordinary" performance—in HR, IS, Logistics, Purchasing, Engineering, Finance or elsewhere. Recall: Distinct ... or Extinct.

So: Q.E.D. The case for *Necessary* Excellence has been made as well as I can make it.

Enter Old Tom. That is ... Thomas Watson ... the de facto IBM founder. Rumor has it that Watson was once asked, "How long does it take to achieve Excellence?" His response, pre-dating Ken Blanchard by decades, was, "A minute." He continued by claiming that Excellence (and, yes, let's capitalize that "E") was entirely in the hands of the perpetrator, no matter how "junior" or "powerless." Excellence? A state of mind! A *decision*, actually, per Watson. A decision ... *right now* ... to ... *never again* ... do anything that was not excellent.

Harder done than said, of course. For many reasons, but least of which is that excellence (an obsession, by definition) often does not fit comfortably in lackadaisical settings.

Some have argued that AA (Alcoholics Anonymous) is the most effective change program ever. Buy that or not, the AA model is the Watson-Excellence model. How long does it take to stop drinking? But a second. And then the hard work begins. One day at a time. Forever. The Great

News: Excellence is Cool! Excellence is Fun! The Excellence Attitude *reduces* stress: I.e., one perceives with deep conviction that one is pursuing a ... Worthy Quest; you needn't think twice. Is "it" ... Excellent? (Or not?)

If you're an exercise freak (I am ... most of the time), you know exactly what I'm talking about. You may be breathless ... but there's little that's more self-(self-ish-ly)satisfying than knowing that you've pushed yourself right to the edge of the possible ... and then a little beyond. That feeling, I contend, is replicable. On *any* task. At *any* time. Does "it" turn you on? Will "it" have been marked by ... Excellence? And if not, precisely what do you plan to do about it? Right now?

47. **Show up! (If you care, you are there.)** Show up! Rudy! Case closed!

Woody Allen once said that 80 percent (or was it 90 percent?) of success is showing up. Texas Bix Bender, purveyor of homilies: "You *can* pretend to care. You *cannot* pretend to be there." Sports super-agent Mark McCormack claimed there are times when it's well worth a 5,000-mile trip for a five-minute face-to-face meeting.

Consider 9/11. Rudy showed up! And seven million New Yorkers, plus a couple of hundred million Americans, felt better for his ever-so-visible presence. His presence ... *per se*.

I learned it early. And I've never forgotten. "Being there" matters ... Big Time. I'd go so far as to say that three out of every four (or nine out of every 10) (or 99 out of every 100) of the most

intractable situations could have been ameliorated by ... showing up ... and are exacerbated by ... absence.

The idea holds at every level: How many deteriorating relationships, personal or professional, could have been mended by one humbling (or even not so humbling) phone call ... two days ago ... or two months ago? Call it death by 1,000 uncertainties. Perhaps the most potent force in the world is powerlessness—and/or paralysis—that comes from the confusion of the moment. The physical presence of the leader, even though she arrives bearing no Strategic Silver Bullet, makes all the difference—and moves tens or tens of thousands out of the paralytic/catatonic state and off the proverbial dime.

The Power of Presence. Never, ever underestimate it!

48. **Your calendar knows all. (You = Your calendar.)** *Physiologically*, we are indeed what we eat. *Professionally*, we are our calendar. Fact is, there is only one surefire way for the boss to underscore her/his commitment to quality or empowerment or innovation or the Web or whatever: Spend (*gobs of*) Time on “It.”

Gandhi famously said, “*You must be the change you wish to see in the world.*” Tom, less famously, says, “*You are your calendar.*” Your calendar reveals *all*. (***All = All.***) Translation, if needed: Your calendar reveals like no other tool (such as soaring rhetoric) what you actually *care* about. The premier (only true!) indicator of caring is ... Visibly Spending the Time:

- You = Your Calendar.
- Your True Priorities = Time Visibly Spent.
- I care = It's on the Calendar. Big Time.
- I *don't* care/it's *not* a priority = It ain't repeatedly/relentlessly on the Calendar.

* * *

Axiom No. 1: Calendars Never Lie!

* * *

All non-bosses are would-be Kremlinologists, as we used to call them; or intense Examiners of Tea Leaves. There's no more important survival question for an underling than "What's the Boss *really* thinking about?" And the answer is revealed ... with crystal clarity ... in that boss's ... Calendar. If she or he is spending (lotsa) time on quality ... THEN QUALITY MATTERS. If not ... the converse is the case.

There's a crucial variation on this theme. I once watched a highly energetic chief ripped asunder by a senior member of his board. "Richard," the determined board member almost shouted, "you are smart, energetic, creative to a fault, perhaps even a genius. But much of your 'genius' is dissipated because you apply it to ten different things at a time, albeit with great skill.

"Let me tell you what you need," he concluded. "A 'to don't' list."

I don't know about "Richard," but for me that was a profound moment. Fact No. 1: We all have 50 genuine priorities. Fact No. 2: If we get even two Big Things Done in a six-year tenure on the current job, we will have had a ... Great Ride. Axiom No. 1: Therefore, what we choose *not* to do (the sole subject of that "To Don't" list is at least as important, or more important, as what we choose to do. And, finally, effective "To Don't-ing" is far, far more difficult than effective "To Do-ing."

49. ***Life Is Sales. (The rest is details.)*** Our records of accomplishment are a function of our skill and devotion to ... Sales. Period. True of George W. Bush. And Billy Graham. And the symphony conductor, attempting to "sell" 80 professional instrumentalists on ascending peaks they'd never known before.

True of trainers. And financial professionals trying to convince bosses and underlings alike to look at the world in a (slightly) new way. True of anthropology professors and third grade teachers, attempting to inflame 1 or 1,001 students about a topic.

Sales! Sales! Sales!

Sales for breakfast! Sales for lunch! Sales for dinner! And dream about Sales as you sleep!

I can't count the number of "professionals" (accountants, engineers, artists) who have said to me, "But I *hate* sales." Or: "Sales is slimy, fundamentally delusional." Or: "I'm not the 'sales type.'" Or: "I have no knack for sales."

And I virtually spit in return: Influencing others to make anything happen—from a three percent raise to a political campaign for high office—is a matter of the studious application of sales principles.

Oh dear, oh so many have spent oh so many years *studying* finance or purchasing or engineering. And yet they wouldn't deign to *study* sales and marketing, influence and persuasion, political science. Yet each of these *disciplines* (and they are that!) lends itself to *study* and *mastery* and *meticulous application*.

Message: *Success = Passion for Sales*. (And that's all, folks.)

50. **Boss mantra No. 1: "I Don't Know" (I.D.K. = Ultimate Permission to Explore.)** I *hate* the term "empowerment." I *love* the idea of ... "I don't know." Empowerment typically translates into, "We the powerful deign to dribble some tantalizing drops of reluctantly granted freedom on the unwashed masses." On the other hand, "I don't know" from the mouth of the boss means: "I don't know." Thence "***I dare you to commence a Quest to the Unknown—and I will pray that you discover/invent a New Place that Surprises us both—and literally takes our collective breaths away.***"

I see “leadership” as ... Launching Quests. Nirvana TP style: Hire Fabulous Talent. Beg that “talent” to Fulfill their Wildest Dreams ... by avid and fearless exploration ... pursuit of Kool Kwests.

(There will be a few rules. E.g.: integrity in all we do. Respect for one’s fellows—but not necessarily one’s bosses. Action trumps talk ... always. Other than these few strictures ... go for it. Go for it with ... a new training course ... a new purchasing procedure ... a new product ... a new whatever ... and as long as you continually surprise me/us, your license to Explore will remain valid.)

There’s another (critical) twist to this. In the absurdist days of, say, 2003 ... the boss does *not* know. He or she is like a King or Queen in the Age of Exploration a half millennium ago. The boss *imagines* limitless riches in lands faraway ... but isn’t even sure whether the earth is flat or round. Hence, he or she bankrolls Intrepid Explorers—and fires 100 or 1,000 cannons from the shoreline as he or she sends said explorers off on a five-year trek to the Complete Unknown.

Sounds good to me!

51. **Management Rule/Role No. 1: GET THE HELL OUT OF THE WAY. (“Manager” = Hurdle Removal Professional.)** Peter Drucker once famously said, “Ninety percent of what we call ‘management’ consists of making it difficult for people to get things done.”

Fact: Project teams pursuing exciting goals run into a thousand hurdles. In my experience, it's seldom the Big Hurdles (Is the idea worth doing?) that get them off track. Instead it's a thousand "trivial" roadblocks—a shortage of travel funds, lack of access to another unit's data, being shuffled from work space to work space—that torpedo the potentially Wow Project. Thence ... it is *the* job of the Chief to take a Great Team (for sure) and help them concoct an Exciting Roadmap (for sure); but mostly it's the Chief's Job No. 1 to roll up his/her sleeves, dive into the grubby details—and remove those "trivial" barriers that look like mountains to those involved. While some see the chief as Master Strategist, I see her/him as Master Housekeeper, Assistant-in-Chief to her/his project teams. Or: Hurdle Removal Professional. From flawless execution of such humble (removal) chores emerges the Project Team that takes the Gold ... and makes that Chief famous!

52. *Avoid the epitaph from hell!* Namely:

Joe J. Jones

1942-2003

He would have done

Some really cool stuff

But ...

His boss wouldn't let him.

No, I repeat, I do not own a pair of rose-colored glasses. But the hair on the back of my neck *does* bristle when I hear, from anyone at any age, the commonplace, "blah, blah, blah ... but my boss wouldn't let me." Okay, so I *am* 60. And one thinks more of legacy and the like at 60 than

at 46, 36, or certainly 16. Still: (1) It's never too early to Dream Big, and (2) those who dwell on the "Why I can't's" at age 16 will probably still be doing exactly the same thing at age 66!

Epitaphs are personal. Not corporate. We may well be born disadvantaged physically, or from a socio-economic standpoint. Still, it is our forthcoming epitaph, and our primary life's task—come hell *and* high water—to make our *own* way, carve our *own* niche. To matter. (Or not.)

I'm not talking about getting rich. Or becoming President. I'm talking about my (alas) observation that, as usual, there are two kinds of people: Those who see barriers ... and hunker down. And those who see barriers and more or less rub their hands with glee ... and batter them down, or step decisively by them.

*Lord ... do with me what you will. But please, oh please, don't stick me in Complainers' Corner!
I'm here! I'm alive! I'm vital! And it's my game to play!*

53. **Change takes however long you think it takes.** The query goes more or less like this: "So how long does it take to create an 'empowerment program' with teeth?" My answer: 17 years. Or: 17 days.

In short: If you think it will take 17 (or 3.5) years, it probably will. If you think 17 days (or 87 days) will do the trick ... you're probably spot on.

Much (most?) of life is about self-fulfilling prophecy. (Believe it.) Mount a three-month hunt for “empowerment consultants” to help us with our program ... and I wager you’ll still be in the “planning phase” of your “empowerment program” for the next year or so. But boldly declare that “Empowerment is Strategic Priority No. 1” ... and that you want five initiatives, to be funded at 1 million dollars each, within 30 days, with more or less full implementation to follow in 90 days thereafter ... and I’ll bet you’ll see Serious Results ... within 60 days.

After those 60 frenetic days will there still be work to do? Of course! A lifetime’s worth—no true strategic initiative is *ever* complete; and must be re-worked and re-imagined forever and ever. Still, Earth Will Have Moved, the Seas Will Have Parted, and the New Die Will Have Been Cast ... within 30 days. (Believe it.) Axiom: *Major change takes ... 30 days ... or Three Years.*

Your choice!

54. **Respect!** A story I heard tells of a great consultant called in to head an executive class on leadership. His fee was stratospheric. He arrived, nodded at the “class,” turned to the whiteboard behind him, picked up a marker and wrote, “Don’t Belittle.” Then he turned. And departed. (And religiously sent his hefty invoice.)

I’d not be surprised if this fellow earned his fee 100 times over. Or: One thousand times over. (And only wish I had the nerve to do the same thing!) Harvard professor Sara Lawrence-Lightfoot authored a marvelous book with a marvelous one-word title: *Respect!* “It was much later,” she wrote at one point, “that I realized Dad’s secret. He gained respect by giving it. He talked and listened to the fourth-grade kids in Spring Valley who shined shoes the same way he

talked and listened to a bishop or a college president. He was seriously interested in who you were and what you had to say.”

Don’t belittle! Respect! Wonderful recipes for decent living. (No small thing.) *And* wonderful recipes for successful leadership of units varying in size from 2 to 200,000.

I’d add, if it’s necessary, that there’s nothing in the least bit “soft” about this idea. It’s hard. Hard as nails. Respect, to me, means respect for what you are *capable* of doing, for who you are *capable* of becoming. In fact, the ultimate mark of *disrespect* is to be “nice” when one’s protégée falls short of what she or he is worthy of becoming. I may well be empathetic, but my empathy will mostly be expressed by giving you a hand up—and then nudging you back into the fray. Immediately.

55. **“Thank you” trumps all!**

“The deepest human need is the need to be appreciated.”—William James, psychologist.

“The two most powerful things in existence—a kind word and a thoughtful gesture.”—Ken Langone, co-founder of Home Depot.

“You must care.”—Melvin Zais, General, U.S. Army.

I've been writing about this "little" topic for longer than I care to remember. I don't plan to stop anytime soon.

Life *is* frantic. Hardly time to catch a breath. Precariousness is the Name of the Game—every hour of every day. Hence: This is the Perfect Opportunity to ... Take a Moment ... to pass on a Small Marker of Appreciation ... to someone ... almost anyone ... who has been of help in weathering our storm over the last 24 hours (or the last 24 years!)

I'd add that the evidence is clear: "Thanks yous" are few and far between. So: Do something about it!

Appreciate!

There's nothing more powerful!

56. **Integrity matters! (Integrity = Credibility.)** Roosevelt evaded the Constitution to help the Brits in 1940. Lincoln did the same four score years before. Which is to say that the most effective leaders have violated their most sacred oaths upon occasion. Yet that does not negate the fact (perhaps it reinforces it!) that integrity is the Effective Leader's Tool No. 1. That is, followers can smell sulfurous air from miles away. And can smell the opposite—moral conviction—from at least as many miles away. The leader may be wrong. The leader may have to tack and jibe with the shifting winds. Nonetheless, his or her inherent decency and fundamental humanity ... will shine through. (OR NOT.)

57. **Soft is Hard. Hard is Soft. (Numbers are “soft.” People are “hard.”)** When Bob Waterman and I hit the road in 1982 in pursuit of excellence, we were on a Quixotic Mission. Excellence. “Everybody” in business knew what “it” meant! A brilliant, MBA-engineered Strategic Plan! (And don’t forget to capitalize the “S” and “P”.) People at the top who dreamed in numbers! Call it the Age of ... The Best Plan Wins. Call it the ... Era of the MBA.

(Call it ... Stupid?)

But we found something(s) else. Firms that honored employees ... delighted in the provision of excellent service ... cherished obstreperous “internal” entrepreneurs ... lived by a core set of values.

Yes!

Yes!

Yes!

Still ... what we found was then considered ... “soft” ... by the regnant business intellectual class.

And so Bob and I, 20 years before the Enron-WorldCom numbers fiasco, coined a term:

Hard is Soft.

Soft is Hard.

It's the numbers and plans that are mush figments of deluded imaginations, we said. It's the values and people and service and attitude toward risk taking that is/are the (hard, need I say) Bedrock of Enterprise Excellence.

Fact is, the numbers *are* terribly important. They are, however, the abstract *byproducts* of collective *individual* actions that certify whether or not you are on track. But if there was a singular business failing in 1982 (the birth date of *In Search of Excellence*) which dogs us to this day, it is/was the failure to pay enough attention to this so-called "soft stuff." Certification of the above recently came from former IBM chief Lou Gerstner's autobiography. Gerstner, King of Strategic Thinking and Planning, acknowledged that he would have preferred to side-step the "soft" "cultural issues" when he began his rescue of IBM. Yet he acknowledged ...

WHOLEHEARTEDLY ... the wholesale "culture change" that turned out to be the key to his unparalleled success. Nice.

58. ***Try sunny! Dispense enthusiasm!*** Fire the merchants of doom and gloom, counseled the legendary ad man David Ogilvy. One sour apple, he counseled, can cause the whole bushel to rot! Renowned symphony conductor and management guru Ben Zander says of his musical role, "I am a dispenser of enthusiasm." And: "A leader is a dealer in hope"—Napoleon.

Lou Cannon was the member of the press closest to Ronald Reagan. Reagan, he said, "radiated an almost transcendent happiness." (Hint: it was contagious, even among his foes, like me.)

Message:

Torpor begets torpor.

Enthusiasm begets enthusiasm.

Clouds beget gloom.

Sunshine begets energy.

Losers see cups as half empty.

Winners see cups as half full.

Despair begets despair.

Hope begets hope.

(Or: The only thing we have to fear is fear itself.)

Could life be so simple?

Of course not.

On the other hand, the above constitutes a medicine chest with potent tonics ... well worth considering ... at age 16 ... or 66.

59. **Fun ... is not a ... Four-Letter Word (so, too, Joy).** I'm an engineer by training ... and disposition. A civil engineer at that. Me and mine groove on the concrete. And are concrete per se. So I surprised myself when I wrote, "Leadership is all about love." Then I defined love, TP-variety: *passion; enthusiasm; appetite for life; engagement; commitment; great causes and determination to make a difference; shared adventures; bizarre failures; growth; unslakable appetite for change.*

Fun. Joy. Two marvelous words. Words seldom uttered in the sober halls of enterprise. (Words, words, words ... remember?)

Fun? Fun! I often advise youngsters, “Never go to work in a place where laughter is not the hallmark, where quiet rules.” (Speaking of “rules,” here’s Education Rule No. 1: Deep learning does not occur in a quiet classroom. Think about it.)

Laughter, to me, is hardly about ribald jokes. (Mostly gone, and hurray for that.) Laughter is all about the ... Joy of the Hunt. And the fact that we are engaged in a hearty, long-odds Quest to conquer the Everest or K-2 or Mount McKinley of HR or IS or Logistics or Sales or new Product Development.

Fun! Joy!

Each/both should be a life staple, a *business* staple. They (joy, fun) are, clearly, precursors to ... Brilliant Quests into the Unknown. (Right.)

60. **Grace**. Celeste Cooper, designer: “My favorite word is ‘grace’—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.”

Ah, yes, words. (Again.) I've fallen madly in love with ... "grace." And it's led me to wonder, "Why so little discussion of (the likes of) 'grace' in management books, or in the hallways and conference rooms of enterprise?"

Enterprises, after all, exist only to ... *serve*. *Serve* ... employees. *Serve* ... customers. *Serve* ... vendors. *Serve* communities and *serve* shareholders. *Service* is an act of ... *grace*.

My favorite synonym finder, *Rodale's*, offers these analogues to grace:

elegance ... charm ... loveliness ... poetry in motion ... kindness ... benevolence ... benefactor ... compassion ... beauty.

To be sure (you'll see it in this paper, I presume), I believe in the rough and tumble of competitive business. After all, I'm a Technicolor Guy. But I also believe that a passion for changing the world is no excuse for running roughshod over one's fellows.

Ah, yes, grace.

Does it have any place in business? Foolish question, I'd say. Of course it does.

This I Believe.

Tom Peters/West Tinmouth VT/26 November 2003