

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

BOSS- Free

Implementation
of STM/Stuff That Matters!

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!

Boss-Free Implementation of STM/Stuff That Matters!

The seminar has been going for a couple of hours. It's break time. I'm approached by a relatively young person, a fairly junior staffer in finance. He begins with flattery: "This is really, truly great stuff." (I beam, naturally.)

"But ...

"But ... I'm not a vice president. I can't implement it. I don't have the power."

What do I do? I flip out. Not true. My mom taught me to be polite, and I'm polite. But inside I'm flipping out.

I don't have the power? Can you imagine ***Dr. King*** saying that? ***Gandhi? De Gaulle***, in Britain, isolated, an Army outcast & maverick to begin with, convicted of treason by a kangaroo court in Petain's France, following the fall of France in June 1940?

I do admit that the question is fair enough. Still, it does get my dander up. My eventual response: to write this short essay.

Comments such as the one noted above have indeed caused me to "reflect on it all." And I put together a presentation a few months ago that I title (the title of this paper): ***Boss-Free Implementation of STM/Stuff That Matters!*** A funny thing happened. When I presented the material for about the second time, I heard the following slip through my lips: ***"This is all I 'know' in the world."***

I study as hard as I can. Try to keep up with topics of importance. (That's how I earn my bread and butter.) But this issue is different. It's up close and personal. It's the way I've lived ... since becoming a "powerless" junior officer in the U.S. Navy, a "powerless" junior consultant at McKinsey & Company. I reveled in the powerlessness. It was just the challenge I needed. I urge you to think about it the same way.

1. The Idea: The 4Fs.

I have never, in print at any rate, made as arrogant a statement as I'm about to make. I don't think this is a "good idea." **I think – after substantial consideration – that this is the only way for "powerless" "junior" folks to get things done.**

I call it, in summary, the **4F** approach. The 4Fs: **Find a Fellow Freak Faraway.** But I get ahead of myself ...

The biggest waste in the world? Adult professionals spending time “selling” untested ideas – that are cool as hell to you – “up” the chain of command. The chain of command: *Who are they?* People who have been promoted ... for adhering with skill to the line called “the way we do things around here.” That is, the “chain of command” is/are the designated and appointed Guardians of Yesterday.

And you’ve got a Seriously Cool Idea.

What – by literal definition – constitutes a “seriously cool” idea? It’s a notion for doing things that are ... *counter* to the way those things are done right now. That is, a cool idea is – by definition – a Direct Attack on the Holy Authority of Today’s Bosses. (More or less. Mostly more.)

What’s the alternative for getting started on your Pet Project to Overturn Authority? **FIND A PLAYMATE! FIND A PLAYPEN!**

What you need is a **(one!)** sympathetic-enthusiastic-piratical-conspiratorial friend.

So you’ve got an SCSI/Seriously Cool & Subversive Idea. For a new way of developing products that deeply and continuously involves the customer. For a new approach to international training, that you came across in a book or at a lecture or at a trade association meeting that you attended. A fantastically clever way of analyzing financial data. Whatever. You’ve done some research. You’ve done some reading. You’ve talked to some folks who’ve tried it. Your excitement rises. You (desperately) want to run into your boss’s office ... to tell him the Good News ... that you have figured out a way ... **The Way** ... to Change the World.

(Right?!)

What do you *really* need? You need to get into a chat room. You need to go to a company meeting. You need to go to the bar. You need to go to the health club. You need to take this Incipient Seriously Cool Idea and talk about it with some folks. (Would-be Seriously Cool Allies.) And you do just that. One of them – **Nancy** – runs a little engineering department in a subsidiary, a few hours drive from the divisional headquarters where you reside as a Junior Dude on the Engineering Staff. You and Nancy get into a conversation. You make a pretty good pitch. She gets excited. Particularly since she has a stalled project that she’s working on right now where this Cool New Approach might be worth a try.

Eureka! You’re closing in on Finding that First Fellow Freak Faraway.

No bull: **That’s all there is to it!**

There’s another way I summarize it:

F2F!/K2K!/1@T/R.F!A.

Obvious, eh?

Freak to Freak. Kook to Kook. One at a Time. Ready. Fire! Aim. That is, find One Very Passionate Person who will allow you to play. Call her/him a Freak. Call

her/him a Kook. And *one* is the critical number/idea. One recruit at a time, at least at the start, until demos are in place and momentum starts building. As for the R.F!A., I stole it shamelessly from Ross Perot, who said that the EDS way of doing things on his watch was ... Ready. Fire! Aim. (Actually, he said that upon selling his company to General Motors. Their approach he described as Ready. Aim. Aim. Aim. Aim. ...)

So:

1. We get passionate about a Cool Idea.
2. We express (bubble about) our **Passion** with folks from hither or thither.
3. We find a/**ONE** Passionate Playmate.
4. The OPP/One Passionate Playmate allows us to try our thing in her Playpen.
5. We start prototyping and testing ... like crazy (R.F!A.)

And on it goes:

6. We have a couple of failures. We have a couple of successes. **We Learn A Lot. Fast.** Now we're beginning to ... **Accumulate (HARD) Evidence.**

Now do we go to the boss? **HELL NO.**

7. Our FFF/"Freaky" First Friend – who allowed us to try the idea in her small, out-of-the-way engineering department – happens to have a Freaky Friend in *another* division. She explains our (COOL) work, and gets that FF/Freaky Friend turned on. This is called **Recruiting Customer-Fanatic #2.**
8. And the friend of our first Playmate starts the R.F!A. approach in his little bailiwick.
9. It works. Again.
10. And ... *he* ... has a friend. (Yet another FF/Freaky Friend.)
11. Before you know it ... we've more or less Surrounded the Bastards.
12. Now ... **ONLY NOW** ... Loaded with Compelling Data about Successful Tries by Real Line Officers ... do we finally make that pitch to the Big Boss.
13. Only "we" don't make that pitch! Remember: "We" am a Junior Staffer! The pitch is made instead by those "real" (Line) people who've been working with Our Baby.

Get the drift???

F2F. K2K. 1@T. R.F!A. But ... it doesn't necessarily have to be a colleague from the company. One of the most effective stealth ways to innovate is to turn on somebody in a client organization. Call it: **K2KK.** (Kook to Kooky Kustomer.) I've seen this happen even in giant firms. There was a cool idea. But "cool" meant that it wouldn't be accepted by the "establishment." (The Main Customers.) So ... find a Small-ish & Innovative Customer ... and use that customer as Playmate/Playpen. A twist on that twist is letting that "Kooky" Kool Kustomer (or, for that matter, Vivacious Vendor) joint venture with us. The customer pays part, thence owns – literally – part of the idea. Then we "allow" (encourage, is more like it) that Kooky Kool Kustomer or Vivacious Vendor to Lead Us/Drag Us to Greener/Kooler Pastures!

Yet another variation. You're not a junior person anymore. You are the Head Honcho of a ... six-person group. Working like blazes. No slack at all. There's no way in the world that you can do anything innovative.

Or is there?

My suggestion ... translate the F2F/K2K/1@T/R.F!A. Idea to your little group. Sit down with your Kooolest/Freakiest youngster. Talk about some of the things that "we might be doing around here to really energize the place." If she gets energized (and it could be a "he" & not-so-young), send that youngster out ... to spend time with customers ... or vendors ... or other cool strategic partners. Suggest that she(he) "find something interesting to do" ... and test it with a customer or vendor or other strategic partner. One term for all of this that I've always liked, swiped from the former Lockheed Corporation, is ... Skunkworks. Skunkworks are off-the-beaten-corporate-track places where the Skunks roam. That is, the stealth innovators, staying out of sight, trying cool stuff. What I've just described, for your six-person group, is what I call the "Micro-Skunkworks Strategy." Essentially send one of your six folks out on a Stealth Mission to Skunk Around ... Sniff Out Kool Stuff and Kool Partners.

(Hey, this idea ... Skunking/Starting a micro-Skunkworks ... is even available to an Independent Contributor, junior-size. That is, with or without sanctions from above, you start devoting/squirreling away 15% of your time to an oddball project ... even a local volunteer community project ... that allows you to work on Stuff You Really Care About.)

K2K. F2F. It's all about ... Weird Playmates & their Weird

Sandboxes! One of my original mentors at McKinsey & Co. urged me to do what he had done ... to create my own ... **University of Weird.** He said that his secret to success was "collecting weirdos," intriguing people with intriguing ideas that he could call upon at times of need to inject new and intriguing life into his projects. He shared his membership list with me, put me in touch with a few of them, and suggested that I start my own version thereof. I did. One result ... eventually ... *In Search of Excellence.*

2. The Nugget: Do something. **Do anything. Get going.** **Now.**

You're in love. With an idea. Don't screw around. Start now. Find an excuse. Any excuse.

Please.

All this ... DOESN'T LIFE? ... revolves around projects. **Projects = Opportunities.**
Off-beat (Kooky, Freaky) projects = Kooky/Freaky Opportunities ...
to Do Kool Stuff with Kool Folks.

Opportunities. They are ***always*** lying around. And usually (or at least, often) they're lying around in the form of what we call the **VFCJ “Strategy.”** That is: **V**olunteer **F**or **C**rappy **J**obs. The jobs that nobody else wants. The ones that allow you to take independent charge of things quickly – and early – in your career. And take charge of things that “nobody cares about” ... and that therefore are ... out of sight/out of mind. Perfect Playgrounds! No?

For example ...

Which is it: “The Oh-Shit-I-Wish-It-Were-Over Memorial Day Picnic.” Or: ***“The First Annual Seriously Cool Celebration of Our Incredible Staff.”***

Again. WHICH IS IT?

Nobody wants the job. Yes, “boss” of the Dreaded Memorial Day Picnic. (Question: Why is it “dreaded”? Because nobody has given a shit. Prior “project managers” – demoralized “volunteers” – have gone through the motions. They have unwittingly turned it into an unwanted ritual. Right?) But you say, “Ah-ha, what an Opportunity! *Nobody* wants this thing! It's hated by all. But ain't it true that we do indeed have a **Seriously Cool Staff** in our 73-person telemarketing department? And if we do, shouldn't we Celebrate their Insanely Cool Greatness? And what better opportunity than the (Dreaded) Memorial Day Picnic? So you cobble together a little band of “powerless”-but-determined revolutionaries. You throw heart and soul into **The Picnic**. You find some entertainers on the cheap. And ... discover untapped entertainment skills among staff. (Turns out there's one part-timer who stars in a local mime troop.) Friends of friends provide other resources. People think you're insane, but for a period of two months you let your “real work” slip. But ... WOW ... what a Performance that IGP/Insanely Great Picnic becomes! There's buzz. Serious Buzz. Again: (1) ***WOW***. (2) ***You've done Something Important***. (3) ***Powerless You is on-the-map***. (4) ***It was FUN***. (5) ***You added Members to your University of Weird***. (6) ***You gained the Unstinting Respect of 73 folks in the under-appreciated-but-vitally-important telemarketing department***.

Or ...

Or: How do we look at this assignment? Is it: Wrestle the Damn Safety Manual into line with the ridiculous new OSHA Regs? Or: ***A Stealth Opportunity to address the All-Important War for Talent via a thoroughgoing review of how safety and environmental issues contribute to making this a Great Place to Work?*** Again. Nobody wants the job. (To put it mildly.) And it all boils down to ... as every

damn thing in the world does ... **A**ttitude. Is it a go-through-the-motions, get-the-job-out-of-the-way sort of thing? Or is it ... as suggested above ... an Incredible Opportunity to make a Major Contribution to the Great & Universal War for Talent? I think that's a no-brainer. What about you?

Or ...

One more either/or. Is it: Fix these Bloody Customer Problems that have cropped up with the new 2783B machine? Or: ***A chance to work with a hotshot, young division general manager on using Internet/Internet Speed to revisit the entire process of how we get customer input – before and during the fact – into the heart of the Product Design Process?***

(“Powerless”) You are getting the drift by now. I presume. Is it a throwaway task to be gotten out of the way. Or is it a Great Volunteer Opportunity ... to use a “trivial” problem as a Stealth Opportunity to address a Great Cultural Issue ... which Strategically affects the organization?

Boil it all down, and it’s what I call **Reframers’ Rules**. There are three:

Rule #1: Never accept an assignment as given! (Please.) In short, only idiots accept assignments as given! Those who will change the world (in the smallest of ways, even) twist any assignment until it can be turned into a Seriously Cool Project.

Rule #2: You are never so powerful as when you’re “powerless”! Hint: I REALLY BELIEVE THIS. When are you “powerless”? When everybody is watching! Everybody views you through an electron microscope. But when you’re Officially Powerless ... you can dig into an assignment ... virtually unobserved ... and Raise Hell at will. (Hey, it was my approach to the research at McKinsey & Co. that led to *In Search of Excellence* ... whose offspring now constitute 50% of the Firm’s business. My secret ... and stroke of fortune: NOBODY GAVE A SHIT. Hence, I could do pretty much as I pleased ... recruit whatever Junior Freaks I could find. I did. One of my Junior Freaks became ... Managing Partner of the whole shebang.)

Rule #3: Every “small” project contains the entire enterprise DNA! Perhaps this is the “real” secret. You don’t need a Big Project to attack Big Opportunities. On the face of it, it’s “just” the “trivial” Memorial Day Picnic. Or is it? I’d suggest that the way we respond to that picnic is a perfect photo of the degree to which we give a damn (or don’t) about our staff! Likewise, the OSHA Manual update provides an opportunity to deal with the Entire Context in which our Precious People work. And those “little” new product problems are a Perfect Window on the way we value Customers (or don’t!).

No bull redux, every small project is a Perfectly Transparent Window on the Soul of the Corporation (Agency). A far better window than “official policy.”

(In that last sentence I used the word “Agency.” Government people in particular tell me All of the Many Reasons that they Can’t Do Any of This – the stuff I suggest. To which I say: Bull! I’ve worked in the government, several assignments spanning almost a decade. Things Can Be Done. And the secret ... I think ... Fervently Believe is more like it ... is ... F2F/K2K/1@T/R.F!A.)

3. The Tool: Prototyping Mania!

Yikes! First I make the audacious (outrageous?!) assertion that the “4F” approach is the *only* way to get things done if you’re not one of the Big Bosses. Then I nonchalantly assert that Crappy Jobs Are the Best Jobs. (Yikes II.) And: Now I declare that there is a tool ... that is in fact ... **The Tool**. The one ... **and only(!?)** ... tool worth talking about.

Ready. Fire! Aim. Try something. Anything. Now. Or: *Become a Rapid Prototyping Maniac*. The “try” *is* the prototype. Better yet: the “Rapid” Prototype.

I contend that we have a “No.1” Student of Innovation. Namely, Michael Schrage. His tastes are eclectic. Yet he has spent most of the last seven or eight years on the least likely (most would have said) topic imaginable ... an encompassing study of prototyping per se. And he claims, at the end of this Herculean effort, that “it” is the chief discriminator between those who innovate effectively ... and those who don’t. “*Effective prototyping*,” Schrage wrote at one point, “*may be the most valuable core competence an innovative organization can hope to have.*”

He points to Sony, and references an interview with former Sony chairman Norio Ohga. Ohga claimed that prototyping is an enormous part of Sony’s incredible record of new product development. Moreover, Mr. Ohga baldly asserted that what Sony calls the Mean Time To Prototype ... elapsed time between the glimmer of a new idea and some kind of a quarter-baked test ... is a scant ... **5 DAYS**.

Holy smoke!

Schrage pressed this study to the limits in his brilliant book, *Serious Play*, which in a foreword I called the “best book on innovation I’ve ever read.” (Hint: I meant it.) “*You can’t be a serious innovator*,” Schrage begins, “*unless you are willing and able to play. ‘Serious play’ is not an oxymoron; it is the essence of innovation.*”

And the essence, I contend, of our subject here: Boss-Free Implementation of STM/Stuff That Matters. We find that First Freaky Friend (see above). She offers us a playground. What must we do: **Play. Prototype. Rapidly.**

The logic is utterly simple ... *and* utterly compelling. As Schrage observes, innovation *is* the reaction to the prototype. We get an idea. It’s just that, an idea. We conjure up a few first steps. We run a (very) quick and (very) dirty test. That’s great. But we still really haven’t done anything. The “doing” (the innovating) consists of sitting down with our colleagues, after that first hair-brained test, and saying: WHAT HAPPENED? WHAT CAN WE LEARN? WHAT DO WE DO DIFFERENTLY NEXT TIME? And then we get on with that “next time” ... Exceedingly Rapidly.

Storytelling is the essence of leadership, leadership guru Howard Gardner insists. The best leaders are the best storytellers ... from Churchill to Roosevelt to Gandhi. A prototype has this same attribute. “Good prototypes have ‘charisma,’ ” Schrage says. “They create narratives and tell stories.” I love that:

Great Prototype = Cool-Compelling Story!

Years (and years) ago – in my Ph.D. dissertation at Stanford – I coined another term for what I now call Rapid Prototyping. (Or Serious Play, per Schrage.) I called “it” ... the “**Small Win.**” That is, the “little” “demo” that adds to the material track record, adds to our credibility. Consider it this way: **Small Win = BIG WIN = Demo = Realism = Track Record = Attractant/Catalyst.**

Yes, that “little test”/**S**mall **W**in that shows that this idea isn’t quite so flaky at all – and that it *does perhaps* equate to the Birth of the Cool – is one **V**ery **B**ig **D**eal.

“This” is all about “wins.” But a quick loss is a win as well! (No baloney. No rose-colored glasses.) It’s that old Edison idea, in which he said that he hadn’t made one failure in the process of inventing the incandescent lamp. Sure, it took some 9,000 experiments. But each of the first 8,999 was a clear victory ... a brilliant demo of something that didn’t work. A high-tech executive who attended a seminar of mine must be from the Edisonian school. He said his philosophy is simple:

Fail. Forward. Fast.

Love that!

IDEO founder and design & innovation uber-guru, David Kelley, gives it a twist: **Fail faster. Succeed sooner.** Again, I love it.

We’re junior. We’re powerless. No Vice President’s chevrons on our sleeves. We’ve got an idea. We’ve got that friend. Now we need ... posthaste ... a Track Record. A Track Record consists of Events. That signal Progress. Or ... for me (& Mr. Schrage & Mr. Kelley) ... Seriously Cool Rapid Prototypes ... which Succeed or Fail ... but which have Charisma (are Cool) ... and from which we reap Quick Learning ... and generate Growing Excitement & Credibility.

Prototyping. It’s not a “test.” Again, to Schrage & Kelley & Peters & Sony’s Ohga it is a Way of Life. I think of it, in fact, as a dance ... Break Dancing. Think of: **Creating the Rhythm of Prototyping.**

VFCJ. K2K. Ready. Fire! Aim. NOW.

4. The Soft Stuff #1: It's All About Politics!

I wrote an entire book on what we call WOW! Projects. (*The Project50*.) I'm rather happy with the book ... and ecstatic about one piece of it. I think I know the "project management" literature ... and I'm quite sure that my book is an original on one dimension. That is, it is the only project management book with a chapter ... and in this case one of only four chapters ... on the topic of:

SALES!

Getting things done ... junior staffer in purchasing or finance ... or President of the United States of America ... is mostly a matter of "selling." Getting folks inflamed about your ideas. Getting them to sign on.

[And ... literally ... nothing gets my dander up more than the "professional" staffer who looks with disdain and says (or implies), "I'm a skilled technician. I don't do politics. I'm not some door-to-door Avon salesperson." HISS!!]

All this is why, in our training on creating WOW! Projects, we used an unusual text before my book was available. In an age where anything that happened before 1999 is considered old-fashioned and thence suspect, we continue to slavishly adhere to the dictums of a 30-year-old book. Written by a Very Tough civil rights and union organizing militant. He was Saul Alinsky. The book: *Rules for Radicals*. The (simple/hard) message: Getting Things Done that fly in the face of Conventional Wisdom (STM/Stuff That Matters) is a matter of ... **Community Organizing.**

You're trying to bring about a change in a business process in, say, Finance. Fact: Every business process has "customers." Users in other departments and divisions who will benefit from that new financial reporting method. (Or feel put upon by it.) They are Customers. (Happy. Or sad.) They are Clients. No matter how Cool the idea and no matter how Charismatic the rapid prototypes, those Clients need to become Enthusiasts ... *if* you are to have a significant success. And in fact – back to the major point of this essay – if you can garner Passionate Grass Roots Support (for that new reporting method, say) ... then you've taken a Giant Step toward what we earlier called "surrounding the bastards." (The bastards being the Big Bosses ... Defenders of the Old Way of Doing Things.)

You may be a technical virtuoso. (That's why you came up with this Absurdly Insanely Cool Idea in the first place.) But now it's time to sharpen your "soft" skills. As Bob Waterman and I said 20 years ago in *In Search of Excellence* ... SOFT IS HARD. (And: "HARD" IS "SOFT.") That is, the truly "hard" stuff – the essence of getting things done – is, in the end, all about ... Relationships ... Trust ... Credibility. Um, purposeful & planned salesmanship. DAY & NIGHT. 'Til our piratical Grass Roots Movement supplants the current "Way We Do Things Around Here."

Message: You must master the Rules of Politics. E.g.: Years ago, mega sports agent Mark McCormack wrote *What They Don't Teach You at Harvard Business School*. He proffered a

bushel of good tips. But one stuck in my mind. (I had practiced it with great effect ... as a “powerless” person ... in the past.) The point: Travel 5,000 miles for a five-minute meeting ... if it’s essential to show your face to get the deal done. **“Eighty percent of success,”** Woody Allen said long ago, **“is showing up.”** Mark’s right. Woody’s right.

And/but: When you “show up” ... you must engage.

Engagement. Connection. Harvard professor Sara Lawrence-Lightfoot wrote an utterly magnificent book ... with a one-word title. The word and title: **Respect.** The essential idea: **“It was much later 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.”**

Does that give you goose bumps? (I still get ’em, and I’ve read the above 25 times.)

A pal of mine is learning to play the cello. He attended the World Cello Congress in 2000. At the Congress, he attended a Master Class presented by Yo-Yo Ma. He reported Ma’s wondrous remark: “All of you here know all the notes. Your technical skill is high. *But can you make them believe you? Can you play [and convey] ... love itself? Despair?*”

Who was it? Oh, who was it? Alas, I have lost the identity of the author of the following quote. But I bless him/her in absentia. The quote:

“Only Connect.”

It’s a hell of a lesson ... for neophyte cello players ... and neophyte corporate staffers attempting Boss-Free Implementation of Stuff That Matters.

5. The Process: Summary.

In summary:

Get a zany idea.

Shop it with a couple of good pals.

Polish it a little. (Quickly.)

Shop it a little more, polish it a little more.

Surface (using your network) a list of (operational) folks who might be interested in playing.

Call, visit and choose a couple of Prime Round #1 Prospects.

Settle on the First One.
Engage her. (She must “own” “it”!)
Concoct a rough – quick and dirty – plan and an initial Quick Prototyping Schedule.
Move forward. NOW. (Ready. Fire! Aim.)
Get some Quick Learning (“small losses”) under your belt, and score some “small wins.” Adjust & Adjust & Adjust. Fast.
Keep on recruiting.
Get your Playmate/Customer #1 to infect/recruit a couple of her buddies for Round #2 tests. (Meanwhile have Test Customer #1 roll out the program within her bailiwick.)
Get going with Round #2 prototypes.
Log a few more Small Wins. (And, of course, Cool Small Losses.) Adjust & Adjust & Adjust. (Remember: Innovation = Reaction to the Prototype.)
Start conscious, but low key “buzz building.” (Let “the word” of successful tests/prototypes/small wins trickle out.)
Have the Happy Testers put on a demo for, say, a couple of “cool” regional bosses.
Etc.
Etc.
Have the growing Network of Cool Converts initiate a Major Proposal “up the line.”
Etc.
Etc.
Keep on selling! Forever!

Oddly, this idea also works for bosses. The new boss comes in, and finds the establishment tightly arrayed against his “cool” ideas. He needs help. And the boss (call him department head of a 200-person IS outfit) probably isn’t going to get that initial enthusiastic boost from the Deputies he inherited. (For starters, they’re pissed that they didn’t “inherit” the top job.) A/The secret ... per me and the logic of this section: Dip down ... find some Passionate Pirates who are already at work on some “cool” stuff ... but are unrecognized (perhaps unloved) by the current establishment. In summary:

Chat up a cross-section of the organization.
Develop a tentative list of Pioneers/Skunks/Dissatisfied Pirates.
Hang out with those Pioneers/Skunks/Dissatisfied Pirates, discover their list of “cool things I’ve long wanted to do.” Encourage them to “Do it! Now!”
Begin to showcase the developing results brought forth by these Pioneers/Skunks/Dissatisfied Pirates. Give them, in effect, your Public Stamp of Vigorous Approval. (“This is what the New World Order looks like.”)
Dig deep ... and promote one of those Super Pioneers/Skunks/Dissatisfied Pirates two or three levels ... to near the top of the Emerging New Establishment.
Incorporate the Passionate Pioneers’/Skunks’/Dissatisfied Pirates’ work into your vision statement, your chatter.
Now: Welcome ALL aboard! (“You’re either on the New-Cool Bus ... or you’re not.”)

Ah, yes, sometimes it isn't even enough to be a Corporate Vice President in a giant outfit. I talked to one of the dozen most senior people in a Huge Firm a while back. She was trying to push the culture in a more vigorous direction. We tried applying some of the ideas above. Here's what we came up with:

Basic idea: Dig the Passionate Pirates & Pioneers out of the woodwork ... and give them an opportunity (showcase) to display their Cool Stuff in a legitimate forum.

Use the principals of "Event Marketing." Hold an Idea Fair/Internal "Trade Show"/Bragfest. Encourage one and all – junior and senior – to bring their New Look "Braggable" Projects to be shown off and discussed.

Another angle: Hold a Visiting Lecturer Seminar Series. But here's the trick: Don't use people that, say, you normally use in your training activities and to entertain the bigwigs at their Palm Beach "retreats." Bring in Freaks! "Risky" people with new points of view. (Signal that "Cool & Risky Ideas and their Piratical Proponents are Welcome around here.") Perhaps, around each of these seminars, build intranet-/Internet-based "Neighborhoods of Interest." (Goal, again: It's Community Organizing, Stupid!)

Induce more people out of the closet. Establish a "Play Fund," around one or two topics of importance. The fund might consist of a few hundred thousand dollars, perhaps a couple of million bucks. (It's a big company.) The idea: Establish an Innovations Grant Process ... which encourages interesting (and often "powerless") people to readily apply for modest-sized grants to Quickly Try Cool Stuff. Make the application process easy. Offer relatively short time frames to cobble together demos (Piratical Playful Prototypes) that will begin to test the idea and attract others to support it. (When he was running a big piece of American Express, now-IBM CEO Lou Gerstner did precisely this to establish an extraordinarily valuable foothold in artificial intelligence software.)

And more: Provide "scholarships" for the relatively powerless best & brightest & coolest. They might amount to a two-months-off-with-pay opportunity to go Hang Out with an Insanely Cool Customer ... and work on a Far Out Project concocted by the customer and our sabbating person. Or, more generally, based on some kind of a Cool Contest, provide Sabbatical Funds for one-month Wacky Excursions.

Etc.

Etc.

The bottom line on all this, we decided:

Don't try to "change the culture."

Create "flypaper" which attracts mavericks and pirates.

Let the New Culture (which is lurking around you!) find you.

Publicize, at the appropriate moment, the New Hall of Fame. Help the New Culture Adherents create a Vibrant Community.

6. The (Really) Soft Stuff #2: **You Must ... BE IN LOVE!**

I'm in love. With a quote. From management guru and renowned conductor of the Boston Philharmonic, Ben Zander. His take on life (including conducting and guring):

“I am a dispenser of enthusiasm.”

As I said, I love it. I'm not urging a particular management style. E.g., loud. Quiet is fine. (Or loud. Loud is fine, too.) But it's all about – quiet or loud – wearing your passion and enthusiasm on your sleeve. Enthusiasm begets enthusiasm! It's as simple as that. As difficult as that. As profound as that.

Our leading business strategist, Gary Hamel, declaims on reinventing a company. Secret #1: “Create a cause, not a business.” Love that one, too. As I've said throughout this essay, I don't suggest that you “dispense your enthusiasm” or publicize your “cause” by immediately taking your Very Cool (and totally untested!) Idea up the chain of command. But sideways? Amen. Downward? Amen. Seek out Fellow Passionate Pioneers & Pirates & Kooks & Freaks ... who want to play ... and who will offer you a playpen.

Then, PLAY. And INFECT OTHERS.

And that's my story. My entire story. I say again (undoubtedly to still great quantities of disbelief): I am certain of very little. I am certain of this. It's the only way to go.

F2F/K2K/1@T/R.F!A.

Are you game? Or will you settle for the following epitaph:

Joe T. Jones
1942 - 2002
HE WOULD'VE DONE SOME
REALLY COOL STUFF
BUT
HIS BOSS WOULDN'T LET HIM!

The Appendix that follows is another, more generic look at Implementation (and Power).

Appendix: the POWER+IMPLEMENTATION50

1. Limit your priorities to two or three. Practice “strategic rudeness.” IT’S FOCUS, STUPID. “I used to have a rule for myself that at any point I wanted to have in mind – as it so happens, also in writing, on a little card I carried around with me – the three big things I was trying to get done. Three. Not two. Not four. Not five. Not ten. Three.” – Richard Haass, *The Power to Persuade*. “It’s easy to decide what you’re going to do. The hard thing is deciding what you’re not going to do.” – Michael Dell.
2. Be beholden to no one. SCROUNGE. LEARN TO BE A BOOTSTRAPPER. LIVE OFF THE LAND. “The less you ask for the more you can do. Naysayers can’t kill a project they don’t fund.” – John Patrick, IBM electronic commerce champion.
3. YOU CAN GET STARTED ... NOW! “We all have space. Start with things within your purview.” – Bob Knowling, former EVP, USWest.
4. All you need is [a little] love. FIND ONE FRIEND. To get going with “it,” find one ally. Test a rough version of your idea with her/him. Collect early allies with care ... and one-at-a-time. Build “out” from that little nucleus of supporters. Corollary: Life is too short to waste precious time – and emotional energy – fighting foes. *Build your support base ... the hell with your adversaries!*
5. Volunteer for the crappy little job, that no one wants ... that gives you a chance to run your own show and stand out ... AND DO SOMETHING. *Hint: There is no task so little or crappy that it can’t be used as the thin end of the wedge relative to a big/higher-impact issue.*
6. TEST. TEST. TEST. TEST. Do it, fix it, try it. – *In Search of Excellence*. Break the project down. CHUNK IT. *Do a quick and dirty prototype ... in the next five working days.* (No kidding. It can be done!) (Remember: The essence of the scientific method is ... experimentation.) (He/she who experiments the mostest, the fastest ... wins!)
7. Be the summarizer. WRITE THE AGENDA. WRITE THE MINUTES. The power to “agendize” + “summarize” is the power to shape history. Literally. P.S.: *Anything – no matter how complex – can be effectively summarized on one page!*
8. IT’S HACKNEYED ... BUT IT’S TRUE. Soooooooooooooo ... LISTEN UP: “Asking for permission is asking to be told no.” – Bob Knowling, former EVP, USWest. Or: The naval commander-in-chief hoisted Signal No.39. *Retreat*. One commander disobeyed. “You know, Foley,” said Lord Horatio Nelson in a line taught every schoolchild in Britain, “I have only one eye, and I have a right to be blind sometimes.” At that point, amidst the battle of Copenhagen, Nelson raised his spyglass to his blind right eye: “I really do not see the signal.” (Hint: Bosses ... teach Creative Disobedience ... and the world just may become your oyster.)
9. FLY 3,000 MILES FOR [a one-hour] LUNCH. (This idea is swiped, shamelessly, from super sports agent Mark McCormack.) It may well be a “virtual world” ... but face-to-face counts

... *BIG TIME*. Nothing else so clearly demonstrates your seriousness. “A body can pretend to care, but they can’t pretend to be there.” – Texas Bix Bender.

10. Don’t forget to ask your question! I.e.: CLOSE THE “SALE.” After months of trying, you finally get that crucial meeting. You walk out 30 minutes later. But ... you fudged; you didn’t directly ask for what you wanted. *Tragic*. (And common as dirt.)
11. *You must care*. PEOPLE CAN SMELL A PHONY FROM A THOUSAND MILES AWAY. “What creates trust, in the end, is the leader’s manifest respect for the followers.” – John Kotter, *Leading Change*.
12. TELL THE TRUTH. People can handle lots of shit. But bridle at bullshit. Hint: *Errors of omission are actually worse than errors of commission; it’s the “communication” of half-truths that convict you of condescension ... or worse*.
13. WEAR YOUR PASSION ON YOUR SLEEVE. People sign up to follow passionate leaders. Passion about a project attracts followers. Passion – alone – keeps the leader motivated when the yogurt hits the fan. (It does.) Etc.
- 13a. But don’t forget the systems! Passion rules. Systems insure sustainability.
14. DON’T FORGET YOUR “THANK YOU” NOTES! “*Thank you*” = *Most powerful “tool” in the leader’s arsenal*. (Again: assuming it’s genuine.) “The deepest human need is the need to be appreciated.” – William James. “If you don’t have time for the ‘little things,’ you’ve given your life away.” – Marjorie Blanchard.
15. BECOME THE “DONUT DOYEN.” The queen [king] of celebrations wins! Become the one who buys the box of donuts/muffins ... to celebrate the “little” milestone passed yesterday. As usual: It’s an “attitude thing.”
16. *Give everyone credit!* The “little” person who flew the proposal from London to Spain – on a moment’s notice, while missing his kid’s pageant – is as big a hero as the “big guy” in creative. OKAY?
17. Praise in public. Criticize in private. CHEWING PEOPLE OUT IN PUBLIC IS CHICKENSHIT. PERIOD. As one organizational development guru put it: *There’s only one rule: Don’t belittle!* Amen.
18. MAKE IT FUN! Fun is not a four-letter word. Energetic/effective groups are caught up in their thing. “Caught up” = Workplaces that ring with laughter/that are marked by constant celebrations/that literally vibrate with good feelings and camaraderie about the project and one’s peers.
19. *One eye ... two ears*. Again it’s hackneyed ... but no less true as a result. GOOD LEADERS = GOOD LISTENERS. Stephen Covey preaches the Gospel of “empathetic listening.” It is Holy Writ! It’s attitude ... and a bunch of tricks to help you along. (E.g.: Count “one, two, three, four” after the phone rings before you pick it up ... to compose yourself. Or: Count “one, two” after the last person finishes talking before you jump in. Easier to say than do!)

20. Become a “notebook freak.” GREAT IMPLEMENTERS = GREAT OBSERVERS = GREAT NOTE TAKERS. Keep a constant eye on the good, the very good, the awesome, the “ho-hum” [perhaps the worst of all], and the ugly ... in everyday life. To observe [well] is to “tune-in” to the little – more than big – stuff going on in everyday life that has a message for our cherished project in HR, wherever.
21. Boss: YOU ARE A V.C./venture capitalist. Act accordingly! Your job is to sort through project proposals ... and bet on the best ones ... bet on the “WOW-est” would-be projects, the most passionate project champions. “V.C.s” create an exciting portfolio of projects and people. They “think talent.” They “think WOW.” And you?
22. PICK YOUR FIGHTS. It’s good to lose some. (And keep your values intact.) And it’s good to avoid some. (And, mostly, avoid making unnecessary enemies.) The real point: *It’s all about art – that is, picking the fights to pick, the ones to avoid.*
23. *Tomorrow is another day.* Effective implementers are in love with their projects. They are not rational. But ... they also understand that – if they seek real change – the system is stacked against them. That is ... they will take far more than their share of lumps. Soooooo ... they learn to grit their teeth ... and get a good night’s sleep ... and get on with the next act ... with as few hard feelings as possible. (*The research evidence is clear: Effective implementers are [unreasonably] sunny optimists.*) (Hint: Staff your team with sunny folk if you can. Weed out sourpusses.)
24. *Master-Clearer-of-Apparently-Minor-Hurdles.* IT LOOKS LIKE A SMALL BARRIER TO YOU. TO “THEM” IT’S EVEREST WITHOUT OXYGEN. Good chiefs have a keen eye on the little stuff that ain’t to the troops – literally, the food for the Army at war. The great boss dives in/down to find a “little workspace” for the project team – which would take them forever on their own.
25. Rolodex fanatic. IT’S RELATIONSHIPS – quantity and quality – STUPID! *Great implementers are great “collectors of people.”* It’s whom you know – how many/how well – not what you know. That’s an exaggeration. And it’s not. *Power = Rolodex Power.* Relationships – HOW MANY, HOW DEEP – is a b-i-g issue ... no matter how you cut it. As some say, not entirely in jest: HE/SHE WHO HAS THE FATTEST ROLODEX WINS.
26. “Talk good.” JOIN TOASTMASTERS. “*Everyone lives by selling something.*” –Robert Louis Stevenson. All implementers are “in sales.” PERIOD. One [b-i-g] aspect of sales: making a terrific 2-minute presentation. Thence ... W-O-R-K O-N I-T.
27. Hang out with those who know the score. Years ago, I discovered that Hewlett-Packard called this “managing by wandering around”/MBWA. The big idea: *Go to where the action is – at unexpected times – and learn the real score!*
28. Dissect-a-transaction. *To get to the heart of the/most any matter, take a single transaction [relative to a key process] ... and tear it apart limb by limb.* THE HABIT OF DIGGING IN V-E-R-Y DEEP AROUND A SEEMINGLY TRIVIAL EVENT WILL SERVE YOU ASTONISHINGLY WELL IN UNDERSTANDING THE MOST COMPLEX ISSUES.

29. “Carpenters bend wood. Fletchers bend arrows. *Wise men fashion themselves.*” – Buddha. Politics-is-life ... but winners – scars notwithstanding – remain true to themselves. YOU GOTTA STAND FOR *S-O-M-E-T-H-I-N-G* IF YOU WANNA MAKE A [lasting] DIFFERENCE.
30. RENEW YOURSELF. Life – the implementer’s life – is about battles [anything important is resisted like the plague by the establishment]. You can get v-e-r-y tired. *Thence ... figuring out how to refresh yourself is of the utmost “strategic” importance.* Soooooooooo ... you’ve got to figure out how to shut down from time to time. Corollary: Stoke yourself by creating a great “personal university.” (That term, courtesy Warren Bennis.) You will be as catholic in your taste as your advisors are in theirs. CONTINUALLY USE YOUR CONTACTS – many from offbeat places – TO STRETCH/INVIGORATE YOU.
31. Surround yourself with intriguing folks! DIVERSITY REALLY DOES MAKE THE [creative] WORLD GO ’ROUND. Want interesting discussions/debates? Mix folks of the most outrageously different backgrounds. It really is almost that simple.
32. Re 30 above: Message ... EFFECTIVE IMPLEMENTERS – like 3rd grade teachers – ARE IN THE TALENT-DEVELOPMENT BUSINESS. PERIOD. Management, ’tis said [accurately], is about “getting things done through others.” Soooooo management is, therefore, all about talent development. RIGHT? Sooooo: *Is talent development your no-baloney top priority?*
33. Rules of thumb: EFFECTIVE IMPLEMENTERS TRACK [absolutely] NO MORE THAN THREE OR FOUR KEY/LEAD VARIABLES/NUMBERS – DAILY + RELIGIOUSLY – THAT GIVE THEM A REAL HANDLE ON WHAT’S UP ... AND WHAT’S NOT.
34. THE HUMBLE TIME-LINE AIN’T. The time-line is the most important “tool” in the leader’s kit. “Hot” software? Forget it ... mostly. *The “living” time-line document – posted prominently on butcher paper – becomes the effective leader/project manager’s Bible.*
35. IT’S GOTTA ADD UP. Regardless of the program type, it’s got to deliver its brand of bacon – \$\$\$\$\$, increased church attendance, whatever. Great implementers are dreamers who can pass on a contagion for their idea ... but they also know deadlines + budgets. *Cold.*
36. POLITICS IS LIFE. *All organizations with more than two people are “political.” Get used to it.* I.e.: Understand that in order to “get things done” ... in the real world ... you’ve gotta take lots of competing views into account. And: You must tack and jibe with the best of them ... while not gutting the essence of the/your dream.
- 36a. Power is “OK stuff.” Power is not a four-letter word. Management = Getting things done through people. (It’s the Webster’s definition.) A-n-d: Whenever more than one person is involved, power politics is inevitably present. That is: Different folks come from different places. (That’s why we hired them in the first place.) Soooooo ... differing points of view must be thoughtfully considered/accomodated. That is life. (At least ... if you wanna lead anything.)

49. MAKE THE CALL N-O-W. SOLVE THE PROBLEM BEFORE IT FESTERS. Most b-i-g problems could have been headed off at some [early] point by a 5-minute, conciliatory phone call. So ... make that call!

50. MAKE EACH DAY A MASTERPIECE – that’s the advice of John Wooden. (The basketball guy.) I don’t think it’s pie in the sky. Or corny. Effective implementation is about *embracing* the hurdy-gurdy of life itself. I.e.: ENJOY!

