

## **Highlights from ... The Little BIG Things: 163 Ways to Pursue Excellence**

*This is the era of short attention spans. And short business books. And yet The Little BIG Things came in at 538 pages—albeit there were 163 items, averaging about 3 pages each, and additional space consumed by oversized type used for emphasis (hey, that's what I do). I wouldn't cut it by a page—I didn't. Nonetheless, in the interest of getting connected with as many people as possible, I've produced this "Highlights" pdf which captures the "BIG idea" in each of these "little ideas." Missing are (1) the nuances and (2) 90 percent of the "How to's" and the rationale for those "How to's." Eliminating the subtleties and cutting the action part is cutting the heart out of the book—nonetheless, I hope you will be titillated by what follows and moved, perhaps, to purchase the whole shebang.—Tom Peters, July 2010, West Tinmouth VT*

### **Epigraph**

*"Courtesies of a small and trivial character  
are the ones which strike deepest in the  
grateful and appreciating heart."*

—Henry Clay, American Statesman (1777-1852)

### **Introduction**

One executive who was a stalwart admirer of *In Search of Excellence* called that book's innards "a blinding flash of the obvious." Indeed, it focused on people, customers, action-over-analysis-paralysis and values—basics all too frequently short-changed in a world of enterprise dominated by business-school thinking and consultants bent upon creating complex business strategies (that invariably came a cropper upon attempted implementation).

*The Little BIG Things* might well be called "more of the obvious." It's based on 40+ years living and working in and observing organizations, and five years of Blogging and the "success tips" posted during that time that re-emphasized, mostly, those basic ideas—little big things. Still ignored—and the absence of which are at the root of organizational failures, personal pratfalls and, indeed, the Great Recession of 2007++.

## "LITTLE"

**1. It's All About the Restrooms!** A sparkling restroom with family photos in a small restaurant in Gill MA shouts "*We care.*" (Hey, I made this the #1 item in my book for a good reason!) To enshrine this attitude in the organization I suggest in part, tongue only half in cheek, a job titled, perhaps: "Little Things Lunatic," "Tiny Touch Maniac-in-Chief," or "Wizard-of-Wee."

The devil—and a culture that demands EXCELLENCE—really is in the details!

**2. "Small Stuff" Matters. A Lot!** For you or me, the recorded phone message literally sets the stage. A vast array of "small stuff" like this adds up to strategic distinction—or, clearly, not. Moreover, working on "the small stuff" is doable, right now, with no muss or fuss or political infighting or position of formal power.

**3. Flower Power!** An unlimited flowers budget, regardless of the economic context, may yield the highest "ROI"/Return On Investment imaginable. Flowers transform spaces and attitudes!

My advice: Go berserk ....

**4. Master the Fine Art of ... Nudgerly!** Huge multipliers emanating from "nudges" lie in wait all around us:

- Wal\*Mart increases shopping cart size—and sales of big items (like microwave ovens) go up ... 50 percent!
- Use a round table instead of a square table—and the percentage of people contributing to a conversation leaps up!
- If the serving plate is more than 6.5 feet from the dining room table, the number of "seconds" goes down 63 percent, compared with leaving the serving plates on the table.
- Want to make a program "strategic"? Put it at the top of *every* agenda. Make asking about "it" your *first* question in *every* conversation. Put the person in charge in an office next to the Big Boss.
- Frito-Lay adds new bag sizes, suffers no cannibalization of current offerings, and ends up creating totally new (and enormous) markets—racking up, eventually, billions in revenues.
- Get rid of wastebaskets under desks—recycling leaps up.
- Simply put hand-sanitizer dispensers all over a dorm, with no signs asking students to use them—and the number of sick days and missed classes per student falls 20 percent. (University of Colorado/Boulder).
- "Broken windows": Clean up trash, fix broken windows, stop miscreants for trivial offenses such as loitering or open alcohol containers—and increase neighborhood safety dramatically. (Using this approach, Chief Bratton and Mayor Giuliani had spectacular success on a pretty big stage—New York City.)

What's called for is a belief that such multipliers abound—and a determination to become a "professional nudgist." "Get it right the first time"? Rarely. Relentlessly experiment your way to frequent success? That's the ticket.

## EXCELLENCE

### 5. If Not Excellence, What? If Not Excellence Now, When?

*"Strive for excellence. Ignore success."*— Professional driver Bill Young

"Excellence can be obtained if you:

" ... care more *than others think is wise*;

" ... risk more *than others think is safe*;

" ... dream more *than others think is practical*;

" ... expect more *than others think is possible*."

—K. Sriram @ tompeters.com:

*"A minute. You 'achieve' Excellence by promising yourself right now that you'll never again knowingly do anything that's not Excellent—regardless of any pressure to do otherwise by any boss or situation."* —Tom Watson, IBM, approximate words, on how long it takes to achieve Excellence

**6. Whither Excellence? Or: Asleep at the Wheel.** One of our best business analysts, James B. Stewart, offered this "simple" commentary on the staggering decline of General Motors (in the June 3, 2009, *Wall Street Journal*): "It has been long in coming, this slow death of what was once the greatest and biggest corporation in the world. The myriad causes of its demise have been thoroughly chronicled, but to my mind one stands out: The custodians of GM simply gave up trying to build the best cars in the world. *To accommodate a host of competing interests, from shareholders to bondholders to labor, they repeatedly compromised on excellence.* Once sacrificed, that reputation has proved impossible to recapture. ... Can anyone say GM builds the best cars in any category?"

And you?

*Has the word "EXCELLENCE" per se been used as a basis for evaluating your actions? Could you personally call the outcome of each meeting or the nature of the milestone/s achieved "EXCELLENT"?*

Key idea: The "Excellence Standard" is *not* about Grand Outcomes. In Zen-like terms, all we have is today. If the day's work cannot be assessed as Excellent, then the oceanic overall goal of Excellence has not been advanced. *Period.*

**7. "Quality": You'll Know It When You See It.** Six Sigma is "good stuff"—great stuff. No doubt whatsoever about it. From a more encompassing standpoint, the quality "movement" added billions upon billions of dollars to America's bottom line. Only ... Whoops! Better car quality—which we surely got from GM and Ford—was supposed to have saved the U.S. automotive industry from the Japanese automotive onslaught.

Am I suggesting you scrap quality programs? Hardly! But "quality," as it's commonly understood, is Six Sigma-ish and readily measured. But there's more to it. Much more. I believe that "quality," like "Excellence," is one of those ... "I'll know it when I see it" ... words. So quantify quality all you want (please do!) ... but don't forget that quality is equally—nay, primarily—determined by something that is elusive, mysterious, indefinable. *And ... in the eye of the beholder.*

Bottom line: Give the "soft side" of quality the respect it deserves!

## 8. Excellence Is ...

Excellence is the best defense.  
Excellence is the best offense.  
Excellence is the answer in good times.  
Excellence is the answer in tough times.  
(Excellence is *the* answer in tough times.)  
Excellence is about the big things.  
Excellence is about the little things.  
Excellence is a relationship.  
Excellence is a philosophy.  
Excellence is an aspiration.  
Excellence is immoderate.  
Excellence is a pragmatic standard.  
Excellence is execution.  
Excellence is selfish.  
Excellence is selfless.  
Excellence is what keeps you awake.  
Excellence is what lets you sleep well.  
Excellence is a moving target.  
Excellence is that which ... knows no bounds.

*EXCELLENCE. Always.  
If not EXCELLENCE, what?  
If not EXCELLENCE now, when?*

*EXCELLENCE is not an "aspiration."  
EXCELLENCE is the next five minutes.*

## **SPECIAL SECTION: Guru Gaffes**

The "gurus"—like me—tend to focus almost exclusively on big companies, public companies, sexy industries, superstar CEOs. Yet "what makes the world go 'round" are small private enterprises, doing mostly unsexy stuff. What can we do to assist them? There are another 25 or so "guru gaffes" explored in this special section of the book; the first five are included here:

Guru Focus (GF): Big companies and attendant first-order, industry-redefining strategic issues.  
Real World (RW): *Most of us, still, in 2010 don't work for Big Companies; we labor in "SMEs," Small and Medium-sized Enterprises. (Or the likes of government agencies.) And if we are in a big company or agency, most of our focus is the 17-person department in which we labor*

GF: Public corporations.

RW: *Most of us work in privately owned companies. (Or in those government agencies.)*

GF: Cool industries.

RW: *Most of us aren't in "Cool" industries, we do pretty ordinary stuff—like my pal, Larry Janesky, who makes a buck, and then another (\$60 million, actually), creating "dry basements," that are free of toxic mold, and can be used as a spare room or for a playroom or storing anything and everything.*

GF: "Excellence" is reserved for GE and GE and GE (maybe Google and Apple, too).

RW: *"Excellence," bar none, is the fabulous, friendly, informative, instantly responsive pharmacy next door that takes on docs and insurance companies with vigor and usually victory. (Gary Drugs on Charles Street in Boston, for me.)*

Etc.

## **CRISIS**

**9. That Which Goeth Up and Up and Up Doth Not Goeth More Up and More Up and More Up Forever and Ever and Ever.** The Great Recession was the byproduct of many factors—collectively the failure of commonsense to counter the bizarre projections of supposedly hyper-smart people. Will it happen again? Of course, just in another form. If we could realize cyclicity is an immutable fact, regardless of measures to prevent it, we'd be a lot better off.

If you/we want answers, we'd do no better than to ingest Vanguard Mutual Fund Group founder John Bogle's amazing book ... *Enough*. Rather than try to provide a clever summary of the book, I'll let the chapter titles do the work for me. Here's a sample:

*"Too Much Cost, Not Enough Value"*

*"Too Much Speculation, Not Enough Investment"*

*"Too Much Complexity, Not Enough Simplicity"*

*"Too Much Counting, Not Enough Trust"*

*"Too Much Business Conduct, Not Enough Professional Conduct"*

*"Too Much Salesmanship, Not Enough Stewardship"*

*"Too Much Focus on Things, Not Enough Focus on Commitment"*

*"Too Many Twenty-first Century Values, Not Enough Eighteenth-Century Values"*

*"Too Much 'Success,' Not Enough Character"*

As to the overarching theme of the book, Mr. Bogle begins with this vignette: "At a party given by a billionaire on Shelter Island, Kurt Vonnegut informs his pal, Joseph Heller, that their host, a hedge fund manager, had made more money in a single day than Heller had earned from his wildly popular novel *Catch-22* over its whole history. Heller responds, 'Yes, but I have something he will never have ...  
*enough.*'"

Enough said.

**10. Good Things (Especially in Bad Times?) Come in Threes.** As the crisis unfolded, the troika of Paulson-Bernanke and Geithner worked together in unconventional ways (friction-free communication, try something quick and if it fails reverse course quickly) which hold important lessons for all crises:

- (1) Concoct an *authoritarian* control group that numbers three. I am anti-authoritarian to the core, but there are rare exceptions to that rule.
- (2) "Over"-communicate. (!!!)
- (3) "Over"-communicate. (!!!)
- (4) *Drop all pretense of formality.*
- (5) Park egos at the door. (*Boot egoists from the inner circle if they don't shape up very quickly.*)
- (6) Ensure that the group is diverse.
- (7) Ensure that each member of the group has a Towering Competence—and is perceived as having such.
- (8) Each member must have widespread credibility.
- (9) Foster a predilection for ... rapid trial and error. First, that creates the perception that "they aren't dilly-dallyin'"—motion matters. Second, the cure is anything but sure—so one must get moving if for no other reason than to see what happens when the system is perturbed. Third, there must be a willingness to admit error and stop a failed experiment ASAP—rather than holding on as a way of not admitting the experiment was a bust.
- (10) Also "over"-communicate beyond the group.

**11. Get China on Your Mind! Get India on Your Mind!** Regardless of your rank and serial number, you should become a student of China and India. Both countries continue to grow at a remarkable pace—and together their population is about two-and-a-half billion. I'm not asking for the moon, but I am saying you'd best move up the learning curve to some extent.

## **OPPORTUNITY**

**12. Tough Times? Matchless Opportunity!** The conventional wisdom is that tough times are a great opportunity to crowd out competitors suffering more than you are. I believe that tough times are mostly the ultimate test of character. Behaving decently when the yogurt hits the fan will be long remembered after the worst has passed.

Instead of leaping to "grab our staggering competitor's customers," maybe we should react with great compassion toward that competitor—not by paying his bills, but by making it clear that we have neither the intention nor the desire to rip his customers out from under him (or her).

Instead of "think positive," try ... "think thoughtful." Mindless optimism is just that—mindless. We must deal realistically with the crisis—and, arguably, exhibit a level of decency that knows no bounds. Such behavior is neither "positive" nor "negative." It is what it is: *decent*. Sneaky fact is, such a display of character is probably damn good for business when the comeback occurs—people have very long memories of thoughtful behavior!

**13. Boring Is Beautiful! (Or at Least It Can Be.)** Jim Penman started out mowing lawns. Now the Aussie-based company he started has over 2,500 franchisees doing "stuff" that busy people don't have time to do—from walking dogs to installing security doors to cleaning carpets.

Basement Systems, Inc., meanwhile, is a fast-growing, \$60-million-plus Connecticut-based business.. Larry Janesky runs it. He'll dry out your basement. (See his, yes, best-selling book *Dry Basement Science*.) The basement thus becomes a stellar storage area, or a non-damp, non-moldy, non-illness-inducing family room, or a spare bedroom—whatever.

Message: For would-be entrepreneurs, there's more to life than Biotech and Internet start-ups and "boutique" financial planning businesses.

#### **14. "Old" Rules. (Yes, Even in the "Age of the Internet.")**

*"People turning 50 today have half their adult lives ahead of them."*—Bill Novelli, 50+: *Igniting a Revolution to Reinvent America*

Americans on average own 13 cars in a lifetime; 7 are bought after the age of 50.  
(How about deriving a "code" to remind you of "all this": 13/7/50.)

People age ... 55 or older ... are ... more active ... in ... online finance, shopping, and entertainment ... than those under 55 (Forrester Research).

The "boomer-geezer" market is exploding around the world—and is ridiculously underserved. What an opportunity for the next 25 or so years—in fact, market opportunity #1. Mantra, by an old guy (me):

*We are the Aussies & Kiwis & Americans & Canadians. We are the Western Europeans & Japanese. We are the fastest-growing, the biggest, the wealthiest, the boldest, the most (yes) ambitious, the most experimental & exploratory, the most (self-)indulgent, the most difficult & demanding, the most service- & experience-obsessed, the most vigorous, the most health-conscious, the most female, the most profoundly important commercial market in the history of the world—and we will be the Center of your Universe for the next twenty-five years.*

*We have arrived!*

**15. Build Green Now. (No Excuses!)** Here is the impact of our buildings on energy consumption, CO<sub>2</sub> emissions, and the like (from *Green Building A to Z*, by Jerry Yudelson):

Share of total energy used by buildings: 39%  
Share of electricity used by buildings: 68%  
Share of carbon-dioxide emissions caused by buildings: 40%  
Share of raw materials used in buildings: 30%

In terms of energy efficiency/independence and minimized climatic damage, curbing the likes of SUV use is of course controversial. "Green building" should not/need not be! The opportunity is huge, and the payback period is relatively short. A host of approaches have been proven. The process is motivating. And you can get started more or less tomorrow in old buildings as well as new.

**16. Bottom Line in Bad Times: Obsess Over the Top Line.** Containing costs in tough times is imperative—especially given our relative sloppiness when markets were soaring. But assuming that cost-control-r-us is a bad mistake. Working to improve the distinction of our products and services is more important than ever. In the toughest of times, there's a lot of business left—and we want an "unfair" share of it, right?

## RESILIENCE

**17. Swan Dive: A Guide to Getting On with Getting On.** Nassim Nicholas Taleb's *The Black Swan* was an extraordinarily well-timed book. The black swan is an unpredictable event. If it's unpredictable, what, then, if anything, can we do about it? One answer is create "resilient enterprises" staffed with people in all positions who have exhibited a disposition for resilience. While we can hardly afford "redundant everything," policies and processes and projects and training aimed at increased resilience are very much possible—e.g., Microsoft helped employees equip their home offices when it appeared the swine flu might restrict the # of folks working in standard offices for a lengthy period.

**18. Lifetime Employment Is Dead. Your Career Is Not.** Electricians and plumbers and carpenters and the couple running the 17-table Italian restaurant on Main Street, your "ordinary" neighbors and the majority of us, have never in their wildest dreams imagined "lifetime employment." Well, neither should you or I as time marches/sprints on. The best/only defense is (1) work of great distinction and (2) networks that are both wide and deep. The ability to "think like an entrepreneur" is in fact widely distributed—the new immigrant single-mom with no college education, working two or so jobs, "gets it"—how about you?

**19. "Failure"—Celebrate It!** Whoever tries the most stuff wins. (All you need to know in life.) Hence, it is axiomatic that whoever fails the most wins—truly. Hence failures must not just be "tolerated;" they must, in effect, be encouraged—and, yes, celebrated.

Wisdom:

*"Fail. Forward. Fast."*—high-tech exec, Valley Forge PA

*"Fail. Fail again. Fail better."*—Samuel Beckett, Nobel Laureate, literature

*"Success is going from failure to failure without losing enthusiasm."*—Winston Churchill

*"Whoever Makes the Most Mistakes Wins"*—book title, Richard Farson and Ralph Keyes

*"If people tell me they skied all day and never fell down, I tell them to try a different mountain."*—Michael Bloomberg

**20. The World's Worst Advice (Please Ignore It)** "Relentless" may be my favorite word in "success literature." Hence, "Know when to hold 'em and know when to fold 'em" is 99% wrong-headed. Most of us won't end up in the history books, but those who do—*every bloody one of them*—did not know when to fold 'em!

Bottom line: *"There's a time to hold 'em and a time to keep on holdin' 'em—if you really really really care."*

## **SPECIAL SECTION: The Recession46: Forty-Six "Secrets" and "Strategies" for Dealing with the Severe Downturn of 2007++**

Developed for a seminar in Finland, these "secrets" are in fact anything but:

- (1) You come to work earlier.
- (2) You leave work later.
- (3) You work harder.
- (4) You may well work for less; and, if so, you adapt to the untoward circumstances with a smile—even if it kills you inside.
- (5) You volunteer to do more.
- (6) You dig deep, deeper, deepest—and always bring a good attitude to work.
- (7) You fake it if your good attitude flags.
- (8) You literally practice your "stage face" in the mirror each morning, and in the loo mid-morning.
- (9) You give new meaning to the idea and intensive practice of "visible management."
- (10) You take better than usual care of yourself and encourage others to do the same—physical well-being significantly impacts mental well-being and response to stress.
- (11) You shrug off shit that flows downhill in your direction—buy a shovel or a "pre-worn" raincoat on eBay.
- (12) You try to forget about the "good old days"—nostalgia is self-destructive. (And boring.)
- (13) You buck yourself up with the thought that "this too shall pass," but then remind yourself that it might not pass anytime soon; and so you rededicate yourself to making the absolute best of what you have now—character is determined, virtually in full, by one's reaction to adverse circumstances.
- (14) You work the phones and then work the phones some more—and stay in touch with, and on the mind of, positively everyone.
- (15) You frequently invent breaks from routine, including "weird" ones—"change-ups" prevent wallowing in despair and bring a fresh perspective.
- (16) You eschew all forms of personal excess.
- (17) You simplify.
- (18) You sweat the *details as never* before.
- (19) You sweat the *details as never* before.
- (20) You sweat the *details as never* before.
- (21) You raise to the sky and maintain—at all costs—the Standards of Excellence by which you unfailingly and unflinchingly evaluate your own performance.
- (22) You are maniacal when it comes to responding to even the slightest screw-up.
- (23) You find ways to be around young people and to keep young people around—they are less likely to be members of the "sky is falling" school. (Naïveté can be a blessing.)
- (24) You learn new tricks of your trade.
- (25) You pass old tricks of the trade on to others—mentoring matters now more than ever.
- (26) You invest heavily in your Internet-Web2.0-Twitter-Facebook-"cloud"-computing skills.
- (27) You remind yourself, daily, that this is not just something to be "gotten through"—it is the Final Exam of Competence, of Character, and, even if you're not a boss, of Leadership. (People often make great leaps in a short period during difficult times.)
- (28) You network like a demon.

- (29) You network like a demon *inside* the company—get to know more of the folks who "do the real work," and who can be your most dependable allies when it comes to getting things done seamlessly and fast.
- (30) You network like a demon *outside* the company—get to know more of the folks "down the line," who "do the real work" in vendor-customer outfits. (They can become, and will become, your most avid allies and champions.)
- (31) You offer thanks to others by the truckload if good things happen—and take the heat if bad things happen.
- (32) You behave kindly, but you don't sugarcoat or hide the truth—humans are startlingly resilient, and rumors are the real spirit-killers.
- (33) You treat small successes as if they were World Cup victories—and celebrate and commend people accordingly.
- (34) You shrug off the losses (ignoring what's going on in your tummy), and get back on the horse and immediately try again.
- (35) You avoid negative people to the extent you can—pollution kills.
- (36) You read the riot act to the gloom-sprayers, once avoiding them becomes impossible. (Gloom is the ultimate "weapon of mass destruction" in tough times.)
- (37) You give new meaning to the word "thoughtful."
- (38) You don't put limits on the budget for flowers—"bright and colorful" works marvels.
- (39) You redouble and re-triple your efforts to "walk in your customer's shoes."  
(Especially if the shoes smell.)
- (40) You mind your manners—and accept others' lack of manners in the face of their strains.
- (41) You are kind to all mankind.
- (42) You keep your shoes shined.
- (43) You leave the blame game at the office door.
- (44) You call out, in no uncertain terms, those who continue to play the "office politics" game.
- (45) You become a paragon of personal accountability.
- (46) *And then you pray.*

## **SELF**

### **21. You Are Your Product—Develop It.**

*"The last of human freedoms—the ability to choose one's attitude in a given set of circumstances."* —Viktor Frankl, psychologist and Holocaust survivor, on concentration camps

*"You must be the change you wish to see in the world."*—Gandhi

All you have for sure is your ... attitude. So: Work on it, including, yes, your smile (the smile/warmth was a huge part of Nelson Mandela's success); and shape it. Why:

*Energy begets energy.*

*Wow begets Wow.*

*Optimism begets Optimism.*

*Honesty begets honesty.*

*Caring begets caring.*

*Listening begets engagement.*

Message: LBUAA/Leadership By Unilateral Attitude Adjustment.

**22. Job One: Amuse Yourself!** You must stay fresh and energized. (If you want to transmit freshness and energy to others—see immediately above.) Hence you must—and most don't in the heat of day-to-day affairs—somehow or other find the time/make the time to re-tool yourself. It's one of my hardest personal tasks—but, perhaps, my most important task.

**23. Fitness Power = Staying Power.** I'm not playing "health nut" here. I'm playing "attitude nut." Fact is, if you're fit you feel better about yourself which adds to your resilience (especially important in tough times) and is indirectly transmitted to others.

**24. Mental Gymnastics, Urgency of.** Unless your mind is jerked around, stood upside down, shocked, etc.—you are not growing. If you can't say, a couple of times a week, "I had my mind twisted like a pretzel today," you are sliding down a slippery slope to stale thinking and staleness in general. (Both mind & body must be fit and stretched!)

### **25. You Are Your Story! So Work on It!**

*"A key—perhaps the key—to leadership is the effective communication of a story."*—Howard Gardner, *Leading Minds: An Anatomy of Leadership*

He/she who has the best/most compelling/most resonant story wins:

*In life!*

*In business!*

*In front of the jury!*

*In front of the congregation!*

Few things are more important to moving mountains (or even anthills) than storytelling. You must be an emergent and compelling story—and you must mainly communicate through stories to kindle change.

Your schedule—TODAY—is a short story with a beginning, narrative, end, and memory that lingers on. Your current project is ... an unfolding story about making something better, exciting users, etc. Your organization's raison d'être, and hence its effectiveness, is a story.

FYI: Developing effective storytelling skills is hard work! (But worth it X10.)

**26. Develop Your R.POV8—ASAP!** Seth Godin says: *"If you can't describe your position in eight words or less, you don't have a position."* My abbreviation is R.POV8, for Remarkable Point Of View in 8 words or less. In my own case, I beat Seth's requirement by 7! Took us a year+ to "get it right" for the Tom Peters organization—we ended up with a RED (Pantone #032) Exclamation Mark. Fits my last 30 years perfectly—thanks, Seth!

## **OTHERS**

### **27. Kindness Is Free!**

*"Three things in human life are important. The first is to be kind. The second is to be kind. And the third is to be kind."*—Henry James

An extensive 225-hospital, 140-thousand patient survey by Press Ganey identified 15 factors which shaped patient satisfaction. The startling results: "Not a single one of the top 15 sources of patient satisfaction had to do with the patient's health outcome. All 15, in effect, were related to the quality of the patient's interactions with hospital staff—and employee satisfaction among staff members." The key, at an even deeper level, according to a patient-centrism experts at top-ranked Griffith Hospital:

*"There is a misconception that supportive interactions require more staff or more time and are therefore more costly. Although labor costs are a substantial part of any hospital budget, the interactions themselves add nothing to the budget."*

*"Kindness is free."*

*"Listening to patients or answering their questions costs nothing. It could be argued that negative interactions—alienating patients, being unresponsive to their needs, or limiting their sense of control—can be very costly. Angry, frustrated, or frightened patients may be combative, withdrawn, and less cooperative—requiring far more time than it would have taken to interact with them initially in a positive way."*

This has become a centerpiece of my work. In the commercial sphere I encompass it with an equation:

$K = R = P.$

Kindness = Repeat business = Profit.

That is, among other things, kindness is the ultimate "hard" variable affecting the bottom line.

## 28. Civil! Civil! Civil!

*"For many years literature was my life ... One day, while lecturing on the Divine Comedy, I looked at my students and realized that I wanted them to be kind human beings more than I wanted them to know about Dante. I told them that if they knew everything about Dante and then went out and treated an elderly lady on the bus unkindly, I'd feel that I had failed as a teacher."*—P.M. Forni, *Choosing Civility: The Twenty-five Rules of Considerate Conduct*

It's a variation on the theme above: civil behavior. I was influenced by a description of a book called *Rules of Civility & Decent Behavior in Company and Conversation* that George Washington had produced from a list of 110 items encompassing civil behavior originally created by French Jesuits in 1595. (E.g.: #1 - Every action done in company ought to be done with some sign of respect to those that are present.) Washington's proper & gracious behavior was a key success factor throughout his life. Again, to me, "civil" strikes me as a stunning profit-enhancement tool. (Among other things.)

**29. Listen to Ann—and "Act Accordingly."** The late Texas governor Ann Richards tells us that despite ire, or even fury, at a service mixup, you must remember that the frontline person you are dealing with is the ... only person on earth ... who can help you. Act accordingly—i.e. with reverence! It's great advice! It works!

## 30. "Being There" (Or: How I Learned First Principles from My Grandfather's Last Rites.)

*"You can make more friends in two months by becoming interested in other people than you can in two years by trying to get other people interested in you."*—Dale Carnegie, *How to Win Friends and Influence People*

My grandfather ran a little country store in a little town in Virginia. Thousands—*literally*—attended his funeral. He had been helpmate to virtually everyone in the community over the years. That turnout sent an unforgettable message to me.

## 31. Appreciating the Great Battle: A Case for Consideration

*"Be kind, for everyone you meet is fighting a great battle."*—Plato

This is not a plea to be soft. (Though it's certainly the decent way to behave.) It's a plea concerning the value of trying to understand the pressures and cross-pressures on every (*very different*) person you deal with—in fact about 98% of what's going on with them is hidden from view..

"I'm not paid to be a shrink" is a commonplace from the mouth of managers. It's, well, unspeakably stupid. Of course you're paid to be a shrink—if, that is, you're interested in implementation. Every day at work you field a different team—depending on the state of individuals' stresses and strains at the moment. Sports coaches, the good ones at least, get this. So should you.

Mike Krzyzewski ("Coach K"), coach of the Duke basketball team: *"Things don't stay the same. You have to understand that not only your business situation changes, but the people you're working with aren't the same day to day. Someone is sick. Someone is having a wedding. [You must] gauge the mood, the thinking level of the team that day."*

### **32. Thoughtfulness Is Free (or Close Thereto)**

Thoughtfulness is *key* to customer retention.

Thoughtfulness is *key* to employee recruitment and satisfaction.

Thoughtfulness is *key* to brand perception.

Thoughtfulness is *key* to your ability to look in the mirror—and tell your kids about your job.

*"Thoughtfulness is free."*

Thoughtfulness is *key* to speeding things up—it reduces friction.

Thoughtfulness is *key* to Business Issue #1, cross-functional communication—XF communication is 98% a matter of social factors.

Thoughtfulness is *key* to transparency and even cost containment—it abets rather than stifles truth-telling.

So think about thoughtfulness, think about adding *"Thoughtfulness in all we do"* to your unit's (or company's) (or agency's) values statement. As to the day-to-day "work of thoughtfulness," I call it: "The Practice of Dogmatic Thoughtfulness."

## **CONNECTION**

### **33. Only Connect ...**

*"Only connect"*—E.M. Forster, *Howard's End*

The business of business is relationships.

The essence of effective business is effective relationships.

The "R.O.I." (Return on Investment) that truly matters is ... R.O.I.R.

Return On Investment in Relationships.

Moreover, we can manage and actually measure R.O.I.R.-related activity more accurately than we can manage and measure standard "financial" R.O.I. Lying with statistics is relatively easy. Lying about the state of relationships is nigh on impossible.

**34. They Liked Ike (Because Ike Liked Them)** General Dwight David Eisenhower did the impossible. No, not the successful and history-changing D-Day landing per se. Nor the subsequent march to Germany. His "impossible dream"—come true—was to keep the Yanks and the Brits from annihilating each other long enough to hit the beach and get on with the real job at hand!

Turns out General Eisenhower, most keen professional observers agree, had a "secret," which he in fact understood: "Allied commands depend on mutual confidence; this confidence is gained, above all, through the development of friendships."

That is, Ike, with his easy demeanor, was a master friend-maker. This doesn't come naturally to many of us. One suggestion: Revisit Dale Carnegie's classic *How to Win Friends & Influence People*—named by NPR as one of the top three business books of the 20th century.

**35. Always Make It Personal.** I break all the rules, and "waste" a lot of time at the outset of a speech. What I'm working on is ... connecting. I'm going to perhaps give my audience

uncomfortable advice (that's why I was invited); to have a chance of succeeding, I must be on the audience's side. I sometimes call it "'We' power."

Taught by my 1<sup>st</sup> boss at McKinsey 35 years ago, I'm faithful to "we" to this day. I religiously use "We" and "Us" when working with Clients—and a team of wild horses could not elicit "I" or "You." While it may be a trick of sorts, it is also a Fundamental Value concerning groups on joint ventures in quest of better understanding and harmonious relationships. So:

We hereby swear to use the word "us" until we are blue in the face. (Words matter! A lot!)  
We hereby swear to use the word "partner" until we are blue in the face. (Words matter! A lot!)  
We hereby swear to use the word "team" until we are blue in the face. (Words matter! A lot!)

*We* agree, right?

**36. Commit "Acts of Deliberate Relationship Enhancement"** As boss of Goldman Sachs, Hank Paulson religiously called "60 CEOs in the first week [of the year] to wish them happy New Year." It was at some level a "trick" or "tactic." But I, who have a similar ritual, find it to be the greatest of pleasures as well. I call these sorts of purposeful activities "ADREs." Or: Acts of Deliberate Relationship Enhancement.

Action: Call (C-A-L-L!) (NOT EMAIL!) 25-50 people ... IN THE NEXT FIVE DAYS ... to thank them for their support in the last 90 days or six months!

## **ATTITUDE**

**37. Put the "Eye-Sparkle Factor" on Your Menu.** I gave a lecture in Switzerland on "talent selection"—and the use of "unconventional" (emotional, mostly) measures for so doing. At a break I had an exchange with a youthful participant, who wondered aloud why I would go on and on and on ... and then on ... about the likes of "vivacity":

*"Suppose you and I were opening the restaurant of our dreams," I said to her. "We'd both put in \$75,000 ... effectively, our life's savings. We were 'betting the farm.' We were dead certain we had a great idea, and we'd bargained our way into a very good location—and through our networking even lassoed a terrific chef. Now the time had come to hire 'the others'—e.g., waiters and waitresses and busboys. Numerous applicants had satisfactory 'restaurant experience.' But several didn't. One young woman (man) in particular was a rank amateur—but had the most compelling 'sparkle' in her/his eye. The sort about which we Americans say 'lit up the room.' How would that 'sparkle' that 'lit up the room' rank in our hire-no hire consideration? Remember, we've bet our entire stake on the restaurant."*

She reluctantly agreed, lesser Swiss emotionalism notwithstanding, that the "sparkle" pretty much ruled.

Message: So-called "soft factors"—which are the true "hard factors"—rule! For scientists who must convince others to spend money to support their research. For IS/IT bosses who only succeed if users become enthusiasts. And for those "betting the farm" on the restaurant of their dreams.

**38. Pleasant, Caring, Engaged—at 6 A.M.!** There's a bistro I frequent near my Boston house. The coffee is available at 6A.M. And for years I went there—as much for the woman who had first-shift duty. She wasn't "a babe". And her style would *not* be described as "chirpy." But she seemed to enjoy what she did, and when we'd exchange a few pleasant sentences. She was:

*Pleasant.*

*Caring.*

*Engaged.*

I strongly urge you to put those three blockbuster traits at or near the top of the list in the hiring manual—for every job.

**39. Hire "Cheerful"—Or: That Damned AV Guy!** I was in a foul mood before a speech—a disastrous state of affairs. At the AV check, the guy in charge was in great humor. Despite myself, I was infected. Attitude is contagious. A happy camper creates a happy camp. And someone in a foul mood can befoul an entire battalion in a flash. Again, in hiring, promoting, evaluating—pay close attention to these "soft" factors which in actual fact are the ultimate "HARD" factors!

**40. Which "Flag" Are You Waving?** At a road construction stop, one flagman was of good spirits, per my reading of his face; and the other was emanating bad vibes. The job ain't great, but I was reminded of Dr. King's declaration, one of the few I've committed to memory:

*"If a man is called to be a street sweeper, he should sweep streets even as Michelangelo painted, or Beethoven composed music, or Shakespeare wrote poetry. He should sweep streets so well that all the hosts of heaven and earth will pause to say, here lived a great street sweeper who did his job well."*

This (to me at least) doesn't mean one shouldn't aspire to more than a flagman's job—but it does mean that we can literally ... CHANGE THE WORLD AND CHANGE OUR SURROUNDINGS ... by a unilateral effort to bring a certain attitude to what we do.

Are you Flagman #2?

Or Dr. King's street sweeper?

Today?

Right now?

## **PERFORMANCE**

**41. It's Show Time! All the Time!**

*"It's always show time"*—David D'Alessandro, *Career Warfare*

I could not agree more. "Show time" for *me* =

Every speech!

Every PowerPoint presentation!

Every *individual* slide!

Every CLIENT phone call!

EVERY INTERCHANGE WITH A "FOURTH-LEVEL" CLIENT "ADMIN ASSISTANT" (who may make a negative—or positive!—comment to her boss's boss—who signs my check!—about an off-the-cuff comment I hastily made).

EVERY EMPLOYEE INTERACTION ... especially when I'm stressed and/or grouchy.

Every Post at [tompeters.com](http://tompeters.com)!

Every Tweet at Twitter!

Every TEN-SECOND EYE CONTACT with someone who asks me to sign a book!

And so on.

And on.

"Show time" is a state of mind, an encompassing approach to life. It deserves careful attention—age 23 or 63, commander-in-chief or squad-leading corporal.

**42. Work on Your First Impressions.** First impressions are your and my personal-career keys, and the keys to the likes of a company's customer service report card. We both get that. (Of course.) And yet I feel quite sure that we need constant reminding, reminding not just of the Power of First Impressions, but that there is a full-blown ... *Science and Art of the Construction and Execution and Maintenance of Fantastic Beginnings*. That is, like so many things in *The Little BIG Things*, it's "obvious"—but to pull it off with power and aplomb, one must become a serious student of the phenomenon—and practice as you would practice gymnastics. I've long had as my mantra: "Perception is all there is." It may irritate you, especially if you, like me, are an engineer by training and disposition—but the fact is the "packaging" is almost as important as the content.

NB: For company leaders, how about CFIO, or Chief First Impressions Officer? (I'm more or less serious about the title—and totally serious about a formal job assignment.)

NB: For you and me as individuals, Fox News über-spin doctor Roger Ailes says all I/you/we have is ... 7 SECONDS ... to make a first impression. Yikes! (On the other hand, package-goods marketers have but 1/3<sup>rd</sup> of a second to produce consumer impact.)

**43. Work on Your "Last Impressions."** Beginnings and endings overwhelm our memory of a thing. Their importance demands far more than casual concern. I call the whole shebang EEM (Emotional Experience Management—sorry, I enjoy conjuring up these acronyms). And working on the parting garners PEASS/Planned Exit Atmospheric Strategy & Story. Commerce Bank, the East Coast retail-banking superstar was bought by Toronto Dominion; but in its independent glory, one tactic was to be religiously open 15 minutes before the opening bell and open for another 15 minutes after the closing bell—gotta love it (and it worked like magic).

Big message: *It's not nearly enough to avoid last impression "screw-ups." Of course we don't want anything to "go wrong" at the Experience Exit Stage. But more important, we want a ... PLANNED EXIT ATMOSPHERICS STRATEGY & STORY that's ... MEMORABLE, COMPELLING, EMOTIONAL, that goes "AGGRESSIVELY RIGHT," not "not wrong."*

Beginnings-Endings = Strategic opportunity.

**44. Work on Your Presentation Skills (Or: 17 Minutes Can Change the World!)** Barack Obama moved from obscurity to the Big Tent with a 17-minute speech at the 2004 Democratic National Convention. While the stakes are much lower for you or me, the cost or benefit of presentation skills is nonetheless enormous within our local context.

My obsession with bugging others about primacy of top-tier presentation skills started late, after I sat at dinner, in 2007, next to a "Top 25" exec at a Fortune 25 company, an outfit known for its "just the facts" approach to decision making. We were chatting about this, that, and the other, and at one point he said to me, out of the blue, "I work like hell developing guys for the top, and say I've got four guys who've performed well and could move up. I'll swear, two or three, or sometimes all four, will drop off the track as a direct result of lousy presentation skills."

I know this chap well, and he's a naturally reticent genius engineer whose speaking skills were marginal until he applied, over a period of years, his matchless willpower—and brute force—to training/improving himself.

## **WORK**

**45. On Being a "Professional."** Think "professional," and what words come to mind? Doctor. Lawyer. School teacher. Musician. Ballplayer. Six Sigma quality guru. Cloud-computing consultant. JIT inventory management expert. These sorts of professionals share certain characteristics such as: student of their craft, dedicated to a "calling," pursuing constant improvement, master of a defined body of knowledge. My effort in many sections of the book is to expand, or even re-define, the idea of "professional" to include several bedrock areas of behavior, the effective practice of which determines success or failure in getting things done. For example:

- Saying "Thank you" (Mastering the Practice of Appreciation)
- Apologizing (Repairing frayed relationships)
- Listening (Hearing and Absorbing others' views)
- Achieving peace and prosperity among warring organizational tribes (turning cross-functional integration into Strategic Weapon #1)

Each of these items *can* be studied and *can* be mastered—with about as much practice as is required to achieve mastery in painting or molecular biology. Most of us take most of the things enumerated immediately above "seriously." But few of us are determined to achieve no-bull ... "professionalism" ... around these and like topics, which are the true bedrock of enterprise effectiveness.

**46. "Everything Passes Through Finance." (And So Should You.)** While one can joke about finance ("Those guys have a one-word vocabulary, 'No'"), the fact is that the "finance guys" play a determining role in all but the tiniest projects. Face up to it—and do something about it. Study, make pals, seek a temp assignment in finance, whatever—the dividends will be stratospheric. Bottom line:

Everything passes through Finance.  
Their business is your business.  
Stop pissing and moaning about their world.  
Invest in appreciation of their world.

**47. What's on the Agenda? Why Don't You Decide?** There are a bunch of "lousy" or "trivial" tasks that are neither lousy nor trivial. Agenda creator and official notetaker are perhaps first among equals. Using avenues like this to manipulate the power nodes within an

organizational system can be extraordinarily useful—and can happen early in one's career. (James Madison to a significant degree shaped the Constitution because he was the convention's official scribe—is that a good enough example for you?)

#### **48. We Are All in Sales. Period.**

*"Everyone lives by selling something."*—Robert Louis Stevenson

A successful TV producer saw his work rejected again and again. While accidentally viewing a late-night advertorial on some topic such as "How to get rich in real estate," it dawned on him that his sales skills stunk. He turned his formidable skills to learning the sales trade—reading and reading, attending a dozen all-day sales seminars, etc. In relatively short order, he reports, his losing streak became a winning streak—and now he sits near the top of the TV-world food chain.

The "bottom line" is or should be obvious: Literally every one of us needs to formally sharpen our sales skills—many will end up echoing the record of my TV industry pal.

### **INITIATIVE**

**49. Make That "Three-Minute Call"! Today! Now!** Yes it is all—as in *all*—about relationships. And ever so many are off track or under-nourished—at any point in time. One very big part of the problem-opportunity comes in the form of what I call "the all-important three-minute call." That is, address the problem early, before the tipping point, with what amounts to no more than a smidgen of effort—and avoid immeasurable pain down the pike.

*In short, a three-minute call made today (NOW!) to deal with a "slightly" bruised ego or a "minor" misunderstanding can go a long way toward helping you avoid a trip to divorce court, the loss of a billion-dollar Client (lots of evidence for this), or an employee lawsuit tomorrow.*

And it can be and usually is, even more powerful than it seems. In 9 of 10 cases, the call goes far, far better than you anticipated it would. (The fact that you took the initiative accounts for a lot.) Not only does "the call" help "deal with" a thorny problem, but surprisingly often it launches a new and positive trajectory for a fraying relationship.

The issue, of course is the will to "just do it"—which at times means swallowing your pride and seems to be much tougher for boys than girls. Part of the answer, my frequent answer in *The Little BIG Things*, is "working at it." That is, I'd argue that "making the three-minute call" is at least as worthy of study and practice as learning to play a piano or build a fine cabinet: Nations rise or fall, battles are won or lost, based on (1) not making the call, or (2) making the call occasionally, or (3) making the call routinely, as a matter of habit, and with abiding skill.

**50. Show Up! (It's a Start)** Woody Allen famously said that *"Eighty percent of success is showing up."* It's a good laugh line—and unchallengeable. It's true for me and you—and true in circumstances of the greatest import. In 1787 in the U.S., delegates came to Philadelphia to draft our enduring, as it turned out, Constitution. The smallest of all the states, Delaware, may have greater influence than any other state. They took the effort seriously (some, such as New York, didn't). Delaware sent a big delegation, they showed up every day (most others didn't) and members volunteered to do every damn thing imaginable—and in the end it paid off, big time.

Hence I conclude that "Woody's strategy" works in an office of five people—and when the fate of a nation is at stake. As I said ... Big Time.

**51. Get Up Earlier Than the Next (in This Case) Gal.** I was flying to Boston from London on a Saturday morning. It was a seven-hour flight. A professional woman was sitting in front of me. I duly swear, she did not look up once during the entire flight. She produced more on her laptop in those seven hours than I do in a week. Or a month.

There's something to say for out-working "the other guy"—or woman. In short, I would give both my right and left arms to have the woman described above on my side—and, God help me, not on the other side!

**52. Make an Insane Public Effort.** The late sports super-agent Mark McCormack (once voted the most powerful man in sports) once condoned and even certified one of my own crazy habits. He said there are times, not necessarily infrequent, when it is wise-*imperative* to travel 5,000 miles for a 5-minute meeting. It was a tactic I started using in 1974, when I was a junior White House staffer working on drug abuse issues. And the power and effectiveness thereof are literally beyond measure. You can get a lot done in a short meeting when it's clear that you've killed yourself to be there; but it's overwhelmingly psychological. The power of making an "insane effort" almost always breaks a logjam—and not infrequently leads to a solution on the spot.

The key word here is ... "insane."

## **LEADERSHIP**

### **53. To Lead Is to Help Others Succeed.**

*"The role of the director is to create a space where the actors and actresses can become more than they've ever been before, more than they've dreamed of being."*—Robert Altman, Oscar acceptance speech

*"No matter what the situation, the great manager's first response is always to think about the individual concerned and how things can be arranged to help that individual experience success."*—Marcus Buckingham, *The One Thing You Need to Know*

The "business" of leaders at all levels is to help those in their charge develop beyond their dreams—which in turn almost automatically leads to "all that other stuff," such as happy customers, happy stockholders, happy communities.

To start the ball rolling, change every performance review into a two-part process, the first in which there is a rigorous evaluation of the employee—and the second of which is a rigorous review of your own efforts to help that employee forward.

**54. At Their Service.** Leadership is a "service business." Robert Greenleaf gave us the concept of "servant leadership"—it's one of those "pretty much all you need to know" ideas. My take:

- (1) *Organizations exist to serve. Period.*
- (2) *Leaders exist to serve their people. Period.*
- (3) *A team well-served by its leader will be inclined to pursue Excellence.*

Use the word "Serve." (That's what you *do*.)  
Use the word "Service." (That's what you *provide*.)  
Use the word "Servant." (That's what you *are*.)

The unadorned word "service" is beauty encapsulated.

**55. Have You "Hosted" Any Good Employees Lately?** Consider the leader's primary job to be a host to her or his employees. That's the way Jan Gunnarsson and Olle Blohm put it in *Hostmanship: The Art of Making People Feel Welcome*.

Gunnarsson and Blohm based this universal (as they—and I—see it) idea on their experience owning/running a hotel. Here's the core idea:

*"We went through the hotel and made a ... 'consideration renovation.' Instead of redoing bathrooms, dining rooms, and guest rooms, we gave employees new uniforms, bought flowers and fruit, and changed colors. Our focus was totally on the staff. They were the ones we wanted to make happy. We wanted them to wake up every morning excited about a new day at work."*

*"The path to a hostmanship culture paradoxically does not go through the guest. In fact it wouldn't be totally wrong to say that the guest has nothing to do with it. True hostmanship leaders focus on their employees. What drives exceptionalism is finding the right people and getting them to love their work and see it as a passion. ... The guest comes into the picture only when you are ready to ask, 'Would you prefer to stay at a hotel where the staff love their work or where management has made customers its highest priority?'"*

Your call, but I'd call it "putting first things first"—and it applies as much in the 7-person purchasing department as in the retail establishment.

**56. A Sacred Trust.** As I see it, anyone who takes on any leadership job, minor or major, assumes no less than a ... Sacred Trust. I know that's extreme language. But I stand by it. This sacred trust is all about what organizations are all about: *the professional (and, to some extent, personal) development of people*. Sure, the boss's job is to "get the job done," and done effectively. But "boss-hood" primarily entails an abiding responsibility for the people under your charge. (It's circular, of course: Turned-on people do turned-on work. Q.E.D.)

Consider this as the translation of "sacred trust" into a plank in your core-values statement: *"We are committed to the measurable growth of each and every member of our staff. We aspire to have every staff member say, of their stay here, 'That was a remarkable period of my development.'"*

**57. Rat Psych Rules! Or: Deploying Positive Reinforcement's Incredible Potency.** You can overdo anything—including positive reinforcement. It's just that in 9 out of 10 cases (more like 99 in 100) we "underdo" positive reinforcement—and usually overdo negative reinforcement. I, like Mark Twain, "can live for months on a compliment" or a small act of encouragement. This is one powerful tool!

Consider the following, drawn from the recent book *Barack, Inc.: Winning Business Lessons from the Obama Campaign*, by Rick Faulk and Barry Libert:

*"[Retired United States Navy] Captain Mike Abrashoff knows the importance of saying 'thank you.' In his first book, It's Your Ship, he relates how he sent letters to the parents of his crew members on the guided-missile destroyer USS Benfold ... Putting himself in those parents' shoes, he imagined how happy they would be to hear from the Commanding Officer that their sons and daughters were doing well. And he figured that those parents would, in turn, call their children to tell them how proud they were of them.*

*"Abrashoff debated whether to send a letter to the parents of one young man who wasn't really star material. Weighing the sailor's progress, he decided to go ahead. A couple of weeks later, the sailor appeared at his door, tears streaming down his face. It seems the kid's father had always considered him a failure and told him so. After reading the captain's letter, he called to congratulate his son and tell him how proud he was of him. 'Captain, I can't thank you enough,' said the young man. For the first time in his life, he felt loved and encouraged by his father."*

## **WORDS**

**58. "What Do You Think?"** Our colleague Dave Wheeler said, in a Comment at [tompeters.com](http://tompeters.com): "The four most important words in management are ... 'What do you think?'" I agree! And the old engineer in me screams: Quantify! So: How many times today did you "use the four words"? I.e., *exactly* how many times did you utter: "What do you think?"

Maybe go so far as to put this idea in the formal "values statement":

*"We obsessively ask 'What do you think?'—We understand that we rise or fall on the engagement and intelligence and constant contributions of 100% of us."*

## **59. "Thank You"**

*"The deepest human need is the need to be appreciated."—William James, premier American psychologist*

*"You shouldn't be looking for people slipping up, you should be looking for all the good things people do and praising those."—Richard Branson*

There's no overestimating the power of appreciation—and yet its application is usually stingy at best. Hence, as in so many of these "discussions of the obvious," this is a genuine skill to be practiced, mastered and applied. And, again, please think about it, perhaps "Thank you" ought to gain a place of honor in the values statement: *"We habitually express appreciation for one another's efforts—because we do in fact consciously appreciate everyone's 'ordinary' 'daily' contributions, let alone the extraordinary ones."* Or words to that effect ...

## **60. "I'm Sorry."**

Message: THIS IS A BIG DEAL. THIS IS "STRATEGIC."

*"I regard apologizing as the most magical, healing, restorative gesture human beings can make. It is the centerpiece of my work with executives who want to get better."—Marshall Goldsmith, What Got You Here Won't Get You There: How Successful People Become Even More Successful (Goldsmith is perhaps the world's most prominent executive coach.)*

Repeat: "centerpiece of my work with executives who want to get better."

Like Goldsmith, I believe that a genuine apology (and there's a lot to write, which space here does not permit, about "genuine") is of the utmost personal and strategic importance—and, indeed, worthy of using the label "magical."

As I have become convinced of the power (personal, professional, magical) of apology, I have actually accumulated a small library of books on the topic—yes, there is such a library available on apology per se. One is left with an encompassing sense of the extraordinary power of the ... Art of Apology ... rightfully considered. I believe we are talking about, in practical business terms, a ... "matchless strategic lever." In the arsenal of what really matters when it comes to getting things done/execution/ implementation, there are few—if any—"power tools" that have the heft of:

*"I apologize."*

*"I'm sorry."*

*"I'm to blame."*

*"Simply put, I screwed up."*

*"I bear full responsibility for this f\*\*\*-up."*

*"I blew it. Period."*

Bonus: Often as not, an Effective Apology is far more than a "bullet dodged." That is, not only is a problem cleared up, but also the cock-up brilliantly and overwhelmingly and unequivocally atoned for solidifies a relationship—and carries it forward.

## **61. Words of Truth—from a Fiction Writer**

*"Why not just tell the truth?"*—Raymond Carver, premier American short-story writer

## **NETWORKING**

### **62. One Line of Code: The Shortest Distance Between "Critic" and "Champion"**

"They" say that complex software implementations fall short of promised effectiveness almost all the time. "They" add that the problem is rarely the software; it's almost always less-than-enthusiastic down-the-line users.

I have the answer (which an Aussie CIO gave me): One line of code!

You're in IT.

The software you've got on offer will change the world!

But implementation will take place far from home. What's the success secret? If you're wise, it's sales; you hit the road and ... sell sell sell ... would-be users ... retail ... one at a time. You sit down with, say, Erik H. in marketing. He listens to your pitch, agrees on the importance of the project—*but*—has a host of concerns. You listen, you go home; and, in effect, you alter ... one line of code ... which deals with ... one ... of Erik's issues.

Bingo!

Nine out of 10 of Erik's issues are still not addressed ...but ... you changed ... SOMETHING ... DIRECTLY ... BECAUSE OF ERIK!

In 4.2 out of 5 cases, Erik flips from thorn in your side to fellow champion! Suddenly the whole damn thing is "Erik's project"! In Erik's mind, the whole thing would have collapsed without his precious, save-your-ass input!

**63. "Suck Down" for Success.** Forget "sucking up"—it's a low-odds strategy. If you are willing to invest the time, and it takes time, "sucking down" is a high-odds affair—to paraphrase the immortal robber Willy Sutton on why he chose to knock off banks, "It's where the money is." (Oh is it ever!) In addition to the plain fact that "down there" is where the real work is done, indirectly, where the deal is effectively done, the folks a couple of levels "down" ["down" always in quotes—"down" is the real 'up'" is the anthem here] are typically bowled over by your time and attention—we all crave being taken seriously. Hence, the next thing you know (after a lot of work) you've got a network to die for in the bowels of the customer organization working for you—and it's a network, typically, with staying power; there's not so much volatility "down there."

As always, the point is not "catch as catch can" or "a good idea." It's about a well thought-out scheme, in fact, no less than a "way of life"—a measured, systematic effort to penetrate the ranks of a client organization and develop a set of relationships with the real deal makers! (Hint: As in so many implementation issues, women are instinctively better at this than men.)

(NB: Alternate formulation to "Suck down for success": "Success does not depend on 'the people you know in high places'—it depends on 'the people you know in low places.'")

**64. Formula for Success:  $C(I) > C(E)$ .** I've long argued that the set of relationships inside your own company is almost as important as the relationships with external bill-paying customers. While it may not be a universal truth, it struck me as I talked to a GE group that sold big international projects that in many cases our Internal Customers/"C(I)" are in more important than our External Customers/"C(E)." That is:  $C(I) > C(E)$

In the GE case, to win with External Customers the systems salespeople typically want an "unfair share" (the words of one GE informant) of a host of insiders' time—engineers, the logistics team, lawyers and the all-important ("yes" or "no") risk-assessment staff.

Bottom line: What ... PRECISELY (measure it!) ... have you done lately (LAST 36 HOURS!) for your all-important "portfolio" of ... INTERNAL CUSTOMERS? I.e.: Do Not Let A Single Day Pass Without Doing Something Notable For Some Internal Customer.

### **65. How Does Your "Inside Game" Measure Up?**

Given: Cross-functional communication is such a universal problem that it could fairly be called enterprise "Problem #1."

Solution (one more part thereof): All staff departments ought to/should/*must* quickly install first-rate internal customer satisfaction measurement systems—with tough up and down incentives. In my experience, it is the rare staff department that measures (internal) customer satisfaction religiously—and the ever more rare internal unit that ties substantial rewards and penalties to such measurements. That must change!

*Case: I met the boss of Staff Services at a large Italian bank. He was fanatic about "customer" satisfaction for his departments' internal customers. In his scheme, each staff department's internal "customers" themselves devised the measures; and the primary dollars and cents (Euro) incentives for staff departments were based primarily on quantitative measures of their internal customers' satisfaction—the staff department exec called this Internal Customer Satisfaction System "my principal strategic initiative."*

## **LUNCH**

**66. Across the Board: Cross-Functional Collaboration Is Issue #1**—in a 6-person logistics sub-department, a 12-table restaurant, an auto dealership. Therefore going after this issue daily is a Monster Opportunity. Want great cross-functional cooperation-opportunity maximization, or XFX/Cross-functional Excellence?

*Answer:* Make friends in other functions! (Purposefully.)

*Answer:* Go to lunch with people in other functions!! Frequently!!

*Answer:* Ask peers in other functions for some references so you can become conversant in their world. (Big deal: You'll find it interesting—and it's a helluva sign of ... GIVE-A-DAMN-ism.)

*Answer:* Invite counterparts in other functions to your meetings. Religiously. Ask them to present "cool stuff" from "their world" to your group. (B-I-G deal; useful and respectful.)

*Answer:* Present counterparts in other functions awards for service to your group—hold an "All-Star Supporters [from other groups] Banquet."

*Answer:* When someone in another function asks for assistance, respond with even more alacrity than you would if it were the person in the cubicle next to yours—or more than you would for a key external customer.

*Answer:* Do not bad mouth ... "the damned accountants," "the damned HR guy." Ever.

*Answer:* Twenty more things like this that boil down to establishing and maintaining and enhancing social-human bonds with "the 'thems,'" as I label it.

**67. Getting Along and Going to Lunch: Solving the Cross-Functional Cooperation Problem**

There's a lot more to say about cross-functional integration, but I want this one to stand by itself.

*Do lunch!*

Consider each workday lunch an "at bat." Four workweeks at five days each adds up to about 20 "at bats" each month.

20 *opportunities* to start New Relationships;

20 *opportunities* to nurture or extend Old Relationships;

20 *opportunities* to patch up Frayed Relationships;

20 *opportunities* to "Take a Freak to Lunch"—and learn something new;

20 *opportunities* to test an idea with a potential Recruit-Alliance Partner;

20 *opportunities* to get to know someone in Another Function;

20 *opportunities* to ... PURSUE or MAKE A SALE ... to gain a Convert-Champion for your idea or project.

Each lunch gone is gone for good. 20 per month. 240 per year. To a Major League Baseball Player, EACH AT BAT is Precious. To a "determined-to-build-a-matchless-network-and-collect-cool-outsiders-and-useful-allies" ... EACH LUNCH is Precious.

## **SPECIAL SECTION: "THE EQUATIONS": An Engineer's View of the ... Secrets of Effective Implementation**

Engineers live for mathematical and/or algebraic representation of any and all things. Hence, I, an unrepentant engineer, offer this set of "equations" aimed at helping you, engineer or not, boost your odds of success at implementing damn near anything.

Success at GTD/Getting Things Done Is a Function of ...

$$S = f(\#DR; -2L, -3L, -4L, I\&E)$$

Success is a function of: Number and depth of relationships 2, 3, and 4 levels down inside and outside the organization.

$$S = f(SD>SU)$$

"Sucking down" is more important than "sucking up"—the idea is to have the entire "underbelly" of the organization working for you.

$$S = f(\#non-FF, \#non-FL)$$

Number of friends, number of lunches with people not in my function—e.g., "#non-FF" is number of friends not in my function.

$$S = f(\#FF)$$

Number of friends in the finance organization.

$$S = f(\#EODD3MC)$$

Number of end-of-the-day difficult (you'd rather avoid) "3-minute calls" that soothe raw feelings, mend fences, etc.

$$S = f(\#TYsT)$$

Number of "thank you"s today, number of thank you notes sent today.

$$S = f(SU)$$

Show up!

And about 20 more like these ....

## **YES**

**68. Just Say Yes!—Or: A Lesson from My Mother-in-Law** My wife Susan and I, on short notice, invited her mom to come down from New Canaan CT and join us for a Midtown Manhattan dinner. She said "No." I've known her for a long time. If she's anything, she's self certain. I.e., "No" = No.

When we arrived in town from Vermont, we were therefore nonplussed to find a message from Joan, saying, *"I'll be arriving at 7."* We obviously asked her why she'd changed her mind.

"I decided to say 'Yes.'" She recalled a friend who'd had a vigorous life into her 90s. "She said she had three 'secrets': First, surround yourself with good books on any and every topic. Second,

spend time with people of all ages. And third, say 'Yes.'" She added that indeed she had not intended to drive down from Connecticut. But she remembered her friend and determinedly decided to say ...

"Yes."

**69. For the Sheer Glorious 24/7 Fun of It!** Richard Branson's idea of fun is going head to head in the ring with someone who has him by a jillion pounds. As Michael Specter wrote in his wonderful *New Yorker* profile ("Branson's Luck"), "Branson likes to enter a market controlled by a giant ... British Airways, say, or Coke or Murdoch. Then he presents himself as the hip alternative." Branson *is* his brand, he enjoys nutty stunts that personify the brand's "hipness."

I'm not Branson by a long, long shot; but I understand the guiding impulse. The *only* reason that I take on new stuff, and keep accumulating frequent flyer miles, has long been the unadulterated pleasure I get from always marching "the other way"—and in particular storming after those I think have let us down—from numbers-obsessed execs to the healthcare industry's lack of rigor as measured by hundreds of thousands of preventable annual deaths in the U.S. alone.

My advice?

This is *strategic*: As boss, do your darnedest to "make it fun," "make it a ride to remember," "make it a bloody ball"! Though you don't need to do round-the-world balloon escapades like Branson, your Job #1, or at least Job #2, is to in fact ... "make it fun/cool."

## **NO**

**70. "To Don'ts" Are More Important Than "To-Dos"** My friend Dennis is a prominent educator. A few years ago he received a huge \$\$\$ grant—and he was given the opportunity to roll out his program across the country. Suddenly, he was required to turn his innovative ideas into a system that could be replicated by "ordinary people." Dennis is "one of those people" who has 10 ideas a minute—moreover, all 10 are usually *good* ideas. And so his talented staff ran around madly working on exciting this or exciting that. But now he had that "low variation" system to run—and things promised to be different. I attended a meeting of his advisory Committee at a critical moment. The Chairman had been CEO of an enormous firm. I will always remember a single line that emerged from the fellow's mouth:

*"Dennis, you need a 'to-don't' list."*

In simple language: What you decide *not* to do is probably *more* important than what you decide to do. (A lot of smart-wise people agree on this, super-coach Marshall Goldsmith, the gold standard, among them.) But you probably can't work on "to-don't" alone—you need a sounding board/mentor/advisor/nag you trust to act as a Drill Sergeant who will frog-march you to the woodshed when you stray and start doing those time-draining "to don'ts." (Said advisor could be spouse, professional coach, other, need not be expert in your world, and must be totally trusted.)

**71. Some Things Worth Doing Are Worth Doing Not Particularly Well.** The reminder came one night as I was doing dishes. I was dealing with a particularly resistant old baking pan. I cleaned up the food residue—it was fully sanitary. But there was some crusty crap left, which I went after with a vengeance—but somewhat unsuccessfully. At one point I started laughing at

myself. The pan was sanitary and "clean enough," plus I really didn't need to treat the effort like a speech to Fortune 50 CEOs.

The micro-event (*I did* stop) reminded me of the Greater Truth. In a world (personal, professional) of limited resources (time, in this instance, time in most instances) and priorities of the utmost importance (to you and me at any rate), there's a lot of "stuff" that must be done—but for which "good enough" *is* in fact good enough. For some of us making the distinction is easier said than done—and the cost for not figuring out the difference is high.

## **CUSTOMERS**

### **72. It's 11 A.M.—Have You Called a Customer Today?**

Stop.  
Now.

*Call a Customer.  
Out of the Blue.*

*"How can I help?"  
"Have we delivered on every promise, implicit as well as explicit?"*

Listen and take copious notes.  
Follow-up instantly on at least one "little" thing.  
Repeat. 48-hours hence.

Hint: This applies to 100% of us.

### **73. There's Nothing But Nothing Cooler Than an Angry Customer!**

*"The problem is almost never the problem. The problem is invariably the response to the problem."—anon.*

Bizarre but true: *Our most loyal customers are ones who had a problem with us ... and then marveled when we went the Extra Ten Miles at the Speed of Light to fix it!*

Business opportunity No.1\* = Irate customers converted into fans. (\*Yes, No.1.)

So ... are you on the *active* prowl for customer problems to fix? Rules:

Make "over"-reacting to problems a keystone in the corporate culture, a plank in the Corporate Values statement. (*"We respond to customers with passion and rapidity and resources in ways that stun-amaze-overwhelm those customers 100.00% of the time."*)

Reward (BIG TIME.) those who unearth ... and report ... customer problems.

"Over"-connect: let the customer know ASAP (!!), and update constantly—even if there is *absolutely nothing to report.*

Ensure that there are *devoted* resources at the ready to respond to problems. (No matter how good your systems, there *will* be problems—be staffed adequately, and then some, to respond at lightening speed.)

Repeat: Business opportunity No.1 = Irate customers converted into outspoken fans.

**74. What We Have Here Is a Failure to *Over-Communicate*.** I was flying home from Mexico City to Boston, on Delta, via Atlanta. The ATL-BOS leg was delayed about 75 minutes: *Never once did waiting area personnel or the pilot provide any explanation whatsoever. I do not exaggerate. Not one bloody, frigging word.*

No, this is not really news in "airline service sucks significantly land." Nonetheless, it serves as a not-quite-friendly alarm bell to all of us in any and every circumstance, signaling the ... *Insanely Important Value of Keeping People Informed/Over-informed 100.00% of the Time.*

We can almost all deal quite well with shit—we all/almost all deal very poorly with uncertainty. Tell me it'll probably be a 90-minute delay because the pilot is in the bar popping Tequila shots—and I'm fine. (More or less.) Total Silence? I'm on edge, pissed off as hell.

(Play back the last 24 or 48 hours. Is there an instance where you have failed to Fully Inform a Client, or other stakeholder, of a delay, wee or grand, or glitch? *If your answer is "nope, all is well"—you are a dunce.*)

**75. Be "Entwined" with Your Client** Came across, stuck in a book, the torn-out cover story from *Time*, 25 October 2004, "The God Gene." There was a quiz therein, "How Spiritual Are You?" I imagined, as a not particularly "religious person," I'd be in the lower quartile. But to my surprise, I scored 15/20—"highly spiritual, a real mystic."

Here's Question #1, to which I instantly answered "Yes": *"I often feel so connected to the people around me that it is as if there is no separation between us."*

Of course!

That's what my "speaking career" is all about!!

That's how I make a difference!!

No-Zero-Nada-Zip degrees of separation!!

So: Are you "one with your clients"—effectively "spiritually" entwined with those clients? Do you truly "get them"?

Richard Branson does.

Bill Marriott does.

Sam Walton did.

Anita Roddick did.

Lee Iacocca does/did.

(Would you buy a car from this man?)

Rick Wagoner—former GM boss—did not.

(Would you buy a car from this man?)

## **ACTION**

**76. "Trying My Damnedest!" Wrong Answer!** Long story, but as a junior officer (U.S. Navy) in Vietnam, I once answered a general with, in part, "I'm doing my best." He erupted, a true Vesuvius. It is not enough, he said with an icy stare, to do one's best [in taking care of my sailors], I must do it, period. [A parallel Churchill quote goes like this: "*It is not enough to do your best—you must succeed in doing what is necessary.*"] All I can say, 43 years later, is that the lesson took.

Consider: "A man approached J.P. Morgan, held up an envelope, and said, 'Sir, in my hand I hold a guaranteed formula for success, which I will gladly sell you for \$25,000.' 'Sir,' J.P. Morgan replied, 'I do not know what is in the envelope; however, if you show it to me, and I like it, I give you my word as a gentleman that I will pay you what you ask.' The man agreed to the terms, and handed over the envelope. J.P. Morgan opened it, and extracted a single sheet of paper. He gave it one look, a mere glance, then handed the piece of paper back to the gent. And paid him the agreed-upon \$25,000. The contents of the note:

- "1. Every morning, write a list of the things that need to be done that day.
- "2. *Do them.*"

**77. Captain "Day" and Captain "Night": A Tale of Two Deployments and Two Suggestions.** As a combat engineer (Seabee) in Vietnam, I made two deployments and had two commanding officers, or COs. To this day, I call them "day" and "night." My first CO, Dick Anderson (CAPTAIN Anderson!), was "day." Our job was to build stuff—roads, bridges, camps, gun emplacements, etc.—mostly for the U.S. Marine Corps. Captain Andy's approach could be summarized in three words, subsequently made immortal by Nike; namely, "Just do it." Above all, Captain Andy wanted no damned excuses. The upshot was that we got a lot of work done, and done well, in short order.

Deployment #2 brought Captain "Night," whose name shall not be mentioned. He had a different style of "leadership" entirely. It's often called "by the book." He was a stickler for the formalities. I sometimes thought and think that he was more interested in typo-free reports of jobs not yet done than hell-and-high-water-completed construction. I had a crappy time, as did pretty much the whole set of junior officers; and our track record in getting things done for our customers was less than sterling.

Between the two, I had pretty much all I needed for a successful management career. When faced with a thorny issue, I try to follow Captain Andy's rules—and avoid the approach of Capt. Night at all costs.

**78. If You Want To Find Oil, You Must Drill Wells.** Right after publishing *In Search of Excellence*, I received a nice note in the mail accompanied by an inscribed book: *The Hunters* by John Masters, a successful Canadian Oil & Gas wildcatter. Here is the excerpt I underlined 25 years ago, and have battered seminar participants with ever since:

*"This is so simple it sounds stupid, but it is amazing how few oil people really understand that you only find oil if you drill wells. You may think you're finding it when you're drawing maps and studying logs, but you have to drill."*

Message: YOU HAVE TO DRILL!

I sometimes, and not in jest, call "it" "the only thing I've learned 'for sure' in the last 44 years." Namely, *She or he who tries the most stuff ... wins!* Naturally I've collected a ton of supporting quotes to support my bias for a "bias for action." A few of my favorites:

*"We have a strategic plan. It's called doing things."*—Herb Kelleher, founder, Southwest Airlines

*"READY. FIRE. AIM."*—Ross Perot (and others)

*"Blame no one.*

*"Expect nothing.*

*"Do something."*

—Locker room sign posted by football coach Bill Parcells

*"You miss 100 percent of the shots you never take."*—Wayne Gretzky

## **CHANGE**

### **79. Zen and the Art of Achieving Change Where It Already Exists.**

*"Some people look for things that went wrong and try to fix them. I look for things that went right and try to build on them."*—Bob Stone/Mr. ReGo/VP Al Gore's point man for "reinventing government"

*"Somewhere in your organization, groups of people are already doing things differently and better. To create lasting change, find these areas of positive deviance and fan the flames."*—Richard Tanner Pascale & Jerry Sternin, "Your Company's Secret Change Agents," *Harvard Business Review*

Bob Stone was a Zen master, a Sumo wrestler—a Master of Indirection. He knew he could not force change on the Federal bureaucracy; even the President rarely succeeds by frontal assault. But he also knew there were astonishingly effective, renegade Civil Servants at work in the underbelly of the system—plying their effective-but-scorned trade as far from the light as possible. The trick was to discover their existence and induce them to "come out" and serve as visible role models/"benchmarks" to their more timid peers.

Message:

- (1) Comb the underground for "troublemakers" who are creating and living tomorrow today.
- (2) Anoint them as Public Paragons of the New Deal-to-Be.
- (3) Encourage others to visit them and observe palpable models of new ways of doing business.
- (4) Applaud the Nouveau Copycats of the First Round Pioneers—and grow the Renegade Brigade as rapidly as possible.

**80. The Way of the Demo.** Change in "big" places is mostly a result of showing off "demos" from modest-sized "cool" places! (This happens also to be true with individual change.) You've got a great new software solution to a purchasing conundrum. You need a test bed. At a meeting, you get into a private discussion with the on-the-make General Manager of a small division of BigCo in Ireland; she thinks your new software is off-the-charts good, and is keen to get a jump on others by becoming an early adopter. Once she's done her bit, you can say to the slugabed big-division General Managers, "Why don't you go and look at what the Irish have done with this—it changed their world."

To succeed with "new stuff," you must find ... Kindred Spirits ... those who will ... Play with You (and your "cool stuff") ... which in turn provides you with ... "Demos" ... that you can Tout Far & Wide.

I call "it": THE WAY OF THE DEMO. And I will boldly state: Selling-by-demo is the single-best way to accelerate acceptance of a novel (=scary) idea.

NO DEMO.  
NO DEAL.  
PERIOD.

(I used the example of internal sales—precisely the same approach works wonders in external sales. Message: Do not, except in rare circumstances start by making presentations to "the big guys.")

**81. Big Change—All at Once!** I am an avowed incrementalist—even if the eventual aim is stratospherically high. That is, get going ASAP—and quickly experiment your way toward/to success. But when my wife and I had a Grand Idea in 2008 for a landscaping project that would change the look and feel of our Farm in Tinmouth VT, we decided, more or less, to ... do it all at once. There has been pain from biting off more than we could readily chew, but the story to this point has the mark of a real success far beyond our initial imaginings.

*The power of "getting going on everything at once" with but a sliver of a master plan (a couple of "napkin" sketches) was that we could envision from the outset the vague outline of what was going to (more or less) end up happening—thence we could adjust like crazy, improvise constantly, destroy and create using the entire palette, and dramatically reshape the overall work, and even the overall concept, as we went along. Which, of course, means we didn't really reject my beloved Rapid Experimentation Method—we just did it on and amidst a Grand Platform called "everything is in motion and up for grabs."*

I'm not sure I'd do things, big things, this way in every instance, but I do think there are times when such an "all at once" approach is merited—when you have a Big Idea but need to be living "in the middle of it," with all ends loose ends, to figure out what it means.

**82. Big Change—in a Short Time.** The story goes that General George Patton turned around a bedraggled U.S. Army in North Africa in a matter of a few weeks upon taking charge in 1943. (Some say a few days.) Upon taking over a new command, Admiral Lord Nelson would change the attitude of an entire fleet in ... *less than a week*. The CEO of a giant transportation company completely upended line officers' responsibility and authority and accountability (increased by an order of magnitude) almost "overnight"—literally everyone, including a couple of "hopeless bureaucrats," bitched and moaned and rose to the occasion—performance spurted more or less instantly, and then kept going.

Several expert analysts argue from extensive anecdotal evidence that "big change" is actually "easier" than small change. Mostly because it's far easier to get people excited about a Big Hairy Audacious Goal (Jim Collins's felicitous term) than "incremental improvement:" also big, quick change cuts off escape routes.

My "bottom line" after lots of thought and observation: Change will take *precisely* as long as you think it will. The "arrogance of absurdly high expectations" can pay off in very short order if you've got the nerve to go for it and the deep-rooted (messianic) belief that ... "*There's utterly no reason why we can't do this in a month!*"

### **83. Clever? Never!**

*"The art of war does not require complicated maneuvers; the simplest are the best, and common sense is fundamental. From which one might wonder how it is generals make blunders; it is because they try to be clever."*—Napoleon

I make every effort to read new business strategy books and articles. In 90 percent of cases, I can dismiss neither the author's thought process nor his or her evidence—but I am always taken aback by the abundance of "clever" and the absence of any discussion or consideration of the ability to implement the suggestions made or implied. There is total silence around the subject. For example, I did a quick analysis of the Index of one "famous" strategy tome circa 2007—words like "people" and "customer" and "leadership" and "implementation" and "execution" were *literally* missing.

(NB: I gave some thought to not including any commentary in #83, just letting Napoleon's quote stand alone on the page. I dearly do not want to dilute in any way the power and clarity and simplicity of his words.)

## **SPECIAL SECTION: You, Me, and Charlie Wilson's War**

George Crile's *Charlie Wilson's War*, the tale of the defeat of the Soviet Union in Afghanistan (which led directly to its subsequent unraveling), is quite simply the most extraordinary non-fiction potboiler I have ever read. And, perhaps surprisingly, it has lessons for you and me from Congressman Wilson and his CIA cohort, Gust Avrakotos:

(1) Make friends with the ... "Invisible 95%." Gust Avrakotos apparently knew every "top floor" CIA executive secretary by name—and had helped many of them sort out personal or professional problems. The folks in the mailroom and in the bowels of the computer operations affairs were also the subject of Gust's intense and affectionate attentions. In effect, you could say that Gust was Commander-in-Chief of the "Invisible 95%" of the Agency—which allowed him to make extraordinary things happen despite furious resistance from his bosses and bosses' bosses sitting atop a very rigid organization.

(2) Create a Networker-Doer Partnership. Congressman Wilson had the networking part down, but he needed help with the doing. Conversely, if you are the doer, then you must find the politician-networker.

(3) Carefully manage the BOF/Balance Of Favors. Practice potlatch—giving so much help to so many people on so many occasions (purposeful overkill!) that there is little issue about their supporting you when the (rare!) time comes to call in the chits.

(4) Follow the money! "Anybody with a brain can figure out that if they can get on the Defense subcommittee, that's where they ought to be—because that's where the money is."—Charlie Wilson

(5) Found material. (And found people.) Don't reinvent the wheel. It costs too much, takes too much time, requires too much bureaucratic hassle, and is too hard to implement—you've got enough problems already.

(6) The enemy of my enemy is my friend. Hold your nose—and get the job done with some thorns in your side at your side.

(7) Real, Visible Passion! Create graphic evidence of the source of your passion. Wilson's passion about his beliefs were visibly magnified by tactics he shamelessly employed to make it personal—and to make sure that others knew it was personal. For example, on every visit to the refugee camps, Wilson donated blood on the spot.

(8) Passion as Deterrence. Passion suggests exhausting "staying power"—"I might as well not waste energy or chits blocking him, he's not going away and he'll hound me and absorb my time till hell freezes over."

(9) Cut red tape. "What we did in one month with Charlie would have taken us nine years to accomplish."—Gust Avrakotos

(10) Create a small, insanely committed "band of brothers-sisters" to act as mostly invisible orchestrators.

(11) Keep the Long Haul in Mind, Too. Passion for today's action is paramount—but always, always, always think consciously about ... Network Investment for the future.

(12) The Game Ain't Over Until the Fat Lady Sings. "They" (lots of "theys") call it the Law of Unintended Consequences. In this instance, after the Russians had withdrawn from Afghanistan, the U.S. once again returned to benign neglect of the region—the result was, indirectly, 9/11, orchestrated from Afghanistan by some of the people we had supported a decade earlier.

In Honor of Charlie and Gust and Their ilk:

*"The reasonable man adapts himself to the world; the unreasonable one persists in trying to adapt the world to himself. Therefore all progress depends on the unreasonable man."* —G.B. Shaw, *Man and Superman: The Revolutionist's Handbook*

*"Whenever anything is being accomplished, it is being done, I have learned, by a monomaniac with a mission."*—Peter Drucker

## **PASSION**

**84. I Second That Emotion!** Ever heard of a success story featuring a

... *dispassionate symphony conductor?*

... *bored painter?*

... *apathetic self-made billionaire?*

... *9 to 5 entrepreneur?*

"Great leaders move us. They ignite our passion and inspire the best in us. When we try to explain why they are so effective, we speak of strategy, vision or powerful ideas. But the reality is much more primal: Great leadership works through the emotions."—Daniel Goleman, *The New Leaders*

*Acknowledge* emotion.

*Hire* for emotion.

*Evaluate* for emotion.

*Promote* for emotion.

*Lead* by emotion.

(*Follow* by emotion.)

"*Sell*" emotion.

**85. One Rule! Much Gold!** Enterprise, public or private, small or enormous, is all about humanity—about humans serving humans, about human growth and community. That's obvious, or should be. But it's *always* worth a reminder—far more than usual as we reflect on the thoughtless shenanigans that delivered to us the worst financial crisis in 75 years.

Thinking deeply about these fundamentals reminded me of my old friend, the late John McConnell, founder of Worthington Steel. A pragmatist to a fault, as befits an Ohioan born and bred, John believed that growth and profitability flowed from fairness and trust. In fact, he went further, and insisted that the Golden Rule makes for a complete "policy manual"!

As far as I'm concerned, he was on to something, and Worthington's continuing success in *very* tough times in a *very* tough industry is testimony to the validity of McConnell's "simple" beliefs, lived for decades with a passion by a cast of thousands.

The icing on the cake and the irrefutable challenge, courtesy Dr. Frank Crane: "*The Golden Rule is of no use to you whatsoever unless you realize that it is your move.*"

**86. Seize the Moments.** Business ("life," too, of course) rises or falls on the nature and character and lingering memory of what the legendary airline (SAS) boss, Jan Carlzon, called "moments of truth"—those fleeting fragments of true human contact that quite literally define our enterprise's Spirit & Excellence—or lack thereof.

Thus our goal, perhaps our primary goal, in every flavor and every size of business, is to "MTMMOT"—Manage To Memorable Moments Of Truth. Every decision—about hiring, firing, supervision, training, systems development, lobby décor, etc.—should be designed for and brought immediately and directly to bear on the "production" of Memorable Moments of Truth. Perhaps we need a ... Manager of Memorable Moments of Truth? (Seriously!)

## **PRESENCE**

**87. Managing by Wandering Around—It's All Around You!** Back in 1982, as my *In Search of Excellence* coauthor Bob Waterman and I were preparing in our Manhattan hotel room for our brief appearance on the *Today* show to talk about "the book," we got into a tussle. Turns out we both most loved the same thing in *Search*—and both wanted to utter the word/words on national TV. We flipped a coin, Bob won—and I'm still frustrated almost three decades later! The bragging rights at stake?

MBWA or "Managing By Wandering Around," a concept we learned about from what was, in 1979 when we began our research, a much smaller, more intimate Hewlett-Packard.

For me, MBWA has become a metaphor for the manager's/leader's #1 priority: *Staying in touch*.

I am a MBWA zealot.

I swear by MBWA.

In any and all circumstances.

It is indeed leadership's sine qua non.

(I ran into a senior healthcare exec who'd attended a big-league leadership seminar. The prominent instructor asked the group, "Who is your #1 enemy?" Answers, no surprise, included "competitors," "execs who play politics," "clunky systems," "thoughtless regulations." "No," the instructor snapped, "it's your *desk*—getting stuck behind your desk and slowly, or not-so-slowly, losing touch." Amen!)

**88. All Senses! Or Nonsense!** I swear I can hear him. The successful community bank CEO. But, actually, it was two decades ago. The topic, at one of my seminars, was MBWA. Or Close to the Customer. No matter. I remember his translation from his world, circa, say, 1986, to what I had been discussing:

*"Tom, let me give you the definition of a good lending officer. On Sunday, after church, driving the family home, he takes a little detour past a distribution center he's lent money to. Doesn't go in, barely slows down, just takes a look, tidiness, external maintenance, whatever, takes it in with all his senses. That's all."*

And that was it.

In touch.

All senses.

Fleeting but "real."

Have I just explained the alpha through omega of the financial meltdown? Of course not! But we could have used a few more "all-senses" "drive-bys" in the world of mortgage banking. And in a few of the CDS shops, not to mention Mr. Madoff's shop, too!

"In touch"—literally and figuratively—matters. A lot.

**89. Leave Your Wallet (or Pocketbook) at Home.** I recently forgot to take my wallet with me on a grocery trip. It was only after I got to the grocery store—22 miles from home—that I discovered my mistake. Luckily, I had a secret cash stash in the glove compartment, just for this

sort of eventuality. Boy, did I ever decimate that (not-so-small) stash in my 5 or 6 stops around town!

So what?

I, undoubtedly like you, typically pay for stuff with plastic or keystrokes. There is many an "ouch" in the process. But the credit-card "ouch" is a far cry from peeling off \$138 at the grocery store, \$47 to fill a ... *Subaru*, \$78 at one of my "ordinary" stops at the bookstore, and more, more, more at a couple of other shops—e.g., \$68 for fresh fish for four. One's sense of the true cost of living goes up by an order of magnitude. The bigger point is obvious, if elusive—more than ever, companies of all sizes have to bring reality home in some high-impact way. Not that "work as a clerk for a day" silliness—which is mostly a charade, albeit a well-meaning one—but something more realistic.

Pay for your groceries with cash next time.  
Your car repair, too.  
The office supply bill? Ditto.

By hook or by crook ... drag realism in the office door.

**90. Get Down from Your Pedestal—and Beware the Sound of Laughter!** In his autobiography, General Norman Schwarzkopf reveals, hardly central to his story but perhaps worth a moment, that he simply cannot tell a joke effectively. Forgets stuff. Timing off. Screws up the punchline. Etc. But then a funny thing happened when he got promoted to General. The moment he pinned a ... STAR ... on his collar he apparently became hilarious—associates start laughing uproariously at his jokes, botched or not.

The message is clear, and it's one for all who manage, not just General Officers: *Beware underlings who laugh at your jokes*. Writ large, as is my habit: Once you become a boss you will never hear the unadulterated truth again! (Keyword: *Never*.) And that's almost as true for a 20-year-old shift boss in a Dunkin' Donuts in Littleville as for a senior middle manager or business owner or General S.

**91. Big Plan? No, Small Steps (Steps on the Ground)** In *The White Man's Burden: Why the West's Efforts to Aid the Rest Have Done So Much Ill and So Little Good*, nation-building expert William Easterly laments, "The West spent \$2.3 trillion on foreign aid over the last five decades and still has not managed to get 12-cent medicines to children to prevent half of all malaria deaths. The West spent \$2.3 trillion and still has not managed to get three dollars to each new mother to prevent five million child deaths."

Easterly is the arch enemy of the Big Plan (his capital letters, not mine—for once) and the fan of practical activities of "Searchers" (his cap "S") who learn the ins and outs of the culture, politics, and local conditions "on the ground" in order to use local levers, and get those 12-cent medicines to community members. He writes:

*"In foreign aid, Planners announce good intentions but don't motivate anyone to carry them out; Searchers find things that work and get some reward. Planners raise expectations but take no responsibility for meeting them; Searchers accept responsibility for their actions; Planners determine what to supply; Searchers find out what is in demand. Planners apply global blueprints; Searchers adapt to local conditions. Planners at the top lack knowledge of the bottom; Searchers find out what the reality is at the bottom. Planners never hear whether the*

*planned recipients got what they needed; Searchers find out if the customer is satisfied. ... A Planner thinks he already knows the answers; he thinks of poverty as a technical engineering problem that his answers will solve. A Searcher admits he doesn't know the answers in advance; he believes that poverty is a complicated tangle of political, social, historical, institutional, and technological factors; he hopes to find answers to individual problems only by trial and error and experimentation. A Planner believes outsiders know enough to impose solutions; a Searcher believes only insiders have enough knowledge to find solutions, and that most solutions must be homegrown."*

Herewith, a sampling of the "lessons" I've extracted from William Easterly:

Lesson: *Show up! Stay!* "Boots on the ground," "permanently," at the loci of implementation. (No long "home leaves" if possible—"in this with you" is the message that must be sent.)

Lesson: Invest in ceaseless study of conditions "on the ground"—social and political and historical and systemic.

Lesson: Talk to the "locals."

Lesson: *Listen* to the "locals." (And *listen*.) (With perceived patience!) (And *listen*.) (And *listen*.) (And *listen*.) (And *listen*.) (And *listen*.) (With perceived patience!) (And *listen*.)

Lesson: *Respect* the "locals."

Lesson: *Empathize* with the "locals."

And on it goes with 10 or 20 more in *The Little BIG Things ...*

Lesson: To summarize the summary:

*Show up!*

*Listen!*

*Hear!*

*Respect!*

*Empathize!*

*Skip the Grand Theorems!*

*Dive in and Try and Try and Adjust and Try Again and Plagiarize from Extant Experiments ... until You're Blue in the Face!*

*Move at an appropriate pace, not a headline-grabbing pace!*

*Honor the local politics as your life's blood—regardless of attendant frustration!*

*Get the community's women heavily involved. (THIS IS HUGE—AND I EMPHASIZE IT ACCORDINGLY IN THE BOOK.)*

NB:

"Local politics"—"the last 95%!"

Make that "the last 98%!"

Politics: Love it—or go home!\* \*\* \*\*\*

\*Hint: This applies ... everywhere!

\*\*No "politics," no progress!

\*\*\*Period.

NB: Probably not many reading this book work for NGOs or other agencies delivering aid. But 100% of us are in the full-time business of ... GTD/Getting Things Done. Simply put, Easterly's book is perhaps the best tract I've read on the topic of implementation-getting things done. There is a ridiculously small library of books on implementation per se—which is a scandal.

## TALENT

### 92. Hiring: Do You Approach It with Unabashed Fanaticism?

"Hiring is the most important aspect of business—and yet remains woefully misunderstood."—  
Geoff Smart and Randy Street, *Who: The A Method for Hiring*

"Development can help great people become even better—but if I had a dollar to spend, I'd spend ...70 cents ... getting the right person in the door."— Paul Russell, Director of Leadership & Development, Google

We *are* seriously concerned with hiring, no doubt of it. *But ... do we treat it ... strategically ... as the "most important aspect of business"—4-person auto body shop or Siemens? My constant refrain concerning such topics: Are we ... "professional students of" ... hiring???* As I see it (again!): Effective *hiring* = Effective *offshore motorboat racing* = A craft, a profession with a body of knowledge to be *mastered*.

(FYI, give Geoff Smart and Randy Street's *Who: The A Method for Hiring* a try.)

**93. Promotion: Are You Building a "Two Per Year" Legacy?** Suppose you hold one of your organization's top jobs for five years, about average. Suppose, and this is typically about right, that you have two key promotion decisions per year. Then it stands to reason that just *ten* decisions in five years *determine* (not "contribute to," but "determine") your legacy!

Once more, I'm hardly accusing you of being a slacker. I have ... ZERO ... doubt about the seriousness with which you attend promotion decisions. But once more I *am* asking: *Do you give the promotion decision, if you are, say, BigCo CEO, exactly the same attention you give a major acquisition?* That's the level of importance in terms of impact—hence it's a pretty decent yardstick of "attention deserved." Most of us, obviously, are not "CEO of BigCo," but the idea is precisely the same in *any* boss selection process.

Promotion decision?  
*Fanaticism* rules!

### 94. Development: Are You Finding and Cultivating First-Rate First-Line Supervisors?

Success in the marketplace is a great thing!  
Top quality products you can be proud of are great things!  
Integrity and transparency are great things!

But none of the three is the *principal determinant* of worker satisfaction. That honor goes, hands down, to ... whether or not the employee gets along with/works well with his or her first-line supervisor! So, for example:

- (1) Are you, Big Boss, a ... *f-o-r-m-a-l student of front-line supervisor behavioral excellence?*\*  
(\*Yes, again, damn it, this sort of thing can be formally studied.)
- (2) Do you spend ... *gobs and gobs (and then more and more gobs and gobs) of time ...* selecting the first-line supervisors?

- (3) Do you have the ... *best training program in the industry (best = best)* for first-line supervisors?
- (4) Do you Formally & Rigorously ... *mentor* ... first-line supervisors?
- (5) Are you willing, pain notwithstanding, to ... *leave a first-line supervisor slot open* ... until you can fill the slot with somebody *spectacular*? (And are you willing to use some word like ... "*spectacular*" ... in judging applicants for the job?)

I am, again, absolutely ... *not* ... suggesting that you aren't serious about first-line supervisor selection, care, and feeding. I absolutely ... *am* ... suggesting, in pretty much no uncertain terms, that you probably don't take it as seriously as you might if you saw it as precisely what it is ... a first-order ... *strategic* ... decision.

Fact (unequivocal): *The single most significant/#1 determinant of your outfit's product-service quality and productivity is the quality of your "portfolio" of first-line supervisors.*

*Summary:* The last three items (#92, #93, #94) constitute HR's "Big Three"/the "Talent Trio":

- (1) Hiring = Most important business decisions.
- (2) Two promotion decisions per year = Legacy.
- (3) First-line supervisors = Keystone to employee morale and satisfaction and productivity.

Followed in each instance by my "Big Two" queries:

- (1) Are you an avid student of the three issues/opportunities?
- (2) Do you spend an appropriate (that is, "insane") amount of time on these three issues-opportunities-strategic watersheds?

To stretch a little further:

*Hiring + Two promotions/year + First-line supervisor development = Business strategy + Personal leadership effectiveness.*

**95. People Who Develop People: What's Your Track Record?** In New Delhi in the spring of 2009, I had a senior General Officer in the Indian Army in the front row of the meeting room. I don't recall the details, but evaluating senior officers for promotion came up. I ventured, boldly, that there "was ... *one* ... issue [in the promotion evaluation] that stood head and shoulders above the rest." Namely: What is this candidate's track record—in *exacting detail*—in developing people. Though hardly locked in concrete, I posited that "the ONE question" might go something like this:

*"In the last year [3 years, say, duration of the current assignment], name the 3 people whose growth you've most contributed to. Please explain in significant detail where each was at the beginning of the year, where he or she is today, and where each is heading in the next 12 and 24 and 60 months. Please explain in detail your development strategy in each case. Please tell me your biggest development disappointment this past year—looking back, could you or would you have done anything differently? Please tell me about your greatest development triumph—and disaster—in the last ten years. What are the 'three big things' you've learned about 'people development' along the way?"*

For starters, give yourself a soul-searching/soul-searing exam:

Please list.

5 people.

Whose development you have contributed to.

Directly & Profoundly.

In the last 24 months.

## **PEOPLE**

**96. It's All About ... the Quality of the Workforce.** The formulation that follows came from a speech I gave in Shanghai in the spring of 2009. I was part of a program that included renowned consultants, economists, etc. I began by saying, "In the next several hours you will hear many prescriptions for dealing with today's shaky times—and preparing for China's future. Many of those prescriptions will involve the role of the government in manipulating economic levers, the sorts of help that big firms and SMEs will need, etc. I will doubtless find myself in agreement with many, probably most, of the suggestions made." But then I added that *my* role was to simplify, to boldly and perhaps foolhardily assert that, regardless of economic levers pulled, there was in fact only ... One Thing that Really Mattered in the long run to the health of the enterprise—and, indeed, the economy as a whole: *the quality and character of the work force.* (And, concomitantly, *the unstinting "24/7" devotion of enterprise leaders to developing each and every member of that work force.*)

This applies throughout the world—in America and Brazil and Lithuania and Estonia and Korea. And in China, as it pursues a future obviously more and more dependent on incorporating intellectual capital and creativity into its economic portfolio (already China bristles at being assigned a role as "the world's workshop"). This applies to 100% of people in the workforce. As in a football team or symphony orchestra, there are no "bit players." This applies in every industry and for every price-point strategy therein. In Brazil, Magazine Luiza, the country's Wal\*Mart, is invariably near the top of the "Best Companies to Work For" list, just as Wegmans, the regional grocer, and the Container Store are at the head of the pack, peers of Google and Amgen, on the American "Best" list. This applies to companies of all sizes—from microscopic to humongous. This applies in good times—and especially in bad times. Engaged workers and an unwavering commitment to Excellence from those workers are not the whole story—but they are the bedrock upon which all else is built.

**97. Up with People! As in: Increase Your People Budget.** There's a convenience store near me. They undertook what I'd guess was a \$500,000 physical renovation.

Bravo!

Except ...

The staff attitude, previously crappy, is as crappy as ever. And it's all the more obviously crappy in what's now a great-looking space. Frankly, I feel the owners pretty much pissed away the \$500,000! That is: I'll trade a paint job for a terrific attitude any day!

It calls to mind a Very Big Issue. It's so easy to get caught up with the capital budget. The capital expenditure:

It's "permanent"!  
You can take pictures of the result!  
It doesn't take sick days!

The people budget, on the other hand, is ...

All about intangibles.  
"Soft stuff."  
No photo ops to speak of.

So here's my dogmatic suggestion: When you've absolutely, positively, unequivocally locked down your budget for the next year, I beg you to pick the lock. Please, please, please: Cut the projected capital expenditures by 15 percent. And: Redirect those savings to the people budget (recruiting, training, perks, pay, extra staffing, whatever) ... penny for penny or million for million!

**98. Cherish the Last Two-Percenter.** Simply put, one cannot overestimate the value of ... "the last two-percenter." That person who, at 2 a.m., takes one final look at the presentation to the Board tomorrow, and discovers that two key numbers are transposed on the footnote on Slide 47—and then looks "one [more] last time" when she returns at 5:45 a.m. The carpenter who, though technically "finished," adds one final touch that alters the character of the cabinet he's spent two weeks building, and then hauls the piece back to his shop for a significant (to him) revision. Etc.

Sometimes we call the last two-percenter a "pain in the ass." True, but no one (LITERALLY NO ONE!) is of greater importance to the success of what we do. Recognize and reward the "pain in the ass" "last two-percenter" as if she were the Ultimate Gift from The Gods. She is!

**99. The Excitement Axiom—and the People Corollary.**

*Axiom: Only Excited People can excite customers over the long haul—i.e., again & again.*

*Corollary: To cause our colleagues to be Excited we must put—and keep—the maintenance of their well-being and their opportunity structure at the Top of our agenda.*

Which must necessarily mean that ...

- (1) the employee who serves the paying customer is for the leader, in fact, her primary customer;
- (2) hence the paying customer actually comes second.

(Which is what Southwest founder Herb Kelleher, RE/MAX founder Dave Liniger, and former Rosenbluth International boss Hal Rosenbluth, among others, would say. I have learned at their feet and cribbed directly from all three of them.)

Bottom line:

*Want to put the customer first?  
Then put the customer second!*

Pledge of Enterprise Allegiance: I hereby promise to ...

First and Foremost  
Cherish and Excite the People  
Who in Turn Have the Opportunity to  
Cherish and Excite the Customer  
And Induce the Customer to Recommend Us to Others  
Which is the Premier Path to Growth and Profitability.  
Forever and Ever,  
Amen.

## **GENDER**

### **100. Pronoun Power!—Or: The Customer Is a "She."**

*"Forget China, India and the Internet: Economic Growth Is Driven by Women."*—Headline, *the Economist*

*"One thing is certain: Women's rise to power, which is linked to the increase in wealth per capita, is happening in all domains and at all levels of society. Women are no longer content to provide efficient labor or to be consumers. ... With rising budgets and more autonomy to spend, this is just the beginning. The phenomenon will only grow as girls prove to be more successful than boys in the school system. For a number of observers, we have already entered the age of 'womenomics,' the economy as thought out and practiced by a woman."*—Aude Zieseniss de Thuin, founder of the Women's Forum for the Economy and Society, rated one of the top five global forums by the *Financial Times*

Hey, g-u-y-s:

If women are your/our primary customers (they usually are, commercial as well as consumer goods in the U.S.), knock off the likes of football analogies. If women are your/our primary customers, always (ALWAYS!) refer to the generic customer as ... "she." There's obviously lots and lots and lots more to this issue—it's been an obsession of mine since 1996. But ... *language matters*.

"She."  
Starting.  
Now.  
Period.

**101. Women Lead! (Can Men Learn to Be Good Sports About It?)** A main message of *The Little BIG Things* deals with the-"soft"-stuff-that-is-really-the-"hard"-stuff that underpins organization and individual effectiveness. Fact is, a lot of "this stuff" (e.g., primacy of relationship development) comes pretty naturally to most women—and is Big News and a struggle to most males. Hence, I wonder sometimes, mostly as I toss and turn in bed, if this book, and its ilk, have much or any relevance to women. Or do some-many-most-damn near all women readers laugh themselves silly as, one more time, I treat the obvious as the un-obvious? (E.g., "Listening is a ... Very Good Thing.") Consider just one compelling example, from "Gender

Experiments Surprise Even the Experts," a chapter sub-title in *Leadership and the Sexes: Using Gender Science to Create Success in Business*, by Michael Gurian and Barbara Annis:

"In the 1990s, the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation/CBC created a short film that recorded an experiment in leadership styles between women and men. CBC didn't tell the participants the objective of the work they would do that day; the director simply divided the male and female leaders into two teams, and gave those team leaders the same directions: build an adventure camp. The teams were set up in a somewhat militaristic style at first, including team members wearing uniforms, but also with the caveat in place that the teams could alter their style and method as they wished as long as they met the outcome in time.

"Leader one immediately created a rank-and-file hierarchy and gave orders, even going so far as to assert authority by challenging members on whether they had polished their shoes. Leader two did not have the 'troops' line up and be inspected, but instead met with the other team members in a circle, asking 'How are we doing? Are we ready?' 'Anything else we should do?' 'Do you think they'll test us on whether we've polished our shoes?' Instead of giving orders, leader two was touching team members on the arm to reassure them.

*"As part of the program, CBC arranged for corporate commentators to watch the teams prepare. Initially the commentators (mostly men) were not impressed by the leadership style of leader two; the second team wasn't 'under control,' members weren't lined up, and they 'lacked order' (or so it seemed). The commentators predicted that team two would not successfully complete the task. Yet, when the project was completed, team two had built an impressive adventure camp as good as team one's, with some aspects that were judged as better.*

"When de-briefing their observations, the commentators noticed that when team one was building the structures for the camp, there had been discord regarding who was in charge and who had completed which job and who hadn't. Team one exhibited a lack of communication during the process of completion that created problems (for example, 'Wasn't someone else supposed to do this?') Team two, on the other hand, took longer to do certain things, but because of its emphasis on communication and collaboration during the enactment of the task (such as 'Let's try this' and 'What do you think about that?'), the team met the goal of building the adventure camp in its own positive way, and on time."

Interesting, eh?

Lessons to learn: Many & Profound.

Over to you.

**102. Men, "Get the Facts": Women Are Different.** I love the writer Anita Shreve. I recently read her superb *The Weight of Water*. Few writers—and virtually no male writers, as I see it—deal so lucidly or movingly or in such depth, with life's painful tangles of relationships. Simple fact: Women by and large instinctively appreciate complex, inchoate sets of human relationships. Men are more or less clueless. (Research, including recent neurobiological research, increasingly supports this dichotomy.) Translating this into the emotion-driven, *all-important-these-days* world of design, I have by and large concluded, after 1.5 decades of study and writing and contemplation:

MEN CANNOT EFFECTIVELY DESIGN PRODUCTS-SERVICES-EXPERIENCES FOR WOMEN.

MEN CANNOT EFFECTIVELY SELL OR MARKET TO WOMEN.

MEN WHO DISAGREE WITH THIS ARE DELUSIONAL.

I can't change that, hard as I may try. But I can do ... something (and so can you):

I PLEDGE ... THAT I WILL NEVER ENGAGE IN ANY SORT OF DISCUSSION OF PRODUCTS-SERVICES-EXPERIENCES THAT INCLUDE WOMEN AS CUSTOMERS-CLIENTS, UNLESS ONE THIRD OR MORE OF THOSE PRESENT AND IN POSITIONS OF AUTHORITY ARE WOMEN.

I PLEDGE ... THAT I WILL WORK TIRELESSLY TO ENSURE THAT WOMEN'S VIEWS ARE HEARD FIRST & LAST AND ARE CLEARLY INCORPORATED IN A COMMANDING WAY IN ANY AND ALL ACTION PLANS INVOLVING THE DEVELOPMENT AND MARKETING OF OUR PRODUCTS AND SERVICES.

I FURTHER PLEDGE ... THAT I WILL BECOME A "PIONEER" IN GETTING WOMEN-CENTRIC VIEWS CLEARLY INTO THE MAINSTREAM—AND WILL WORK TIRELESSLY TO ENSURE THAT WOMEN'S REPRESENTATION IN ANY AND ALL LEADERSHIP POSITIONS IS AT LEAST CONSISTENT WITH THE SHAPE OF THE MARKETS WE SERVE OR WISH TO SERVE.

(I'm not asking you to follow this slavishly—obviously there's no reason to think you would. And I know I've become a radical on this topic—not as a matter of social justice, but instead for reasons economic, namely the enormity of the opportunity and the fact that so few "get it" "strategically" and thus "leave so much on the table." On the other hand, I think it'd be hard to dispute a more or less "pledge" that's more or less like what you see here. Your call, obviously—why not discuss it with colleagues?)

**103. Dressed for Success? Or: What the History of the Women's Suffrage Movement Taught Me About Innovation.** I cross-dressed for the first time on March 31, 2007. I went to a local (Dorset VT) costume party, and tried valiantly to represent Elizabeth Cady Stanton, rightfully called the Mother of the American Women's Rights/Women's Suffrage Movement. I was shamefaced as I prepared to play Ms. Stanton-for-an-evening—shamed, after almost fifteen years of loudly and doggedly championing change to women's still diminished role in business and government, that I was almost totally ignorant of the astounding history of the American Women's Rights Movement. This story describes a personal journey (mine) away from ignorance, a journey that was, well, a blast—and, I believe, important. (I now speak noisily for far greater attention to the history of the women's movement—still woefully skimpy; a condition not corrected to this day.) I also dwell on this story because innovation, including social innovation, is the "business" theme nearest and dearest to my professional heart—and the most important business issue of this and, frankly, every era. It is my longstanding argument that all innovation is irrational, non-linear, and anything but the product of plans and focus groups; it is instead about anger to the point of rage that eventually boils over (from suffrage to the personal computer); "a little band of brothers" (whoops, the five Great Sisters of Seneca Falls and a slew of successors); willingness to suffer vicious smear attacks and unspeakable opprobrium of both a professional and personal nature, passion (!!!); relentlessness(!!!—72 years, 1 month and 7 days—from lunch at Seneca Falls on July 13, 1848 through 909 (!!) political campaigns to ratification of the 19<sup>th</sup> Amendment by Tennessee, the 36<sup>th</sup> state to do so, courtesy a 49-47 vote on August 18, 1920); resilience to deal with setback upon setback upon setback.

All the above made the sacrifice of wearing a wig and a long dress for five hours, in honor of Elizabeth Cady Stanton, seem like small beer! My hero, Ms. Stanton, per Elisabeth Griffith, *In Her Own Right: The Life of Elizabeth Cady Stanton*:

*"She was defeated again and again and again, but she continued the struggle with passionate impatience."*

*"She had survived her husband, outlived most of her enemies, and exhausted her allies. Her mind remained alert, her mood optimistic, and her manner combative." [ECS 80<sup>th</sup> birthday celebration, attended by 6,000 people]*

Lessons? I've got just one:

*A record of 1 win and 908 losses [a "batting average" of .001 in 909 political campaigns] is just fine & dandy—and more than good enough for the Hall of Fame—if the cause is worth the effort and pain and personal opprobrium!*

## **INNOVATION**

### **104. The Audacity of ... Research!**

*In good times and bad.* There are lots of sexy innovation strategies—I've championed many of them. But there's also good, old-fashioned spending on R&D—and protecting-the-hell-out-of R&D in tough times.

*In big firms and small.* Aggressive R&D is not just the provenance of the big company. In fact, it is arguably more important to the 2-person Professional Service Firm than the lumbering giant.

*In every department.* AGGRESSIVE R&D IS AS IMPORTANT IN FINANCE and PURCHASING and HR and LOGISTICS as in IT or NEW PRODUCT DEVELOPMENT!!!

*Throughout the "supply chain!"* Having vendors, suppliers, customers, etc., that are top-quartile in R&D spending in their industries is of the utmost importance.

*In Systems!* Innovative systems are as important as innovative products.

*By giving everyone "play" money—think "Micro-R&D."* Giving everyone in the organization the opportunity to get their hands on a few bucks (and a mentor) in order to play around (right term) with a new idea is essential.

*By thinking "Venture Capital."* Internal VC funds can run to billions of \$\$\$ at an Intel, but the animating idea is to cast a wide, speculative net for potential investments. This could mean, for a restaurant owner, the likes of a \$10,000 scholarship for a star-in-the-making chef to attend a top-flight cooking course in France.

*By reaching out to universities.* Associations, large and small, with research universities are an important part of the innovative enterprise's R&D strategy.

**105. Adhocracy—Love It or Leave It.** In my experience, most truly innovative projects invent themselves, as opposed to being the product of a formal planning process; and their growth, too, is mostly organic, and constantly punctuated by odd twists and turns. An effective culture of innovation, then, is largely ad hoc—which drives many traditional senior managers

crazy. To them, "adhocracy" is little better than "mobocracy." But if they can't "get it," they don't belong.

### **106. Beyond Excellence: The "Berserk Standard."**

Amazon has changed the world.

eBay has changed the world.

Craigslist has changed the world—put about a zillion nails in the coffins of newspapers, among many other Richter 8.0+ things. Craigslist has more traffic than Amazon or eBay; though a private company, Craigslist has a projected market capitalization numbering in the billions of dollars.

Amazon has 20,000 employees.

eBay has 16,000 employees.

Craigslist has ... 30 employees.

There is more than one way to skin a cat—even a thoroughly modern cat.

Message: Never get seriously underway on a project of any sort until you've surfaced a couple of ideas that score perfect 10s, or at least 8s, on what I call ... The Berserk Scale—e.g. 14,000 or 20,000 vs. 30.

**107. Out of the Shadows: Skunkworks, Revisited.** Lockheed invented the term "Skunk Works"—a small unit born in 1943 and based in Burbank, CA, that used a totally unconventional approach to developing essential military aircraft such as the famous SR-71 Blackbird spy plane, a pillar of our Cold War tactical package, in record time at minimum cost with maximum innovation executed by an astonishingly small group of astonishingly motivated people. (Their 1<sup>st</sup> project was the XP80, the 1<sup>st</sup> tactical jet fighter—75 guys, 143 days start to prototype.) I came across the Skunk Works in the early 1980s—and immediately fell madly in love. I had long been convinced that "normal pathways" would not yield innovation at Big Companies. And I was on the lookout for byways—places that stunk to the reigning bureaucrats. And Skunk Works, or Skunkworks as I prefer, filled the bill perfectly.

So the generic "Skunk Works idea" is a "band of brothers and sisters," contrarian in nature and determined to do it their own way, who live in the netherworld, who stink-up-the-central-culture as they pursue what they believe is an earth-shattering dream. (Companies like Xerox and Apple have used these units to great—yes, earth-shattering—advantage.) The idea as we packaged it was picked up by numerous companies—e.g., a Pitney Bowes unit rented an unused restaurant about 12 miles from HQ, and a little team-of-more-or-less-freaks cobbled together a remarkable product in a few weeks.

### **108. S.A.V. (No, It's Not a Kind of Truck.)**

*"If I had said 'yes' to all the projects I turned down and 'no' to all the ones I took, it would have worked out about the same."*—David Picker, movie studio exec, quoted in William Goldman's classic *Adventures in the Screen Trade* (cited by Caltech physics professor and author Leonard Mlodinow in *The Drunkard's Walk: How Randomness Rules Our Lives*)

*"Ever notice that 'What the hell' is always the right decision?"*—a shrewd observation, attributed to an unknown Hollywood scriptwriter

If, as I fervently believe ... Randomness Rules Our Lives ... then your ... *only (logical) ...* defense is-must be taking refuge in the message of the so-called "law of large numbers"—that is, any success follows from tryin' enough stuff so that the odds of doin' *something* right tilt your way.

Ultimate & Perhaps Only "Sure-fire" Winning Formula:

S.A.V.\*

\*Screw Around Vigorously.

### **109. What Have You Prototyped Lately?**

*"Effective prototyping may be the most valuable core competence an innovative organization can hope to have."*—Michael Schrage

*"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 is the essence of innovation."*—Michael Schrage, *Serious Play*

Don't let yourself get stuck!  
(What a silly statement.)

Fact: There is ... ALWAYS ... *something ... some little thing ...* you can start/do in the next ... 30 minutes ... to make a wee, concrete step forward toward solving a problem or creating a new opportunity. My colleagues and I call this the ... "Quick Prototype Attitude." MIT's Michael Schrage tells us that innovation ... *is ...* the reaction to a prototype. To move forward, you must have some eighth-baked thing to talk about and shoot at and tinker with ... ASAP.

### **110. Hell Hath No Fury: Celebrate "Disturbers of the Peace."**

*"What drove Trippe? A fury that the future was always being hijacked by people with smaller ideas—by his first partners who did not want to expand airmail routes; by nations that protected flag carriers with subsidies; by elitists who regarded flight, like luxury liners, as a privilege to be enjoyed only by the few; by cartel operators who rigged prices. The democratization he effected was as real as Henry Ford's."* —Harold Evans, on legendary PanAm boss Juan Trippe

I believe that the Mother of [Almost] All Innovation is ... *FURY*. Abiding anger at the way things are... coupled with an "irrational" (statistically inappropriate) determination to beat back the innumerable protectors of the status quo and find and implement a better way.

An innovator's life, almost regardless of the size of the innovation (people fight the small ones about as tenaciously as the large ones), is pure hell. All guardians of the status quo are her enemies. That includes about 100 percent of her bosses, appointed stalwart custodians of "the way we do things around here." Why is fury required? Simple: In order to survive the onslaught of these Powerful Guardians of Yesterday, and come out the other end in tact, she has to be really pumped up 100.00% of the time, and equipped with very thick skin indeed—that is, really truly pissed off with the way things are.

**111. The Innovation10: What We Know So Far ...** Libraries are full of books written about innovation. Nonetheless, I felt a pressing need here to devote an item to summarizing my four decades of noodling on this subject:

- (1) *Try it. Repeat. Repeat. Repeat.* He who tries the most stuff wins.
- (2) *Prototype it.* A particular form of trying—some model of some part of "it" that everybody quickly has an opportunity shoot at.
- (3) *Celebrate failure.* Keyword: CELEBRATE. Not "tolerate," but "celebrate"—if "most tries" are king, then "most failures" are necessarily crown prince.
- (4) *Hang Out Axiom.* Every "hang out" decision is an innovation decision: Yes. Or: No. That is, hang out with interesting, get more interesting. Hang out with ordinary, get more ordinary.
- (5) *Diversity.* That is, diversity on any damned dimension imaginable. In any and every situation. More variety = Higher odds of success!
- (6) *Parallel Universe.* Frequently the resistance to change is so strenuous that one must, in effect, give up on normal channels. So create a pretty-damn-separate "new world" (new folks, new location, new attitude, etc., etc.)—a parallel universe.
- (7) *XFX/Cross-functional Excellence.* Ninety percent (95 percent?) of innovation requires working across functional borders, so Border Bashing/X-border Love is key to innovation success.
- (8) *R&D Equality.* "Research" is not the exclusive provenance of the new product folks. Every department needs a well-funded, highly regarded R&D activity; the clear expectation is that every unit/function will be as well-known for its innovation record as for its execution of standard tasks.
- (9) *Hire and promote innovators.* The best test of innovation potential is ... a track record in innovation. If you are assessing a 26-year-old candidate and there are no cases-of-innovation-worth-bragging-about in his past—then don't expect much in the future.
- (10) *Fun!* Innovating is about breaking the rules—often *our* rules. There is a certain *mischievousness* about innovative organizations—not fun & games, but pleasure in sticking a finger in convention's eye, especially one or more of our own conventions.

## **LISTENING**

### **112. Now Hear This! Listening Is the Ultimate "Core Competence."**

Listening\* is ...

(\*And when you read "listening," please substitute "OBSESSION with listening.")

Listening is ... the ultimate mark of *Respect*.

Listening is ... the heart and soul of *Engagement*.

Listening is ... the heart and soul of *Kindness*.

Listening is ... the heart and soul of *Thoughtfulness*.

Listening is ... the basis for true *Collaboration*.

Listening is ... the basis for true *Partnership*.

Listening is ... a *Team Sport*.

Listening is ... a *Developable Individual Skill*.\*

(\*Though women are *far* better at it than men.)

Listening is ... the basis for *Community*.

Listening is ... the bedrock of *Joint Ventures that work*.

Listening is ... the bedrock of *Joint Ventures that last*.

Listening is ... the core of *effective Cross-functional Communication*\*

(\*Which is in turn Attribute #1 of organizational effectiveness.\*)

Listening is ... the engine of *superior EXECUTION*.  
 Listening is ... the key to *making the Sale*.  
 Listening is ... the key to *Keeping the Customer's Business*.  
 Listening is ... the engine of *Network development*.  
 Listening is ... the engine of *Network maintenance*.  
 Listening is ... the engine of *Network expansion*.  
 Listening is ... *Learning*.  
 Listening is ...the *sine qua non of Renewal*.  
 Listening is ...the *sine qua non of Creativity*.  
 Listening is ...the *sine qua non of Innovation*.  
 Listening is ... the core of *taking Diverse opinions aboard*.  
 Listening is ... *Strategy*.  
 Listening is ... *Source #1 of "Value-added."*  
 Listening is ... *Differentiator #1*.  
 Listening is ... *Profitable*.  
 (\*The "R.O.I." from listening is higher than from any other single activity.)  
 Listening underpins ... *Commitment to EXCELLENCE*.

Do you agree with the above?

*If you agree, shouldn't listening be ... a Core Value?*  
*If you agree, shouldn't listening be ... perhaps Core Value #1?\**  
 (\* "We are Effective Listeners—we treat Listening EXCELLENCE as the Centerpiece of our Commitment to Respect and Engagement and Community and Growth"—or some such.)  
*If you agree, shouldn't listening be ... a Core Competence?*  
*If you agree, shouldn't listening be ... Core Competence #1?*  
*If you agree, shouldn't listening be ... an explicit "agenda item" at every Meeting?*  
*If you agree, shouldn't listening be ... our Strategy—per se? (Listening = Strategy.)*  
*If you agree, shouldn't listening be ... the #1 skill we look for in Hiring (for every job)?*  
*If you agree, shouldn't listening be ... the #1 attribute we examine in our Evaluations?*  
*If you agree, shouldn't listening be ... the #1 skill we look for in Promotion decisions?*  
*If you agree, shouldn't listening be ... the #1 Training priority at every stage of everyone's career—from Day #1 to Day LAST?*  
*If you agree, what are you going to do about it ... in the next 30 MINUTES?*  
*If you agree, what are you going to do about it ... at your NEXT meeting?*  
*If you agree, what are you going to do about it ... by the end of the DAY?*  
*If you agree, what are you going to do about it ... in the next 30 DAYS?*  
*If you agree, what are you going to do about it ... in the next 12 MONTHS?*

### **113. Are You an "18-Second Manager"?**

*"He [Christopher] had learned when he was still very young that if he kept quiet, the other person would eventually fill the silence: 'Everyone has a story to tell, if only you have the patience to wait for it and not get in the way of it.'"—Charles McCarry, Christopher's Ghosts, on the protagonist, Paul Christopher, a CIA field officer*

In *How Doctors Think*, Dr. Jerome Groopman reports that ... *the best source of evidence ... on a patient's malady is ... the patient*. Then he trundles out research demonstrating that docs interrupt their patients, on average, 18 *seconds* after the patient starts speaking. I cannot point to equivalent research (though it's doubtless out there), but I will bet you a beer, or a 6-pack, or a case, or a Bud

truck's full of brew that there are, per capita, as many "18-second interrupters" among managers as among docs.

So ...

Stop.  
Quit bloody interrupting.

#### **114. Get the Story.**

*"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."*—From *Respect* by Harvard professor Sara Lawrence-Lightfoot

*Everybody* has a story!

It's your job-opportunity ... as consultant, boss, project-peer, whatever ... to get it!  
"Get it" as in extract it—and as in understand it and hence understand, a bit, the storyteller.

### **SPECIAL SECTION: Quotations 34**

A few of my favorites from the set:

*"Ph.D. in leadership. Short course: Make a short list of all things done to you that you abhorred. Don't do them to others. Ever. Make another list of things done to you that you loved. Do them to others. Always."*—Dee Hock, founder, Visa

*"ARE YOU BEING REASONABLE? Most people are reasonable; that's why they only do reasonably well."*—Paul Arden, *Whatever You Think Think the Opposite*

*"The one thing you need to know about sustained individual success: Discover what you don't like doing and stop doing it."*—Marcus Buckingham, *The One Thing You Need to Know*

*"I can't tell you how many times we passed up hotshots for guys we thought were better people, and watched our guys do a lot better than the big names, not just in the classroom, but on the field—and, naturally, after they graduated, too. Again and again, the blue chips faded out, and our little up-and-comers clawed their way to all-conference and All-America teams."*—Legendary football coach Bo Schembechler, "Recruit for Character," from *Bo's Lasting Lessons*

*"The most successful people are those who are good at plan B."*—James Yorke, mathematician, on chaos theory, in *The New Scientist*

*"Stay Hungry. Stay Foolish."*—Steve Jobs, Apple

*"You are the storyteller of your own life, and you can create your own legend or not."*—Isabel Allende

*"Nothing is so contagious as enthusiasm."*—Samuel Taylor Coleridge

"A man without a smiling face must not open a shop."—Chinese proverb

"Life is not a journey to the grave with the intention of arriving safely in one pretty and well preserved piece, but to skid across the line broadside, thoroughly used up, worn out, leaking oil, shouting ... 'GERONIMO!'"—Bill McKenna, professional motorcycle racer

## **CURIOSITY**

### **115. If You Have to Ask ... Then Ask (and Ask and Ask.)**

"I don't invest in anything I don't understand."—Warren Buffett

One translation:

"I shall lead the league in Asking Dumb Questions."

"I shall become Questioner-in-Chief."

"I shall become 'Dumb Question'-er-in-Chief."

"I shall fill in no blanks—I'll ask until I 'get it' well enough to repeat it."

"I shall persist until I 'get it,' regardless of how dense it may make me appear at the time."

"I shall fight my ever-so-deep-seated instincts, and repeatedly say, 'Could you say that again, a little more slowly?'"

"I shall evaluate others in part on their skill and persistence at ... Asking Dumb Questions."

"We shall hire in part on perceived or measured Instinctive Curiosity." (For every slot.)

**116. Reward DNK (Do Not Know)** Bosses and "brilliant" staffers are very prone to falling into the trap of not admitting when they don't know the answer or have trouble with the concept. (CEOs pocketing \$75,000,000 bonuses didn't grock the Super-derivatives served up by their U. Chicago math Ph.D.s—welcome to Recessionus Gargantuas.) The boss thinks "I'm supposed to know that"—and is loath to admit that he doesn't. He rarely lies outright, but he is very inclined to obfuscate his ignorance. So, too, those "brilliant" staffers who are paid large sums to be brilliant, not to not know.

Fact is, we should not only readily (gleefully?—"that's what I hired *you* for") admit when we do not know something, but also actively *seek out* things we do not know, or "DNKs." Perhaps start meetings by asking, "*What are our DNKs here?*" (And end the meeting the same way.) We can, and should, make it positive ... and praiseworthy ... for anyone to say "DNK" when he/she/you/me DNK. Publicly cheer the person who admits—*in front of a boss*—that he or she "does not know" the facts here, or the answer to this or that. In fact, you might make a game (a serious game!) out of identifying the "DNKs" regarding any analysis or proposed action.

**117. Work the Watercooler—Or: Are You Gossiping Enough?** The human brain is about nine times bigger, on a body-size-adjusted basis, than that of mammals in general. The reason is fascinating—and mostly counterintuitive. We are, of course, a long way from being the strongest of the species. So how did we win out over the Truly Big Dudes? Answer: Not by intellectual skill at calculating warhead (spear) trajectories, but by joining together in groups and outwitting and out-organizing the brutes. And what brought these groups of humans together? A brain that grew to accommodate: Gossip! As British evolutionary psychologist Robin Dunbar puts it, our brains expanded almost entirely to store social information. This "relationship stuff" allowed us to

manufacture the "social glue" that would underpin co-habiting in sizeable bands; by developing social cohesion skills, we improved or maximized what we now call "organizational effectiveness" ... and became Kings and Queens of the jungle and beyond.

My point here is to suggest that anyone, as so many (esp. males) do, who dismisses or diminishes "relationship stuff" and "communication stuff"—and in particular "political stuff"—as "the soft stuff" is not only an ignorant damn fool, but also denying the essence of what it means to be human.

## **LEARNING**

**118. Making the Grade: Lifelong Learning Is a Mission Statement Must.** In our rapidly gyrating world, learning-for-life is no longer an option; it's a professional life (or death) necessity—as more and more are beginning to realize. This is true of you age 16 or 26 or 46 or 66—and God knows it's true of my great pal, *The Little BIG Things'* dedicatee, Warren Bennis, voracious in the depth and breadth of his quest for knowledge at 85!

I'll go so far as to say that an explicit focus on "life-long learning" for everyone on board could well be the most sustainable advantage an organization of any flavor can have. Hence, I hereby strongly suggest that ... *"An unstinting commitment by every one of us to accelerated lifelong learning"* ... or some close kin be made a formal part of your mission-values statement. It deserves to be right up there in the stratosphere with the likes of superior quality and profitability.

**119. Out-Study 'Em!** I loved this line from *New York Times* columnist Tom Friedman: *"When I was growing up, my parents used to say to me: 'Finish your dinner—people in China are starving.' I, by contrast, find myself wanting to say to my daughters: 'Finish your homework—people in China and India are starving for your job.'"* Tennis or finance or engineering or bartending ... this "simple" lesson bears repeating.

Age 26: Study!  
Age 46: Study!  
Age 66 (me): Study!

### **120. Out-Read 'Em!**

Read!  
Read Wide!  
Surprise Yourself With Your Reading Picks!  
Read Deep!  
Read Often!  
Out-READ the "Competition!"  
Take Notes!  
Summarize!  
Share With Others What You Read!  
Read!  
Read!  
Read!

**121. Out-Write 'Em!** Ulysses S. Grant was likely America's most effective general. He had many skills—and lucid writing, interestingly, ranked near the top. His orders to his generals before battles were masterpieces of clarity and brevity. Writing matters ... on the battlefield at Vicksburg as well as in the boardroom.

So: *Work your ass off* ... on your writing, from Tweets to emails to Blog Posts to letters to your Mum—each is an opportunity. (Re Tweets, I'm amazed at how much you can learn to pack in, with some clarity++, in 140 characters.)

**122. Now Enrolling: "The People's MBA."** I have long been a vociferous critic of the MBA—such criticism was the *de facto* point of *In Search of Excellence*. Bob Waterman and I, though both engineers (Waterman in Mining, me in Civil) and both Stanford MBAs and both McKinsey consultants (the latter a Mecca of cold-blooded business analysis), lamented business's abiding emphasis on the numbers and its accompanying *de facto* and *de jure* de-emphasis of the so-called "soft" "people stuff." Now, with tongue only slightly in cheek, I hereby offer the core courses in my prospective MBA curriculum, without comment:

- \*Managing People I, II, III
- \*Servant Leadership I, II
- \*Execution I, II, III
- \*Creating a "Try it now" environment/Celebrating Failure
- \*Maximizing R.O.I.R. (Return On Investment in Relationships)
- \*Value-added through XFX/Cross-functional EXCELLENCE/"Sucking down,"  
the Art of "Lower"-level Networking
- \*Value-added by converting *all* "Departments" into PSFs/Professional Service  
Firms/Centers of Excellence with Astounding Value-Added
- \*Sales I, II
- \*Service EXCELLENCE
- \*Creating INCREDIBLE Customer Experiences
- \*Accounting I, II (Yes, the numbers *are* important.)
- \*Accountability I, II
- \*Calendar Mastery/Time Management
- \*MBWA I, II [Managing By Wandering Around]
- \*Nurturing and Harvesting Curiosity
- \*Design-as-Strategy
- \*Giving Great Presentations I, II
- \*Active Strategic Listening I, II (III?)
- \*Civility/"Thank you"-Recognition/Thoughtfulness/Decency/Respect/  
*Apology-as-Strategy*
- \*Knowing Oneself
- \*EXCELLENCE as Aspiration/EXCELLENCE as Standard for Behavioral  
Evaluation/EXCELLENCE Everywhere/EXCELLENCE All the Time.

And, enumerated in *The Little BIG Things*, are a ton of contrarian electives as well. While I admit that the tongue *is* within range of cheek, the spirit encompassed by the above is deadly serious. As to practicalities, at least consider these *sensibilities* when you are designing your training curriculum.

## TIME

### 123. It Might Be Later Than You Think.

A "couple of minutes" late is ... LATE.  
Five minutes late is ... LATE.  
One-point-three minutes late is ... LATE.  
LATE is ... LATE.  
PERIOD.

(It matters.)

(NB: A boss being late for a meeting with an employee is worse than an employee being late for a meeting with his/her boss.)

**124. Time Off for Smart Behavior.** Hustle rules. But the very same times that call for speed-speed-speed also call for exceptional creativity, and that doesn't always match up with 90-hour workweeks—especially back-to-back-to-back 90-hour weeks. So, in the course of the day, week, year, figure out how to take a pause—even a 2-minute "right breathing" break, like I do—that refreshes.

And take it.

(This is of the utmost importance. Believe it.)

**125. Time Out for ... Daydreaming!** Dov Frohman is a pioneer in the semiconductor industry. Among (many) other things, he started Intel Israel and was significantly responsible for the growth of Israel's potent high-tech sector. With Robert Howard, he presented us with a truly original book on leadership, *Leadership the Hard Way: Why Leadership Can't Be Taught—and How You Can Learn It Anyway*. In a chapter titled "The Soft Skills of Hard Leadership," Frohman astonishes as he insists that the leader-manager must free up no less than 50 percent of his-her time from routine tasks:

*"Most managers spend a great deal of time thinking about what they plan to do, but relatively little time thinking about what they plan not to do. ... As a result, they become so caught up in fighting the fires of the moment that they cannot really attend to the long-term threats and risks facing the organization. So the premier soft skill of leadership the hard way is to cultivate the perspective of Marcus Aurelius: avoid busyness, free up your time, stay focused on what really matters. Let me put it bluntly: every leader should routinely keep a substantial portion of his or her time—I would say as much as 50 percent—unscheduled. Only when you have substantial 'slop' in your schedule—unscheduled time—will you have the space to reflect on what you are doing, learn from experience, and recover from your inevitable mistakes. Leaders without such free time end up tackling issues only when there is an immediate or visible problem. Managers' typical response to my argument about free time is, 'That's all well and good, but there are things I have to do.' Yet we waste so much time in unproductive activity—it takes an enormous effort on the part of the leader to keep free time for the truly important things."*

The chapter's second mind-ripping idea is labeled "The Discipline of Daydreaming": *"Nearly every major decision of my business career was, to some degree, the result of daydreaming. ... To be sure, in every case I had to collect a lot of data, do detailed analysis, and make a data-based argument to convince superiors, colleagues and business partners. But that all came later. In the beginning, there was the daydream. By daydreaming, I mean loose, unstructured thinking with no*

*particular goal in mind. ... In fact, I think daydreaming is a distinctive mode of cognition especially well suited to the complex, 'fuzzy' problems that characterize a more turbulent business environment. ... Daydreaming is an effective way of coping with complexity. When a problem has a high degree of complexity, the level of detail can be overwhelming. The more one focuses on the details, the more one risks being lost in them. ... Every child knows how to daydream. But many, perhaps most, lose the capacity as they grow up. ..."*

**126. Master the Art of Milestoning.** My latest trip from VT to MA (173.6 mi) got me thinking of something else besides pit stops. I was running late, and noting my progress via odometer and various landmarks and highway markers. As my mood went up and down I realized (re-realized?) the power of manageable goals in every form of activity:

- (1) Milestones are all-important, no matter how trivial or repetitive the task.
- (2) "Milestoning" is a real art for reasons psychological, as much as or more than for reasons of "substance."
- (3) Truly trivial milestones *are* often meaningless, even if they are "accomplishments" of a sort and "milestones" of a sort—scoring the eyedrop's distance from the Dorset turn to the Stratton turn is no big deal and not really a motivator.
- (4) "Milestone power" is variable. E.g., at the beginning or near the end of a task, the apparently trivial can indeed seem utterly grand. "Well, I've done *something*"—that's what I feel seconds after 4 a.m. when I make it to the immediate end of the farm road that starts at our house, thus putting behind me the first click, or 0.7 miles, in numbing reality a scant 0.4 percent of the whole.
- (5) There is a definite sweetspot ... "the perfect milestone." The 13 miles from home to Dorset, or the 12 miles from Gill to Erving, is a winner—substantial enough to matter, to merit a pumped fist at 4:23 a.m., and to constitute "progress of note."
- (6) There is a fine line between "trivial" on the one end and "daunting" on the other. (A 27-mile stretch, if thought of that way, is downright discouraging: "Dear God, these 27 miles of Route 2 are frigging endless.")

Action: Become a "milestone activist." Use milestoning, for instance, on every project, large or small, as a matter of routine, but do so with the greatest care, as only partially explained above—that is, become a Milestone Professional as well as a Milestone Activist. These project landmarks, the establishment and celebration thereof, can have an enormous impact on the energy and motivation of a team.

## **DESIGN**

### **127. Design Is ... Everywhere!**

*"Everything is design."*—from Richard Farson, *The Power of Design: A Force for Transforming Everything*

"Design" means the string of gorgeous products from Apple or OXO or Herman Miller or John Deere. But it applies equally to the "presentation" of the training course you are about to deliver. And "design mindfulness" is at the heart of the new purchasing process about to be unveiled—in a 20-person organization. And it's the soul of the reception area in a 3-person accountancy; and the very heart of the Formal Reports that same accountancy delivers. Hence, if you are serious about design, among other things:

- (1) It becomes part of *every* (e-v-e-r-y) project, tiny to grand, in *every* (e-v-e-r-y) department.
- (2) *Every* project has a formal "design advocate."
- (3) *Everyone* is encouraged through example to become "design minded." (And it's part of their formal evaluation.) (Everyone = General management to housekeeping at the hotel, Managing Partner to receptionist at the accountancy or consultancy.)
- (4) Design is always considered on five dimensions: (a) usability, (b) simplicity, (c) aesthetics, (d) "Cool"/"Wow"/"Gaspworthy," and (5) EXCELLENCE.
- (5) *Every* work space is a living example of Excellence in design—it sings "our song."
- (6) Design EXCELLENCE applies to *every* business process as much as to *every* product.
- (7) Design per se is explicitly addressed in *every* written work plan.
- (8) While design is not always "free," design-mindedness is not a cost item—and EXCELLENCE in design applies at least as much at the "low end" as at the luxury end of a market.
- (9) Design Reviews are part of *all* project reviews.
- (10) If you are a/the Big Boss, there should be a ... Chief Design Officer ... who lives in the "power corridor" with the Chief Financial Officer, Chief Marketing Officer, etc. (If you are a "little boss," there should be an appointed "design champion" whose collateral duty is to represent the "design view" in all the unit's work product.)
- (11) "Design-mindfulness" or "EXCELLENCE in design" should (must!) be part of the organization's Core Values Statement.
- (12) Design per se should be directly and indirectly part of *all* training programs.

**128. Is It "Lickable"?** Steve Jobs says that the definition of a superbly designed product is one you ... "want to lick." BMW advertised a new model car as ... Radically Thrilling. Economists agree that inducing people to re-open their wallets is a major part of the cure to the recession. And I claim it all boils down to the right kind of hammer. A hammer you ... want to *lick*. A hammer that is ... *radically thrilling*. And a hammer that ... induces you to make an expenditure that you hadn't intended to make. That is, my Tuf-E-Nuf hammer. This gorgeous little hammer, actually the ... Tuf-E-Nuf Mini Striker Stubby Claw Hammer ... is a true innovation, even an *earth-shattering* innovation. (By my lights.) The head looks like and has the heft of a regular heavy hammer. But the full-diameter handle is only five inches long, half the normal length. And the grip is great, up to the standard of the easy-to-hold OXO kitchen tool line. The net result is the ability to maneuver in tight spots while retaining almost all the power of a full-size hammer—and, as a bonus, owning a piece of sculptural art! I ended up buying six of the bloody things for Christmas presents last year—including, Christmas spirit be damned, one as a present to myself, which I use as a paperweight or bookend when not whacking nails!

So:

Great *design* rules!

*Innovation* is king!

*Functionality* scores!

*Lickability* and *Radically Thrilling* are the standards worth shooting for!

(And ... there is more to design—and life—than iPods and iPhones!)

**129. Design Sign: Can You Get There from Here?** The closest I've come to being late to a speech was attributable to ... lousy directions. It was at a big convention center—it ran for blocks and blocks. The driver and I puzzled at the directions—and the client's cell phone was not receiving. I finally picked a place, got out, and started hunting. Literally 25 minutes later, fit to be tied, I made it to my destination. It got me thinking: Directions, signs, manuals are life's blood, in this case and more or less in general. And most directions-signs-manuals are, well ... pathetic.

But, these guides (directions-signs-manuals) ought to be ... Works of Art (damn it). ... Plusses rather than Minuses ... Full-scale Members of the "Value-added" Package. They should top the charts on dimensions such as these:

Clear!  
Simple!  
Engaging!  
Beautiful!  
And: Breathtaking! (Why not?)

**130. Love + Hate = Design Power.** Design is all about ... emotion. Moreover, it's *not* about "liking" something—or "disliking" it. Design's ... awesome power ... comes precisely from the fact that it is about unvarnished emotion, about ... LOVE. And ... HATE.

I LOVE LOVE LOVE the simplicity of the controls on my Black & Decker coffeemaker. One switch: ON. Or: OFF.  
I HATE HATE HATE (HATE HATE) the THREE devices it takes to control my satellite TV and DVD player.

That's design.  
Love!  
Hate!  
Ultimate power tool!  
(Applies to ... absolutely everything!)

## **DETAILS**

**131. The Case of the Two-cent Candy** Years ago, I wrote about a retail store in the Palo Alto environs, a good one, which had a box of two-cent candies at the checkout. I remembered that "little" parting gesture of the two-cent candy as a symbol of all that is Excellent at that store. Dozens upon dozens of people—from retailers to *bankers* to plumbing supply house owners—who have attended seminars of mine have come up to remind me, sometimes 15 or 20 years later, of "the two-cent candy story," and to tell me how it had a sizeable impact on how they did business, metaphorically and in fact, how they had become "fanatic 2-centers."

Translation: Ask yourself ... NOW: What is my (personal, department, project, restaurant, law firm) "Two-cent Candy" score? Does every part of the process of working with us/me include two-cent candies? Do we, as a group, "think two-cent candies"?

Operationalizing: Make "two-centing it" part and parcel of "the way we do business around here." Don't go light on the so-called "substance"—but *do* remember that ... perception *is* reality ... and perception is shaped by two-cent candies as much as by that so-called "hard substance." (This is a

particularly Brilliant Idea for a recession. You doubtless don't maximize "Two-cent Opportunities"—and what opportunities they are. And they only, in effect, cost 2-cents!)

**132. If The Envelope Doesn't Fit, Forget It!** Stanford, beloved (and I mean it) Stanford, sent me a snail-mail questionnaire in prep for my MBA reunion. I took some pains to fill it out. When I got ready to mail it, I discovered that it didn't fit into the envelope they'd enclosed—I tore the questionnaire up and tossed it in the recycle bin. (Ever wonder what's wrong with MBA programs? Lack of attention to envelopes!) (Ever wonder why so many small businesses fail? Lack of attention to envelopes!)

**133. It's All About the Mud** It's "mud season" in Vermont as I write and as we all too appropriately call it. Cars, and trucks in particular, look like flying mud balls. While on a (muddy!) speed walk, I passed through the parking lot of the Equinox Hotel, which was in the midst of a massive renovation. The primary contractor was Bread Loaf Construction, out of Middlebury. Bread Loaf folks must not be as smart as I think; that is, they apparently didn't know it's mud season. Every contractor's truck in the parking lot—and the FedEx and UPS trucks, too—confirmed the "mud ball" image I just suggested. Except for Bread Loaf's. There were two BL pickups in the lot. Both, in BL tradition, painted fire engine red. And neither—and I do not exaggerate—had the tiniest apparent trace of dirt or mud or even dust.

Later in the afternoon, I was having a long interview with a top dog at the ad agency TBWA/Chiat/Day, and, not surprisingly, the topic turned to branding. Out of my mouth, startling me, popped, *"Branding is a squeaky-sparkly clean bright red contractor's truck in mud season in Vermont."* We nattered on about the fact that branding is about, well ... Everything. Nothing, absolutely nothing, is irrelevant to individual branding—or the branding of a construction company in VT, or Susan Axelrod Accountants, or Megacorp, Inc. So, right now:

Check the reception desk.

Check the reception area.

Check the bathroom.

Check your last Client email.

Check 10 "little things."

Right now.

Is each one Excellent?

Does each one confirm & extend & broadcast your "brand promise"?

(Remember, a very BIG thing: You *are* in absolute control here! There are things you *cannot* make happen, to be sure; but you, no matter how "junior," or no matter what the state of the economy, *can* project Brand Excellence via a thousand "atmospherics" that in the end overwhelmingly determine Client-Employee perception.)

**134. Think Billboard Sign. "We Care." "We Don't Care."** I was walking through a giant mall—visiting a renowned retailer's space. Usually, they're one of the best, poster practitioners of "experience" design & marketing.

But ... THE PLACE WAS A MESS. To me the space ... SCREAMED ... "We Don't Care." There's a lot to Great Retailing, or great whatever. But very near or at the head of the line is: "WE CARE!" And it starts with "look and feel." (To be fair, in the case under discussion, it was a Saturday two or three weeks before Christmas. DOESN'T MATTER! In fact, the greater the confusion, the more the attention to "I care" matters-and stands out.)

We care.  
We don't care.  
(Take your pick.)  
(No in-between.)  
(Really ... no in between. Think about it.)

## **GRUNGE**

**135. The Enemy Within—Or: There Is No Cost Higher Than the Cost of Rigidity.** In his June 2, 2009, *New York Times* column, "The Quagmire Ahead," David Brooks begins his assessment of the GM fiasco by citing an internal memo written in ... 1988 ... by EVP Elmer Johnson: "*We have vastly underestimated how deeply ingrained are the organizational and cultural rigidities that hamper our ability to execute.*"

Business schools, the always helpful whipping boys in my rants, focus on the "cool" FMS troika. (Finance-Marketing-Strategy.) And yet it is the internal organizational "stuff," mostly MIA or very secondary in B.Schools (not sexy enough), that trip companies up. Not "bad strategy," but ... "rigidities" ... that impede the ability to ... "execute" or innovate in a timely fashion ... are the culprits behind shoddy performance in 9 out of 9.01 cases.

Toyota *didn't* do in GM.  
Honda *didn't* do in GM.  
Nissan *didn't* do in GM.

We have met the enemy.  
He is, indeed, us.

## **136. Become a Decentralization Dervish!**

Child rearing.  
Delegating.  
Organization structure.  
Governance in general.

In many ways, the primary issue in all these cases boils down to the classic Jeffersonian-Hamiltonian debate on centralization vs. decentralization. (I call the centralization-decentralization debate ... "the all-important first 100 percent." That is, it's pretty much the whole ballgame!)

True, you will never get "it"/the centralization-decentralization balance *right* (nation, child rearing, your 27-person unit). But ... I bet you (*I guarantee!*) that ... *you will s-l-o-w-l-y get it wrong.* That is, unless ... *fanatically* (right word) ... managed, there is an inexorable movement toward centralization. I call it ... ICD/ Inherent Centralist Drift. As an ordained Bishop in the High Church of Decentralization, I humbly suggest that creeping centralization, or ICD, is the cause of the lion's share of corporate collapses!

Hence I suggest maintaining constant (every day!) vigilance so as to limit and in fact reverse the proliferation of originally-sound-procedures-collectively-become-bureaucratic-cancer. Effective rigidity-fighting should be an explicit part of everyone's evaluation. Every system should be "zer-

bsed" every couple of years. And, of course, you'll need to appoint Anti-ICD Police (*please use the term*) ... armed ... and dangerous ... and authorized/encouraged to Act.

Start ... today.

**137. Play the ... Great Grunge Removal Game!** Commerce Bank (now owned by Toronto Dominion) more or less revolutionized retail banking on the East Coast. For one thing, among ever so many, computer terminals in the branches have a ... *red button* ... on the keyboard. When you (teller) run into any self(bank)-created roadblock to serving the customer ... you push the red button. The impediment you discovered will be noted and formally addressed—and if action is taken, and it often is, you'll get a financial reward for having unearthed Grunge of any sort that gets between the customer and an excellent service experience.

My point-suggestion here is that you invent your flavor of highly visible Red Buttons for your 3-person department, your 9-person temporary project team, your 17-table restaurant, or your 235-person division. That is, mimic Commerce Bank by creating formal processes for Identifying Grunge and Removing Grunge and getting everyone in on the ... Great Grunge Removal Game. Think of it at an even higher level of abstraction as a "Strategic" "Grunge Removal Culture," a full-blown philosophy supported by a formal infrastructure to try to keep the "inevitable grunge growth" in check or even reversed—and headed, of course, by the CGRO/Chief Grunge Removal Officer.

Get on with this ... today!

Grunge Grows ... 60/60/24/7/365.

**138. The 1% Drill: Clearing Away a World of "Slop" in Just 45 Minutes.** I co-presented an all-day in-company seminar in the UK several years ago. At about 2 p.m. the principal presenter called an abrupt halt to proceedings, and said, "*I want to make sure I earn out my full fee today, and then some. We're going to stop and do a 45-minute exercise.*" He explained that *any* operation can at *any* time cut 1% of its budget. (We all have flab, regardless of circumstances—not many 6 percent BMIs around.) The leader then broke the group up by function. He gave the sub-groups 30 minutes on the dot to identify their team's 1 percent. Then he had each group report in public for 2 or 3 minutes—this public recitation, he told me, raised the odds of execution; it also provided others with ideas. Indeed the groups readily identified their 1 percent and reported accordingly—there was actually no bitching.

1%? No small thing, regardless of business size.

**139. Goal: To Make "Common Sense" More Common.** A lot of the giant financial-economic mess we're in can be chalked up to a failure of common sense, often by the so-called best of the best and brightest of the bright, egging each other on with a series of implicit "I dare you." We are all, in fact, "insiders" in our own worlds—and we all too often lose touch with reality to a lesser or greater extent. There are a host of things one can do to deal with this, but in this instance I only want to suggest routinely running proposals or budgets, or whatever, by a "Common Sense Ombudsman." Said ombudsman could be a spouse or a neighbor who owns a restaurant or the down-to-earth woman running the distribution center in South Podunk who you chatted with at the management meeting in Orlando last year. (It absolutely cannot be someone in your own unit—even a "contrarian" someone; even the so-called contrarian abides by 90 percent of "the way we do things around here.")

Presumably you've got three or four projects running as we speak. Call your friend Jack, who runs finance at the local Ford dealership. Offer him box seat tickets to next week's Royals game if he'll spend a couple of hours reviewing your project-planning docs in the next few days. Repeat this process—routinely! obsessively!—with different Jacks and Janes and Annes and Rogers. The price of the baseball or concert box seats will be trivial in comparison to value added and pratfalls avoided.

## **ENTERPRISE**

**140. An Organization Is "People Serving People." (Period!)** A challenging trip to Siberia to give an all-day seminar got me thinking about the fundamentals of organizing and organizations. I surprised myself when the definition of "enterprise at its best" that follows emerged from my keyboard:

*An emotional, vital, innovative, joyful, creative, entrepreneurial endeavor that maximizes individuals' growth and elicits maximum concerted human potential in the wholehearted service of others.\* (\*Employees, Customers, Suppliers, Communities, Owners, Temporary Partners.)*

On the one hand, this definition is pretty high-stepping. Idealistic beyond the realm of common sense. But examine it ... one word at a time. Conjure up the word's opposite, and consider the possibilities:

*Do we want an emotionless organization—or an exciting one? (That's a practical enough question, eh?)*

*Do we want a joyless organization—is joy "impractical" in the World of Work? (Since said world is where we spend the bulk of our conscious hours as adults, I'd hope the possibility of Joy is not pie-in-the-sky.)*

And so on.

I have used this formulation 100 times now, literally in every corner of the globe, from Seattle to Shanghai to Riyadh to Estonia to Luanda. And to my delight, most of the people at my seminars sign up for the "Siberia option." Not "sign up" in the sense of taking a blood oath, but in the sense of agreeing that when you examine the words ... ONE AT A TIME ...and when you do conjure up the opposite of each word, you are likely to agree that while it is indeed a towering aspiration, it is not to be dismissed, either.

Organizations exist to *serve*.

The true bottom line: *People serving people.*

If membership in your club (organization) is not aimed at "mind-blowing" development for each staff member and "window rattling" service for each customer and other extended family member, then ... *just what the hell is the point?*

**141. The PSF Mandate: "Work Worth Paying For."** At the beginning of 2008, a *BusinessWeek* cover story reported that Schlumberger may well take over the world: "THE GIANT STALKING BIG OIL: How Schlumberger Is Rewriting the Rules of the Energy Game." In short, Schlumberger knows how to create and run oilfields on a turnkey basis. As China and Russia, among others, make their move in energy, state-run companies are eclipsing the major

independents. Aiding these new players, at the center of the Schlumberger "empire," is a relatively new outfit, reminiscent of IBM's enormous Global Services unit (these days, Global Services = IBM) and UPS Logistics' teams, which run entire supply chains for enormous companies. The Schlumberger version is called IPM, for Integrated Project Management. It lives in a nondescript building near Gatwick Airport, and its chief says it will do "just about anything an oilfield owner would want, from drilling to production."

As I see it, Schlumberger is transforming itself pell-mell into what may become the biggest and most powerful "PSF" (Professional Service Firm) in history. Moreover, paths like this, from IBM and UPS and Schlumberger, are open to many firms. Think Best Buy's "Geek Squads," the mobile service units that *are* Best Buy's competitive advantage in electronics retailing; or the "PSF" components of many giant GE "industrial" units, which produce well over 50 percent of the units' revenues; even the likes of MasterCard are getting into the act—MasterCard Advisors are running entire payment systems activities for some of their clients, penetrating ever more deeply into the heart of the Clients' operations.

In view of all this, one of my "Top 5" Tom Rants is urging *every* "department" in an organization to re-conceive itself as a turnkey-service, de facto or de jure profit-making "PSF." And, likewise, I urge companies of all flavors to consider aiming to grow through "PSF-ing"—more or less along the lines of the Schlumberger-IBM-UPS-GE-MasterCard transformations. In short, I believe the "Professional Service Firm Idea" is central to many firms', including or especially small ones, potential to differentiate themselves in today's and tomorrow's increasingly competitive environment. In particular, these "PSFs" can offer differentiated services limited only by their imagination—who would have thought that the "Geek Squads" would have led the way to re-positioning giant Best Buy?

#### **142. Don't Let the "Enemy" Rule Your Life.**

*"Obsessing about your competitors, trying to match or best their offerings, spending time each day wanting to know what they are doing, and/or measuring your company against them—these activities have no great or winning outcome. Instead you are simply prohibiting your company from finding its own way to be truly meaningful to its Clients, staff and prospects. You block your company from finding its own identity and engaging with the people who pay the bills. ... Your competitors have never paid your bills and they never will."*—Howard Mann, *Your Business Brickyard: Getting Back to the Basics to Make Your Business More Fun to Run*

Mr. Mann in turn quotes Mike McCue, former VP/Technology at Netscape: *"At Netscape the competition with Microsoft was so severe, we'd wake up in the morning thinking about how we were going to deal with them instead of how we would build something great for our customers. What I realize now is that you can never, ever take your eye off the customer. Even in the face of massive competition, don't think about the competition. Literally don't think about them."*

Don't let the "enemy" rule your life. Try your damndest to follow the exact advice of Mr. McCue: *"Literally don't think about them."* Far, far easier said than done, no doubt, but self-awareness is a start:

*We ... are the problem.*

*They are ... not ... the problem.*

*We have one source only of Excellence: Us.*

**143. Love Your Competitors.** At the top of my *business* priority list is a desire for my overall market to grow by leaps and bounds! Sure, as the number of people giving speeches and seminars and writing books and blogging and tweeting on similar topics has leapt, my "market share" has gone w-a-y down. (It was about 100 percent after *In Search of Excellence*, when I was more or less the only public "management guru.") But my revenue has soared in the process—the "smaller share of a much bigger pie" axiom.

Moreover, I want (am desperate that) my competitors to do terrific work! If they do, the "guru" industry's stock as a whole, which is sometimes wobbly, will rise. In short, I want my competitors to thrive.

Does all this suggest an altruistic streak? Perhaps. But mostly not. To begin with, I think that when one badmouths or attempts to diminish one's competitors in any way or tries to limit their activities, the "word gets around." And one develops a reputation as prickly and egocentric—and, well, as a selfish jerk.

More important: *I think (I know!) the only effective long-term defense against the competition (think Apple versus its stalwart competitors) is to do better and unique work—and to earn and to retain the custom of those who are interested in the things I worry about.*

*"Win" with a remarkably better product.*

*"Win" with deeper relationships.*

*"Win" when your industry is prospering and has a good reputation.*

*Build up your competitors!!*

*Build up your entire industry!!*

## **SPECIAL SECTION: The Top 50 "Have-Yous"**

*While waiting in the Albany airport to board a Southwest Airlines flight to Reagan one morning, I happened across the latest Harvard Business Review, on the cover of which was a bright yellow "lead article" sticker. On it were the words "Mapping your competitive position." It triggered a furious negative "Tom reaction," as my wife calls it. Of course I believe you should worry about your "competitive position." But instead of obsessing on competitive position and other abstractions, as the B.Schools and consultants would invariably have us do, I instead wondered about some "practical stuff," which I believe is far, far more important to the short- and long-term "strategic" health of the enterprise, tiny or enormous. Hence, rather than an emphasis on competitive maps or looking for a "blue ocean" (empty space, per the popular book Blue Ocean Strategy), I urge you to pay attention to my Top 50 "Have Yous." The underlying hypothesis, of course, is that if you proactively do the "small" stuff below, your "competitive position" will improve so much that mapping will become a secondary issue!*

1. Have you in the last 10 days ... *visited* a customer?
2. Have you called a customer ... *TODAY*?
3. Have you in the last 60-90 days ... had a seminar in which several folks from the customer's operation (different levels, different functions) interacted, via facilitator, with various of your folks?
4. Have you thanked a front-line employee for a small act of helpfulness ... in the last three days?
5. Have you thanked a front-line employee for a small act of helpfulness ... in the last three *hours*?

6. Have you thanked a frontline employee for carrying around a great attitude ... *today*?
7. Have you in the last week recognized—publicly—one of your folks for a small act of *cross-functional co-operation*?
8. Have you in the last week recognized—publicly—one of "their" folks (another function) for a small act of cross-functional co-operation?
9. Have you invited in the last month a leader of *another function* to your weekly team priorities meeting?
10. Have you personally in the last week-month called-visited an internal or external customer to *sort out, inquire, or apologize* for some little or big thing that went awry?
11. Have you in the last two days had a chat with someone (a couple of levels down?) about specific deadlines concerning a project's next steps?
12. Have you in the last two days had a chat with someone (a couple of levels down?) about specific deadlines concerning a project's next steps ... and what specifically *you can do to remove a hurdle*? ("Ninety percent of what we call management consists of making it difficult for people to get things done."—Peter Drucker.)
13. Have you celebrated in the last week a "small" (or large!) *milestone* reached? (I.e., are you a milestone-celebration fanatic?)
14. Have you in the last week or month revised some estimate in the "wrong" direction and apologized for making a lousy estimate? (Somehow you must publicly *reward the telling/tellers of difficult truths*.)
15. Have you installed in your tenure a very comprehensive customer satisfaction scheme for all *internal* customers? (With major consequences for hitting or missing the mark.)
16. Have you in the last six months had a week-long, visible, very intensive *visit-tour* of external customers?
17. Have you in the last 60 days called an abrupt halt to a meeting and "ordered" everyone to get out of the office, and "into the field" and in the *next eight hours*, after asking those involved, fixed (f-i-x-e-d!) a nagging "small" problem through practical action?
18. Have you in the last week had a rather thorough discussion of a "cool design thing" someone has come across—away from your industry or function—at a Web site, in a product or its packaging?
19. Have you in the last two weeks had an informal meeting—at least an hour long—with a frontline employee to discuss "things we do right," "things we do wrong"—and what it would take to meet their mid- to long-term aspirations?
20. Have you had in the last 60 days had a general meeting to discuss "things we do wrong" ... that we can fix in the next *fourteen days*?
21. Have you had in the last year a one-day, intense offsite with each of your internal customers—followed by a big celebration of "things gone right"?
22. Have you in the last week pushed someone to do some family thing that you fear might be overwhelmed by deadline pressure?
23. *Have you learned the names of the children of everyone who reports to you?* (If not, you have 60 days to fix it.)
24. Have you taken in the last month/2-weeks an interesting-*weird* outsider to lunch?
25. Have you in the last month invited an interesting-weird outsider to sit in on an important meeting?
26. Have you in the last three days discussed something interesting, beyond your industry, that you ran across in a meeting, reading, etc?
27. Have you in the last 24 hours injected into a meeting "I ran across this interesting idea in [strange place]"?
28. Have you in the last two weeks asked someone to report on something, anything, that constitutes an act of brilliant service rendered in a "trivial" situation—restaurant, car wash, etc? (And then discussed the relevance to your work.)

29. Have you in the last 30 days examined in detail (hour by hour) your calendar to evaluate the degree "time actually spent" mirrors your "espoused priorities"?
30. Have you in the last two months had a presentation to the group by a "weird" outsider?
31. Have you in the last two months had a presentation to the group by a customer, internal customer, vendor featuring "working folks" 3 or 4 levels down in the vendor organization?
32. Have you in the last two months had a presentation to the group of a cool, beyond-our-industry ideas by two of your folks?
33. Have you at every meeting today (and forever more) re-directed the conversation to the practicalities of implementation concerning some issue before the group?
34. Have you at every meeting today (and forever more) had an end-of-meeting discussion on "action items to be dealt with in the next 4, 48 hours"? (And then made this list public—and followed up in 48 hours.) And made sure everyone has at least one such item.)
35. Have you had a discussion in the last six months about what it would take to get recognition in local-regional-national poll of "best places to work"?
36. Have you in the last month approved a *cool-different training course* for one of your folks?
37. Have you in the last month *taught* a front-line training course?
38. Have you in the last week discussed the idea of *Excellence*? (What it means, how to get there.)
39. Have you in the last week discussed the idea of "Wow"? (What it means, how to inject it into an ongoing "routine" project.)
40. Have you in the last 45 days assessed some major process in terms of the details of the "experience," as well as results, it provides to its external or internal customers?
41. Have you in the last month had one of your folks attend a meeting you were supposed to go to which gives them unusual exposure to senior folks?
42. Have you in the last 60 (30?) days sat with a trusted friend or "coach" to discuss your "management style"—and its long- and short-term impact on the group?
43. Have you in the *last three days* considered a professional relationship that was a little rocky and made a call to the person involved to discuss issues and smooth the waters? (Taking the "blame," fully deserved or not, for letting the thing-issue fester.)
44. Have you in the last ... *two hours* ... stopped by someone's (two-levels "down") office-workspace for 5 minutes to ask "What do you think?" about an issue that arose at a more or less just completed meeting? (And then stuck around for 10 or so minutes to listen while visibly taking notes.)
45. Have you ... in the last day ... looked around you to assess whether the diversity pretty accurately maps the diversity of the market being served? (And ...)
46. Have you in the last day at some meeting gone out of your way to make sure that a normally reticent person was engaged in a conversation—and then thanked him or her, perhaps privately, for their contribution?
47. Have you during your tenure instituted very public (visible) presentations of unit performance?
48. Have you in the last four months had a session specifically aimed at checking on the "corporate culture" and the degree we are true to it—with all presentations by relatively junior folks, including front-line folks? (And with a determined effort to keep the conversation restricted to "real world" "small" cases—not theory.)
49. Have you in the last six months talked about the *Internal Brand Promise*?
50. Have you in the last year had a full-day off site to talk about individual (and group) aspirations?

## RE-IMAGINING

**144. Create a "Cathedral"! (If Not, What?)** I was asked to keynote the first major conference, organized by the Australian Institute of Management, honoring the life's work of Peter Drucker. I felt an enormous responsibility—and allowed my imagination to soar on the topic of organizing fundamentals. I began with a barebones definition:

Organizations should be ... *no less than cathedrals in which the full and awesome power of the Imagination and Spirit and native Entrepreneurial flair of diverse individuals is unleashed in passionate pursuit of ... Excellence.*

"Cathedral/s" is a Big Word. My usage is not intended to be religious in any formal sense—hence the lowercase "c." But, in terms of human potential (quasi-religious?), I do see all effective organizations as driven ... first and foremost ... by an Unstinting Commitment to Members' Growth.

A classroom in a primary school should ... obviously ... be such a "cathedral." But so, too, an *accounting* or *training* department. No doubt of it: Organizations must effectively serve their external customers to survive, let alone thrive. But my line-of-logic is, at least to me, crystal clear and admits no alternatives: *The odds of the external customer being served effectively and in a way that binds them to your organization is a direct function of such service being provided by those [employees] who are themselves Engaged in a Vigorous Quest for Growth and Excellence.*

NB: This challenge—organization as cathedral devoted to human development—is simply gargantuan, and one I thought about a lot before issuing. And by now I've tested the idea all over the world—from Dubai to New Delhi to Helsinki to Joinville, Brazil, to San Antonio. In sit-down discussions there is agreement that "If not this, what?" is, in fact, a sane question—at least worthy of serious conversation. I am wholeheartedly convinced that something like this makes commercial sense. (And, I repeat, if not, what's the alternative?)

**145. Enable Dreams. (If Not, What?)** Matthew Kelly's parable-based *The Dream Manager* is not ordinarily my kind of book. But Kelly's premise got to me—and it has become a centerpiece of my work. The idea is simple: *Everyone has a dream!* And if we can help him and her fulfill those dreams then he and she will be more engaged human beings—which will, practically speaking, pay off for the organization as it strives to serve its customers.

Kelly writes: *"A company's purpose is to become the-best-version-of-itself. But an organization can only become the-best-version-of-itself to the extent that the people who drive that organization are striving to become better-versions-of-themselves."* When you ponder that, it is both obvious and profound: "We," the team, is only as good as the engagement of and commitment to *personal* growth and achievement and Excellence by each and every individual. (Obvious in football and dance—why not groceries and the accounting office?) "The question is," Kelly continues, *"What is an employee's purpose? Most would say, 'to help the company achieve its purpose'—but they would be wrong. [Ponder, slowly, again.] That is certainly part of the employee's role, but an employee's primary purpose is to become the-best-version-of-himself or herself."* As stated, the book title is *Dream Manager*. In fact, Kelly asserts that explicitly helping people achieve their dreams—directly business-related or not—is *a*, or even *the*, primary task a boss has. The boss, to both serve her customer or get things done in general, becomes a "dream enabler"—e.g., works with the 28-year-old maintenance man from Ghana to achieve his dream of a junior college degree. To repeat the chain of logic: If that 28-year-old feels wholly supported in

his personal-growth dream, odds of his aspiring to do and doing his maintenance-man job with Excellence are very high.

So ... are you?

That is, are you (explicitly) a "dream enabler"?

Subsequent to the publication of *The Little BIG Things*, I translated the ideas of the last two items—cathedrals, dream-enabling—into what I call "The Manager's Oath":

*Our goal is to serve our customers brilliantly and profitably over the long haul.*

*Serving our customers brilliantly and profitably over the long haul is a product of brilliantly serving over the long haul the people who serve the customer.*

*Hence, our job as leaders—the alpha and the omega and everything in between—is abetting the sustained growth and success and engagement and enthusiasm and commitment to Excellence of those, one at a time, who directly or indirectly serve the ultimate customer.*

*We—leaders of every stripe—are in the "Human Growth and Development and Success and Aspiration to Excellence" business.*

*"We" [leaders-organization] only grow when "they" [each and every one of our colleagues] are growing.*

*"We" [leaders-organization] only succeed when "they" [each and every one of our colleagues] are succeeding.*

*"We" [leaders-organization] only energetically march toward Excellence when "they" [each and every one of our colleagues] are energetically marching toward Excellence.*

*Period.*

**146. Launch "Project Ray."** I very rarely "dedicate" a presentation. But a while back I launched a presentation with a PowerPoint slide that read ... "For Ray." Susan and I had just watched the movie *Ray* on DVD. And, in short: *Ray Charles is the embodiment of the Spirit of Re-imagining!*

Time and time again he chose to Invent & Go His Own Way, to spit in the face of the sure thing, the assured cash flow, the powerful advisors ... and instead march in the brand new musical direction his Spirit willed him to march. To be sure, the movie is an extraordinary story of overcoming adversity, from blindness to racism to drugs to fame itself. But for me it was, above all, a ... Matchless Tribute to the Power & Glory of Gutsy, Lonely Re-imaginings!

Watch *Ray*. Consider starting a "Ray File" ... or a "Re-imaginings File." The "problem" is so easy to state. We're already scoring 12-hour days—and keeping up is a nightmare. There's no "extra time" for ... Project Ray! However (trust me on this one): Odds are high, very high, that if you could project forward 10 years, you'd wonder why the hell there was no ... Project Ray 2010.

(Time flies.)

(Believe it.)

## **WOW**

**147. Realism? Not On My Watch!** We recently finished a summer building project on our Vermont farm. We did our levelheaded best to budget it correctly—getting contractors to rework estimates and redesigning accordingly. All that said, it looks like the carefully considered \$40,000 project will come in at about \$70,000. (Uhm, or so.)

I decided to do a little casual research at a dinner party, asking several people about their homebrew projects. Three questions:

- (1) How did you do vs. budget for projects completed a couple of years ago?
- (2) If you'd known the real price tag when you started, would you have gone ahead?
- (3) In hindsight, was the eventual price tag worth it?

To Q1, the answer ranged from about 5 percent over plan (if you can believe it—I'm skeptical) to 5 times plan (which I *do* believe). As to Q2, four of the six I queried said "no way" would they have started if they'd known what they were getting into—the other two were on the fence. Concerning Q3, after-the-fact satisfaction, five said, in effect, "*Yes! We'd do it again*"—all five of those five "yups" were dogmatic. And one said "Maybe, maybe not."

It's obviously dangerous to generalize from such a tiny sample and trivial topic, but my reading of history, business, and in general, says this phenomenon is as ordinary as it gets. Furthermore, in the back of one's mind, one damn well *knows* that the price tag will likely be far in excess of what's planned. And my point? Yes, you'd better have a superb number-crunching CFO, but if you let him-her rule the roost, there won't be much left to roost on. Of course I know it's "Damned if you do, damned if you don't." On the other hand ...

Progress (ALL PROGRESS) clearly hinges on illusion and delusion!

Cherish your dreamers!  
Master "dreamer nurturing."  
(And also have a top-drawer CFO.)

### **148. If No WOW, Then ... No Go.**

Does "it" Pop?  
Does "it" Sparkle?"  
Does "it" make you Grin?  
Is "it" ... WOW?

If "it" (grand or mundane) isn't WOW ... re-do it!  
Or don't do it!

This is ... Your Day.  
Not "their" day.

(I own no rose-colored glasses. Few 66-year-olds do. I have crappy days—and crappy months. But I am unable, in *anything* I do, to be satisfied with less than the aspiration of an 8 on the 1-to-10 WOW-o-meter. That's as true for the brushcutting micro-project I do most every day in the summer on my Vermont farm as it is for the speeches-for-profit ... and this book. Why not WOW-as-"ordinary"-goal?)

**149. What Makes You So Special?—Or: "Only" Beats "Best."** I *guarantee* that any reader—from anywhere, in any business—can learn something from this book: *Retail Superstars: Inside the 25 Best Independent Stores in America*, by retail guru George Whalin. These are stores that, literally, give new meaning to the word "special"—and "Gaspworthy" & "WOW"! That personify one of my "Top 10 Favorite Quotes," from Jerry Garcia (The Grateful Dead): "*You don't want to be merely the best of the best. You want to be the only ones who do what you do.*"

We start, naturally (!), in *Fairfield, Ohio*, home to Jungle Jim's International Market. The adventure in "*shoppertainment*," as Jungle Jim's call it, begins in the parking lot and goes on to 1,600 cheeses and, yes, 1,400 varieties of hot sauce—not to mention 12,000 wines priced from \$8 to \$8,000 a bottle; all this is brought to you by 4,000 vendors from around the world. Like virtually all the stores in this book, customers flock to the doors from every corner of the globe.

And on it goes from there ...

These stores demonstrate-prove so many things:

You can create a worldwide attraction and thrive as an independent in the Age of the Big Box retailer!

You can do anything!

You can be from anywhere!

You can make any-damn-thing ... bizarrely-amazingly-stupendously-special!

Yes, regardless of your speciality or business unit, I will indeed ... GUARANTEE ... that you can learn from this book.

**150. Is It "Gaspworthy"?** Will your plan for addressing today's "mundane" task make others "gasp" at its audacity? As an alumni of McKinsey and Co., I received an email from the firm in 2004 about its response to the tsunami in Southeast Asia. I read it, nodded, and cast it aside. (But did not "delete" for some unknown reason.) I returned to it a few hours later—and was moved to send McKinsey's managing partner an email. I said that the response was "perfectly adequate," but I added that business has a tawdry rep those/these days, and that McKinsey is viewed far and wide as the home of the premier Counselors to Global Top Management; so, I chided, I saw it as a missed opportunity in that McKinsey's response failed to ... "*make me gasp by its audacity.*"

Forget McKinsey. The Bigger Point is that in our "responses" to tragedy and opportunity alike, "good enough" is a tawdry way to pass through life. How about, instead, as aspiration, my cobbled-together term ... "*gaspworthy*"? So, does your response to today's principal "chore" qualify for a ... Medal of Certified Gaspworthiness?

(Surely, you say, I live in the land of make believe. There's a lot of stuff that just needs doing—and need not produce a "gasp." I acknowledge that's apparently true, and indeed the default state of nature. Yet *The Little BIG Things* is mostly dedicated to the idea of little things that aren't in fact little at all—so-called "little things" that are in actual fact "gaspworthy.")

**151. Extremism in the Defense of WOW Is No Vice.** Corporations are falling like dominoes. Chief executives are getting the axe at a record pace. Why? Incremental solutions in discontinuous times seldom if ever work. The axiom applies to a great enterprise and to a tiny two-person accountancy alike. And to me. And to you. Take a look at Tomorrow's Calendar. Today's, for that matter. Find and underscore something—*anything*—on that calendar that

represents a small step towards something extreme. Something big. Something monumental.  
(And worry like hell if there's nothing!)

Extremism in politics stinks.  
Extremism in business is a necessity.

## **NOW**

**152. Welcome to the Age of Metabolic Management.** We all know the fabled race eventually goes to the Tortoise. Well, times change. Google-speed or Alibaba-speed is the new limit (until the record is broken, which it will be soon enough), and we are now officially living in the Age of the Hare. As Larry Light, McDonald's Global Chief Marketing Officer, put it in *Advertising Age*: "*Today, you own ideas for about an hour and a half.*"

My "moniker" for dealing with and thriving in the Age of the Hare is ... *Metabolic Management*.

I believe it's one of the boss's ... *prime tasks* ... to Purposefully and Consciously and Perpetually work on Accelerating the Corporate (project team, etc.) Metabolism. Some thoughts:

- Exhibit personal urgency ... *hourly-daily-consciously*.
- Hire for it. (*My car dealer pal Carl Sewell said he looks for antsy people "who literally can't sit still" during an interview. One well-known headhunter takes candidates to lunch in the city—and frowns if they don't jaywalk.*)
- Promote it.
- Reward it. (*"Speed Demon of the Week" recognition at the Monday Morning Huddle.*)
- Set aggressive targets—forget "incrementalism," go after a 75% or 95% or 98% reduction in the time it takes to do X or Y or Z. (*Bold targets inspire—and are indeed possible on the speed front. In fact, I suggest something like never accepting a "speed up" suggestion of less than 50%.*)

Etc. ...

## **153. Walls of "Yesterday." Walls of "Tomorrow."**

What do your walls look like?  
Do they look like "yesterday"?  
Or do they look like "tomorrow"?

*Yesterday* = Plaques from past awards and group pictures from past parties. Etc. Etc.

*Tomorrow* = Work-in-Progress pictures for ongoing projects. Interesting press clips on new products just launched. Customers landed or vendors signed up in the last 30 days. Six new hires in the last 30 days. Etc. Etc.

(This idea is de facto stolen from Steve Jobs. When he returned to Apple from the wilderness in 1997, one of his first acts was to remove all traces of old glory from his office and Apple facilities in general. He felt the product line he inherited was un-scintillating, and wanted the affect of the place to reflect work in progress, not icons of yesteryear.)

**154. Pissing Away Your Life: Like It or Not, Work Is Life!** Some say I use words like "Wow" too much. "You damn well can't," they say, "turn every 'day at the office' into some 'Adventure in EXCELLENCE.'"

Well, "they" have a point—to a point.  
But it ain't much of a point.

Let me be crude, rude, and short but not sweet: By the time you're nearing 30, let's say, the stay-up-every-night-'til-2 a.m. era is pretty much behind you. So, let's say you awaken on average at 6:30 a.m. ... and turn in around 11 p.m. (More or less.) That's 16.5 waking hours—call it 17. You just plain lose, say, two hours a day—a little over one hour on your 2-way commute, and 45 minutes on whatever. So now we're at 15 "usable" hours.

Suppose your ordinary workday is 8:15 a.m. to 5:30 p.m.—that seems about right to me. (I'm not citing research here, other than years and years of casual observation.) So the work day amounts to 9.25 hours.

Which is to say, you are spending, Monday through Friday, about 9.75/15ths ... or roughly two-thirds ... of your usable hours at work. Which in turn means ... *If you piss away your work time, you're pissing away well over half your "conscious" "life."*

## **IMPACT**

**155. Forget Longevity—Think "Dramatic Frenzy."** I occasionally speed-walk while listening to one or another of the Reverend Martin Luther King Jr.'s speeches. One of the most extraordinary took place in Memphis, immediately before Dr. King was assassinated. In it, he anticipates the tragic event:

*"Well, I don't know what will happen now. We've got some difficult days ahead. But it doesn't matter with me now. Because I've been on the mountain-top. And I don't mind. Like anybody, I would like to live a long life. Longevity has its place, but I'm not concerned about that now. I just want to do God's will. And He's allowed me to go up the mountain. And I've looked over. And I've seen the Promised Land. I may not get there with you. But I want you to know tonight, that we, as a people, will get to the Promised Land. And I'm happy, tonight. I'm not worried about anything. I'm not fearing any man. Mine eyes have seen the glory of the coming of the Lord."*

I get chills ... again ... as I write this. I am loath to trivialize Dr. King's remarks in any way, but I do want to make a "business" point: *"Longevity has its place, but I'm not concerned about that now ..."*

I simply don't buy "built to last" in any way, shape or form—and this passage reinforced my abiding belief. *"Built to Impact"* is/has been/will be my Rallying Cry. Dr. King changed the world—and died at 39. To continue the trivializing, here's my business translation of Dr. King's words: I've often said that Netscape is/was my favorite company in recent years—it was born, changed the world and died, at about age 6. Kjell Nordström and Jonas Ridderstråle make this point particularly well in *Funky Business*: "But what if [former head of strategic planning at Royal Dutch Shell] Arie De Geus is wrong in suggesting, in *The Living Company*, that firms should aspire to live forever? Greatness is fleeting and, for corporations, it will become ever more fleeting. *The ultimate aim of a business organization, an artist, an athlete, or a stockbroker may*

*be to ... explode in a dramatic frenzy of value creation during a short space of time, rather than live forever."*

Progress, to my mind, and doubtless significantly influenced by a quarter-century's residence in Silicon Valley, is a series of such explosions—many, many duds and a few, like Apple or Netscape or Google, that change the world. "Long-term" success? If I thought of myself as choosing, in the early '90s, a working future based on retrospective knowledge, I'd put in the years of, say, 1994–1998 at Netscape over any damned alternate you can name!

### **156. How About Replacing Your "Wish It Were" List with a "Do It Now" List?**

"I can't wait until Spring."

"I can't wait until Football season!"

"I can't wait until I've finished preparing this damn presentation."

"I can't wait until So-and-So makes up his mind, so that we can get moving."

One does, reasonably, wish the surgery were over, that final exams were past, that their daughter would get back from Iraq. Nonetheless, and I'm no Zen practitioner, the goal, as in *the* goal, is always, as in *always*, to make the absolute most of the moment—because, to state the obvious but often ignored-in-practice truism, *the* moment, *this* moment, is the only-damn-thing we ever have.

So: How are you going to get past the "wish-it-weres," and make the next, yes, *meeting*, the next 15 minutes special, and fully participate therein? (PLEASE ASK YOURSELF THAT QUESTION. RIGHT NOW.)

## **SPECIAL SECTION: The Heart of Business Strategy**

*We usually think of business strategy as some sort of aspirational market positioning statement. Doubtless that's part of it. But I believe that the number one "strategic strength" is excellence in execution and systemic relationships (i.e., with everyone we come in contact with). Hence I offer, in shorthand form here, the following 47 pieces of advice in creating a winning "strategy" that is inherently sustainable.*

1. "Thank you." Minimum several times a day. Measure it.
2. "Thank you" to everyone even peripherally involved in some activity—especially those "deep in the hierarchy."
3. Smile. Work on it.
4. Apologize. Even if "they" are "mostly" to blame.
5. Jump all over (eventually release) those who play the "blame game."
6. Hire enthusiasm.
7. Low enthusiasm. No hire. Any job.
8. Hire optimists. Everywhere. ("Positive outlook on life," not mindless optimism.)
9. Hiring: Would you like to go to lunch with him-her? 100% of jobs.
10. Hire for good manners.
11. Do not reject "trouble makers"—that is, those who are uncomfortable with the status quo. (Source of ... ALL ... innovation.)
12. Hire for demonstrated resilience.
13. Overwhelming/dis-proportionate response to even the smallest screwups.
14. Become a student of all you will meet with. Big time.
15. Hang out with interesting new people. Measure it. (You = Those you hang out with.)

16. Lunch with folks in other functions. Measure it. (220 opportunities/year.)
17. Listen. Hear. Become a serious "professional"/student of listening-hearing.
18. Work on everyone's listening skills. Practice.
19. Become a student of information extraction-interviewing.
20. Become a professional/student of presentation giving.
21. Incredible care in 1st line supervisor selection and development. Measure it.
22. World's best training for 1st line supervisors.
23. Construct small leadership opportunities for junior people within days of starting on the job.
24. Insane care in all promotion decisions.
25. Promote "people people" for all managerial jobs. Finance-logistics-R&D as much as, say, sales.
26. Hire-promote for demonstrated curiosity. Check their past commitment to continuous learning.
27. Small "d" diversity. Rich mixes for any and all teams.
28. Hire women. Roughly 50% women on exec team. (Or more, depending on market.)
29. Exec team "looks like" customer population, actual and desired.
30. Focus on creating products for and selling to women.
31. Focus on creating products for and selling to boomers-geezers.
32. Work on first and last impressions. (100% contacts = "WOW" experiences.)
33. Walls display tomorrow's aspirations, not yesterday's accomplishments.
34. Simplify systems. Constantly. (Not "systems," but "beautiful systems"!)
35. Insist that almost all material be covered by a 1-page summary. Absolutely no longer.
36. Practice decency.
37. Add "We are thoughtful in all we do" to corporate values list—#1 force for customer loyalty, employee satisfaction.
38. Make headlong employee growth (for all) a formal part of values set. Above customer satisfaction. Steal from RE/MAX: "We are a life success company."
39. Flowers.
40. Celebrate "small wins." Often. Perhaps a "small win of the day."
41. Manage your calendar religiously: Does it accurately reflect your espoused priorities? Use a "calendar friend" who's not very friendly to help you with this.
42. Review your calendar: Work assiduously and mercilessly on your "To don'ts."
43. Bosses: Formally cultivate one advisor whose role is to tell you the truth.
44. Commit to Excellence.
45. Talk up Excellence.
46. Put "Excellence in all we do" in the values set.
47. Measure everyone on demonstrated commitment to Excellence.

## **SUCCESS**

### **157. The "3H Model" of Success.**

The 3H's:

Howard.

Hilton.

Herb.

(1) Starbucks has hit a rough patch, but as "they" say, we should all have Howard Schultz's problems—a guy who took a cup of java and grew a business of over 10,000 iconic shops worldwide. There is no doubt that to run an international show as big as Starbucks is quite a chore, and the staff is tops, and there's data by the ton. Yet the boss, Mr. Schultz, aims (and usually succeeds) to visit—hold on to your hat—25 shops per *week*. He believes you've gotta see the real deal up close with all your senses (after all, Starbucks sells an all-senses "experience") to know the score.

(2) If there's ever been a more prominent and successful hotelier than Conrad Hilton, I'd like to know who it is. One Hilton anecdote: The story goes that at the conclusion of a gala honoring his career, Mr. Hilton was finally called to the podium to "share his success secrets." He made his way to the front of the house, and intoned ... "*Remember to tuck the shower curtain inside the bathtub.*" And that was it, and back he went to his seat.

(3) In 2009, American Airlines and the Southwest Airlines held their annual meetings on the same day in Dallas, headquarters to both. APA, the Allied Pilots Association, picketed American's meeting. The Southwest meeting marked founder Herb Kelleher's retirement after 37 years. Like Mr. Hilton, Herb was asked to reveal his full set of secrets, and, like Mr. Hilton, he severely limited his remarks: "*You have to treat your employees like customers.*" (Whoops, I forgot to mention that on the same day the APA picketed American, Southwest's pilots' union paid a small fortune to take out full-page ads in the likes of *USA Today* thanking Herb for his years of service—and support of the union and its pilots. Quite a contrast, eh?)

Bottom line from the 3Hs:

- (1) Stay in touch! (Howard)
- (2) Sweat the details! (Hilton)
- (3) People first! (Herb)

Pretty close to an "all you need to know" recitation.

**158. A 5-Word, 5-Point "Complete" "Excellence Manifesto."** Here goes, my "summary of everything" ... in five words:

Cause.  
Space.  
Decency.  
Service.  
Excellence.

*Cause:* An objective worthy of our commitment. An aim that supersedes the need for an alarm clock and that we can brag about to our friends, our family, and our mirror.

*Space:* Room to roam. Constant and insistent encouragement for taking the initiative. An expectation that everyone will perceive herself or himself as a Change Agent-Entrepreneur.

*Decency:* Thoughtfulness to a fault in everything we do. Fairness to a fault in everything we do. Sky-high respect for every person with whom we come in contact.

*Service:* We unfailingly aim to "be of service." Our leaders at all levels are "in service" to their staff. Each staff member is "in service" to her or his peers and internal and external customers.

*Excellence*: Our ultimate aim is always ... Excellence. Nothing less. In our treatment of one another. In the products and services we develop. In our relationships with customers-vendors-community.

"How are you doing" I: How are you doing on each point in general?

"How are you doing" II: How have you done on each of the five ... TODAY?

**159. The Full Nelson—Or: 13 Lessons on "Navigating" Excellence.** Lord Horatio Nelson, an old Navy man and avid student of naval history, to me epitomizes Excellence. And, near the 200<sup>th</sup> anniversary of his singular victory at Trafalgar, I happened upon a new biography (I've probably ingested a dozen over the years), Andrew Lambert's *Nelson: Britannia's God of War*. From it, I extracted 13 lessons that I contend are mostly applicable to you and me:

1. *Simple scheme.* Nelson's orders of battle were paragons of simplicity and clarity—he was a damn good writer among other things. (Doable for you or me? Yes.)
2. *Soaring/Bold/Noble Purpose!* Nelson pursued total victory. Many of his peers were willing, essentially, to rate surviving as victory enough. (Doable for you or me? Yes.)
3. *Engage others.* Nelson made his captains full partners in the process as he devised plans—unheard of in those days. (Doable for you or me? Yes.)
4. *Find great talent, at any age, let it soar!* Nelson gave his best captains, young or old, far more leeway than his counterpart admirals—and he eschewed seniority as primary measure of assigned responsibility. (Doable for you or me? Yes.)
5. *Lead by Love!* The sailors, every biographer agrees, loved Nelson, and he them. (Last clause in the sentence is crucial.) His concern for their well-being, regardless of the rough nature of the sailor's life in those days, was legendary. (Doable for you or me? Yes.)
6. *Seize the Moment!* Nelson's sixth sense about enemy weakness was remarkable. He would skip to "Plan B" in a flash if merited by changing circumstances. (Doable for you or me? Yes. More or less—"good instincts" are the indirect product of insanely hard work.)
7. *Vigor!* His energy was palpable! (Doable for you or me? Yes. Mostly. Low energy folks aren't picks for leadership positions—or any other positions, for that matter.)
8. *Master your craft.* Nelson was the best damn sailor in the Navy—sailors and officers appreciated that beyond measure. (Doable for you or me? Yes. Damn it. We are not all created equal—but often "the best" is not the one who tops the charts on raw talent.)
9. *Work harder-harder-harder than the next person.* No explanation needed. (Doable for you or me? Yes.)
10. *Show the way, walk the talk, exude confidence! Start a Passion Epidemic!* Nelson led from the front—visible, in full dress uniform as the cannons roared. (Doable for you or me? Yes.)
11. *Change the rules: Create your own game!* Nelson *always* took the initiative—thus forcing rivals, from the beginning and throughout maneuvering at battle, to be in a full-time reactive mode. (Doable for you or me? Yes.)
12. *Luck!* Believe it! Always necessary! Not "desirable"—but necessary. (Doable for you or me? Anybody can get lucky—and preparedness ups the odds of getting lucky. But, truthfully, lucky is lucky.)
13. *Be determined to come out on top, come hell or/and high water!* Lambert: "*Other Admirals were more frightened of losing than anxious to win.*" This last is a big deal—it belongs as either #1 or #13. (Doable for you or me? Yes.)

**160. A Cheat Sheet for Tough Times. (and Other Times, Too.)** Amid all of the advice "out there" on dealing with difficult circumstances, how do you ... boil it all down? Some thoughts:

- (1) Be conscious in the Zen sense. Carefully consider, far more than you normally might, how you project: Does your "energetic" approach, for example, look more like panic? Is your smile in place—nothing is amusing about tough economic times, but a permanently grim demeanor, even if it's merited, is a guaranteed de-motivator. Etc.
- (2) Meet ... daily, first thing ... with your leadership team—to discuss whatever, check assumptions. Perhaps meet again late afternoon. Meetings max 30 minutes, maybe 15.
- (3) If you are a "big boss," use a 100-percent trusted, private sounding board—check in daily, whether you "need to" ... or not.
- (4) Concoct scenarios by the bushel, test 'em, play with 'em, short-term, long-term, sane, insane. (Not necessarily a formal exercise—but a constant "playful" exercise.)
- (5) MBWA (Manage by Wandering Around). Wander. Sample attitudes. Visible but not frenzied. But visible ... visible ... visible.
- (6) Work the phones, chat up experts, *non*-experts, customers, vendors. Seek *enormous* diversity of opinion. (NB: Big bosses invariably spend too much time with "experts"! Expert = Blinders = Particularly bad in uncertain/ambiguous times.)
- (7) "Over"communicate!!!!
- (8) Exercise—encourage your leadership team to double up on their physical exercise; physical sharpness is insanely important to mental evenness.
- (9) Underscore "EXCELLENCE in *every* transaction"! (Now, more than ever!)

## "BIG"

**161. Retirement Sucks.** My college fraternity brothers have a wonderful ritual: an annual newsletter that we all contribute to. A few years back (I was 62 at the time), I vented about the topic of "retirement": "You've all doubtless heard the Churchill yarn. The old man was transiting the Atlantic by ship. An aide made a mental calculation and turned to WSC, 'Sir Winston, I've calculated how much brandy you've drunk. It comes to about here,' he said, pointing to a spot about halfway up the wall of the cavernous ballroom in which they were seated. WSC leaned in toward the chap, pointed to his de facto marker on the wall, and purportedly said, 'So little time, so much to do.'

"I am often tired (I'm 62, not 22), but I Love & Appreciate the Opportunities I've been granted to take part in the Universal Dialogue about the Meaning of Work & Life & National Purpose.

"PUT SIMPLY, 'RETIREMENT' TO ME MEANS BEING DRAGGED OFF A STAGE AND SLIPPED INTO A SIMPLE PINE BOX INSCRIBED WITH THESE WORDS: 'HE GAVE A SHIT.'"

## 162. Think Legacy!

*"My life is my message."*—Gandhi

LEGACY!

It can be a beautiful word!

(Why I mattered.)

(What I left behind that lasted.)

But I urge you also to think of it as a continuous goal. Consider your current assignment as head of a 7-person branch in an IS/IT department. (Or whatever.) Suppose you move on in 6 or 12 or 18 (or 21) months: WHAT ... ONE SENTENCE ... WILL SUMMARIZE YOUR "TERM"?

Real bedrock: I believe a Single Day can have as much of a "legacy" as a lifetime. In fact, that had better be the case! Why? Because this day ... stretching out before me ... is filled (at the moment) with limitless opportunities ... and it is ... ALL I HAVE!

Right?  
Just another day?  
Hardly!  
THIS IS ... IT!

**163. Don't Forget Why You're Here!** Peggy Noonan, "A Life's Lesson," on the astounding response to the passing of Tim Russert, the *Wall Street Journal*, June 21-22, 2008:

*"In a way, the world is a great liar. It shows you it worships and admires money, but at the end of the day it doesn't. It says it adores fame and celebrity, but it doesn't, not really. The world admires, and wants to hold on to, and not lose, goodness. It admires virtue. At the end it gives its greatest tributes to generosity, honesty, courage, mercy, talents well used, talents that, brought into the world, make it better. That's what it really admires. That's what we talk about in eulogies, because that's what's important. We don't say, 'The thing about Joe was he was rich!' We say, if we can, 'The thing about Joe was he took good care of people.'"*

I wish you a long life, but if tragedy were to have struck you yesterday, what do you think "they" might say at your memorial service? This maudlin question is not to be dwelt on "24/7," but it is worth considering on an irregularly regular basis.

Amen.  
And good luck.