

The Choice Is Yours!

Tom Peters

My constant refrain in 2004: IT'S NOT YOUR FATHER'S WORLD! A new, foreign-owned factory goes on line in China every ... 26 minutes! A new, foreign-owned R & D lab goes on line in China every ... 43 hours! No wonder Hewlett-Packard CEO Carly Fiorina was moved to say, early in 2004, "There is no job that is America's God-given right anymore." Nope, it's sure not your Father's world!

The genie of change cannot be stuffed back into the bottle in 2005, or ever for that matter. In fact the Spread of Globalization, the Technology Revolution, and Generic Insecurity will only accelerate in decades to come.

Dan Pink, who watches all these trends, coined the term "free-agent nation." My contribution, over 5 years ago, was to similarly declare, "It's a 'Brand You' world." That is, each of us must grasp control of our lives from any and every "them," stand out ... and become a "brand" ... Brand You ... or perish, professionally.

Michael Goldhaber, writing in *Wired*, issued the ultimate adult tough-love statement: "If there is nothing very special about your work, no matter how hard you apply

yourself you won't get noticed, and that increasingly means you won't get paid much either." I guess all this explains why I took such a shine to Mark Sanborn's new book, *The Fred Factor*. Fred is not a fictional character in one of those endless management parables. (Fred doesn't even eat cheese, let alone move it.) Nope, Fred is author Mark Sanborn's mailman—and Fred gives a whole new meaning to "going postal." That is, Fred always goes the extra mile, worries when Mark's mail accumulates while he's traveling, thereby signaling "come on in" to any wandering burglar. And so on. Here's my favorite line from *The Fred Factor*: ***"Nobody can prevent you from being exceptional."***

Wow!

Life deals out its share of woes, but it's ultimately up to us—postman or programmer—to adopt our own attitude, pursue distinction, and thus make our own way. In fact Mark Sanborn's line reminded me of the ideas of psychologist Victor Frankl. Frankl survived the Holocaust, and wrote about survivors. He said that man can inflict the worst of indignities on his fellow man, but he can never strip you of your ability to bring your own attitude to a given situation; in the camps, those who managed, inside their heads, to retain a positive self-concept dramatically upped the odds of surviving another day.

On a far more mundane note, a friend passed along an apparent Chinese proverb, *"Man who not smile should not open shop."*

Yup! The horror-laden camps of World War II, Free Agent Nation, Brand You World, the life of a Postman or Shopkeeper ... the secret is the same: take charge of your Attitude & thence your Future. Frankly, most don't make that choice. The ever-quotable Oscar Wilde nailed it long ago, *"To live is the rarest thing in the world. Most people exist, that is all."*

I'm older than most of you, and I sometimes worry about what my tombstone will read. But I recently figured it out. I do *not* want it to go, *"Thomas Peters, He Would Have Done Great Things, But His Boss Wouldn't Let Him."* Hey, it's not my boss' world—or tombstone. It's mine! As to what I'd choose, though I'm in no hurry, I came up with this, *"Thomas Peters, He Was a Player."* Not that "he" (me!) got it "right" or got "rich"—but that I did Fully & Energetically participate in the crazy, rich-with-opportunity times in which we live. Hey, I'm clear: I want to be one of those ones who *"live,"* not just *"exist."* How about you?

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KEY QUOTES

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