

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

The
Work
Matters

Tom Peters

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“We are in a brawl with no rules.”

– Paul Allaire, former CEO, Xerox

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

credo

Re-inventing Work: The Work Matters!

CUBICLE SLAVES ... HACK OFF YOUR TIES ... FLIP OFF YOUR HEELS ...

THE WORK CAN BE COOL!

THE WORK CAN BE BEAUTIFUL!

THE WORK CAN BE FUN!

THE WORK CAN MAKE A DIFFERENCE!

YOU CAN MAKE A DIFFERENCE!

BASH YOUR CUBICLE WALLS!

RIP UP YOUR DILBERT CARTOONS!

THE WHITE COLLAR REVOLUTION IS ON!

90 PERCENT OF OUR JOBS ARE IN JEOPARDY!

TAKE CHARGE OF YOUR LIFE!

SUBVERT THE HIERARCHY!

MAKE EVERY PROJECT A WOW!

BE DISTINCT ... OR EXTINCT!

IT'S A NEW MILLENNIUM: IF NOT NOW ... W-H-E-N?

Re-inventing Work

The Work Matters!

“We aren’t knocking Dilbert ... who would dare? But ... we do believe that ... work can be cool.”

-- tom peters

Work ... yours and mine ... as we know it today ... will be re-invented in the next ten years. It’s as simple as that. And as profound. Here’s why ...

The tough old union militant remembers. Not 1870. (Of course.) But 1970. (Not exactly an eon ago.) Took 108 guys some 5 days to unload a ship full of timber. And now? Container daze: Eight guys ... one day. (!!!)

No big deal. It happened on the farm. It happened in the distribution center and in the factory. And at the docks.

But ... hey ... it’s 2001 ... and 90+ percent of us – even in so called “manufacturing” companies – work in white collar jobs. Fact: We haven’t touched – or really even bothered with – white collar productivity.

Never.

UNTIL NOW.

Ninety Percent in Jeopardy

Take ERP ... Enterprise Resource Planning systems ... from PeopleSoft and SAP and Oracle. (Etc.) And ... of course ... the Web and e-commerce. And Groupware. Intranets. Extranets. And “expert systems.” And “globalization.” (Of the no-baloney sort.) And global *de*-regulation. And the rising tide of entrepreneurialism ... from Shanghai to ... amazingly ... Paris. Etc. Etc. Etc. ...

I recently chatted with the president of one of our – U.S. – biggest white collar unions. I said I thought that 90 percent – or so – of his members’ jobs were in jeopardy. They would either disappear ... or be transformed beyond identification. In the next ten or so years. It was not a scare tactic. It’s what I – fervently – believe.

ERP ... plus the Web ... plus etc. ... will change the white collar world in the next few years as much as containers, robots and forklifts changed the blue collar environs in the last century. I.e.: Unimaginably!

My Dad toiled 41 years for “BG&E” ... the Baltimore Gas and Electric Company. Same door ... West Lexington Street ... 9 a.m. ... Monday through Friday after Friday. That was the way the game was played.

No more.

It’s a b-r-a-n-d n-e-w b-a-l-l-g-a-m-e. And we think we have an inkling of what the rules will be. There is an IS-IT revolution. (Information Systems – Information Technology.) And an attendant White Collar revolution.

AND ...

“Cool” Accounting Departments?

Go to Borders ... or Barnes & Noble ... or Amazon.com ... and you’ll find dozens of books on creating the self-managing work team in the auto factory or pulp mill. Now: Look for a book on creating the Really Cool Accounting Department ... and you’ll look in vain. (Right?) Yet far more of us work in Acct. Depts. than in auto plants. (Right?)

Sooooooooooooo ... what if

What if ... White Collar World was coooooool?

Well ... there is a place where white collar world – and white collar work – *is* cool! A place long ignored. The ... professional service firm. Architects. Engineers. Lawyers. Accountants. Consultants. Industrial designers.

These outfits have been long seen as parasites ... living off the sweat of real men's brows – UAW and USW and UMW members. Then we woke up: “THEY” WON. It's a white collar world ... where the economic value gravitates to the Microsofts ... and the AOL Time Warners. The “soft service” people.

Our Model

So I and my colleagues want to offer a model. It goes like this:

There was/is a revolution. Call it the IS-IT-Web-ERP-etc. revolution. And it's triggering the White Collar Revolution. And ... as I said ... 90+ percent of our jobs are – suddenly – in jeopardy. So ... whadda we do ...

I say ... LOOK TO THOSE WHO'VE ALWAYS KNOWN – THE PROFESSIONAL SERVICE FIRMS. McKinsey knows. Deloitte & Touche knows. And Ogilvy and Mather and Chiat/Day. IDEO knows. And so does Wilson Sonsini. And Kleiner Perkins.

And what do we see at these firms? Let us examine three dimensions: the organization ... the individual ... the work itself.

TO WIT ...

I. PSF 1.0

We call the first part of our model PSF 1.0. That's shorthand for Professional Service Firm Conversion Kit, Release 1.0. Idea: You are boss of a 23-person finance department in a division of a big company. Or, rather, you *were* boss of the finance department. Now, per our suggestion-model, you are Managing Partner, Finance Inc., a full-fledged professional service firm which is a wholly-owned subsidiary of your division.

Goal: Learn from the best professional service firms! Transform your unit! Today, even after re-engineering done well, the “department” doesn't look much like McKinsey, IDEO, Andersen, or Chiat/Day. (And that's an understatement!)

The aim, in short: Cool People working on Cool Projects with Cool Clients. The aim redux: A COOL FINANCE – Purchasing, IS, HR – DEPARTMENT. *Why not?*

The cool professional service firm is just that: cool talent, a portfolio of way cool projects, cool clients. Period. Its only asset – literally – is brains. Its only product is projects. Its only aim is truly memorable client service.

(Are all professional service firms exemplary? No. Don't professional service firms need to learn new tricks too? Yes. Still, 99 percent of white collar units-departments could learn – a lot! – from the under-studied professional service firms in general.)

So step #1, then, is *the organization*: Transforming “departments” in which white collar folks work into ... WAY COOL PROFESSIONAL SERVICE FIRMS ... ADDING WAY COOL VALUE ... BY DOING WAY COOL “STUFF.”

* * *

How does it feel? See the contrasts below between PSF-World and Department-World ...

PSF Contrasts

PSF-WORLD

Out of the office.
(At a client's.)

Lunch with a cool dude/dudette,
tapping her-his brain.

At work on a (one!) WOW Project.

Getting ready for a crucial review
with a senior client exec, two days
from now. (Super Bowl time!)

Going over the design of the
client presentation with a
graphic arts specialist.

Working with outsiders on a
cool market analysis.

A DAY IN HR/FINANCE/ETC.

In the office.

Lunch with the same old folks.

Ticking off an imposing “to-do” list.

Working with close colleagues on
nuances re latest memo
“up-the-chain.”

Huh?

Same old folks!

PSF-WORLD

Two brainstorming meetings – most attendees are not from our Dept. (Half are outsiders/strangers.)

Phone call with my boss to (1) review current project status (she wants lots more WOW!) and (2) scope possible next client project.

In-depth interviews with two client experts.

Phone call: Being recruited for a cool new project by a slightly more senior Professional in “the Firm.”

Cocktails (or racquetball) with a cool pal you’d like to recruit someday.

Mentally and emotionally drained at the end of the day.

Vibrating with excitement.

A DAY IN HR/FINANCE/ETC.

Six hopelessly bureaucratic meetings.

Called in by boss to review memo.

Same old sources.

Bitching about “politics” at the water cooler.

After work beers with same-old-buddies ... to complain about the same-old-shit. (Yo, Dilbert!)

Bored outta my mind. (Again.)

Need those beers!

IA. Talent

“People are our most important asset.” Bet you’ve read that one before. Well, it’s not true for a “PSF.” In PSF land: People are The Only Asset. Period. People are The Brand.

Furthermore, “people” in PSFs aren’t “employees.” (Or “associates.”) PSF People are Talent. Period.

Talent! Great word! Conjures up pro sports. Theater. Ballet. The movies. Great chefs. Stellar mathematicians. And deft surgeons.

And that's exactly the right conjuring. Xerox Palo Alto Research Center founder Bob Taylor pulled together a brilliant team of computer and software researchers. One early colleague described Taylor as a "connoisseur of talent."

I'm in love! In love with that term: Connoisseur of Talent! That's what all professional services chiefs must be! It's a long story. But I preview it below. Take a look ...

A Connoisseur of Talent ...

- Spends lots of time on hiring. (Time rules! Period!)
- Becomes a student of hiring. (Start with Pierre Mornell's *Hiring Smart*.)
- Talks "talent"! ("Leaders of Great Groups love talent and know where to find it. They revel in the talent of others." – Warren Bennis and Patricia Ward Biederman)
- Thinks like a sports franchise General Manager. (Talent = Everything.)
- Practices D.I.Y. / Limits the HR role in hiring. ("San Francisco 49ers Delegate Hiring to HR Department." Not!)
- Writes / reviews all help wanted ads herself.
- Uses plain / sparkling English in want ads and asks for what she wants (if you want "cool," ask for cool; if you want "sunny disposition," ask for sunny ...).
- Develops a Strategic Recruitment Plan.
- Recruits from offbeat places.
- Becomes *de facto* CDO / Chief Diversity Officer. (Diversity = Creativity.)
- Thinks arts. (Hire a musician in accounting!)
- Gets best folks involved in recruiting / hiring / talent development / mentoring up to their eyeballs.
- Networks far and wide *and* weird in pursuit of Cool Talent.
- Turns the pay scale upside down ("talent" > managers).
- Launches / nurtures "great place to work" PR campaign, including institutional advertising (assuming it's a great place to work).
- Works on R.I.P.s / Renewal Investment Plans with all employees; uses R.I.P. success in evaluations.
- Uses project selection and staffing as a key development tool.
- Evaluates all managers on success at talent development *per se*.
- Rewrites values / vision document to reflect "talent obsession."
- Micromanages *all* promotion decisions (excellence in talent recruitment and development is *a/the* principle criterion for promotion).
- Makes recruitment and talent development a staple of every operating review.

Attributes of Those Who “Made” the 10th Grade History Textbook

PSF / Talent redux: History books are flawed. No doubt of it. Nonetheless, they represent a societal consensus of what-who’s important to humanity’s march through time.

So ... take your daughter’s tenth grade history text. Randomly pull out 50 names. Political leaders (Thomas Jefferson, Franklin Roosevelt). Social change agents (Dr. King, Gloria Steinem). Generals (Alexander the Great, Douglas MacArthur). Scientists (Watson and Crick). Artists (van Gogh, Picasso). Weed out the villains (Hitler, Stalin et al.).

Now write down several attributes that characterize those who remain. I’ll bet your list is not far from mine. To wit:

- Committed.
- Determined to Make a Difference.
- Focused.
- Passionate!
- Risk seekers. (Irrational about their life’s “project.”)
- Ahead of their time. / Paradigm Busters!
- Impatient. (But, paradoxically, stay the course.)
- Action obsessed. (Mantra: Ready. Fire! Aim.)
- Made l-o-t-s of people mad!
- Creative. / Quirky. / Peculiar.
- Rebels. / In The Establishment’s face. / Flouted the Chain of Command.
- Irreverent. / Disrespectful.
- Masters of Improv. / Thrive on Chaos. (E-x-p-l-o-i-t chaos!)
- Forgiveness (asking for after the fact) beats Permission (asking for before the fact).
- Bone Honest!
- Flawed.
- “Tuned into” followers’ needs and aspirations.
- Damned good at what they do!

The point: I first tested this list during a talk with elementary school principals. To be honest, I was on the warpath. I think our schools do a perfect job ... of suppressing creativity. (Not such a great idea in Microsoft-AOL Time Warner world.) So I asked the gathering of 5,000 principals, tongue in cheek, if my list (above) characterized their schools. “And if not, why not? If it’s good enough to make the history books as society’s exemplars,” I said, “then why isn’t it good enough for good ole P.S. 29?”

But now I’ll aim my laser pointer at you: If these traits are those we cherish, then why don’t they characterize your HR Dept., Finance Dept.?

PSFs are all about fabulous “talent” vigorously pursuing “WOW Projects.” If so, we PSFers want a culture marked by something akin to the 10th Grade History Book list.

Right?

II. Brand You

The second part of the model we call Brand You. It is the worker herself. Michael Goldhaber, writing in *Wired*, said, "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. In times past you could be obscure yet secure – now that's much harder."

Again: The white collar job as now configured is doomed. Soon. ("Downsizing" in the nineties will look like small change.) So what's the trick? There's only one: **DISTINCTION**. Or as we call it ... turning yourself into a brand ... Brand You.

A brand is "nothing more" than a sign of distinction. Right? Nike. Starbucks. McKinsey. Martha Stewart. The point (again): That's not the way we've thought about white collar workers – ourselves – over the past century. The "bureaucrat" on the finance staff is *de facto* faceless ... plugging away ... passing papers. And hardly Martha Stewart!

But now – in our view – she is born again ... transformed from bureaucrat to the new star. She works *in* a way cool professional service firm (PSF 1.0) ... and works *on* way cool projects that she'll be able to brag about ... years from now.

Icon woman(man). Her-him: the New American Professional. CEO of Me Inc. (even if Me Inc. is currently on someone's payroll). And, of course, Brand You.

Step #1 in the model was *the organization* ... a department turned into PSF 1.0. Step #2 is *the individual* ... reborn as Brand You.

Brand You Contrasts

"BRAND YOU"-WORLD

Working on a memorable [WOW] project. (If it's not WOW ... I'll make it WOW ... or bust trying!)

Committed to my craft. Intend to be incredibly good at s-o-m-e-t-h-i-n-g.

Chose this project because it will add to my learning / because it will s-t-r-e-t-c-h me / because it allows me to hang with cool people.

"EMPLOYEE"-WORLD

Doing what's assigned.

Working assiduously on in-box contents.

It's what the boss told me to do. (Give me a break.)

“BRAND YOU”-WORLD

Don't waste a single lunch ...
networking is my mantra.

I AM A ROLODEX MANIAC.

Willing to take a “lowly”
task if I can turn it into
something “cool.”

Understand that Projects-Are-Me.
Period. (This ain't funny: I am
my project “portfolio.”)

Love the words: WOW ...
Beauty ... Grace ...
Revolution ... Impact.

L-i-v-e for my clients!

Purposefully hang out with
freaks. (Cool people I can learn
cool stuff from.)

Think “fun” is cool!

Am anxious to get out
of bed in the morning.

Piss some people off. (Because
of my strong beliefs.)

Am (frequently) angry at
our slowness to change.

Would love to have been with
Washington at Valley Forge!

“EMPLOYEE”-WORLD

Lunch is my business!

I hate suck ups.

Don't try to push bullshit
off on me, bro.

I show up. I don't make
waves.

Give me a f----- break!

I do my job.

My pals are my pals.
Lay off.

A day at work is a day at
work. Don't try to make
a Congressional case.

Another day older and
deeper in debt.

Don't rock the boat!

C'est la vie.

I'm almost vested. Don't
tread on me.

“BRAND YOU”-WORLD

Love bright colors!

Am action-oriented to a fault.

Embrace life.

Understand that “power” only comes to those who grasp it. (“Pushy” = Good.)

It’s better to ask forgiveness than permission. (Always!)

“EMPLOYEE”-WORLD

Gray is beautiful. (Invisibility rules.)

I AM MEMO MAN!

There’s enough shit that comes my way without asking for more.

I despise all corporate “politicians.”

Don’t expose your butt.

Icon Woman(Man)

Icons are important. Just ask Nike or Apple. Who is “our” prototypical professional-star-of-early-century-21?

- She (he) is totally turned on by her/his work.
- The work is ... a WOW Project.
- “It” matters.
- “It” is ... cool.
- “It” is ... beautiful. It ... literally ... takes your breath away.
- She ... and her work ... are “in your face.” That is, the establishment cringes ... at least a little bit.
- She is an adventurer ... adventurous ... a bit of a Pirate.
- She is her own woman ... CEO of Her Own Life ... even if that life is on someone’s payroll ... at this transient moment. She is Brand You incarnate.

- She's ... at least a little ... funky.
- Her tastes are (notoriously) eclectic ... her curiosity insatiable.
- She laughs a lot. (Especially at herself and life.)
- She thinks screw-ups are as normal as breathing.
- She is driven ... and totally committed to her craft.
- She hangs out with some seriously rad dudes.
- She'll pass up a "prestigious" job in favor of an offbeat project where she can learn something totally new-different. (I.e.: She sleeps, eats, and breathes r-e-n-e-w-a-l.)
- She is *not* God. She is *not* bionic woman. She *is* determined to make a damn difference!

Icon Woman Meets the Web

Oh yeah ... Icon Woman is also Web Woman ! I.e.: She ...

- submits her résumé for a new job on the Web.
- is recruited on the Web.
- negotiates via email.
- is hired on the Web.
- is trained on the Web.
- creates and conducts projects on the Web.
- manages project and Client follow-up on the Web.
- manages her career and reputation building (Brand You development!) on the Web.

III. The WOW Project!

The third part of the model is ... the work itself !

Funny thing ... the work itself always seems missing in most discussions of “management.” (Maybe it’s because we’ve expended so little energy studying white collar work.)

The third part of the model, then, we call the WOW Project. It’s obvious ... in retrospect. The common denominator-bottom line for both the professional service firm/PSF 1.0 and the individual/Brand You ... is the project. And for the cool individual in the department turned cool professional service firm there is only one answer: the cool project.

THE PROJECT IS IT. I HAVE SPENT MY LIFE IN PROFESSIONAL SERVICE FIRMS. I AM MY PROJECTS. I AM AS COOL – OR UNCOOL – AS MY PROJECTS. PERIOD. MY PROJECTS ARE MY LIFE. MY PROJECTS ARE MY LEGACY. PERIOD.

A seminar participant in Sydney, Phil Daniels, said: “Reward excellent failures. Punish mediocre successes.” Amen! The question I ask at every seminar almost always brings a gasp – or at least a heartfelt sigh: “SO ... HOW MANY OF YOUR FOLKS BACK AT HOME ARE AT WORK – RIGHT NOW – ON ‘MEDIocre SUCCESSES’? AT WORK ON PROJECTS THAT WON’T BE RECALLED, LET ALONE RECALLED WITH FONDNESS AND GLEE, A YEAR FROM NOW?” Following a riff on this topic, the chairman of a huge financial services firm pulled me aside and said, “You really got to me. Our future is our information systems projects. They start with fanfare and then, indeed, almost all of them wind down to your ‘mediocre successes.’ ” Need I add: This is exactly the wrong time for mediocre successes!

We don’t study professional service firms. (Mistake.) And we don’t study WOW Projects. (Worse mistake.) There is, of course, a project management literature. But it’s awful. Or, at least, misleading. It focuses almost exclusively on the details of planning and tracking progress ... and totally ignores the important stuff: Is it cool? Is it WOW? Is it Beautiful? Will it Make a Difference? My #1 epithet, as I say to my seminar attendees: “On time ... on budget ... who cares?” I.E.: DOES IT MATTER? WILL YOU BE BRAGGING ABOUT IT TWO – OR TEN – YEARS FROM NOW?

(My problem: I’ve looked in the index of a dozen project management books. I’ve never found any of the following words: *passion, creation, imagination, spirit, talent, sales, marketing, community building, beauty, cool, WOW*. For shame!)

So, then: Step #1 ... *the organization* ... the professional service firm/PSF 1.0. Step #2 ... *the individual* ... the pursuit of distinction/Brand You. And: Step #3 ... *the work itself* ... the memorable project/WOW Projects.

WOW Project Contrasts

I was in New York for a few days last January. On a Thursday night I went to Carnegie Hall ... and saw the Orchestra of St. Luke's, under Sir Charles Mackerras' able direction, perform "A Haydn Miscellany." On Friday night I saw the Metropolitan Opera, with Placido Domingo in town and Philip Levine conducting, do a stunning "Simon Boccanegra." On Saturday morning, at Rizzoli's, I picked up a copy of a book I'd never heard of ... Sir Peter Hall's marvelous *Cities in Civilization*. Somewhere along the way it occurred to me that each of these "items" ... performance or tome ... was a WOW Project ... and a l-o-n-g way from ... a-day-in-the-office, Dilbert-style. So what's the difference? And why isn't a day-at-work-in-the-Purchasing Dept. more like Placido's evening-at-the-Met?

PLACIDO-AT-THE-MET / ETC.

PURCHASING DEPT. / ETC.

A performance

A job

An act of unbridled passion

Puttin' in time

Memorable

Forgettable

WOW!

Blah

A signature piece

Bureaucratic dross

The epitome of character

Faceless

A plunge into the unknown

Highly predictable

Immediately judicable
(re: excellence)

Largely invisible

The product of enormous
investment

Another day's work

Demonstrated mastery of craft

Acceptable work

Exhausting

Numbing

Talent rules

Hierarchy rules

PLACIDO-AT-THE-MET / ETC.

Energizes the performers

Alters the users' universe

Hot

Colorful

Design-centered

Quirky

It matters!

Reaches out

Adventuresome

Exposed

Growth experience

Demonstrates curiosity

Talent-driven

A beginning and an end

An overture and a grand finale

A plot

PURCHASING DEPT. / ETC.

Enervates the "employees"

Customer-as-afterthought

Tepid

Gray / Colorless

Design-free

Predictable

Ho-hum

Inward focused

Risk averse

Hidden

Another day older

Colors inside the lines

Boss-driven

Un-punctuated

All in the same key

Tuneless

Action Now: The Movement!

The time has come to act!

How?

Our answer: start a movement.

Title: **The Work Matters!**

(Or: The Anti-Dilbert Movement.)

We are sick and tired of whining about lousy bosses. (Or companies.) It is – as we see it – our life. To live ... or lose. To form ... or allow to be formed.

Dilbert is hilarious. (I.e., on the money!) And there's the rub. Dilbert stands not only for cynicism (an emotion I appreciate) but the *de facto* acceptance of power-less-ness. And that is where I draw the line!

It is my life! To live ...

fully. Or not. And I damn well intend to live it fully. And I don't think I'm alone. So my colleagues and I are audaciously starting

The Work Matters!

movement. And we invite you to join us. Cost of membership: the time it takes to type www.tompeters.com onto your computer.

So ... welcome aboard!

(P.S.: You may have noted the oversized **!** in the paragraphs above. No accident.

That is our symbol ... the exclamation mark. We figure it's about as far from the spirit – spirit-less-ness – of Dilbert-land as one can get.)

