

# The Anatomy Of Fire

Chapter 6: **Enterprise**

## *Dawn*

Sparking A New Spirit Of Enterprise

Chaplet 6.1

*By Tom Brown*

- *We don't see things as they are; we see them as we are.*

— Author, Surrealistic Thinker  
Anais Nin  
(1903 - 1977)



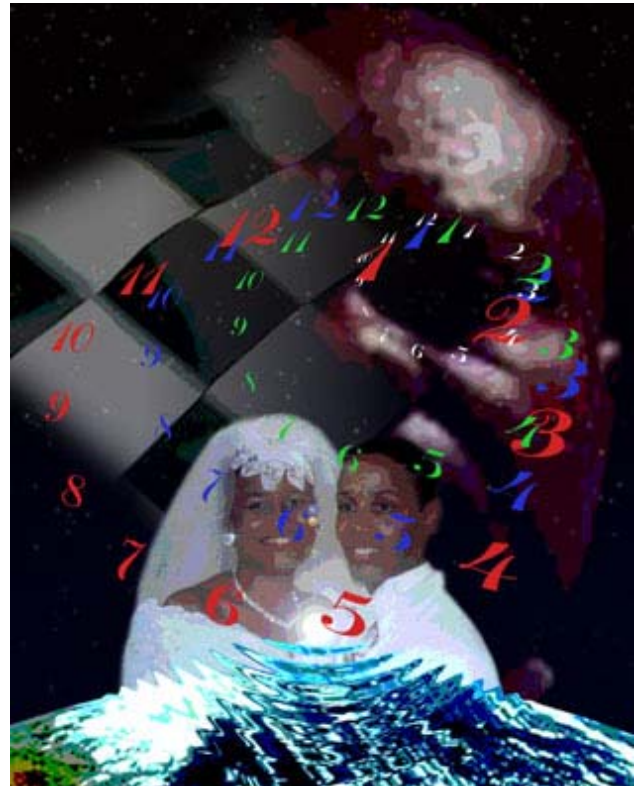
**A**n infant bursts  
From mother's womb,  
Broad smiles  
illuminate the room.  
Each birth a chance to celebrate:  
*Youth, aglow, anew!*  
Once more, a precious fireball  
rises,  
Shimmering above the morning  
dew.

Who you are, what you do,  
Each day's a dawn  
If you stay true:  
*The fire's deep down  
inside of you.*

Your days blazed fast  
When you reprise,  
How few the dawns  
Since the dawn of you:  
The day your lips spoke ooh;  
The day you tiptoed through;  
The day you learned in school  
The thought you never knew.

Who you are, what you do,  
Each day's a dawn  
If you stay true:  
*The fire's deep down  
inside of you.*

First dream first friend first kiss  
first fight  
First job first home first speech  
first flight:  
Every alpha, each aurora,  
Those flags you made and flew,



*Dawnings*

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In your mind, now folded  
carefully,  
Locked away ... they're you!

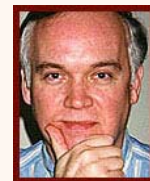
Who you are, what you do,  
Each day's a dawn  
If you stay true:  
*The fire's deep down  
inside of you.*

Ticking ever older,  
You ache; you mourn; you fear.  
Life's quest? A welled-up tear?  
All those dawns behind you:  
Mere ghosts of greatness now;  
Fleeting flecks of fire,  
Smothered in the snow.

If mankind's urge is forward:  
Ideas, then as now, the glue;  
If your own emanations  
Have shaped the life you grew;  
If you yearn to peel away,  
To find once more the new;  
Then go again to where you've  
been:  
It's right there, though out of  
view.

Who you are, what you do,  
Each day's a dawn  
If you stay true:  
*The fire's deep down  
inside of you.*

**To learn more about the author...**



[www.thomaslewisbrown.com/bio.pdf](http://www.thomaslewisbrown.com/bio.pdf)

**about the artist, H.L. Mac Thornton...**  
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# The Anatomy Of Fire

Chapter 6: **Enterprise**

## *Apothecary*

Sparking A New Spirit Of Enterprise

Chaplet 6.2

*By Tom Brown*

- *The minute you begin to do what you want to do, it's really a different kind of life.*

— **Inventor and Futurist  
Buckminster Fuller  
(1895 - 1983)**



**I**n Lapel, Indiana — a small community near Indianapolis, a Methodist minister named Evan Lash stuns his parishioners by reversing the idea of a collection plate. Influenced by progressive thinkers like Leonard Sweet, author of *FaithQuakes*, Reverend Lash freely gives \$10.00 to each of the 210 members in attendance, asking each of them to make the best use of the money and to bring back their “earnings” in six months.

In Hollywood, Jerry Seinfeld stretches the TV screen and those who watch it by airing an episode of his hit comedy series backwards; what happened first in the lives of the characters is actually aired last on the program.

From a humble, 25-person world headquarters of Nucor Corporation in Charlotte, NC, Ken Iverson decides that perhaps the best way to make new steel is to melt down old steel; but though he says it was “just a dream” to build a company based on an untried, untested “mini-mill” concept, Nucor is now the second-largest steel producer in the U.S.

In London, England, Michael Flatley, an entertainment unknown, puts the dancing world on its toes to see just how fast and furiously traditional Irish dancing can be elevated to a new art form. Yet, even as *Riverdance* sets box-office records, Flatley moves on, starting a new dance company from scratch: he says he wants to take dance to even higher levels of expression; he says he wants to express eternal ideas in “new and original ways.”

On the most-wretched streets of Detroit, Bill Cunningham and Eleanor Josaitis found “Focus: HOPE” to make that city a role model for the 21st Century, to “make something work that’s never worked before,” to take hundreds of men and women enslaved by poverty and grow them so they can “compete with the finest scientists and manufacturing people in the world.”

Although many would argue that the times in which we live are saturated with success, that there are no frontiers to conquer, yet others know that the drive of new ideas offers no down time. Although many would say that there is absolutely nothing they could think of or do that would exhibit leadership, there are others who realize that great ideas are born in all kinds of places and that fame is no prerequisite to innovation. Although many would mourn the impossibility of pursuing evergreen horizons in every field of endeavor, still others would follow the imperative of Theodore Roosevelt: “Do what you can, with what you have, where you are.”

On one of my earliest trips to Yellowstone, on a day when it seemed to me that “leadership” had become a jaded and overused term, at a time when wandering aimlessly through the woods seemed like the best use of my time, I packed up my car, left the boundaries of the park, and shook hands with a leader.

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West Yellowstone is just outside the perimeter of the famous park. It is a slip of a city: there couldn't be more than a few hundred regular residents, although its population swells and dips with the ebb and flow of tourists.



*Madison Crossing*

Thread your way south from Bozeman, Montana — through the spellbinding terrain that announces itself immediately as Yellowstone country, and in just a couple of hours you will see the welcome signs for West Yellowstone. A quick glance reveals exactly what you might expect: lots of restaurants, fly-fishing shops, gift shops, places to buy hiking gear, gas stations, groceries, and a few rustic museums. The city is platted to fit its basic function: to provision the thousands of people who want to approach the unimproved vistas of Yellowstone Park, just a few miles beyond.

Quaint center of commerce that it is, the last thing you would expect to find in West Yellowstone is a pulse-quickenng redefinition of an idea that goes back hundreds of years. But from the road south out of Bozeman (just inside the city limits it becomes Canyon Street), turn right on Madison Avenue. Park by the sign for the Madison Crossing mall. Step up. Advance into Yellowstone Apothecary. *It is a drugstore like no other.*

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Gary Evje is a very-focused leader, someone who — when he takes on a new hobby or project — obtains all relevant material, reading and studying it until he masters the subject at hand. It's still not clear to me whether Gary ever delved into the historical roots of what most of us casually call “a drugstore.”



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## No one I know has ever claimed to feel better just by walking into the ambience of a drugstore.

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Encyclopedias like *Encarta* dryly note that pharmacies are places “where drugs are compounded and dispensed.” It wasn’t until the mid-1800s that society split the responsibility for prescribing medicines and filling prescriptions; prior to that, doctors did it all. If one traces apothecaries to earliest times, say the 1600s, the social contributions of pharmacists were of dubious value. Elixirs, spirits, and powders (of questionable merit) were dispensed with unchallenged authority and unclear results. As all professions, it has grown immeasurably.

What Gary, a well-trained modern pharmacist who had owned and managed a drugstore for more than 25 years, plainly *did* know in 1994 was that the concept, the core idea, for a drugstore could yet be improved. He surely knew that huge chains like Walgreen’s (which opened its 1000th store in 1986) were the established norm in American society. As Herman and Rick Kogan point out in *Pharmacist To The Nation* (Walgreen’s, 1989), most drug stores fell into a distinctive pattern of practice by the late

1800s. They operated, no matter where, with the same “layouts, formats, and contents.” And though most of us go to a pharmacy when we’re ill, no one I know has ever claimed to feel better just by walking into the ambience of a drugstore: they are, on every continent I’ve visited, rather dry, uninspired, listless locations.

The telltale aroma and feel of a drugstore was something that was quite intact by the 1950s. The combination of drugs, prescriptions, toiletries, and sundries — all stacked neatly on sleepy-gray shelving with dim fluorescent lighting. In



Gary Evje

© Tom Brown

fact, if you entered the 1994 version of Yellowstone Apothecary, the name for Gary’s pharmacy, there would have been no confusion. It looked like the kind of

drugstore you would find in Bozeman, Boston — or Bonn.

Yellowstone Apothecary was the only drugstore in town. It was successful by all the normal standards. Gary easily could have “retired,” in terms of professional growth. But Gary sensed that his pharmacy, in his home port of West Yellowstone, could be different, could be better, could be unique. Like so many others before him, Gary found himself in a small town with some extraordinarily big ideas. And those ideas quickly became linked to a school.

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When a new school opened in West Yellowstone around 1994, the old one was ripe for conversion. The roughly 30,000-square foot building, the same one in which local residents did basketball lay-ups when they were kids, was quickly targeted by developers who made an offer to buy the school, an offer which was accepted. Their plan was to buy the old school, used by 200 students as recently as the end of 1992, and (by popular reports) to *demolish* it. Replacing the school with a traditional hotel was their idea of progress.

Andie Withner is both Gary’s partner and a real estate broker. She and Gary talked frequently about the ensuing tragedy in their small town. Another hotel was *not* what was needed; further, Gary’s dreams of a Yellowstone Apothecary that reestablished for him and for the world

what a drugstore could be seemed to flow toward this quaint old school. For many depressing days, as they thought of the end of the old West Yellowstone school (and perhaps the end of a new Yellowstone Apothecary!), time crept. Although he attended a different school as a child, Gary would walk past the school, think

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**When you enter the  
new Yellowstone  
Apothecary, you will  
not mistake it for any  
other pharmacy  
anywhere.**

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of it as just-another-hotel, and wince. He had given a lot of thought to how his store could be improved, expanded, transformed into something the whole town could be proud of. The old West Yellowstone schoolhouse — *a hotel?* Then the improbable happened: the hotel developers didn’t perform against the commitments of the sale contract. Although buying the deserted school was not something they originally felt they could consider — with enthusiasm and resourcefulness, Gary and Andie submitted an *alternative offer* within a week of their competitor’s reversal. And in short time, the owner of the home town drugstore was now the owner of — a school.



When you enter the new Yellowstone Apothecary, you will not mistake it for any other pharmacy anywhere. It is rare to walk into a commercial enterprise and find yourself hyperventilating. But that's *exactly* what happened to my wife and daughter after a day of rugged hiking on the trails in Yellowstone.

While I took a nap back in our hotel room, Rita and Nora stumbled onto the school that Gary and Andie have rechristened into a history-making experiment in selling things that help, heal, or amuse.

“Dad! You *have* to see this drugstore! Now! You gotta see it!

“Nowwwwwwwwwwwwwwwww!”

My daughter could not contain herself as she and her mother recited a staccato litany of “firsts” that Gary and Andie had built into a most-inventive enterprise:

- the actual Yellowstone Apothecary is in the area that once was a school gym; approximately 6,500 square feet have been left totally open and airy — with a stairway to a second-floor loft: few stores hold out their hand to you as proudly as this one
- absolutely un-missable, when you first enter, is a huge waterfall, built from five monoliths (by a sculptor from

Nevada City, California), that fill the air with the gentle sound of water cascading down tons of rock to a base pool near the floor

- bright, cheerful honey-colored wood punctuates broad, white walls — with the effect being a store brightly-lit yet warm and inviting



*Apothecary Waterfall*

© Tom Brown

- young, well-trained employees greet you the second you enter — and they do it repeatedly for new customers and regulars as well
- although this is a pharmacy, per se, and a full line of over-the-counter medicines and aids are available, Yellowstone Apothecary is as much a store with “medicine” for the mind and spirit: from greeting cards to unique toys to high-quality gift items; from Montana-made foods and health foods to a photo store with its own processing facilities;



Andie, Left, Inspects Art

© Tom Brown

from kitchenware (including tables and chairs!) to an art gallery which allows the customer to partake of regional culture via the images of its beauty

- Soon after Yellowstone Apothecary was established, they expanded to the rest of the school, making Madison Crossing a kind of mall: specialty shops that range from home furnishings to pan-for-gold entertainment now round out the shopping experience

As with any act of inventive leadership, the journey taken by Gary and Andie reflects travails and triumphs. It started with *discovery* and *enthusiasm*: Andie, who says that Gary has always been a dreamer with an incredible passion to work hard for something he believed in, notes that they both knew the old school gym would be the cornerstone for the Apothecary-to-come.

“Once the school was ours, Gary spent hours sitting in the empty gym, thinking about what wasn’t there — but what could be.” Gary notes that the wonderful shopping experience he now offers customers started with a boundless quest to consider every possibility. “I knew that I liked the sound of waterfalls,” he says, “but inside a pharmacy, inside a gymnasium?” He ultimately brought in a 12-foot ladder and sat atop it, alone, mulling over the myriad possibilities that his old school could offer.

But to fulfill their dreams, as enthusiastic as they were for them, especially as they took shape as blueprints and design plans, required enormous *resourcefulness*. “We knew,” says Andie, “that we would have to take some huge risks here — that we would have to push the boundaries of what we had done before and even what *anyone* had ever done before!” Were designs changed as they started to shape into reality? Yes! Were the original budget projections tested to the limits? Yes! Were the first-take ideas refined again and again into what would best work in reality? Yes!

In fact, in one of the most telling stories connected to this demonstration of innovative leadership, there came a point when it was clear that, in order to build the huge waterfall in the middle of the store (there are tons of slate in the 22-foot wide, 7-foot deep, 10-foot high structure!), Gary would need thousands of dollars more than what was originally planned. Showing once again that “no

“pain, no gain” is a saying that first applies to leaders, Gary sold his cherished four-seater Cherokee airplane to help finance what is now the signal trademark of the store and his personal dream.

There were other, inevitable obstacles for Gary and Andie. These are the predictable setbacks that leaders trip over but refuse to collapse on; leaders are nothing if they are not resolved. For example, like most schools, it was built era-by-era; as the size and needs of the student body grew, the old West Yellowstone school grew to the point where it was really three separate buildings built at three different times to three different sets of specs, then merged into one school. The architectural complexities of remodelling around such differences so that a new and uniform whole emerged was always pushing back at the new owners. Andie remembers asking, at one point, if a huge wood beam which supported a major chunk of the building would actually sustain some of the expansive plans for the new Yellowstone Apothecary.

Leaders, however, constantly find that the combination of resourcefulness and resolve is potent. “At one point when things weren’t going according to plan, it became obvious that we ought to at least *consider* scrapping the waterfall in the middle of the gym,” Andie said. “But Gary wouldn’t flinch on what became, without a doubt, the most distinctive trademark of their enterprise: ‘The waterfall is coming in — no matter what!’ he said. And it did.”

Perhaps the most telling test of a leader is whether he or she is willing to compromise on a dream when reality dishes out a really major setback. In Gary and Andie’s case, this was the point when their idea of having an overhanging mezzanine floor fell just inches short of what was in their minds.

As construction of the remodelling plans were underway, with the flooring for the second-story mezzanine in place, Gary kept staring at the emerging store space and realized it was too high up. “At one point, I said to myself, goodness, we won’t be able to fit anyone over five-foot-six on that mezzanine! This is not going to do. We can’t afford to do this wrong!” So, with budgets increasingly tight and deadlines pressing hard, Gary reworked his plans and reinstalled the mezzanine the way it needed to be done. Leaders simply won’t compromise on the integrity of their dreams.



*A Mezzanine (Once!) Too High*

© Tom Brown

But Yellowstone Apothecary, and all of Madison Crossing, must not be seen as an elementary lesson in economics. One can’t experience the outcome of Gary’s

and Andie's exploration, enthusiasm, resourcefulness, and resolve as simply a "shrewd investment." The fire in their eyes is not one generated by an accountant's ROI. Gary and Andie plainly intended all their efforts as a *contribution*.

"All the time I thought about trying to save that school — when it appeared that developers were going to knock it down and build a hotel, when I was dreaming of making it into a Yellowstone Apothecary that was really special — I thought about the people living in this town," says Gary.

Although neither Gary nor Andie attended the old school, they were keenly sensitive to those in West Yellowstone who did. "A number of people who

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## He wanted local people to be proud to bring their friends and relatives into the store.

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would shop in my store probably played basketball in that old gym, probably rooted for the home team from the bleachers. These folks grew up here; they took their schooling and spent their childhood in that old school. No one I knew wanted it to be torn down. I saw the chance to save the building for them.

"I felt I had to do this for West Yellowstone as much as for myself. Now I get 10 or

better 'Oh, wows!' a week, when new people enter this store. But such compliments do not generate the same feeling I get from someone who knew this building as a school *way back when* smiling when they see it today. We have people in West Yellowstone who are extremely proud of what we've added to what was already there."

So when Andie hears the word "contribution," she nods in quick assent. "Gary *always* had a commitment and a philosophy not to raze the school building. He wanted local people to be proud to bring their friends and relatives into the store. And they are."

One of those people happens to be the mayor. Glen Loomis, who's been the mayor of West Yellowstone for five years, quickly notes that Yellowstone Apothecary is "a showcase" for the entire town. "I commend Gary and Andie for their imagination and vision; what they have done is truly a class act.

"This town and all its citizens are so much better for their efforts. They took an historic building and built it into a valuable community showcase. Without them, it might have just sat there as a boarded-up old school. What they have done just turned out wonderful."

But what's most telling about Gary and Andie as leaders is how the idea, for them, of what Yellowstone Apothecary could be continues to whip and change and grow like the strong winds that cut



through the Grand Canyon of the Yellowstone. The present store is always being tested against the ultimate experience of what Gary and Andie *would like* to offer their customers. The sense of enterprise within these two leaders, the indelible belief that they can invent and shape and nurture their ideas into reality — making themselves, their customers, and society better in the process — is an endless quest.

“We never had a ‘Grand Opening’ for Yellowstone Apothecary,” Gary confides. “To me, it’s not done yet. Offer fresh flowers? Include a fine restaurant? I’ve got a million ideas.”

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After a visitor to Yellowstone Apothecary leaves West Yellowstone and returns home, it is invariably true that the moment comes when a prescription has to be filled, or band-aids bought, or toothpaste, cotton balls, shampoo. Many will go, as I did, to their neighborhood drugstore. Or perhaps to some hyper-market that sells tee-shirts as cavalierly as they sell penicillin.

It is at that precise moment that they will recall with fondness the leading-edge idea that Yellowstone Apothecary presents. In an age of stress and toil, when feeling good is as much a state of mind as it is a state of body, Gary Evje and Andie Withner offer to the world an enterprise that starkly opposes what everyone else means when they say “a

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## Yellowstone Apothecary is not just a leadership statement; it’s a leadership question: *Why can’t all pharmacies be like this?*

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drugstore.” With soothing waters falling, with warm wood embracing, with enchanting openness inviting, Yellowstone Apothecary is not just a leadership statement; it’s a leadership question: *Why can’t all pharmacies be like this?*

In small and unassuming West Yellowstone, a town carved from the formidable terrain of Montana wilderness, two people are redefining the look and feel of modern commerce. You may not read about them on the front page of *The Wall Street Journal*, but they are relentlessly leading nonetheless. There is no Harvard Business School case on them, but they are business models for anyone who dreams of what a store *could* be. They probably won’t make the list of *Fortune’s* most-admired corporations, but I’ve never been in a store that I like better.

To talk with Gary Evje and Andie Withner is a buoyant experience. Even in the middle of a harsh Montana winter,



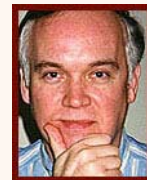
you can feel the fire of their ideas. These are people whose spirit and soul are so much a part of their work that one cannot imagine them spending their days doing anything else. They are living proof that in the right mix, *exploration, enthusiasm, resourcefulness, resolve, and contribution* combine to give leaders a magical momentum of their own making.

Why are so many others — in organizations large and small — so cold and uninspired in contrast?

Why are most pharmacies today still so cookie-cutter simple, old-fashioned, and, well, inhospitably boring?

Why is the world we want and the world we have so — *inverted*?

**To learn more about the author...**



[www.thomaslewisbrown.com/bio.pdf](http://www.thomaslewisbrown.com/bio.pdf)

# The Anatomy Of Fire

Chapter 6: **Enterprise**

## *Inversia*

Sparking A New Spirit Of Enterprise

Chaplet 6.3

*By Tom Brown*

• *Jesus is coming. Look busy.*

— Bumper Sticker  
Anonymous Author  
(Observed In Traffic: January, 1998)



**W**ork becomes us. Each daily commute, each hour of labor, each erg of effort — we shape our world with our vigor; but, in turn, our work ever so subtly surrounds us and then bounds us. When encountering an approachable stranger, exchanging “What do you do?” forms images fast. Engineer, teacher, stockbroker, plumber, florist, sales associate, nurse: we are suffused in our work, impelled by our work, revealed by our work. When our work is ajar with our sense of a personal manifest destiny, we are breathing but not really living. We don’t fulfill; we chill. We do not lead; we tarry. A career gone cold is a life that’s frozen. Take the fire out of our work, and we may just as well be buried in an avalanche of snow.

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Mt. St. Elias is an intimidating, defiant, rock-strewn peak jutting its fierce frown

out from glacier masses that can equal the size of Maine. Somewhere in this territory, on land part U.S.-part Canadian, Charles Campbell and three companions hiked fearlessly one day in 1988. Charles was no rookie at the sport. In addition to being an avid hiker and climber, he was also a sales representative for a company in the skiing industry. He was not innocent of the brute power of a 19,008-foot mountain; he knew about the constant threat of avalanche — for anyone bold enough to brave the terrain.

“Distant thunder,” are his words for it now: “It sounded at first like distant thunder. Then it sounded like a cannon going off: *BOOM!* Then the snow, endless snow, appeared above and on top of us. We weren’t even in the main path

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## **Then the snow, endless snow, appeared above and on top of us.**

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of the avalanche; it was sidewash that got us.” But in such surprise conditions, snow by the cubic meter, tons upon tons of it, falls furiously fast; its speed at mass can achieve 200 miles an hour. “The four of us started skiing at a maddening pace. Two of my buddies escaped the brunt of it. The third was buried up to his neck, *up to his neck*: no kidding!”

“But I was entombed.”

A blanket of sidewashed snow rolled over Charles leaving him immobile, barely alert. When the avalanche ended, the surface above him must have looked charmingly clean and fresh. But there, three to four feet below the rolled-on blanket of crisp white, Charles was trapped. “The experts say that the first thing one should do in a situation like this is to push upward, let others (if there are others) know you’re there. But when the snow came to a stop, I was *packed* in ice. I tried to take a breath. No breath. I tried to pull in my arm. No way. ‘That’s it,’ I moaned to myself. *That’s it!* It was very, very, very, *very* cold!”

Later, Charles would write about all this in his wonderful *Backpacker’s Photography Handbook* (Amphoto, 1994), which is so much more than a guide to picture-taking:

I pictured my wife and her gentle face, thinking I would never see her again. Then I passed out. The cold snow rapidly refrigerated my body and plunged me into a deep hypothermic state. Ironically, the same frigid cold that threatened my life lowered my metabolism to the level of a hibernating bear and kept me in a state of suspended animation while my friends kept digging.

A faint “beep,” “beep,” “beep” from the avalanche transmitter I was wearing indicated where I was hidden under the avalanche debris. Precious seconds were ticking away as they dug

frantically. Meanwhile, I was comforted by a pair of angelic escorts who encouraged me to sprout wings and join them on a distant journey, when I was suddenly freed from my icy tomb. I wasn’t breathing, but I still had a pulse.

Charles survived. Even after being buried for almost 20 minutes — and the additional 20 minutes it took for his friends to dig him out of the ice pack — you can talk to

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## Charles survived. Even after being buried for almost 20 minutes.

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him today; he is perfectly healthy. He still recalls each conscious moment of the terrifying experience. Even when his friends pulled him atop to safety, he denied their succor. “No, I’m dead. I’m dead.”

Since the prearranged pickup by helicopter was set for 10 days (with no way to send radio signals for help over the tall mountains!), Charles used the time to recover. Camped on the side of a mountain awaiting the airlift home, he rested, took nourishment, and thought about what happened and how he was spending his life. “I can go back at a moment’s suggestion and see myself perched on that little ridge of mountain, waiting and thinking, while I watched

sunsets of incredible power and beauty.” He expands on the life-changing days in his book: “I’m not sure why it seems to take a close brush with death before we think seriously about our priorities. But that became all I could think about after the avalanche. What was I doing with my life? What changes did I need to make? How could I live more authentically?”

Between one sunset and the next, Charles decided that it was time for him to move himself and his career in new directions. “So many people want the same three things. First, to love and be loved. Second, to be creative in what they do. Third, to have some fun. But so few of us achieve all three. I knew after that avalanche that I wanted to lead the world in photographing nature.

“I wanted to shun heroes. I wanted to stop emulating what others are doing. I wanted to start taking photographs that felt uniquely right for me.

“Could I be shooting fashion models for big dollars? Yes, probably. But I realized after the avalanche that my life, anyone’s life, is more precious than that. To do work just for money is not really living. My camera will never be just a paycheck. I want to take photographs that reveal the magic of the natural world. And I want to help others do the same.”

Today, Charles is a nature photographer without peer. Even a quick glance at the few of his many master works posted on his website (< [www.photonaturalist.com](http://www.photonaturalist.com)

>) reveals a leader in the arena of life in which he has chosen to excel. “Just like each of us,” he says, “I believe each picture has a soul. My job is to reach out and capture its essence.”

Does it take the terror of being buried alive in an avalanche to wake us up to the terrors of living unfulfilled lives, to propel us into a leadership attitude? Of

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**Most of us will never  
be strangled by  
snow.... Much more  
likely to be choking us  
are — ferns!**

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course, it shouldn’t. Why there aren’t more leaders in every field and every endeavor may have more to do, much more to do, with how we approach our work and our workplaces. Most of us will never be strangled by snow. But that is small comfort if we don’t acknowledge that what is much more likely to be choking us are — ferns.

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Ralph Waldo Emerson was unequivocal on the point. He felt that the trendlines of civilization should point, should always point, toward the ennobling of man. The improvement of the world is impossible without the improvement of the men and women who populate it. There is no such



thing as a farmer, he exclaimed once; there is only “*Man Farming.*” It is a crucial distinction; as he exclaims at the end of “The American Scholar” in 1837: “The world is nothing, the man is all; in yourself is the law of all nature, and you know not yet how a globule of sap ascends; in yourself lumbers the whole of Reason; it is for you to know all, it is for you to dare all.”

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**There is no such thing as a farmer, he exclaimed once; there is only “*Man Farming.*”**

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As history evolved, the 19th Century was, to many historians, an advance in mechanical and economic progress. But those who crossed into the 20th Century (Emerson died in 1882) could not look back and say that men and women had evolved into people always pushing their full potential. What man had become, as an agrarian economy moved into a mercantile-minded mass production economy, was labor. The factory-dominated economies prevalent by the end of the century certainly did little to symbolize or enshrine Emerson’s philosophy that “A nation of men will for the first time exist, because each believes himself inspired by the Divine Soul which inspires all men.”

What Emerson advocated was a world of work that elevated, instead of demoted, mankind. His review of history could not have been that much different from ours today. It can be reviewed in just a few blinks of the eye. Chinese build The Great Wall. Blink. Egyptians great pyramids. Blink. Frenchmen build great cathedrals. Blink. Spanish build great armadas. Blink. English build great factories. Blink. Americans build great railroads. Blink. Progress? Where in all this, he begged, was a civilization of ever-growing, great human beings?

He died with his question essentially unaddressed. By the turn of the 20th Century, the pattern of the working world was plain and indelible. The Office, The Factory, The Organization — man had become subservient to Great Structures of his own making.

Alan Delgado’s “Social History Of The Office,” titled *The Enormous File* (John Murray, 1979), tracks the work practices of “Mass Man.” Going back to office environs of the 1500s, he threads through history showing how men and women assembled to accomplish work *en groupe* took on a collective personality even though they lost their individual spark. He quotes Sinclair Lewis, from *The Job* (1921), talking about the office that “keeps stenographers so busy that they change from dewy girls into tight-lipped spinsters before they discover life.” He shares a scene from *Safety Last* (1923), a Harold Lloyd film which literally has the hero dangling precariously from a huge

clock outside a building with uncaring traffic and crowds teeming below. He quotes T.S. Eliot's *Waste Land* (1922) in reference to the crowds flowing over London Bridge on their way to work: "I had not thought death had undone so many, / Sighs, short and infrequent, were exhaled,..."

Although Delgado closes his book with a quasi-optimistic view of the world of offices and factories, there is so much in his study that demonstrates how big structures and big business more often than not crush the human spirit, that it had to be hard to generate enthusiasm for his predictions even when they were first published two decades ago.

Starting two decades back, an imposing array of writers and thinkers picked up the Emersonian point-of-view and advocated that, in any workplace, three things should be achievable simultaneously. First, that the highest possible Quality of Work could be delivered: man's greatness would speak first through the merit of his work. W. Edwards Deming, whose thinking is now widely known, said in 1987 that "Quality is everyone's responsibility" and, a year later, that "Cutting costs without improvements in quality is futile." To be sure, Deming left an enduring imprint on the world of work: total quality is not only possible, there are no good reasons to demand any less.

But Deming was as keen about Quality of Work Life, work that enriches the

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**“Total quality is not only possible, there are no good reasons to demand any less.”**

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human condition. The writer, of course, who most espoused the importance of mankind in the workplace was Peter Drucker. His comment in *People And Performance* (Harper & Row, 1977) typifies his own idealism: "Whenever we have contributed only the economic factors of production, especially capital, we have not achieved development.... Development, in other words, is a matter of human energies rather than of economic wealth. And the generation and direction of human energies is the task of management." Business leaders often expressed support for such sentiments. In 1978, Fred Allen, then chairman of Pitney-Bowes, said, "It is probably not love that makes the world go around, but rather those mutually supportive alliances through which partners recognize their dependence on each other for the achievement of shared and private goals.... Treat employees like partners, and they act like partners."

Quality products and services — a quality worklife that enhances human existence — together they engendered a third requisite for the ideal workplace: Quality of Management. Writers like Perry Pascarella, at the start of the '80s,

spoke of “humanagement” in *Industry-Week’s Guide To Tomorrow’s Executive* (Van Nostrand Reinhold, 1981). There was a new push for a management philosophy that embraced and made progress on issues like work spirit, vision, and, well, humanism. Said Pascarella: “Not only corporate objectives but the means by which they are pursued are subject to challenge today. Inside the company, workers want more than a day’s pay for doing what they’re told to do. They want rewarding work, a sense of community, and an opportunity to participate in the decisions that affect them.” Pascarella, and many other

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**The “Dilbert” we all relish each morning with our coffee is really The Tramp of the 1990s: Charlie Chaplin, with profit-sharing and voicemail, tie perpetually bending outward.**

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writers, demanded enlightened management, one that does not shun or disregard the importance of profit — but management that considers profit only part of a larger set of social concerns.

But the early 1980s rebirth of Emersonian work ideals is now defunct. Which is why I can show, even today, Charlie Chaplin’s *Modern Times* from 1936, and incite the most buttoned-down crowd of workers (or managers!) into a frenzy. There’s The Tramp bumbling about his factory job feeling underutilized, overstressed, depleted, demeaned, and subjugated to the most mean and manipulative of Management maniacs. I have recently concluded that the “Dilbert” we all relish each morning with our coffee is really The Tramp of the 1990s: Charlie Chaplin, with profit-sharing and voicemail, tie bending perpetually outward.

Which is why Sebastião Salgado could comb the world in 1992 and 1993 to capture a stunning portrait of global labor. Simply titled *Workers* (Aperture Books, 1993), Salgado has portraits of people caught in the skein of work processes. One image I can recall with acute detail: it’s the startled visage of an inspector peering out from the assembly line of pig carcasses in a slaughterhouse in South Dakota. It is hard to find anything noble about this line of work — or, for that matter, any of Salgado’s stunning portraits of workplaces worldwide.

Which is why T. Quinn Spitzer, the president of the huge Kepner-Tregoe consulting house, can overview a 1996 study of the so-called “high-performance workplace” and conclude that the “outward appearance of organizational health hides deeper problems with

demoralized, underutilized workers who are poorly led by out of touch managers.”

Which is why today the inhumaneness of the work world is chronicled in numerous personal journals, such as *First We Quit Our Jobs* by Marilyn J. Abraham (Dell, 1997), and in numerous corporate critiques, such as *Losing Your Job — Reclaiming Your Soul* by MaryLynn Pulley (Jossey-Bass, 1997). Any well-researched, in-touch professor of management or sociology will attest to the unhealthy and pervasive levels of inertia, “turtling,” cynicism, apathy,

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**“Most of us are, I believe, confused by the world we have created....”**

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distrust, “stealthing away,” and fat-and-unhappy “satisficing” — all of which are so prevalent in the modern workplace.

Which is why social philosopher Charles Handy says in *The Hungry Spirit* (Broadway, 1998): “Most of us are, I believe, confused by the world we have created for ourselves in the West. We are confused by the consequences of capitalism, whose contributions to our well-being cannot be questioned, but which divides rich from poor, consumes so much of the energies of those who work in it, and does not, it seems, always lead to a more contented world.”

Which is why we suffer today from *inversia*: the larger and more successful the organization, the less any one human being within it feels of consequence. Revenues roar; people sour. Production swells; pride shrinks. Profits skyrocket; spirits sink.

William Halal opens *The New Management* (Berrett-Koehler, 1996) by asserting: “Civilization today is poised at the brink of a great divide between an old way of life that is dying and a new way of life that is still being born. Behind lies an Industrial Age that lavished wealth on a world that was poor — but which also left a polluted planet, quarrelsome societies, and empty lives.” Halal’s assessment is right, and he argues passionately for the establishment of new organizational models that will bring workplace democracy not only into existence but into predominance.

But smokestack organizations are invariably the outgrowth of smokestack minds. How many organizations have moved deftly, or so they thought, to open-office, open-book organizations only to find that men and women committed to autocracy and bureaucracy are seldom deferred or delayed by a new org chart or floor plan. Nothing will help us if we haven’t first broken free from the ferns that clutter and cloud.

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It was Meg Wheatley who first mentioned Michael Barnsley to me,

explaining the significance of his probes into the impact of chaos in everyday life, and about the ways in which his theories could be displayed via computer-generated ferns. As I took notes, she explained one day that if a programmer starts with a mathematical model of a fern — the faintest etchings of a leaf pattern, mere dots tracing a fern outline on paper — then it's possible for a computer game, controlled by the rules of chaos and order combined, to generate, on its own, ever-greater fern renderings. At the end, after five or six digital iterations, a computer game about chaos theory can yield a well-wrought fern. More than that, as the iterations show, a full and healthy fern just keeps getting thicker, to the point where its form amasses dense clumps.

Chaos theory aside, I started to ponder ferns as an analog to organizational growth. Ferns can represent the fundamental path of a successful enterprise, how it is possible — no, probable — to gag on one's own growth. For the following, think of any example of staggering commercial or organizational success that you like, from making steel to Model A Fords to personal computers. You may even think of nonprofit entities for the following: a postal service or a worldwide church. For all, the fern pattern is distinct.

- **Fresh Fern:** A new idea is born, an invention, product, or process of infinite potential and charm. A small number of people band

together, inspired by the idea and by the force of leadership ideals, and expend fantastic energy to establish a rudimentary organization to support the idea, give it on-going life, help it to grow. Any organization is vital during this stage; everyone within it feels the fire of firsts: first products, first customers, first business processes — and, of course, first revenues.

- **Forming Fern:** As the business grows and the base of those supporting the idea expands, the vision and guiding principles of the foundation idea become concretized. The start-up starts to look “corporate” as an organizational entity embraces the new idea, the opposite of how things were at first when the new idea sought an organization to support it. Outside walls are built; these walls brace more walls, yet even more walls are built inside, deeper. In form, the company starts to take on an identifiable shape.
- **Flowing Fern:** Now comes the real building of the business. A dizzying rush of people are needed to start to maximize the full potential of the new idea. Departments become a major ingredient in business success: the idea doesn't need an engineer; it also requires an engineering



department. Soon, departments are needed to support other departments: quality control, finance, human resources. The tight group of people present at the birth of the organization fret about issues like communication and teamwork. Meanwhile, the organization grows.

- **Full Fern:** Now the organization is complete, fulfilled. There is really no reason, given existing markets, for more people — except to exploit the idea to its gross potential. Thus, while most in the organization are consumed by the daily rigors of existing demands, a few others will pump themselves up about developing wider and wider channels of distribution. In existing markets, “new” products prove to be inconsequential variants squeezed from the original kernel idea. But all this success does not go unnoticed: no idea is innovative for very long; success can always be replicated. Competitors appear. The original leaders retire or die; more often than not, their successors are placeholders, people intent on squeezing all success from the core idea and the organizational model they inherited.
- **Fat Fern:** Now with variants of the original idea being deployed so as to maximize the probability

that everyone, everywhere, can benefit from the core idea, the organization feels flush. Its myriad departments and divisions take on lives of their own as any one branch starts to look like a microcosm of the original organization. Multiple product lines feed a diverse base of customers and functionalized operating units become dedicated to their “own” products and markets — and to themselves. Of large size, with budgets and headcounts to match, the organization starts to worry over “line” versus “staff” issues. Days are spent debating the merits of centralized versus decentralized decision making. “Performance!” becomes the watchword of the day, as the organization struggles just to cut an invoice for services provided or products shipped.

- **Fulsome Fern:** The idea and the organization it spawned have been successful beyond all hope — so successful, it is often quite hard to discern the original shape of the core concept that started it all. Curiously, few in the organization can speak to this history of the company nor even recall the name of those who founded it. The company takes on a daunting complexity: everything now seems to be shrouded in hefty practices and procedures. People are paid

handsomely just to catalog work processes, even internal policies. Communication is cumbersome; execution is plodding; innovation is sluggish. The frenzy and fun of the first days, when the idea that started it all was fresh, are faint footnotes in some corporate log, now tucked in a deep file, stored somewhere in the corporate bowels. Placeholders abound at every level. The organization needs new thinking, new vitality, new ideas; most people, however, are preoccupied with how best to look busy.

And so all ideas, and the organizations they inspire, sag in time. The causes are clear: the weight of the structure required to support a successful idea becomes, over time, so large that it keeps those within its walls literally incapable of thinking up new ideas, or hearing about those harbingers of the future quivering to life just beyond their own boundaries.

A healthy fern becomes so lush that its own leaf structure overpowers whatever systems are in place to provide water, nourishment, and new growth. Browning at the edges, its abundance is now its enemy. When organizational, a company that is a fulsome fern invariably employs people who say things like “the enemy is us” or “no one here can see the forest for the trees.” In reality, most people in such workplaces can’t see the forest for the ferns.

*Against all of this stands the leader with a bold, new idea.* The life of “ferns” is perhaps the most essential lesson for him or her who would lead. For it is the

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## **Against all of this stands the leader with a bold, new idea.**

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unfolding of new ideas that provides new life in the marketplace or in the community. But it is the enfolding of new ideas into organizational forms and structures that create the conditions for new leadership to challenge the old. It is not impossible for a rebirth of leadership to emerge from an organizational fern drooping from its own success. But to do so, a leader must be aware of the nature of work in workplaces that (more often than not) look, feel, and operate like fulsome ferns.

*Against all of this stands the leader with a bold, new idea.* Organizations today are rife with densification, marginalization, mechanization, and profiteering. These are not conditions and characteristics that easily spawn enterprise — the fundamental imprinting of the human mind on the world. Such organizational evils not only stifle the human spirit, they entomb it. It is the difference between Man Working — and men burdened by labor. Take the fire out of our work, and we might as well be buried under an avalanche of snow.

*Against all of this stands the leader with a bold, new idea.* When a leader senses that an organization, even an entire industry or society, has started to over-



*Fern Feel*

© H.L.Mac Thornton

develop, overgrow, over-impose its will on the needs and inspirations of the people within it, then it becomes obvious that more of the same is not only not leadership, it is both business and social deceleration and deterioration. In short, it is time for change, time to reassess the taproots of history and dig deeper to find new growth. Emerson's words echo true to all leaders, more than a century after they were first written:

There is a time in every man's education when he arrives at the conviction that envy is ignorance, that imitation is suicide; that he must take himself for better or for worse, as is his

portion; that though the wide universe is full of good, no kernel of nourishing corn can come to him but through the toil bestowed on that plot of ground which is given to him to till. The power which resides in him is new in nature, and none but he knows what that is which he can do, nor does he know until he has tried.

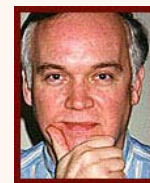
Leaders are adept at spurning old visions and spurring new vistas. "To rest is to rust," said Ernest Hemingway.

What is it about the leader's restless urge to slap success off its pedestal of self-satisfaction?

What is it about the leader's love affair with the "next"?

How is it that leaders can crack the crust of existing organizational or societal norms, turning bureaucracy and humdrum into a heaving, steaming sprint to tomorrow?

**To learn more about the author...**



[www.thomaslewisbrown.com/bio.pdf](http://www.thomaslewisbrown.com/bio.pdf)

**about the artist, H.L.Mac Thornton...**  
[www.mgeneral.com/4-ebook/97-other/040197li.htm](http://www.mgeneral.com/4-ebook/97-other/040197li.htm)

# The Anatomy Of Fire

Chapter 6: **Enterprise**

## *Frontiers*

Sparking A New Spirit Of Enterprise

Chaplet 6.4

*By Tom Brown*

- *Integrate what you believe into every single area of your life. Take your heart to work and ask the most and best of everybody else. Don't let your special character and values, the secret that you know and no one else does, the truth — don't let that get swallowed up by the great chewing complacency.*

— Academy Award Actress  
Meryl Streep  
(1949 - )





Come, leaders, come. We invite you not because we crave to worship you — but because we need you. Wake us from our status quo, rattle our routine, stiffen our spines, shake our roots. Come, leaders, come. A new century is charging hard against our flimsy walls of tradition; we need your force, your fervor, your ferocity: fire our will to grow, to change. We need more than your innovation; we need innervation. Come, leaders, come. We beg no charisma. We do not ask to bask in your glow; help us to kindle our own kinetic charge. We're weary of timeworn continuity; we've seen what emptiness lies in tired conventions and endless echoes. We need your spirit, your delight, your fight. Come, leaders, come.



*Yellowstone Dawn*

© Tom Brown

It's always dawn, for someone, in Yellowstone. Any time, any person can return to the grandest and oldest national park, roam at will, and reawake to its significance. Except for a few man-made artifacts — a store for camping supplies, a bench to view Old Faithful, a bridge to the park's majestic Grand Canyon — everything else within Yellowstone wasn't made by man. That's what's most refreshing; that is what inspires: how far we have come.



On land, just like this, we started. Each measured step of progress by the human race since the days when the entire planet looked like the untamed parts of Yellowstone were achieved by leaders. Leadership through new ideas has made Earth what it is today: at its best, hospitals helping to heal, groceries helping to feed, governments helping to harmonize peoples of generosity and goodwill; at its worst, factories expunging hearty workers, slums robbing people of their potential, despots endlessly suppressing and aggressing.

Each modicum of progress made over the centuries has been a measure of the value of leadership, the forward-looking worth of human enterprise. A world is a mirror

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**Each modicum of progress made over the centuries has been a measure of the value of leadership, the forward-looking worth of human enterprise.**

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of the people who inhabit it, what they imagine, what they treasure. Our schools today, if they expose students to Leonardo da Vinci at all, study perhaps

one of his paintings. He is viewed by most students as a distant and dead artist from the 15th Century.

Grab hold of his *Notebooks*, however, which he started when he was 37 and kept for 30 years until he died in 1519 (Dover Books, 1970; compiled and edited by Jean Paul Richter), and you will find the hidden Leonardo — in current parlance, da Vinci *unplugged*. Writing “backwards, in rude characters, and with the left hand,” the *Notebooks* were for decades da Vinci’s secret, but most august, diary capturing his view of the infinite potential of the human race.

Whatever you yearn to know about the basic techniques of art, it’s right there in his *Notebooks*. His immense curiosities, his quenchless thirst, his immense passion to know and to do as much as any single man could: these are all displayed, shot forth with the reckless beauty of a playful, wandering mind — yet one determined to leave a permanent stamp on civilization. The greatness of his “Mona Lisa” is only one aspect of the full stretch of the man: the *Notebooks* divulge detailed plans for castles and mausoleums, and speculations on the nature of human fat, the human soul, Earth’s place in the universe, what makes saltwater salty, geopolitics, submarines, helicopters, music theory, book reviews, swimming belts, mining — and, oh yes, a few philosophical stabs at “What is life?”

In all ways, da Vinci sought to find the new ideas that would move mankind

further ahead in freedom, health, intelligence, proflicacy, connections, happiness, harmony. “Avoid studies,” said Leonardo, “of which the result dies with the worker... The acquisition of any knowledge is always of use to the intellect, because it may thus drive out useless things and retain the good. For nothing can be loved or hated unless it is first known.”

The spirit of da Vinci is the spirit of leadership. Great ideas are embodied and vocalized in the leader at first, but leaders only provide the opportunity for many others to enroll in the new thinking — and then to roll the rest of society forward with it. Susan Yelavich has a towering portrait of human progress in

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## Great ideas are embodied and vocalized in the leader at first...

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*Design For Life* (Cooper-Hewitt National Design Museum/Smithsonian, 1997). In super-sized type, colorful graphics, and stunning photographs, Yelavich tells the story of man’s current century-long steps in translating human concepts into human products. If commonplace objects like blenders, hairbrushes, and thermostats have a “biography,” this is it. She grabs the reader’s lapels from the very first pages:

Each object tells a story about us and about the perpetual process of design that is central to our existence. How can we explain this restless urge to reinvent the world, generation after generation, from culture to culture? We survive if we have food, clothing, and shelter, but we create families, communities, and civilizations by imbuing these basic requirements with meaning. Design allows us to both respond and invent. It is driven as much by desire as by necessity.

Although Yelavich doesn’t delve into the story behind each of the hundreds of objects on display here, the book is about human leadership nonetheless: jewelry and dramatic plays and telephones do not just happen, they are the result of the fundamental imprinting of the human mind on the world.

And so we must not sneer or laugh at a book like *Plastic* by Stephen Fenichell (HarperBusiness, 1996), who subtitled it: “The Making Of A Synthetic Century.” From his point of view, people in 2098 may look back on us in 1998 and assert with quiet confidence that Fenichell was dead-on when he said, “Our post-industrial epoch frequently goes by the handle Information Age. But it could just as easily be called the Plastic Age.” He not only points out that, as early as 1979, “the global volume of plastics production outstripped that of steel,” he also lists how critical plastic has become to information storage and retrieval, film, computer disks, CD-ROMS, and — as

the book plays out — a staggering list of other products that have been “plasticated” from the mind of men and women. When you sit behind the wheel of your car, you are driving more plastic than you perhaps realized. “We mold plastic,” says Fenichell. “And plastic molds us.”

Daniel Wren and (posthumously) Ronald Greenwood have released a landmark study of 31 people with “ideas that have shaped modern business.” *Management Innovators* (Oxford, 1998) profiles inventors, manufacturers, sellers, movers, communicators, financiers, organizers, motivators, quality seekers; it includes famous names like Thomas Edison and some obscure ones, like Ezra Cornell (would the telegraph have happened without him?). Although Wren and Greenwood have a separate section for “Leaders,” all 31 qualify as discoverers who forged new thinking as well as new industries. As the authors say in their “Introduction”:

The people included here were very much like us, seeking to solve the problems they faced in their space of time. The lessons they learned can give us a vision, not of the past, but of the present. We think of steam locomotives and the telegraph as museum pieces, forgetting that they were as revolutionary to our forebears as modern technology is to us.

William Carlos Williams was a pediatrician-poet who found so much to

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## You can debate the merits of Paterson proper, but his poetic lines are irrefutable.

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admire about Paterson, New Jersey, that he wrote a five-volume epic as a symbolic statement about mankind in the 20th Century. You can debate the merits of Paterson proper, but his poetic lines are irrefutable:

Without invention nothing is well spaced,  
unless the mind change, unless  
the stars are new measured, according  
to their relative positions, the  
line will not change, the necessity  
will not matriculate: unless there is  
a new mind there cannot be a new  
line, the old will go on  
repeating itself with recurring  
deadliness

“Unless there is / a new mind there cannot be a new / line.” Is this not the first leadership hurdle? Gary Gemmill and Judith Oakley, however, strongly take issue with the assertion that leaders and leadership are at the forefront of human progress. In forceful paragraphs, they write in a 1992 issue of *Human Relations* (Volume 45, Number 2) that “It is our thesis that much of the current writing and theorizing on leadership stems from a deepening sense of social

despair and massive learned helplessness. As social despair and helplessness deepen, the search and wish for a messiah (leader) or magical rescue (leadership) also begins to accelerate.”

There is more to like in their essay than to quibble with, for their core argument seems to be that leadership, when it's genuine, is a shared phenomenon of

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## Leaders are no myth, even in times like these, when we seem to be so desperately missing their “magic.”

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many people moving forward, not necessarily being led by an oligarchy. “The social myth around leaders,” they aver, “serves to program life out of people (non-leaders) who, with the social lobotomization, appear as cheerful robots.” Change their use of the word “leader” to “placeholder,” and I could not agree more. Leaders become so the minute they set other minds on fire.

Leaders are no myth, even in times like these, when we seem to be so desperately missing their “magic.” For it's not mysticism that animates a leadership agenda. It's the leader's propensity to rescue lives and organizations so fern-

heavy that they slide downhill, stupefied and sanguine. There are four organizational diseases for which leaders provide strong antidotes. When leaders convey urgency, inaugurate aspiration, invoke spirit, or provide purpose, they are doing so mainly because of the degenerative nature of organizations and work. We *need* leaders.

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*When organizations become too cumbersome, when densification deteriorates the daily flow of critical communication, when it takes ten sign-offs to buy one wrench, when debilitating debate replaces arm-in-arm performance, when getting the simplest chore done seems to be a “biz-antine” exercise, when competition looms but people are too preoccupied with internal politics to hear...*

***then leaders convey urgency:*** John Kotter not only listed urgency as one of his overarching conclusions about *Leading Change* (Harvard Business School Press, 1996), he also spent serious time studying the lifework of Konosuke Matsushita, who pioneered Matsushita Electric (which includes Panasonic) into a company worth tens of billions of dollars but about whom little is known. Kotter's *Matsushita Leadership* (Free Press, 1997) is more about a philosophy of living and working than it is about one man's life. Matsushita was a compelling leader when his company suffered severe

setbacks (and more than once); but he was also compelling when his once out-of-nowhere corporation was hugely successful. In the 1950's, when corporate sales were looping upward at 50 percent per year, when profits were soaring beyond anyone's expectations,

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## But it's densification, not bigness, that cripples.

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Matsushita campaigned for a new view of the situation. "Too many Japanese families did not have labor-saving devices like washing machines," Kotter notes, and Matsushita rallied everyone inside the company to feel, personally, that it was their mission to address that need — now!

A commentator once noted that "The dinosaur's eloquent lesson is that if some bigness is good, an over-abundance of bigness is not necessarily better." But it's densification, not bigness, that cripples. A neighbor recently e-mailed me an unattributed list of comparisons between work and prison. Half-funny, half-serious, the list is a mini-sermon on what's holding so many people and organizations back. It's one thing to smile at the list; it's another to spend one's life feeling that this is the way things are destined to be. Many today do feel this way, and it's a primary cause for

the mass psychology of sluggishness that afflicts many organizations today. Consider just three samples from the list:

In prison you spend the majority of your time in an 8x10 cell. *At work you spend most of your time in a 6x8 cubicle.*

In prison you get time off for good behavior. *At work you get rewarded for good behavior with more work.*

In prison there are wardens who are often sadistic and psychotic. *At work we call them "Managers."*

By pointing out the insufficiency of old ways, by throwing light on the dangers of old systems and old processes, by educating associates on the emerging needs of customers or citizenry, leaders light the fire of urgent necessity. They do not mumble the message; they campaign on it. They take a hapless organization and help it to "hop to." They are fueled by the classic line of French General Ferdinand Foch who, in 1918 at the Battle of the Marne, looked at his unfortunate battle position and asserted: "My center is giving way, my right is in retreat; situation excellent. I will attack."

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*When organizations become places where the human element is seriously devalued, when all effort starts to feel like drudgery, when the Corporation looms large and each and every individual*



*shrivels to insignificance, when new ideas are routinely and consistently shunted aside, when people are considered fungible — inconsequential, when all human potential has been marginalized ...*

***then leaders inaugurate aspiration:***

Inside a \$20-billion telecommunications giant a few years ago to discuss leadership, I arrived early. Two managers were sipping coffee. Arms flapping, one manager pointed to a headline: *Radio Shack Expanding!* “We were just thinking,” one volunteered, “how easy it would be to get the few thousands of dollars required to open up a new franchise.” They rejoiced at the prospect of quitting. “Then we’d actually be in business!” Their words enraged me at the time, though I was stymied. How can corporations survive when those assigned to lead think only of — escape? Yet this predictably happens at the precise moment when people — even managers — have become token players inside an organization.

People are not born marginal; they’re entrapped by organizations that think of them that way. Fast food restaurants that think they have to teach their counter employees to say “thank you” to repeat customers; the register at our local grocery store has an on-screen command telling the employee when to tear off the receipt and give it to the customer; most radio stations broadcast prescribed, pre-taped, pre-configured programs that disc jockeys merely “cue up.” In all these

situations, and many others, the human element is but an operational appendage. It is very hard to achieve greatness when you are considered to be an inconvenience.

This tragedy is something that was quite known to Mother Teresa, who took legions of people with absolutely nothing — perhaps a day’s worth of clothing and

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## **Mother Teresa.... She gave them a cause to live and work for.**

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some scruffy sandals — and instilled in each a sense of worth. She gave them a cause to live and work for. “We ourselves feel that what we are doing is just a drop in the ocean,” she once said, “but if that drop was not in the ocean, I think the ocean would be less because of that missing drop.” What this “saint” could do with the indigent and sick is no different from the aspirations that other leaders inject into far more affluent people and organizations.

Leaders in diverse fields awake people to the chance to do something which has never been done before and is worth doing. Last century’s greatest choreographer, George Balanchine, knew the height of the barre he was setting for those who were willing to come with him in forming the School of American Ballet in

1934, the American Ballet Company in 1935, and The New York City Ballet in 1948. He ultimately staged 200 ballets, choreographed four movies and 19

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## We decide that what makes us significant is either what we do or what we refuse to do.

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Broadway musicals. “I don’t want people who want to dance,” he once demanded. “I want people who *have* to dance.” Call it giving people a life choice. Call it giving people a chance to enroll in a movement. You can even call it a noble form of “ambition” as Joseph Epstein once did in the October, 1980, issue of *Harper’s*. Whatever you call it, leaders cultivate a calling:

We do not choose to be born. We do not choose our parents. We do not choose our historical epic, or the country of our birth, or the immediate circumstances of our upbringing. We do not, most of us, choose to die; nor do we choose the time or conditions of our death. But within all this realm of choicelessness, we do choose how we shall live: courageously or in cowardice, honorably or dishonorably, with purpose or in drift. We decide what is important and what is trivial in life. We decide that what makes us significant is either what we do or

what we refuse to do. But no matter how indifferent the universe may be to our choices and decisions, these choices and decisions are ours to make. We decide. We choose. And as we decide and choose, so are our lives formed. In the end, forming our own destiny is what ambition is about.

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*When technology becomes more than omnipresent — when it’s omnipotent, when people swear on coffee breaks that they are “cogs in the machine,” when the process involved seems much more important than the people doing the processing, when the pace of work seems treadmillish, when the primary value of new technology devolves to its potential for playing Solitaire online instead of with real playing cards, when every task supports the argument that life is a grind, when mechanization is a muscle that hammerlocks the heads of all around...*

***then leaders invoke spirit:*** The biotechnology manager who lived his life and worked in Spain was being candid. Since he was in America for training — and since, he said, I was an American who prized blunt honesty, he would tell me what the average Spaniard thought about the world of big organizations. “They have become,” he confided, “people-eating machines.” Many have written and spoken about the tragedies of those who have been laid off, reengineered, or downsized in the last decade; but this senior Spanish manager

was speaking about the gainfully-employed in his home country. His comments related well to another person I know who called his peers and associates as “worker bees” buzzing about but accomplishing little. And they relate as well to the manager who said that his job was managing “ODTAA: One damn thing after another.” Moreover, they relate to the human resource director who said, upon personally being “right-sized” out of her own job, that she now apocalyptically saw how mechanized corporate processes insulated her and everyone else from the lightning dynamics of the marketplace. All the meaningless checklists, meetings, and memos added up, for her, to this: “Big organizations are really sedatives, aren’t they?”

Not for leaders. The human spirit is not a trifle to be introduced only in occasional, officially-sanctioned short discussions about the “soft side of business.” Leaders license people to discover, to take risks, to explore new horizons. They urge people to read widely, confer broadly, listen carefully — and then deliberate, meditate, ruminate. It is curious: before IBM became known as “Big Blue” and was widely lampooned as a mind-numbing corporation made up of white-shirted automatons, Thomas Watson Sr. constantly urged everyone to “Think!” — even to the point of putting signs with that single word all about. Don’t let the bigness of the corporation lull you, he felt.

His son, and many others at the time, learned the lesson. When Thomas Watson

Jr. succeeded his famous father as CEO, he eagerly tagged some people to be “wild ducks,” to work in different ways and on different projects from the rest of the corporation. Thinking fresh and being

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## “Thinking fresh and being a wild duck are the embodiment of the human spirit....”

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a wild duck are the embodiment of the human spirit: for there is no invention made by men which was not, first, a concept burning inside a solitary and insatiably imaginative mind.

Harry Newman, Jr., wrote a short poem, published in Berrett-Koehler’s *The Poetry Of Business Life* (1994), which shows how one’s life can become as mechanized as an overgrown organization:

Eat your vitamins  
Jog three times a week  
Work out at the gym  
Follow that salt-free  
Low-cholesterol diet  
*Religiously*

Bend all your efforts  
To survive  
And in the process  
You will forget about  
*Living*

So the leadership wisdom of famed psychiatrist Karl Menninger hits hard but hits true. When asked what he would recommend to someone on the verge of a nervous breakdown, he replied, “Lock up your house, go across the railway tracks, find someone in need and do something to help.” So the leadership wisdom of Barbara Morgan, the third-grade teacher chosen to replace Christa McAuliffe as the first teacher to fly on Space Shuttle, seems so stellar. Harkening to the ill-fated Challenger flight some years back which killed McAuliffe, Morgan rejected

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## **An organization that does not live within its means, or a commercial establishment without a decent profit, is doomed.**

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the assertion that playing it safe on the ground was what living should be all about: “Safety is an important issue, but living in a risk-free world is a big mistake. If we are not willing as a society to take some risk for learning, for our future, then we are not doing enough.” So the advice of two janitors from a high school, Bob Rivera and Peter Yates — selected by 115 graduating seniors to give the commencement address, says volumes about leadership in the face of

mechanization: “Do not follow where the path may lead, go instead where there is no path and leave a trail.” They received a standing ovation.

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*When money becomes the end and not the means, when every decision inside the organization is pondered and preceded by dollar signs, when each cost is weighed but no value is calculated, when making a profit morphs itself into profiteering — grossing up profits regardless of principle, when business is reduced to monetary equations and people are reduced to supernumerary status...*

*then leaders provide purpose:* Charles Dickens’ Mr. Micawber was not only numerically right, he was fundamentally right: “Annual income twenty pounds, annual expenditure nineteen ninety-six, result happiness. Annual income twenty pounds, annual expenditure twenty pounds ought and six, result misery.” An organization that does not live within its means, or a commercial establishment without a decent profit, is doomed. It essentially can’t afford to succeed.

But the current placeholder fixation on profiteering, taking the maximum out of a company — then grasping for even more — tears out the corporate heart. An enterprise has nothing to be proud of when it declaims that its top exec, or anyone else, relishes the name “Chainsaw” for being adept at cutting headcount and

other costs. Nothing great was ever achieved simply by trying to beat last year's numbers. Numerical goals triggering huge compensation packages for a select few give no one purpose. Nothing great can be expected from a workforce that is forced to watch its top officers grasp and wheedle for more and more personal compensation even after they have already pocketed millions.

Thus, when a woman like England's Anita Roddick founds a cosmetics business and instills a powerful purpose throughout the entire company, she is a leader to be admired. Convincing hundreds of others that enhancing how people feel about themselves is worth

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## Leaders thus challenge the people around them to live life seriously, meaningfully.

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working at and striving for, Roddick demonstrates that a leader can give an inner glow even to those whose mission it is to give customers an outer glow. She says in her book, *Body And Soul* (Crown, 1991):

You have to look at leadership through the eyes of the followers and you have to live the message. What I have

learned is that people become motivated when you guide them to the source of their own power and when you make heroes out of employees who personify what you want to see in their organization.... If you have a company with an itsy-bitsy vision you have an itsy-bitsy company.... I think the leadership of a company should encourage the next generation not just to follow, but to overtake.

Leaders thus challenge the people around them to live life seriously, meaningfully. If the leadership journey of an organization is such that men and women can align with it because their values coincide, then the few leaders "at the top" rapidly turn into many people participating in leadership at every organizational level.

Leaders know that insincerity in one's employment promotes only mediocrity. The famed editor of *Saturday Review*, Henry Seidel Canby, committed to this personal standard in the 1920s: "We live in the midst of details that keep us running around in circles and never getting anywhere but tired, or that bring on nervous breakdowns and coronary thrombosis. The answer is not to take to the woods, but to find out what we really want to do and then cut out the details that fritter away what is most valuable in life. Live deep instead of fast." Much like Canby, novelist and adventurer Jack London wanted to incite people to find their personal purpose *and only then* to measure the worth of the organization to which they were dedicating their lives:



I would rather be a meteor, every atom of me in a magnificent glow than a sleepy and permanent planet. The proper function of man is to live, not to exist.

I shall not waste my days in trying to prolong them.

I shall use my time.

The turn of any century is a compelling thing to observe. Are people optimistic — or trembling? Are they exuberant — or hesitant? Are they feeling the power of promise — or acting as if they are powerless? We just left one century and entered another. But 1999 is still worth a short span of study for the lessons it might tell us about our recent paucity of genuine leadership. But first, go back with me in time and scan the pages of *The New York*

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## Go back with me in time and scan the pages of *The New York Times* [in] November — 1899!

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*Times* for the first two weeks of November — 1899! *There's* the news story about John Jacob Astor and another mega-financier forming Continental Telegraph, Telephone, and Cable Company. *There's* 200 people gathered in Savannah, Georgia, witnessing the first long-distance call from New York. *There's* the Brooklyn Postmaster announcing that he

was willing to at least consider the use of gasoline-powered automobiles to deliver mail, although he wants to check on the possible use of air or liquid-propelled vehicles instead. *There's* the founder of Vienna Peoples' Kitchens announcing the invention of steam-cooked food. *There's* Silas J. Coyne, a carpenter, announcing that he had found a way to use kites and cables to drop bombs during times of war; a number of kites in tandem could actually support a cable seven miles in length! *There's* Dr. R. J. Gatling proposing to build a machine-driven plow that could, in short time, do the work of eight men and 12 horses.

In 1899, our ancestors read the same papers we now peruse on microfilm; they *knew* that in a matter of weeks a new century would be upon them. Many looked at the swirling churn and chose to deny the opportunities lighting up all around. Many seemed content in merely milking the moment. The world was moving rapidly toward establishing new norms: electricity, automobiles, airplanes, electrocardio-graphs, rayon yarn, radio, and color photography. In the sciences, religions, arts; in schools and media; in communities and governments, leading-edge thinkers were formulating the ideas that would transform human concepts into 20th Century realities.

While leaders were unfolding myriad vistas of enterprise, many others in 1899 hunkered down, locked themselves in place: unchartered, unchallenged, complacent. They read by oil lamps, rode

in horse-drawn carriages, preferred doctors who only used stethoscopes, tied things with worn string, and believed only what they could see printed in ink. In time, they all learned that as comfortable as it seemed to them at the time, you can't ride a stagecoach into a new century.

Faith Popcorn is a brilliant researcher, a "trend consultant" who has built her reputation by predicting what's coming. Among other neologisms, she coined the word "cocooning" to capture the idea that people would prefer a stay-at-home life in the 1980s. She has also been on-target regarding many other recent societal happenings. Does peering into the future keep one from fearing the future?

Jura Koncius, of *The Washington Post*, asked her how she would personally handle the clock beeping awake the new Millennium at the end of December 31, 1999. Her answer stunned: "I'm going to hide under my bed. I'm scared to death of cloning and of pollutants in the atmosphere and all the rest of the stuff out there. I'll be alone with my dust balls."

Only if leadership fails us can tomorrow possibly scare us. *Leaders are the unrelenting, unyielding, unremitting force for a new idea with the promise of positive change.*

In W. H. Auden's "In Memory of W. B. Yeats," these keeping-faith lines appear:

In the deserts of the heart  
Let the healing fountain start,  
In the prison of his days  
Teach the free man how to praise.

To quest to lead is a truly magnificent burden: what other calling makes a profession of perpetually praising the future, stirring people to achieve what has never before been done? In this sense, leaders are quite naturally society's most important teachers: we

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**To quest to lead is a truly magnificent burden: what other calling makes a profession of perpetually praising the future, stirring people to achieve what has never been done before?**

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learn from them when it's time to move forward, to escape the four most-confining prison walls for men and women otherwise free to grow: despair, ignorance, fear, and doubt.

Those who lived 100 years ago were blessed to both live in and define the

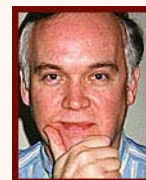
20th Century. We are now living in the 21st Century. We have 100 years to define an age of unbelievable progress — or of stagnation; we can strive for a century of brilliant leadership — or 100 years of placeholder plodding. The road ahead is miles and miles of future possibilities.

Will the world be safer — or more terror-prone? Will we feed all who are starving, heal all who are sick, liberate all who are oppressed — or will the next century merely stutter to find the planet-shaking answers that eluded the last century? On January 1, 2000, we guzzled champagne; on September 11, 2001, we sat in sober silence. Emphatically, the perils of the 21st Century confront us. But it's the promise of a new age that can still enliven us! You see: each of us, most happily, have the opportunity to address our own unanswered question:

*Who among us will join the journey to explore new frontiers, to scale rocky and perhaps perilous mountains — no matter how steep or precarious the slopes — for no other reason than to make the world better for all?*

Come, leaders, come!

**To learn more about the author...**



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