

# The Anatomy Of Fire

Chapter 2: **Inertia**

## *Placeholders*

Sparking A New Spirit Of Enterprise

Chaplet 2.1

*By Tom Brown*

- *He saw the Jungle of his life and saw the lurking Beast; then, while he looked, perceived it, as by a stir of the air, rise, huge and hideous, for the leap that was to settle him.*

— Novelist Henry James  
(1843 - 1916)

from “The Beast In The Jungle”



**H**istorians are like the rangers of Yellowstone, only their province is chronology. Every generation is given its own ticket to traverse a stretch of time. Historians survey each acre of the territorial past, then judge its value compared to all others. They search for periods when men and women consciously went beyond being mere travellers in time. They search for eras that have eminence, magnitude, consequence. They scour each and every instance that might have been the moment to define an “Age.” They can discern, then dismiss, those who travel far but never fulfill the requisites of a journey. But those who convert minutes and hours into meaningful journeys, those who advance themselves and others by embracing bold and brave new ideas, those with the courage to shape the future

and not just allow it: on such people historians fairly bestow the label of “leader.”

In the context of anyone’s time can emerge the challenge of a century. We were born to live in digital times: seconds no longer click by; they segue ahead — smoothly, electronically. But in the blur of all our quartz-driven minutes and hours, our Age is nonetheless being defined, our leadership is being tested. Historians are waiting to judge.

---

## **In the context of anyone’s time can emerge the challenge of the century.**

---

Just having celebrated the dawn of a new Millennium, we live amidst incredible wealth and oppressive poverty, between peaceful harmony and annihilating hegemony, amid boundless gluttony and ravaging hunger, between awesome erudition and senseless ignorance, among faceless individuals and globally recognized celebrities, surrounded by unlimited communications and stupefying misunderstandings, between mind-bending technology and the most elemental human wants and needs.

In the places where we work, we live amidst two conflicting mantras. By

many, if not most, of those who have risen to hierarchical stature and who sit atop corporate and organizational pinnacles, the mantra chanted loudest and most often is the clarion cry to “Maximize shareholder value” — to generate ever-greater profit margins, no matter the future cost. Those who follow leaders of such persuasion too often lament via a different mantra: “We are over-managed and underled.”

---

*How can this be?* How can those *most* positioned to corral and command the vast resources and wealth which could propel our Age into a human, organizational, governmental, and societal journey of unheard-of accomplishment and progress — how can these “leaders” be held with such low regard by those who follow them?

Alas, too many of those today titled as “leaders” are in reality only “placeholders.” Too often, we are following men and women who are running at top speed on the most elaborate and refined treadmills. “I don’t mind being lost,” a corporate vice president once joked to an assembly of managers working in his company, “but I insist on making good time.” Laughter met his words, but laughter can often camouflage tears.

All those charged to lead others at work in any endeavor — large or small, public or private, for-profit or not — carry with

them the responsibility not to waste our collective time and the charge not to demean our Age. *But, alas, between leaders and placeholders, major differences abound:*

- The placeholder sees only boundaries, the specifications for the work being done; the leader strives to understand the larger purpose behind the work.
- The placeholder is transfixed by products or services that have sold in the past; the leader seeks to define the new mandates coming from tomorrow’s customers.
- The placeholder mines every resource under his domination, extracting without replenishing, sucking wealth for the benefit of the few; the leader cultivates resources, reinvesting them to stimulate our abilities to create new, greater, and wider wealth.
- The placeholder exploits, enforces, locks down, fences in, stashes away; the leader enhances, encourages, opens up, explores new vistas, unleashes.
- The placeholder prizes doing; the leader esteems dreaming. All things are finite to the placeholder; all things are infinite to the leader. The placeholder is sure of nothing not in the present;

the leader is enticed by little that is not in the future.

- The placeholder employs as few as he can; the leader engages the family of all mankind. Placeholders provide employment; leaders stimulate enterprise.
- The placeholder looks at a hopping factory or office and sees workers laboring at jobs; the leader glances in the same direction and sees men and women, learning and growing. The placeholder is blinded by utility; the leader is energized by wonder.

---

Other periods of history have been constrained, sometimes for decades, by placeholders who wasted time and demeaned their Age. Consider the Renaissance, the period in history following the dour Middle Ages. After years of sullen disrespect for the potential of men and women, Europeans shook off the placeholder mindset and sought to discover the glow of being alive, today — as opposed to waiting for salvation (and stimulation) in one's afterlife.

The Renaissance was a unique period of social and artistic achievement — as well as personal enrichment. It was a time of pulling together to project ever wider

horizons in arts, science, government — *even business* (the most elemental corporations emerged in this unique period as a way to maximize person-to-person cooperation).

---

## *La vita terrena merita d'esser vissuta* — **Life on earth deserves to be lived.**

---

Yet it was also a time of tapping into and fulfilling individual promise. “Da Vinci” may be one of the few names we recall today, principally by his artistic legacy; but his personal *Notebooks* reveal a man searching on behalf of all men to better understand and nurture *all* human potential.

He was a giant, but his genius typified the Age:

... With the abruptness of a thunderclap, the cry “*La vita terrena merita d'esser vissuta — Life on earth deserves to be lived*” heralded a new kind of man. Man with a capital letter, who lived life so richly, fully, and brilliantly that the flame he kindled lighted all Italy, then Europe, and ultimately the civilized world.

— Luis Marden,  
“**The Renaissance Lives On In Tuscany**”  
*National Geographic* (November, 1974)

Lisa Jardine has published an elegant, staggering, and eminently compelling historical review of the Renaissance, with a most unusual focus. The lens through which Ms. Jardine explores the Renaissance is curiously one of commerce and economics. Here is how she begins her Preface to *Worldly Goods: A New History of the Renaissance* (Doubleday, 1996): “The Renaissance was a time of creative energy, enthusiasm, expanding horizons, collaborative enterprises, bravura entrepreneurialism and intellectual excitement.”

Jardine reveals that even her research associates were caught up, during the process of fact-digging and concept-forming, in the “exhilarating sense of discovery” inherent in thinking about an Age when “trade in bloodstock horses to pigments, from art thefts to currency fluctuations” begat a sense of men, organizations, and society moving forward. The Renaissance, even for those who study it today, is a journey of ideas.

In time, the spirit of the Renaissance faded; ideas expand and contract as leaders and placeholders trade positions. Every generation has the option to kickstart itself into its own Renaissance-like journey. Not every generation so chooses.

*The New York Times* asserted in an editorial (February 23, 1997) that it may have been the absence of such “creative energy,” “expanding horizons,” and

“bravura entrepreneurialism” that caused the corporate tycoon, Andrew Carnegie, to write his 1889 essay on “Wealth” in *The North American Review*.

Coming at a time after the United States had enjoyed an unparalleled economic renaissance — “when fortunes sprouted in rails and steel, department stores and real estate,” Carnegie’s essay extolled the joys of philanthropy. *The Times* says that before he died, he gave away 90 percent of his wealth, some \$311 million, all of which stimulated new frontiers of knowledge, accomplishment, and commerce. “Billions gushed from a single essay” is how *The Times* phrased it, crediting Carnegie’s generosity for setting the stage for the boom times of our own century.

The Middle Ages was a time of impoverished human spirit, but the Renaissance led the world forward. Similarly, the end of the 1800s in the industrialized West, as characterized by *The Times*, also seems to resemble a time of impoverished human vitality: “Epochs marked by gain and greed, by tax breaks, monopoly windfalls and booming stock markets, are followed by something like a moral hangover,” says Karl E. Meyer, writing for the newspaper. But Carnegie’s philosophy also led the world forward.

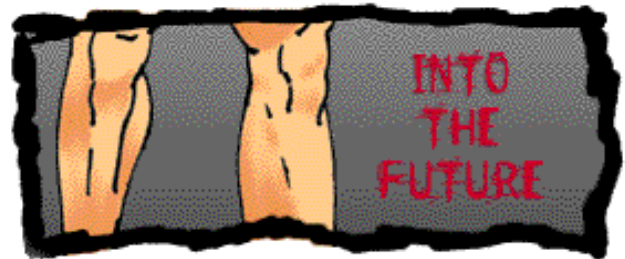
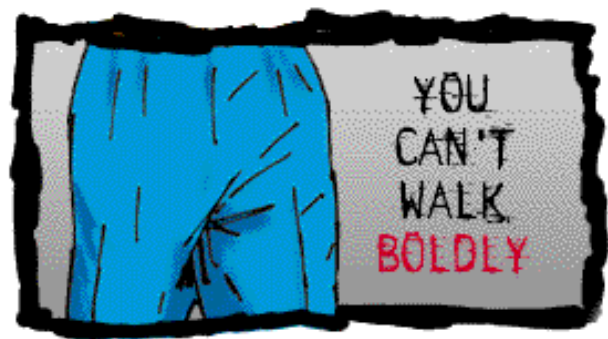
In both cases, the wisdom of Owen Laughlin seems confirmed: “Money never starts an idea. It is always the idea that starts the money.” Leaders seem to

understand this point intuitively; but in a world controlled by placeholders, the preoccupation with dollar signs often becomes a form of myopia, keeping ideas cornered away, contained. “Show me the money!” isn’t just a great line from the popular film, *Jerry Maguire*; it’s the theme song for those whose only mode of travel is running in place.

The global inertia sapping the human spirit which so many of us sense today strikes me as one of the major challenges of *this* century, and it is happening in the context of our own times. All of us at work today have travelled to the end of the 20th Century — and, now, beyond — and found our Age to be a place too arid for the human spirit. We have all been travelling in time, but we can’t seem to find a vision of the future to exhilarate us individually and collectively.

We have undervalued true leadership and promoted placeholders as dry substitutes. So we travel on, time tourists in a new century; we travel without handcuffs yet somehow scared and stymied by “the beast” before us: a world missing a single, cohesive, compelling *idea* to take all of us forward into better times. Many of us doubt that such an idea is even possible any longer. So each day we live and work in places, controlled by placeholders; and we are sustained — even motivated — by an oppressive aura of doubt. But doubt has no future.

Henry James, in his short story, “The Beast In The Jungle,” (in *The American*



*Legs Of Doubt*

© H.L. Mac Thornton

*Tradition In Literature:* W.W. Norton, (1974) writes of a man, John Marcher, who literally spent his entire life telling a friend of his, May Bartram, that he was waiting, waiting, *waiting* for something great, something momentous to jump out at him, like a beast, and thereby define his time on Earth. “The Beast” is more than a topic of conversation; it defined their lifelong relationship. Marcher did not know whether his Beast would provide him the opportunity to prove himself a champion, or whether it would swallow him to oblivion. He only knew he needed to wait.

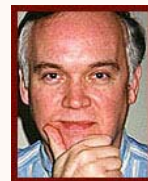
Marcher's doubt that any enterprise of his own making could ever match the challenge and rewards of confronting and overcoming the Beast-to-come blinds him to what life has to offer at the present. In the end, May Bartram dies; and Marcher must confront the fact that he had travelled in time without ever reaching out to love another human being (even one as close to him as May!), without ever committing to an idea greater than himself:

Whereas he had never thought of her (ah how it hugely glared at him!) but in the chill of his egotism and the light of her use. Her spoken words came back to him — the chain stretched and stretched. The Beast had lurked indeed, and the Beast, at its hour, had sprung....

We have now travelled to the very precipice of the 20th Century, celebrated the passing of a tired and troubled hundred-year stretch — and yet it does not feel like the beginning of an exciting and rewarding journey forward to the new frontiers of the 21st Century. Like John Marcher, doubt is “the beast” holding us back from doing something unimaginably great with our lives, our corporations, our organizations, our communities.

You can't walk boldly into the future on legs of doubt.

**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 2: **Inertia**

## *Doubt*

Sparking A New Spirit Of Enterprise

Chaplet 2.2

*By Tom Brown*

- *Worry affects the circulation, the heart, the glands, the whole nervous system. I have never known a man who died from over-work, but many who died from doubt.*

— **Medical Pioneer**  
**Charles Mayo**  
**(1865 - 1939)**





**G**rievances and gripes do not greatness inspire. So any laments about today's workplace are dismissed by "placeholder" leaders as minor grievances or petty gripes, but nothing more. They gloat over soaring stock prices, record profits, and boundless executive salaries; and they believe that greatness has been thrust into their lives with certainty and with impunity. There can be no just debate, the placeholder reasons, about the nature of the companies they have reengineered; nor can there be any fair questions raised about "success" so thoroughly defined by dollar signs alone.

But for every line graph that goes off the chart in terms of economic prosperity, a palpable poverty afflicts many during these great good times. Today's workplace lacks powerful dreams, great ideas, inspiring goals, an enticing future. As an economic engine, many organizations purr; as engines of enterprise, they are poor. Today's Dow

Jones Industrial Average, no matter how high, will never be secure when it has been built on a doubtful infrastructure.

For doubt has been the price paid for today's prosperity, but it will ultimately prove to have been a Faustian bargain. The success of placeholders today will not translate into progress tomorrow. You can travel at very high speeds on a freeway loop and never journey forward; miles and kilometers have been furiously flitting by these past few years, but where, really, have the placeholders taken our organizations and our communities?

**The placeholders said that excellence would come if we just committed to "lean" and "mean."** So we downsized with vigor; hundreds of thousands were pared; in just about every organization, labor costs were reduced to record minimums. Result: we wait longer for just about everything: to buy milk, to inquire about phone service, to register to vote, to have a question answered.

And who, finally, comes to help us? People who have been working longer hours for endless days in a row. Daily interactions have become a case of the whipped serving the tired. Fatigue abounds. Anger percolates. Employed? Not employed? Both today are "the working wounded," to use a phrase trademarked by Bob Rosner, whose syndicated column has many followers < <http://www.workingwounded.com> >. Family time anymore is primarily those

precious few minutes just before we brush our teeth and turn in. The values of tomorrow's twenty-first century adults are now being shaped in a daycare center somewhere across town.

Charles Handy shares the story of his corporate career when 80-hour weeks were the norm. Then one night his wife punctured his inflated sense of personal achievement. "I am happy for you that your work is going so well," she remarked, "I just think you should know that you have become the most boring man I know." (*Beyond Certainty*: Harvard Business School Press, 1996). A recent New Yorker cartoon shows a man at a desk on the phone: "No, I don't have four seconds to talk." A vice president in a financial services company shared with me that all the overflowing in-boxes and hard disks jammed-full of voicemails strike him as the 19th Century "sweatshop," brought up-to-date.

Perhaps the story which most typifies what companies now expect of their employees — and the attitude it has begotten in return — is about the engineer I met on an airplane a few years ago. His job was to maintain the huge mechanical assemblies which help to distribute goods to a national chain of department stores. Sitting next to me, he started to exchange job histories, stories about travel snafus, and perspectives on work and living. There was nothing special in the conversation until we hit a 10-minute pause: "You know," he finally muttered, "when I took this job, the

company said I would have to travel 20 percent of the time.

"And I have found that to be perfectly true." I stared at him as he sat mum for almost a minute. "There's 10 percent travel leaving home on Monday, and 10 percent coming back on Friday or Saturday." Point taken.

In travelling so fast to become lean and mean, we have found burnout, not excellence. We collect our regular pay and deposit doubt into our checking accounts.



*Doubt Sun*

© H.L. Thornton Original

**The placeholders promised that restructuring would produce organizations of renown.** So we closed down factories and offices, moved work

offshore, broadened spans of control, eliminated boundaries, shuffled people to new cities or continents, and endlessly changed organization charts. Result: followers disconnected from a sense of being led, people putting in tremendous hours pursuing a course that is fuzzy or blurred, a pervasive sense of competing against more senseless change rather than against a live competitor.

Late one evening, I sat in a cab in rain-soaked Manhattan with the visionary ex-president of a corporate division who had been deposed in an internal restructuring. His separation package was generous, much like the parting gifts they give on television game shows. Still relatively young, had been made to feel *retired*. He was suffering in comfort; over and over that night, he kept saying, “It’s all BS. All of it: the Boards of Directors, management changes, being loyal, the reorganizations, pulling the strategic plans together — it was all just BS.” I sat mute. How does one console someone whose travels have led him to an unscalable brick wall?

In terms of book sales and popularity, Scott Adams has reigned for years as the preeminent management guru. His cartoon strip, “Dilbert,” runs in hundreds and hundreds of newspapers around the world, and his website attracts (by some estimates) at least 100,000 visitors a day.

And all this fame (well-deserved fame), came from cartoons typified by the one where a boss says, “Knock, knock.” The

employee dutifully answers, “Who’s there?” The reply, “Not you anymore.”

Most of his humor, however, is not about layoffs. It’s about employees or managers who have *both* lost their way in the organizational world. Neither the leaders nor the led, in Dilbert’s world, seem to live with any confidence that anything they’re doing will amount to needed change or helpful contribution.

I asked Scott once what Dilbert’s idea would be of a good day. He thought for a second and replied, “A good day is when

---

**Now Dilbert adorns ties and T-shirts, calendars and mugs. But for those who buy such items and present them to the world, what precisely is their intended statement?**

---

the boss is on vacation, the project I’m working on is not canceled or cut in its funding, I get to order some new computer equipment under the cover story that it’s necessary to do my part of the project (and it takes a really long time to install the equipment), and then I get to surf the Internet the rest of the day.”

Like everyone else, Scott makes me laugh. But recently, the laughs come more slowly.

Now Dilbert adorns ties and T-shirts, calendars and mugs. But for those who buy such items and present them to the world, what precisely is their intended statement? That work doesn't work any more? That companies don't? That employees don't count? That bosses can't? How long can cynicism serve as a life compass?

More than a decade ago, Perry Pascarella predicted today's workplace malaise in a column for *IndustryWeek* (April 4, 1988). He listed a series of bullet points that could easily be printed, framed, and hung in corporate corridors as an expression of the *real* attitude of placeholders controlling the corporate world. Boston University professor Douglas T. Hall unknowingly discovered Perry's list, which (without attribution and slightly modified) had been converted to a wall hanging inside a company Hall was visiting. In his book, *The Career Is Dead, Long Live The Career* (Jossey-Bass, 1996), Hall includes the bullet-point list. It is, at least for me, the current anthem of today's dispossessed workforce:

- We can't promise you how long we'll be in business.
- We can't promise you that we won't be acquired.
- We can't promise you that

there'll be room for promotion.

- We can't promise that your job will exist when you reach retirement age.
- We can't promise that the money will be available for your pension.
- We can't expect your undying loyalty, and we aren't sure we want it.

Every time I have shown this in any organization, everyone sensed immediately the profound shift that we have all experienced in the world of work. When work becomes meaningless, when corporations don't incorporate people with purpose, when the future seems to be both threatening and a mirage, then little is left but one's ability to laugh at caustic cartoons or billboard posters — and to doubt.

**The placeholders promised that technology would bring us together.** So we automated our lives: file cards became pocket organizers, modems merged "home/office" into one syllable, servers linked to countless clients, everyone became a member of the I.S. profession, people clicked mainly with mice, memos and reports were keyed into laptops sitting on seat trays on planes travelling 500 miles per hour, just waiting to be inter-netted or intra-netted at the next airport. Just about everything we wear or use is now CAD'd and

CAM'd into existence. The virtual organization is built on silicon.

Yet who today really feels in touch? Who today senses a real “handshake” when his or her modem uplinks to the main office two continents away?

Who today can look at the computerized work flow on a computer screen and sense a bond with what's shipped from the loading dock — or the customer who will sign for it?

Sir John Harvey-Jones became a popular management writer in the U.K. only after he served as chairman of Imperial Chemical Industries (ICI). One comment he made has stuck with me for years; it may be my favorite quote about managerial leadership: “The ideal organization and the one with the best chance of success is one where, if you ask anyone from the chairman down to the newest recruit on the shop floor what the business is trying to do, you'd get the same answer.” The first time I saw that, I said aloud, “Yes. Yes. YES!”

But with all the technology we have at hand, with all that digital fuel to drive our organizational engines, I can't *find* the ideal organization. Take employee #1, #100, #1,000, or #100,000 — and seat him or her in a room, with the company chairman seated the next room over, and you will *never* hear the same words about what the company should be trying to do. The placeholders have helped us to be linked, not led.

Technology, more often than not, has enabled us to create organizations that resemble high-tech towers of Babel. Conflicting ideas inside most organizations about what to build or make, where to go, whom to serve, and how to start out never quite seem to mesh, even though a single satellite might be reflecting all those ideas from Tokyo to Toronto.

And the net of all this technological networking is, sadly, a sense by many that they are facing the challenges of a global economy all alone. “I'd like to think we're connected one to another, worldwide,” people tell me in countless companies, “but I doubt it.” They say that design-to-production transitions are still too crude, quality issues still too plentiful, marketing-to-production alignment too ajar. They add that, in many cases, some overwhelming levels of technology serve to cloud, rather than clarify, such critical business matters.



*Techn-alone*

© Tom Brown

One day, I pulled into a local gas station to fill up my car. Like most stations these days, the pumps were automated. I slid my credit card into the scanner, but the authorization did not take. I couldn't make the pump accept my commands or my credit. From out of the central station office, which doubles as a general store as well, an attendant walked toward my pump and manipulated some control on the end without ever saying a word. The digital gas and dollar meters instantly reset themselves to zero. The gas finally flowed.

---

## Doubt always seems to end in a question mark, doesn't it?

---

As he walked away, he only said this: "The modern service station! Who needs humans?" Odd question.

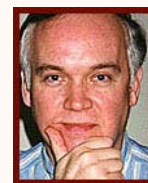
Fair question. Doubt *always* seems to end in a question mark, doesn't it?

For a placeholder who wants to milk an organization of all the potential it has but only for the present moment, who wants to take the status quo and turbocharge it to magnify economic streamlining or output regardless of the social or organizational consequences, the need for humans is admittedly tangential.

So we have come to accept widely a placeholder logic that is lean, mean, flat, global, technological. "That organization is best," the placeholder says, "which employs the fewest people to serve the most customers to generate the greatest profits." In such a scenario, the human spark is reduced to a faint ember; we have come to feel like mere matchsticks in a global forest.

It would be the happiest of scenarios, at least for the placeholders in charge (and perhaps those mindless stockholders who worship their ways), were it not for the one factor that placeholders cannot control and only the human spirit can conquer: the marketplace is in a constant churn.

**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 2: **Inertia**

## *Churn*

Sparking A New Spirit Of Enterprise

Chaplet 2.3

*By Tom Brown*

- *You should always know when you're shifting gears in life. You should leave your era; it should never leave you.*

-- Opera Soprano  
Leontyne Price  
(1927- )



No photograph can show it. No video can capture it. No movie can reveal it. No compact disc can display it. No quantity of terabytes on a hard disk can contain it. To label a person's experience of traumatic social change a "progression," or even a "cycle," simplifies matters of the mind and heart to such a level that one could almost be accused of deceit. A progression has a clearly-defined start and endpoint. A cycle brings you inevitably back to where you began. On a day-to-day basis, existence is never that reassuring; life, not that predictable. Living, especially today, has more to do with surviving a tornadic, societal Churn — *especially* in the marketplace.

Perhaps it was always thus. In *By Jove!* (Cader, 1992), Michael Macrone recaps the great myths of Greece. He speaks of the Ancients' fascination with "chaos" in the poems of Hesiod, which would have

been written about 800 B.C. He notes how the myths about Zeus deify his ability to establish some level of control over "primal forces and beings" which move without predictable patterns, engendering confusion or terror.

Four hundred years later, in India, the *Bhagavad-Gita* (in *The Wisdom of China and India*: Modern Library, 1942) laments a chaotic world filled with "demonic people" who "know not how to follow right or how to refrain from wrong; there is neither purity, nor good conduct, nor truth in them." It continues, berating "these ruined souls, of small understanding and of fierce deeds, [who] rise as the enemies of the world for its destruction."

Just before the birth of Christ, the Roman poet Lucretius confessed that he, too, was intimate with Churns, "This terror... this darkness of the mind":

...Nature's aspect and her law, Which, teaching us, hath this exordium: *Nothing from nothing ever yet was born.* Fear holds dominion over mortality Only because, seeing land and sky So much the cause whereof no wise they know, Men think Divinities are working there.

— Lucretius, from "On The Nature Of Things" in *The Portable Roman Reader* (Viking, 1951)

In Chinese literature, there is a tradition known as "drum stories": it is a form of folk poetry told to the beat of a drum. "The Tale of Meng Chiang" is an excellent example. It concerns a young



man, conscripted to build the Great Wall, who dies while doing so. His bride searches for her husband and finds only his bones. Her wailing is so great, a section of the Wall melts against her tears. The author is apocryphal, but his or her words are nonetheless memorable; life's Churn has reduced her to "a lotus-pod adrift":

Ah, husband, whither strays  
Your orphaned spirit? Now for whom  
Has your small wife embraced the doom  
Of homelessness...?  
You perish, leaving me to gaze  
Upon a moon that mists consume,  
Swift sinking stars that dull and fade,  
Clouds that the winds have rent and frayed!  
My world forever and forever  
Is but a lotus-pod adrift —

from Canto V of "The Tale Of Meng Chiang,"  
in *The Wisdom of China and India* (Modern  
Library, 1942)

The literature of all countries bears some testament to man's darkest fears that life's inexplicably certain Churn will swallow him and everything he values.

We sometimes think of the Dark Ages and the Middle Ages as a period of chivalrous knights. Is this not the period from which King Arthur and his Round Table ultimately evolved? In truth, the period was much lower in charm than a Lerner and Loewe's musical.

For a vivid account of life starting after the Dark Ages (400 - 1000 A.D.), read

William Manchester's *A World Lit Only By Fire: The Medieval Mind And The Renaissance* (Little, Brown, 1992).

A brilliant work, its subject is abjectly bleak, depressing, black. He captures the mood and the mindset of dark times in which the only way people could comprehend relentless Churn was to project such revolutionary change as beastly bodies:

When the cartographers of the Middle Ages came to the end of the world as they knew it, they wrote:

### **Beware: Dragons Lurk Beyond Here**

They were right, though the menacing dimension was not on maps, but on the calendar. It was time, not space. There the fiercest threats to their medieval mind-set waited in ambush. A few of the perils had already infiltrated society, though their presence was unsuspected and the havoc they would wreak was yet to come.

Manchester ultimately reveals that the "dragons" which would wreak the most havoc on anyone who cherished the medieval status quo were bold thinkers advocating new ideas. The "dragons" were nothing less than a parade of new thinkers who sought to change popular thinking and social priorities in dramatic ways: "Johannes Gutenberg, Cesare Borgia..., Desiderus Erasmus, Martin Luther..., Nicolaus Copernicus..., Thomas More...." He lists perhaps a dozen other Middle Ages-busting minds.

---

## History shows repeatedly that it is usually new ideas which shake the foundations of most status quo's.

---

History shows repeatedly that it is usually new ideas which shake the foundations of most status quo's. Wars, of course, also have great impact. But when France's Victor Hugo, in 1852, uttered his famous line about "An invasion of armies can be resisted, but not an idea whose time has come," not only was the thought a bit of a yawner, it was self-evident to *thinking* people. Ah, but!

The fundamental nature of massive societal Churns is that they hit most of us first, and sometimes *only*, deep in the gut. New ideas can really seem — even today — like ghastly dragons to our emotions. That is precisely the point Shakespeare was driving at around 1600 in *Troilus and Cressida*. He wanted so much to believe that a societal Order could withstand any Churn: "The heavens themselves, the planets, and this center / Observe degree, priority, and place,..." But the thinking Shakespeare, right at the edge of the mind-tingling, society-shaking 17th Century, presaged a time

when massive change would ensue and — clichés be damned! — the world really would never be the same:

O, when degree is shaken,  
Which is the ladder to all high designs,  
The enterprise is sick....  
Take but degree away, untune that string,  
And, hark! what discord follows.

Shakespeare could not predict what was to come; in fact, he did not live to see the bulk of the Churn which was to hit the Western world. Taken in full measure, the 1600s rattled everyone's world view in stark ways.

In religion, philosopher Giordano Bruno was burned at the stake for refusing to worship Earth as the center of the physical and spiritual universe.

In politics, revolts against Queen Elizabeth ultimately led to the first beheading of a British king, Charles I. Civil War ensued.

In music, Antonio Stradivari began making violins of a quality and timbre unknown before (perhaps since); concepts like "modern harmony" and "modulation" came onto the performing stage, redefining the basic standards of music.

In science and mathematics, Isaac Newton created differential calculus; while Kepler, Brahe, and Galileo probed the stars with minimal tools but maximal results: the heliocentric universe was

born. Meanwhile, Christiann Huygens came up with the first designs for clock pendulums; Robert Hooke soon followed with the first mainspring for watches.

In medicine, Santorio Santorio inaugurated the importance of measuring human temperature. The research of Thomas Willis revealed typhoid fever; he then explored something called “the human nervous system,” right about the time that Nicolaus Steno was describing the heart in astonishing new ways: the heart a “*muscle*”?

In exploration, the New World in North America was being explored and colonized; Harvard College was founded in Cambridge, Massachusetts. The English established a trading post in Bengal. Santa Fe, New Mexico, was founded. The Dutch settled the Cape of Good Hope.

---

All of these historical flashpoints are cataloged neatly in Bernard Grun’s *The Timetables of History* (Simon & Schuster, 1991).

But having spent many college days studying and reading widely in this period of history (in essence: my major), even I didn’t grasp until recently the tremendous Churn that had to be happening in the daily lives of men and women trying to survive and prosper throughout such heady events. For it was during the 17th Century that:

- Postal agreements were established between Germany and France
- The Plague hit England, killing thousands
- Daily newspapers emerged in several countries (but advertising in newspapers didn’t occur until 1647)
- Corporations took root, reaching out to global ports
- The first public library was founded in Rome
- The first “checks” (cash letters) appeared in the Netherlands; elsewhere, copper coins became currency
- Tea was first sipped in locales like Paris
- The glass industry was started in England
- Slavery came to Virginia
- Chess became the “Game of Kings”
- Potatoes were first planted in Germany
- Fire engines and hackneys first travelled English streets

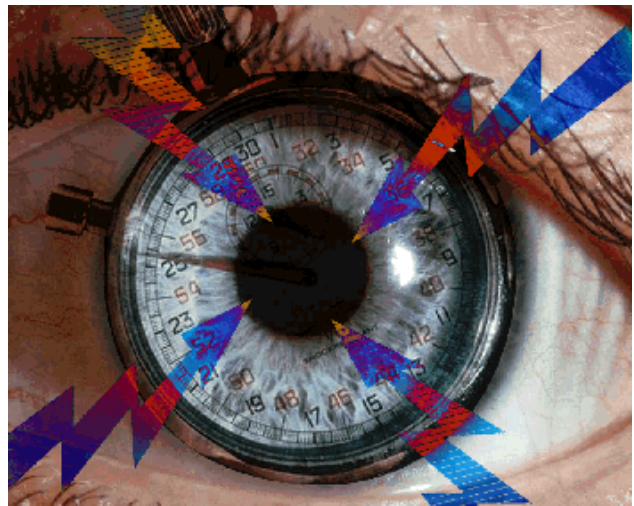
- Wigs first became fashionable
- Duels were outlawed in France
- London saw its first coffee shop
- The Dutch saw their tulip trade collapse
- Income taxes and property taxes were installed in England
- Due to war, famine, and plague, the population of Germany plunged by more than 50%
- Leather started to adorn furniture
- Companies in Paris began manufacturing the first stockings and the first fountain pens
- China saw a major outbreak of cholera
- Canada launched its first census

This is but a *partial* list.

What must it have been like to have been alive during this century?

Shakespeare may have yearned for a tranquil status quo, a “solid globe,” when he wrote *Troilus and Cressida*, but on a daily basis what people had to come to terms with was “The baby figure of the giant mass / Of things to come.”

*So: what must it have been like?*



*Churn*

© H.L. Mac Thornton

It must have been like *today*. At no time since the 17th Century has change been so pervasive, so intense, so overwhelming as it is *right now*. The stresses we face are due to the Churn we confront each day. We are facing — as individuals within communities within states within nations — profound shifts on an almost-daily basis. Think of our homes, vehicles, meet-places, help-places, and workplaces: *nothing* is as it was just 25 years ago.

*In Louisville today, I can wake up to music on CD, microwave my breakfast, use a computer to guide my drive to the hospital, check-in for a CAT™ scan of “that nagging pain in my right side,” check e-mail and Internet happenings on my laptop in the waiting room, be at the airport by noon to catch a jet to San Francisco, call the office or other associates (anywhere!) enroute from 35,000 feet, land in time to give a speech, modem my office to request changes in tomorrow’s meeting agenda in New York,*

*then zip across town to take part in a video conference with associates across the world in Australia, attend a company dinner where the guest speaker (due to an unavoidable conflict) presents his thoughts via videodisc on multiple screens (some say he's better that way than he is in real life), be back in my hotel room in minutes courtesy of a pre-registered computerized profile, call home, and fall asleep to Cable News Network™ headlines while it stitches up to the minute reports and video clips from around the world per the last half-hour. At 5:00AM, a computer rings my room with a wake-up call and...*

Though by no means all, *many* people in the world now proceed to call this kind of pace their “normal” day. And on any normal day, some new disease, new cure, new government program, new terrorist incident, new credit/debit card, new work process, new building design, new clothing material, new educational technique, new physical element, new law, new communications tool, new war, new social agenda, new form of music, new comet or planet, new vehicle, new postage stamp, or new something else will be introduced into our lives in the form of *background noise* to our immediate work at hand or game at play.

A close friend once confided that he doesn't read any newspapers or watch any news shows. “They just make me stressed out,” he said. My friend can hide, but he cannot run any kind of organization without encountering the

immense changes — social, technological, or political — happening in our time. As those in the 1600s did, we, too, must cope with a “giant mass of things” that keep coming daily. Put the impact of our own giant mass of things into a discussable pattern, and five discernible dislocations emerge to frame the Churn that confronts and confounds men and women at the end of the 20th Century:

- We don't know what to learn.
- We don't know what to believe.
- We don't know what to esteem.
- We don't know whom to trust.
- We don't know where to go.

Much like the vice president I mentioned earlier who told his subordinates that he didn't mind being lost as long as he was making good time, today's society of men and women seem to be moving relentlessly — not necessarily forward, just relentlessly. What did Hemingway say? *Never confuse motion and action!*

---

All of this may seem far removed, perhaps even totally unrelated, to a discussion of managerial leadership. “What has all of this to do with where I work? *Placeholders? Leaders?* What difference does it make when life is in such Churn as now?”

“No wind favors a boat without direction,” said the French writer, Montaigne, more than 400 years ago. The world is about to shift gears. Individually and collectively, will we leave this era and journey to a new one of our own making — or let this era slip away, beaching us like lost and stranded travellers on an archipelago of remote and distant islands?

A century ago, at the tail end of what has been widely called the Industrial Revolution, technological automation and new work processes made the importance of people seem minor by comparison. Machinery, many thought, would become the primary *engine of change*. Indeed it has: placeholders see



*Part Of Life*

© Tom Brown

today’s extension of those 19th Century automation techniques — the ability to make cars, radios, steel, hamburgers, refrigerators, insurance policies, computers, televisions, *you name it*, with ever fewer people — as a *great place*. Call it “Economic Nirvana.”

So we have come to view offices closing, stores being shuttered, factories being

fenced, and plants being shut as just another nasty part of life. To find her “dying” spouse today, Meng Chiang would travel to a Great Company instead of a Great Wall. But all placeholders have done is to find solutions to a question phrased *last Century*. At the end of the 1900s, placeholders only found a way to maximize the 1800s quest for utmost productivity and profits.

***The 21st Century Question has yet to be phrased.***

When fully articulated, it will talk about what happens to the placeholders of today (and those who labor for them) who excel at making products no longer needed or wanted by society. ***We can make more typewriters today at lower cost with fewer people than at any time in the history of mankind. So?***

It will discuss how everyone can enlist to address the critical concerns of making education relevant and timely, of restoring the fountain of faith, of redefining value and values, of linking a universe of men and women with equity and dignity, of formulating a healthy, evolving society all aspire to be part of. ***We now know that pervasive poverty, ignorance, and want beget insecurity, violence, and despair — and are not remedied over time by governmental treaties or programs. So?***

And, most of all, it will not confuse machines with humans. Machines go; *people grow*. So the 21st Century

Question will take into account that when placeholders focus on technological machines alone as the predominant engines of change, limits immediately accompany the built-in capacity of each machine. Front-page chess matches aside, machines enable progress; they cannot define it. *We now know that endless subtraction of people and resources will not create a permanent path of progress.*

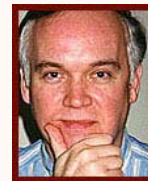
So?

Churn, in and of itself, is not something to be dreaded nor feared. Churn is simply the tumult caused by new ideas seriously assaulting an unsatisfactory status quo.

Whether we seek to cope with or to capitalize on the Churn we are now steering into, we desperately need new-thinking leaders who can peer into this newly-minted Century and realize that the ideal society is one comprised of people who are *themselves* the primary engines of change.

We need leaders who can unleash the creative energies that reside, and can glow, within every man and every woman — living on a planet of boundless horizons, boundless potential.

**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)