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Mastering Change in the Midst of Chaos

2. Technology and Communication

Alexander Graham Bell (1847-1922) is often referred to as the Father of Technical Communication. In fact he wanted to invent something that would specifically help the hard of hearing. Likewise, Vinton Cerf is widely regarded as one of the Fathers of the Internet, and coincidentally wears a hearing aid.

In the early-70s a graduate student, Cerf worked on a data packet networking group that was the predecessor of the Internet. After this his career just took off – doctorate, assistant professor where he conducted research on packet network interconnection protocols and co-designed a major protocol suite. His status simply grows and grows, vice-president of MCI Digital Information Services from 1982 to 1986...and so on, through to ‘vice-president and chief Internet evangelist for Google’ (as he is described on his own medium, the Net) in 2009. And I ask myself *how did he foresee the groundswell of change?*

In fact he didn’t. When I interviewed him in 2004 he was more interested in the future possibilities of his research than on his historical accomplishments. And why not? Technology is booming and is a source of constant change.

Intel co-founder Gordon Moore stated in his 1965 paper, ‘Since the invention of the integrated circuit in 1958, the number of transistors that can be placed inexpensively on an integrated circuit has increased exponentially, doubling approximately every two years’, commonly referred to as ‘Moore’s Law’.

Here are some other things to look at and consider when analyzing this ‘ground swell’: A surge of new communication tools; Wireless and landlines colliding; Social networks opening doors for some, scaring others creating confusion; clashes between early adopters and those who don’t care to adopt; Facebook, YouTube, Linked In, Twitter, Me.dium, Lijit, Brad Feld’s Blog (one of the top blogs in the world); Search engines, Wikipedia, and others fight for survival; Email and spam; new media such as w3w3tv.com; hand held wireless tools; the youth; Moore’s Law; and this is only the tip of the iceberg.

Christine Heckart, General Manager of Marketing, Connected TV Business, Microsoft Corporation said, “When the Internet rolls over an industry it will be fundamentally changed. As it has with the newspaper industry... so it will with television, the question is, How will that look and who will pay for it?”

There are volumes of books detailing the history and exploits of these and hundreds of others that have made a difference in the field of technology and communication. It is a constant ground swell of change.

Lesson:

- *Boy!* The acknowledged Father of the Internet has sure spent a lot of his career time out of the lab - in committees usually as president, chairman or chief. The lesson to be learned here is the surprising mixture of creative and boardroom life.
- Vinton Cerf is also the active public face of Google, which in itself indicates the future direction of discretion. There was a time when inventors weren't celebrities, but now – fulfilling Andy Warhol's '15 minutes of fame' dictate – the spotlight is good for business. And,
- Vinton Cerf never rests on his laurels, he continues to break new ground in a sector that (more than any other) is bursting at the seams with the word NEW.
- The ever changing Internet and social media is a continuing demonstration of this ground swell of change.

Capitalizing on the Ground Swells of Change with Your Team

Here's a process you and your team can use when addressing the ground swell of change that is impacting your organization. You can easily integrate your teambuilding methodology with the following points.

- Have consist thinking and discussion rules
- Be aware of and discuss the change makers in the past to get a feel on the patterns that cause and support ground swells
- Be willing to challenge current vision and mission statements
- In addition to tapping into the opinions and expertise of other employees, you might consider surveys and focus groups to get outside opinions

Take time to discuss, debate and analyze with these seven steps.

- 1- ***Try to identify and describe the ground swell of change impacting your organization*** but be willing to modify it a number of times as you go through the process. Your customers, suppliers and other associates are dealing with the same challenges (whether they are aware of it or not).
- 2- ***Then identify what are the elements that are creating and sustaining the ground swell.*** Remember they include innovations, disruptive technologies, inventions, laws, events, in/out of favor fads, something that is displaced or replaced, cultural changes, local events, controversy, fiscal changes, mergers, movements, etc. Your customers and suppliers might have a different take on these.
- 3- ***Is there additional input and information*** that can help you in this assessment process? It's easy to see that this process is not a one to two hour meeting, but is well worth it.
- 4- This would be a good time to expand or ***reshape your view*** of the ground swell.
- 5- Go through the famous Ben Franklin exercise ***with your entire team***. Simply draw a vertical line down the middle of a flip chart or white board and on the *left* title it Areas of Challenge and on the *right* side, Areas to Capitalize on. Use your brainstorming rules.
- 6- ***Develop a short-term action plan and an overall game plan*** with specific measurable outcomes and a clear understanding of who is responsible for what.
- 7- ***Assess your progress*** weekly to begin with and monthly when that seems appropriate.

The future is often lost without the understanding of the past and present. Sure it takes time and energy to go through the process, but it is nothing compared to the sometimes horrific wrath if time and energy are not invested.

As Bill Gates said, "Success is a lousy teacher. It seduces smart people into thinking they can't lose".