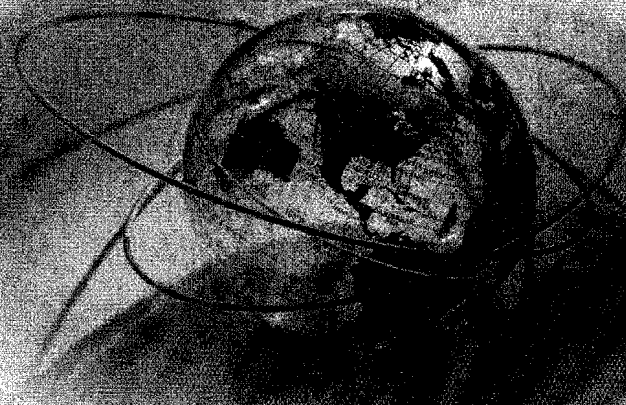


CHANGE  
THE  
WORLD



HOW ORDINARY PEOPLE  
CAN ACCOMPLISH  
EXTRAORDINARY RESULTS

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AUTHOR OF DEEP CHANGE

position of authority has little to do with our ability to access the transformational process. Being transformational is not about position but about values, thoughts, and behaviors. We become transformational change agents through choice—our own.

## CHAPTER TWO

# ENVISION THE PRODUCTIVE COMMUNITY

### The First Seed Thought: Envision the Productive Community

**JESUS** *Jesus called them unto him, and said, Ye know that the princes of the Gentiles exercise dominion over them, and they that are great exercise authority upon them. But it shall not be so among you: but whosoever will be great among you, let him be your minister; And whosoever will be chief among you, let him be your servant. [Matthew 20:25–27]*

**GANDHI** *[I]n the orthodox army, there is a clear distinction between officer and private. . . . In a nonviolent army, the general is just the chief servant—first among equals. [Iyer, 1990, p. 257]*

**KING** *[N]onviolent resistance does not seek to defeat or humiliate the opponent but to win his friendship and understanding. . . . The aftermath of nonviolence is the creation of the beloved community, while the aftermath of violence is tragic bitterness. [King, (1968) 1986, pp. 7–8]*

Whether we recognize it or not, we each carry a mental picture or vision of how human relationships are supposed to work. This vision may reflect assumptions about relations between two people or a family, small group, or large organization. One of the most commonly held pictures is a vision of people in hierarchical relationships. In this picture it is normally assumed that parents are superior to children, teachers are superior to students, coaches are superior to players, bosses are superior to subordinates, and so on.

Within envisioned relationships of this kind, the key to being able to wield influence is to gain a position of authority. Once we have done this, we have presumably gained the right to tell other people to change. The problem is that telling people to change often does not work. Instead it results in power struggles. Normal families, groups, teams, and organizations are thus filled with conflicts. Because of the pictures or assumptions we carry, our communities are often less efficient and effective than they might be.

### Productive Community

The three quotations cited above suggest a different picture of human community. These three change agents share an unusual vision. I consider their shared vision a seed thought, because the vision, if we come to understand it, can give rise to a major shift in our perception, thinking, and behavior. That is, we can envision and enact a new form of community, one in which ordinary people can generate extraordinary results.

The three change agents see a system of relationships in which the members share a common purpose and each works for the benefit of all. Throughout this book we will explore the creation of communities of this kind. These are what I call *productive communities*. When people become members of a productive community they tend to become more inner directed and other focused. They tend to be motivated by a calling that they feel deep within. They make contributions that exceed narrow self-interest. People in productive communities also have another unusual characteristic. They want to be connected to reality. They want to know what is real, even if the news is bad.

Given a choice between being effective or being in control, most of us choose being in control. I do this all the time. I deny emergent reality and in doing so I maintain at least a temporary illusion of control. When I am passionate about a purpose, I tend to become more inner directed. I am willing to sacrifice in order to make it happen. I also tend to be more willing to embrace emergent reality. I want to see clearly and accept what is true right now, because I want to be effective, even if it means giving up control. I am more willing to recognize the need to change and learn how

to achieve the desired outcome. I have an unusual willingness because I am more clear about who I am. In productive community, many people feel and act this way.

### A Surprising Characteristic of Productive Community

Normally this kind of discussion leads the optimistic, "right-brained" people of the world to condemn hierarchies and call for some kind of utopian commune. Such people will read the quotations at the beginning of the chapter and claim that all three of the change agents were for love, equality, and peace, and against hierarchy. This same line of reasoning leads the realistic, "left-brained" people of the world to shake their heads in disbelief. They argue that human nature being what it is, such idealistic nonsense will never work in the real world.

Which group is right?

First, note that none of our three change agents say anything in these quotations about abolishing hierarchy. Their message is much more demanding than that. In the community envisioned by Jesus, there are chiefs who achieve greatness relative to others. In Gandhi's nonviolent army there are still generals and privates. What we see in all three quotations is that the vision, in fact, does not reject hierarchy.

Jesus, Gandhi, and King were all dedicated to getting difficult things done in the real world. To do this they envisioned productive community. In these communities people have different roles, often distinctly different. Each person, being inner directed, is naturally going to be following a unique path, which in itself results in differences. When differences exist, there is, of necessity, a hierarchy. Yet this hierarchy is not like our normal picture of hierarchy. This hierarchy is paradoxical. People in higher positions see themselves as the servants of those in lower positions. Productive community is characterized by clarity of purpose, high standards of performance. Yet it is also characterized by highly trusting and supportive relationships. These kinds of purposes and relationships allow for learning and change.

We all have assumptions about the social world. These tend to become ideological and they tend to blind us to what is possible. Productive community is not easily envisioned by the right-brained

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optimist. The standards of achievement and discipline are much too excruciating. Neither is it readily envisioned by the left-brained realist. The necessary surrender of control in an emerging community of trust is much too idealistic. Since most of us fall into one of these two camps, all of us should have some difficulty envisioning productive community. Yet please bear with me. In this chapter we will more deeply explore each of the concepts associated with this concept. We begin with the notion of the inner-directed and other-focused person.

### **What It Means to Be an Other-Focused Person**

Several years ago my wife Delsa and I were struggling to raise a family of six children. Demands on our time and finances were incredible. At the height of these pressures Delsa was asked to volunteer as a teacher for a religious class consisting of eleven-year-old girls. In spite of family demands, Delsa accepted the challenge enthusiastically.

Not long after her decision to take on this extra responsibility I came home to find the kitchen in extreme disarray. On the table was a beautiful cake. But it was no ordinary cake. It was quite large, sculptured in the shape of a doll, decorated like a work of art. Delsa had taken nearly the entire day to make it. She explained that it was for a girl in her class. It was the girl's birthday. Delsa was on her way to the class and was going to give it to the girl.

When Delsa returned, I was anxious to hear about the birthday celebration. She described the amazement and joy of the girl who got the cake. I asked Delsa how the other girls had reacted. She said they were very excited and wanted to know whether she was going to make a cake like this for everyone's birthday. Delsa replied that she intended to do exactly that, and she did! In the months that followed, she spent hours preparing thoughtful, highly focused, and creative lessons. She initiated service projects. She talked to the girls on the phone and spent time with them individually.

Over time, each of these girls' parents contacted Delsa and thanked her for all she had done. Virtually every girl had changed in ways that were quite heartening. Some thanked Delsa because their daughters had changed their attitudes toward church. Oth-

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ers told stories of how the girls were changing individually. Some were becoming more disciplined, some more sensitive, others more open to taking direction. The girls had had many teachers but Delsa was different. She was a transformational teacher and thus a transformational change agent. She had inspired the girls to change because she herself modeled the process of moving outside the normal system. Her unusual behaviors—the cakes, the creative lessons, the service projects, the phone conversations—and her very way of being, attracted the girls to change and to emulate her, to be more inner directed and other focused.

After they graduated from Delsa's class, most of the girls stayed in touch with her. Their relationships with her really mattered to them, and they mattered to Delsa. Even when the girls were in college, many of them would stop by our house to visit and tell Delsa what they were doing. I once commented to my wife about the richness of those relationships, and she shared an observation:

When I first started teaching the girls, I was not naturally drawn to each one. But that did not last long. Since I saw it as my duty to serve them, I did, and as I started to make sacrifices to serve those girls, I started to see them differently. I started to see beyond their weaknesses. I started to see their potential. The more sacrifices I made in their behalf, the more I wanted them to grow. Pretty soon preparing the lessons, making the cakes, and designing the service projects were not a sacrifice. They were a joy. The more the girls felt my joy and concern, the more they were willing to try new things. The more new activities we tried, the more we could think of trying. One good thing seemed to produce another.

So what happened here? When asked to teach the girls, Delsa accepted the responsibility. As she executed that responsibility, she started to extend herself, doing much more than the normal teacher might do. The sacrifice of baking cakes, preparing creative lessons, designing unusual service projects, and spending time on the phone changed both the girls and Delsa. Those sacrifices led to increased commitment. The increased commitment resulted in new behavior, and the new behavior changed her vision. She could now see potential that no one else could see. She envisioned a productive community and behaved accordingly. Soon a productive community emerged. Note her comment, "One good thing

seemed to produce another." Productive communities become synergistic. As one part of the community is enlarged, all parts are enlarged. What is good for the part is good for the whole. The individual good and the collective good are one. Productive communities usually emerge when one inner-directed and other-focused person begins to envision such a synergistic community.

## Two Kinds of Heroes

How do we become inner directed and other focused? In his classic book *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, Joseph Campbell described the journey of personal transformation. He pointed out that a core human experience is to descend into the dark valley where we have to face our core challenges and fears. As people emerge from this journey, they return "empowered and empowering to the community." Having undergone the transformation of self, they now see the world differently. They are more aligned with emergent reality. They have fewer illusions about themselves. The new worldview gives them new choices and new strategies that make them more effective. They are also more concerned. They are not self-focused but other focused. Such a person is excited about having others grow and experience the same kind of increased meaning.

In our culture we also carry another hero image. It is the image of the "ruthless hero" (Csikszentmihalyi, 1997). This hero is highly competitive and ego driven, aggressively pursuing the road to success. For the ruthless hero any means is justified by the "bottom line." Whereas Joseph Campbell's hero epitomizes the transformational process (empowered and empowering to the community), Csikszentmihalyi's ruthless hero epitomizes the transactional process (maintaining authority, control, and the illusion of power).

For the ruthless hero, most endeavors are self-focused and externally driven. This pattern is expressed by the obsessive pursuit of results. Here self-image is based on the accumulation of wealth and power. Driven by this image a person can become obsessive, destroying other people—and destroying his or her own health in the process. In our society, we often put this hero on a pedestal.

In spite of how we might glorify and reward the ruthless hero in our culture, the fact is that in the "real" world the ruthless hero is

plagued by shortcomings. In fact, I am going to make this radical claim: The ruthless hero model does not work. Why? Because each of us lives in the world that we create. The ruthless hero usually reaps what he or she sows.

## An Illustration of the Ruthless Hero

Csikszentmihalyi offers a wonderful anecdote that illustrates the frustration of the ruthless hero. It also illustrates how a small shift in perception can often alter the obsessive pattern and bring that which was initially unobtainable:

Keith is one example of many managers I have met who have spent a decade or more desperately trying to impress their superiors in order to get promoted. He worked seventy hours and more a week even when he knew it was not necessary, neglecting his family and his own personal growth in the process. To increase his competitive advantage, Keith hoarded all the credit he could for his accomplishments, even if it meant making colleagues and subordinates look bad. But despite all his efforts, he kept being passed over for important promotions. Finally Keith resigned himself to having reached the ceiling of his career, and decided to find his rewards elsewhere. He spent more time with the family, took up a hobby, became involved in community activities. Because he was no longer struggling so hard, his behavior on the job became more relaxed, less selfish, more objective. In fact, he began to act more like a leader whose personal agenda takes second place to the well-being of the company. Now the general manager was finally impressed. This is the kind of person we need at the helm. Keith was promoted soon after he had let go of his ambition. His case is by no means rare: To be trusted in a position of leadership, it helps to advance other people's goals as well as one's own.

[Csikszentmihalyi, 1997, pp. 113–114]

As long as Keith pursued the role of ruthless hero he was trapped in a power struggle. The world treated him as he treated the world. It was impossible to move up that ladder of power because this system, which he had helped to create, did not treat him fairly. From his perspective, he believed that he sacrificed all for the system and yet the system did not reward him. It was not until he gave up in frustration that there was hope. Once he let go,

once he became other focused, the system began to respond to him differently. Keith was now co-creating a new world, where individual efforts, including his own, were appreciated. When he changed, the world changed.

### The Strength of the Transformational Person

As change agents we are much more likely to be transformational—that is, truly making room for change—if we are inner directed and other focused. These two positive characteristics give rise to a positive tension. People who are inner directed and other focused are usually full of energy and tend to be enormously hard-driving. They feel a need to satisfy a deep personal calling that is linked to a positive and constructive change in the outside world. They can be tough and uncompromising about standards of performance and progress. Yet they are simultaneously concerned and caring. They want people to be at their best. This kind of person becomes “empowered and empowering to the community.” They attract people to a higher level of experience.

Advanced Change Theory (ACT) is about being very disciplined. From what we know of him, Gandhi was one of the strongest, most demanding and courageous change agents in history. The same could be said for Jesus and Dr. King. These men were not weaklings. They operated at a level of courage and effort that far exceeds normal expectations.

### Ordinary People

I see the same kind of behavior in Delsa. She is a person who is ferocious in the pursuit of the common good. Once she commits to serve a person or a purpose, she is not dissuaded from her path. Yet she is usually other focused. She is a dedicated servant to the common good. As the years pass, it is interesting to watch her take other assignments. A number of times, she has been asked to be preside over various organizations. She has accepted each assignment with the same dedication that she had when teaching the eleven-year-olds. Each time, there was a dramatic change in the organization. The process that worked with teaching the girls worked with leading adults.

I use Delsa as the first example in this chapter because she is a homemaker and volunteer, not a person holding a position of recognized authority in some large organization. She sees herself as a normal human being. Yet she is a reminder that each one of us is a potential agent of transformational change.

We find inner-directed and other-focused people in all walks of life. They are not more prevalent in one job than in another. They may emerge from the mail room but be absent in the executive suite. They may emerge from the executive suite but be absent in the mail room. When Erin’s mother (whose story I shared in Chapter One) changed her relationship with Erin, when Delsa changed a class of young girls, and when Gandhi changed South Africa, these were all transformational acts. All of them brought about changes for the better, changes that empowered people around them. We all have this potential. But even though we are each quite capable of this kind of behavior, few of us choose this journey. Why? One reason is that we have to move outside our normal vision of community.

### The Nature of Hierarchy

What is a hierarchy? It is a way of organizing elements or beings in order of rank, grade, or class. In the social world, a hierarchy will always emerge. It is as true in the animal kingdom as it is in the human realm. Interaction with other people over time gives rise to hierarchies. The process can be formal or informal. In the high school classroom, for example, the process is informal. One person becomes the class clown, another the academic nerd, another the bully, another the well-rounded leader, and so on. These roles are not assigned; they simply emerge as time passes. In formal hierarchies, such as corporations, jobs are designed and people are hired to fulfill highly defined roles within established hierarchies.

Hierarchies are often criticized. Two criticisms tend to dominate. First, hierarchies are often seen as epitomizing unresponsive bureaucracy. They are seen as not serving the needs of the intended customer, employee, or client. Second, they are often criticized as systems that dominate politically weaker people. This is said to waste human potential. These criticisms are often justified.

Nearly any hierarchy can evolve into a negative state that I call frozen bureaucracy.

## The Ideological Flaw

I once sat with a woman at a professional conference who was on the cutting edge of feminist theory. She was convinced that one of the roots of evil in the world was hierarchy. She saw hierarchy as a form of domination practiced primarily by men to keep women down. She argued that hierarchy needed to be replaced with an alternative form of organization. She was practiced in this argument, and she was accustomed to having her viewpoint acknowledged and accepted. On this particular day, however, she got into a public debate with a man who was highly articulate about organizational issues. He proceeded to tear apart her best arguments. She was deeply upset and afterward I spent some time trying to help.

After some time passed, she asked for my opinion. Given her negative definition of hierarchy, I asked her to define the opposite of hierarchy. "It would be a responsive collective of people who cooperate in a system of openness and equality," she replied.

I indicated that she now had a negatively defined concept, hierarchy, joined with a positively defined concept. So I asked, What is the positive opposite of the responsive and open organization? She accused me of playing word games.

I was not playing word games. I was trying to bring to the surface a problem that existed in all of us. It is a flaw in our logic. Let me explain.

She defined hierarchy as a negative state. She was actually describing a frozen bureaucracy, that is, a dysfunctional hierarchy. Such hierarchies are inwardly focused and rigid. Human potential is wasted and people do not grow. My friend could envision a positive alternative in which there was equality, openness, and cooperation. Let us call it, for a lack of a better name, *adhocracy*. Adhocracies do exist. Basketball players on a fast break are operating in an adhocracy, as are any other group of people who are improvising as they go. Examples include crisis teams, therapy groups, movie crews, jazz bands, entrepreneurial business start-ups, and many high-tech firms. There are many more.

For people who are disenchanted with hierarchy, it is fairly normal to condemn hierarchy and call for some kind of responsive adhocracy. Many books have been written on this theme. They argue that because change is so prevalent, hierarchy must and will go away. The argument is distorted because it is not balanced. But let us not mistake a hierarchy for a frozen bureaucracy—they are simply not the same. Hierarchies become frozen bureaucracies due to the failure of human courage, but hierarchies themselves are not inherently dysfunctional. Here is a telling observation:

The criticism often leveled at hierarchies has nothing to do with the essential structure and function of the pyramidal model. These problems all come from one source, conflict avoidance. Hierarchies become dysfunctional when decision makers don't want to confront redundancy and incompetence and instead bury the problems in another organizational layer. Or they find it too painful to confront difficult but key people who use legitimate roles and functions in illegitimate, destructive ways. Hierarchies don't do damage to businesses any more than alcohol creates problem drinking. Structures don't create problems; people do. [Shechman, 1994, p. 93]

Hierarchical organization is positive unless someone allows it to become negative. But the same can be said for the adhocracy. The positively defined adhocracy is assumed to be responsive, creative, and conducive to growth. From my perspective, adhocracy, like hierarchy, is inherently positive. Yet like a hierarchy, an adhocracy is difficult to maintain. Because humans lack courage and do not manage conflict well, adhocracies, like hierarchies, tend to become negative. In the real world they tend to move from being responsive adhocracies to chaotic anarchies. They become inefficient and unmanageable.

Now, why all the attention to these notions? Because we are all like the woman in the above story. We are biased in our observations and our arguments. Optimistic, right-brain people tend to condemn the frozen bureaucracy and see responsive adhocracy as the only alternative. Realistic, left-brain people scoff. They condemn chaotic anarchy and call for the predictable hierarchy. Both groups tend to be blind. They cannot see the positive opposites. Nor can they see the potential power in joining the positive opposites.

## The Emergence of Hierarchy

For the moment, let's think of hierarchy as a form of organization that emerges over time. As we learn how to solve the problems that will confront us along the way, we become increasingly skillful at achieving the outcomes we seek. As this understanding emerges, based on the successes and failures we observe, we develop standards and expectations, routines, roles, and relationships that will allow us to function efficiently and achieve our stated purpose or mission.

Hierarchies can provide stability, control, predictability, and efficiency. These are all good things. But hierarchical methods are always based on past history, that is, on solutions to problems we have faced in the past. Inevitably, of course, the external world in which the organization operates changes. New realities emerge, demanding new responses. At this point, people and groups within the hierarchy may become threatened and self-serving, insisting that their way of operating in the organization works. After all, history has proved it to be so. When it doesn't, they become embroiled in political conflicts and lack the courage to assess and communicate the truth. They lose touch with emergent reality, choosing instead to live in the past, where their vision and knowledge worked.

Consider a hypothetical case. Joan comes to work for a team who is developing a new product. She is absorbed in very creative challenges. The team is making great progress and she feels gratified. Yet suddenly there is less support. The external competition is increasing. Senior management is pressured by the investment community to reduce costs. Resources that once came automatically to her project now require extensive justification. Her team leader promises to meet deadlines that everyone knows are impossible. Other teams, who were once cooperative, now see themselves in competition for the same scarce resources. They withhold essential information. Every day the conflicts increase. Everyone is wrapped up in preserving his or her own little territory, and no one is much concerned about the fate of the overall organization.

People tend to take the easy way out, the path of least resistance. We tend not to know how to live in a productive community or even recognize one when we see it. As more and more changes

occur, with the original hierarchy still in place, the organization begins to stagnate. Gradually, it takes on more and more negative characteristics. Finally, it becomes a frozen bureaucracy where people subordinate the original purpose of the organization to their own self-interests. Every one strives to hold onto what they have. Collective purpose takes a back seat to self-interest.

## The Emergence of Adhocracy

Under conditions of change and uncertainty, we do not know how to solve the problems that we face. In fact, that is the nature of change and uncertainty. We do not understand the cause-and-effect relationships that will bring the results we desire. For that matter, we may not even know what results we desire. It is at this point that most humans tend to form *adhocracies*. If hierarchies emerge from shared assumptions or known realities from the past, adhocracies are created by change. They emerge when there is a need to understand new trends and identify appropriate responses so that the organization can come into alignment with emergent realities. The key question here is not one of efficiency but of meaning and invention. Rather than maintaining the status quo, adhocracies arise when there is a need to discover new paths.

Driven by the challenge of discovering and meeting new needs, we group together in flexible networks and search for information. We try action experiments, compare observations, and attempt to make sense of things. In this search mode, we care little about the status that people might carry from past hierarchies. We are only concerned with the competencies they can bring to solving present problems, along with their ability to effectively relate to others in the problem-solving process. That dynamic is the essence of adhocracy, which is characterized by four key features: flexibility, learning, adaptation, and change.

In an adhocracy, predictability and control give way to the open mind of learning and adaptation. However, there's a potential downside: If we place too much emphasis on flexibility, learning, adaptation, and change, abandoning all consideration for predictability and control, the adhocracy is in danger of spinning entirely out of control. Such an organization evolves into chaotic anarchy.



## The Integrated Picture

With these concepts in mind, and the language to talk about them, we can now discuss two kinds of opposites: the hierarchy is the positive opposite of the adhocracy. Both are useful. Hierarchy gives us predictability—but at the cost of flexibility. The other gives us flexibility—but at the cost of predictability. Furthermore, a frozen bureaucracy is the negative opposite of chaotic anarchy. Whereas frozen bureaucracy is on the verge of death by stagnation, chaotic anarchy is on the verge of death by disintegration.

But keep in mind that hierarchy and adhocracy are like the Chinese yin and yang. One opposite is always becoming the other. The more we strive for one, the more we stimulate the emergence of the other. Consider the woman in the above story who argued against hierarchy. She had differentiated two concepts, hierarchy and systems of equality. She devalued hierarchy and valued systems of equality. In so doing she was creating a hierarchy of organizational forms. Equality was good, hierarchy was bad. In trying to destroy hierarchy she was creating one. This paradox takes many forms. In working with people, if we push hierarchy to the extreme, it becomes a frozen bureaucracy, and people will cope with the disconnection from emergent reality by joining in emergent adhocracies. If we push adhocracy to the extreme, it becomes chaotic anarchy. People will cope with the uncertainty by creating mechanisms of control (hierarchies) and will cling to them tightly to avoid the pain of chaos. As time passes, the tight grip ironically but inevitably leads to the disintegration of control and the emergence of uncertainty. At this point the entire cycle begins again.

## The Need for Certainty

Having said all this, let me point out that the woman who was arguing against hierarchy was mostly correct. Although she was advocating a fruitless end, the elimination of hierarchy, she was articulating a correct set of concerns. When given a problem, we humans tend to group together, just as our ancestors have done since the beginning of time. As people experience success, they bond and develop a set of common beliefs that are reinforced by more success. Through their successes they come to “know,” or at

least believe they know, that they are right. The beliefs and associated roles become the foundation for a culture with a set of related expectations. They create *norms*, that is, ways of behaving that mirror the decisions and actions that have allowed the group to enjoy success. To ensure continued success, the group requires conformity to those norms. Nonconformity typically brings some form of punishment, so most people conform.

For a while, the hierarchy holds us in orderly and even productive equilibrium. When the external reality changes, however, and the hierarchy ceases to be as effective as it once was, individual members exert increased pressure to maintain their established order. This can be positive when the external change is temporary—such as we might encounter with a natural disaster—but too often this resistance to change gives birth to organizational stagnation.

Change is not easy. Both organizationally and individually, we are continually faced with the choice between deep change and slow death (Quinn, 1996). We are all terrified by the prospect of deep change, since deep change means altering some of our most fundamental beliefs and commitments. In practical terms it can mean giving up an entire way of life—changing our job, our station in life, our salary, our daily activities, the people with whom we associate, and the place where we live.

When someone tells me they love change because it offers an opportunity to grow, it's a pretty good bet that they are talking about incremental change, that is, change over which they have some degree of control. Deep change is not incremental change; rather, it is radical or “out-of-the-box change.” It usually requires letting go of control. It means facing the unknown, walking naked into the land of uncertainty. We spend most of our lives striving to avoid that very prospect. When faced with the choice between uncertainty and conformity, we will usually choose conformity. Oddly enough, we will cling to conformity even when we know the overall system in which we are operating, and which gives us our all-important illusion of certainty, is dying.

During the period when change is imminent, those in authority will often try to dominate. If the truth is threatening to those in power, it must not be stated. If the emperor has no clothes, nobody is allowed to say so. On the contrary, everyone is ordered to admire

the clothes of their naked emperor. Organizations get disconnected from reality during such times. When this happens, fewer resources and less energy flows in or out of the system. This is the very essence of stagnation. At an individual level, people end up living lives of "quiet desperation." They now work for money, not meaning. They lose track of who they are. Gradually they discover that there is no longer any connection between what they need and what they want to get from their work.

### Getting Stuck in Our Fears

The sense of disconnection occurs in virtually every kind of organization. I recently had lunch with a doctoral student from another school on the campus where I teach. He told me he was very discouraged and was considering leaving the university. When I asked why, he told me he was burned out. "Universities are supposed to be organizations of ultimate freedom," he said. "But I feel like I am in prison. Everywhere I turn someone is giving me advice on rules for being a good inmate."

For example, when he presented an idea to his peers, instead of getting help with developing the idea into something that might work, he was told why it would not work. The criticism he received often took the form of advice on political survival. For example, he was often advised about the preferences of the dominant faculty. His peers informed him that his ideas were not in the right "theoretical domain" for the faculty, or his idea would not yield to the "right" methodological treatment. He told me that he was proud of the fact that he had started a martial arts club on campus, yet he was advised against publicizing his part in it. A faculty member might conclude that if he was able to put energy into something like that, he was obviously not working hard enough.

The underlying message in all of this was quite clear to this student: The university is a dangerous place, a jungle. Be careful about your ideas and how you present yourself. If you create the wrong impression, the more powerful animals in the jungle will chew you up and spit you out. Since the message was coming from other disempowered, terrified observers—this young man's peers—it had great validity.

The litany of rules and rituals went on. Both of the metaphors that the student had used to describe his situation—prison and jungle—seemed appropriate. I could envision inmates in dark corners, talking over the implicit rules of survival. As for the jungle image, it was easy to imagine small animals furtively sniffing the air, checking to make certain they were a safe distance from bigger and faster animals that might prey upon them.

The student's dark descriptions were like the dark descriptions voiced by "insiders" of so many other organizations. I recently met with a talented and vibrant group of executives. Since we all knew each other well, the discussion soon turned to the inner workings of the organization with which they were associated. The conversation grew heavier as they told the stories of what had happened to people who had made political mistakes. Everyone agreed that this company was unfortunately a very dangerous place, indeed, where there was no choice but to leave or helplessly conform.

Here is a critical point. The stories those executives told were true; people had been punished for political mistakes. Even so, there were people at that very table who had taken enormous risks and flourished. *This fact was never introduced into the conversation.* Why? Because, when we are articulating the valid foundations of our fears, we are seldom interested in exploring contradicting facts that are also valid. That organization, like the university, was a place of both danger and opportunity. When people become fearful, they recognize and communicate the dangers. They do not recognize and communicate the opportunities.

### Seeding the Universe

Before we parted company that day, I shared an insight with the doctoral student. I told him that if he were to learn every unwritten rule in the academic culture where he was presently studying, and if he followed every one of those rules to perfection, he would have a perfectly mediocre career. His life would become an experience of quiet desperation, filled with psychic entropy. This is the case in the life of many professionals. I told this young student that establishing a notable career requires that we break the rules. At some point, we have to know, accept, and express who we really are, not be content with being what others want us to be.

**Our work in life takes on a unique character only when we have something unique to offer. We do not become unique by learning and following all the rules. We must conform in order to master the professional technology, in the student's case the theories and methods of his particular field. Eventually, however, we must bring our deepest self to that technology. We must, like a musician, learn to rise above the technical rules and begin to create, to give what is uniquely ours.**

To be truly creative, we must be willing to accept punishment. No one in the academic world, not even the most brilliant superstar, feels accepted. There is always someone around to criticize what we do. We are punished for failure. Surprisingly, we are punished for success. If we succeed, we come to stand for something, and that thing always gets criticized. Some of the criticism is justified and some is simply rooted in jealousy.

The same is true in large corporations and even in families. We must know who we are and begin to create, not in hopes of approval, but because we are in love with an idea. We must create for the sake of creating. We cannot fall in love with our ideas if we live in constant fear of judgment. When we create, we experience deeper meaning. We begin to do the thing because we must. At that point, negative feedback takes on an entirely different value (Fritz, 1989). Because we are doing something we love, we can let go of the concerns that drive our egos. When we are doing what we love, negative feedback becomes part to the creation process. At the very least, it keeps us grounded.

### **Productive Community and the Flow of Energy**

By the time my student friend and I finished lunch that day, he was beginning to brighten. He was beginning to see that the fear of punishment and a sense of inadequacy had caused him to get stuck. He had lost his sense of meaning. He was not growing.

The notion of growing is key to understanding a basic truth—that when we experience meaning, we are in the process of becoming. During this process, we get fully aligned with our emerging reality. The resources of the universe are attracted to us and us to them. As we unfold, we take on new levels of complexity. A most

unusual description of health, which mirrors the ideas I just articulated, is found in the writings of Carl Rogers:

Life, at its best, is a flowing, changing process in which nothing is fixed. In my clients and in myself I find that when life is richest and most rewarding it is a flowing process. To experience this is both fascinating and a little frightening. I find I am at my best when I can let the flow of my experience carry me, in a direction which appears to be forward, toward goals of which I am but dimly aware. In this floating with the complex stream of my experiencing, and in trying to understand its ever-changing complexity, it should be evident that there are no fixed points. When I am thus able to be in process, it is clear that there can be no closed system of beliefs, no unchanging set of principles which I hold. Life is guided by a changing understanding of the interpretation of my experience. It is always in process of becoming. [Rogers, 1961, p. 27]

This statement suggests several things:

First, that the universe is never static. It is constantly changing. There are no fixed states. A basic unit of the universe is energy. It is ever-flowing from one form to another. We may see fixed points, such as a planet, a mountain, a table, or a chair, but even these are changing. They were once something else, and they will again become something quite different. The illusion of permanence is a function of our sense of time. Were it possible we might speed up a video of these objects over a period of a century or two, and we could watch them form and then transform in an unending process.

Second, at some point I must surrender control and allow myself to flow with the complex of forces all around me, letting them carry me "toward goals of which I am but dimly aware." That is, even my goals are not the permanent possessions I think they are. They are co-created as I interact with the universe. I am change.

Third, in the flow-state that Rogers talks about, I am in the process of becoming. That is, my "life is guided by a changing understanding of the interpretation of my experience." I experience an increased awareness of how I interpret the world. I can understand more effectively how I think. I am learning about how I learn.

When I am in the transformational process; that is, when I allow myself to become the change that I am, I experience profound learning; I see emergent reality more accurately; I develop a new worldview. My altered understanding and interpretative systems allow me to see a world that was not previously observable. As I become the change that I am, I see that change is a natural state. I discover the world I am helping to create. When I myself am evolving with the evolving reality in which I am immersed, I know I am becoming more than I am. Because I am in a state of becoming, the universe is becoming more than it is.

In such a state, I can more clearly see how the old reality works. And I become increasingly aware that the hierarchy itself is not the problem. The problem has more to do with the human tendencies that are so quickly attached to the hierarchy—any hierarchy. These include (1) the tendency to put self-interest ahead of collective interest, (2) the tendency to rely on routines instead of thinking, and (3) the tendency to bury conflict and let fear drive out our desire to tell the truth.

In the altered state of flow, I can see the role that fear plays and why people get stuck. I become empowered because I no longer fear the sanctions within the old system. I feel whole and become filled with concern about relationships. With my new understanding and concern, I can imagine new and more effective patterns of behavior. I become “empowered and empowering to my community.”

### Flow at the Collective Level

One might accuse Carl Rogers of being more poetic than practical. What about the real world? Can this process really work in our families, groups, and organizations? I like the statement of Dee Hock, former CEO of Visa International:

In the field of group endeavor, you will see incredible events in which the group performs far beyond the sum of its individual talents. It happens in the symphony, in the ballet, in the theater, in sports, and equally in business. It is easy to recognize and impossible to define. It is a mystique. It cannot be achieved

without immense effort, training, and cooperation, but effort, training, and cooperation alone rarely create it. Some groups reach it consistently. Few can sustain it. [Schlesinger, Eccles, and Gabarro, 1988, p. 486]

Hock describes human groups behaving as productive communities. Productive communities are synergistic. Getting to the state of productive community is not easy. It requires immense effort and cooperation. Getting there takes more than willing it to happen. In most cases, particularly in the ones he lists, people do bring training to the process. I disagree, however, that it requires training. Synergistic human experience can occur without any training. Even expertise, the knowledge of how to do the task, is not necessary. In fact, the absence of knowledge is often a key to getting there.

Let's go to Marine Corps basic training, which many people would describe as hyper-reality. Imagine the following scene as described by Smith (1995):

Eleven men are dropped into a hole that is eight feet in depth. The instructor drops in a “live” grenade and the men have ten seconds to escape. What happens next is a seemingly miraculous exercise in uncoordinated intelligence. With no training and with no boss making plans or giving orders, with no centralized control mechanism, eleven men escape. They are afterward exhilarated by their accomplishment. [Smith, 1995, p. 65]

Consider the same phenomenon in a large company. Florida Power and Light (FP & L) is a major utility. Traditionally utilities were slow-moving hierarchies. A number of years ago, Hurricane Andrew devastated Florida. For FP & L, being hit by Hurricane Andrew was like being in the hole with the live grenade. There was a crisis in every neighborhood. All semblance of order broke down. All the rules were suspended. Employees of FP & L worked for days without sleep and did so outside their normal job titles. Networks of employees joined together in responsive adhocacies and then dissolved as problems emerged and disappeared. In the end, their effort to solve the problems of emergent reality, brought on by Hurricane Andrew, was successful and heroic. Today, when I mention

Hurricane Andrew to a group of FP & L employees, their eyes light up. Many of them consider that event to be one of the high points of their professional lives.

If I talk to people at FP & L about adhocracy before I mention hurricane Andrew, their eyes glaze over. They cannot imagine what I am talking about. After I mention the hurricane, they connect. This is normal. Even when we experience adhocracy or the natural self-organizing processes that take place in that marine foxhole, we tend not to see the self-organizing process. Our experience tells us there cannot be order without centralized control.

There is another reason it is hard to see adhocracy. Adhocracies keep disappearing. Where do they go? The answer is surprising. They turn into hierarchies. At every moment in our journey outside the normal world, we are striving to learn. As the patterns come together, we start to see means-to-end relationships; we start to solve problems in new ways. We grow in expertise. We begin to normalize our behaviors. In the midst of adhocracy, we find hierarchy. Each is always giving birth to the other. Parker Palmer shares a profound insight about all this:

The question assumes that community can happen only where there are no divisions of status and power—but such places do not exist. If community is to emerge, it will have to be in the midst of inequalities that appear whenever two or three are gathered. To argue that grades must be eliminated before community can emerge is to assume a utopian alternative nowhere to be found: It is to give up on community altogether. When authentic community emerges, false differences in power and status disappear, such as those based on gender or race. But real differences remain, and so they should, for they are created by functions that need to be performed if community is to thrive—such as the leadership task of maintaining the boundaries and upholding the standards that define community at its best. [Palmer, 1998, p. 138]

By *community*, I think Palmer means a collection of human beings who can effectively pursue a common purpose while also growing individually. Because they are all committed to the common purpose, each person is willing to sacrifice for the good of the whole, and the whole makes the pursuit of the individual good

more likely. In such an organization, it is possible to discuss emergent reality. People are not defensive about their power and authority because they love the whole. They will change to preserve the whole. Here there is a kingdom in which the great are ministers to all (Jesus), an army where the generals are chief-servants-first among equals (Gandhi), and a beloved community of friends (King). In such communities there are differences, but we easily transcend them through our love for the common purpose and each other. The great sages understood that the objective is not to destroy hierarchy but to join it with its positive opposite so as to create a system of productive community.

### Productive Community in the Real World

The cynic who works in the professional world reads about transcending the assumptions of hierarchy and responds, "What about the real world? In an entire career, I have never once seen such an organization!" This is a valid point. Even optimists ask me about the practicality or applicability of the principles I describe here. Many people claim they have never experienced a synergistic collectivity. My response to these people is that their claim is probably inaccurate. Whenever I have asked people to tell about their five most memorable career experiences, they usually share stories where examples of productive community abound. It is not that this seemingly ideal community does not exist; it is that such communities are difficult to see. In our heads, most of us are blocked by the assumptions, language, and concepts of hierarchy.

### A Productive Community in the Corporate World

In fairness to the skeptics, it is likely that any examples of productive community that they experienced were probably transitory. In most organizations and relationships, productive community arises only during times of crisis or unusual challenge. Yet this is not always the case. As Dee Hock claims, "Some organizations reach it consistently."

When I encounter such organizations, I sense it immediately. Such was the case when I visited a highly recognized company that

was part of a major pharmaceutical corporation. I was there only a few minutes when I knew I was in a high-performing organization. I could feel it.

As we started our session together, my colleague asked the top management team to make a list of the strengths of the company. They did. As the list grew, and despite my initial positive feeling, I began to suspect that they were posturing. The list was too good to be true. The characteristics were outside the normalized realm of organization. Consider their claims:

We are proactive: When a product is still climbing in the market, we move on.

We shape practices in the market.

We love responding to a challenge.

We think big and seek success at all costs.

We are the place you go in the larger corporation if you want to become a leader.

We cannot stand to be anything less than number 1.

We take strength from having done the impossible in past crises.

We are highly galvanized and rally in times of crisis.

We appear to have very few formal systems, but when a problem arises, a team spontaneously emerges, solves it, and then disappears.

We have quality people with a "can-do" spirit.

We have people-friendly policies; it is a place of high trust.

As this impressive list was being articulated, my attention was drawn to a particular conversation. The third to the last entry on the list came from the statement made during the conversation, "Whenever there is an important problem, a team of appropriate people spontaneously emerges, solves the problem, and then voluntarily disbands." I thought it the most extreme claim of all, but at that moment it was made, a woman on the management team responded, "That is right. I have been here three months, and it is driving me crazy. I have worked in a number of corporations,

and I pride myself in being able to rapidly comprehend the culture of any organization. This place baffles me. I watch those teams form and disintegrate. It is like magic. I cannot understand or explain it."

To this statement, there was a rejoinder by another member of the organization: "I have been here more than a year. I am in charge of systems and processes. I cannot understand it either. It is an extraordinary phenomenon."

As the day unfolded, I became convinced that the list was for real. These were people with a powerful culture. The company was a productive community. It was a hard-driving organization making lots of money. There are, however, many hard-driving organizations that make money. This one was more. It was an organization in which people were as committed to each other's success as they were to their own. Because there was trust, people could communicate their problems and get help. Because there was trust, there was cooperation. The self-interest, which is the bedrock of most corporate cultures, was also operating here, but the collective interest and individual interests really were one. Here everyone was a servant to the system and to each other. This was a focused, money-making company that was also a productive community.

A productive community is a relationship or collectivity that is both structured and spontaneous. It is highly differentiated and integrated. Members are clear about their accountability and their freedom. This is true in formal organizations, small groups, and families. Consider the following statement:

Much has been written about what makes families work. The consensus is that families that support the emotional well-being and growth of their members combine two almost opposite traits. They combine discipline with spontaneity, rules with freedom, high expectations with unstinting love. An optimal family system is complex in that it encourages the unique individual development of its members while uniting them in a web of affective ties. Rules and discipline are needed to avoid excessive waste of psychic energy in the negotiation of what can or cannot be done—when the children should come home, when to do homework, who is to wash the dishes. Then the psychic energy released from bickering and arguing can be invested in the pursuit of each member's goals. At

the same time, each person knows that he or she can draw on the collective psychic energy of the family if needed. Growing up in a complex family, children have a chance to develop skills and recognize challenges, and thus are more prepared to experience life as flow. [Csikszentmihalyi, 1997, p. 88-89]

You might want to try an experiment. In the above paragraph, substitute the word *organization* wherever the word *family* appears, and substitute *the employees* for *children*. Then reread the paragraph.

### Creating Productive Community

As Palmer suggested in the earlier quotation, "If community is to emerge, it will have to be in the midst of inequalities that appear whenever two or three are gathered." We start in a context of hierarchy but the key is to not start by focusing on hierarchy. Our job is to transcend the assumptions of hierarchy. But what exactly does this mean?

Katzenbach (1995) and his colleagues published a book entitled *Real Change Leaders*. It was a study of people who are not in top positions yet brought significant changes to their companies. They were transformational change agents. In the book, the authors identify a number of characteristics that differentiate these real change leaders from normal managers.

First, real change leaders get outside the hierarchical box. They may even lack authority for the task at hand. They are not defined by their positions. Although they avoid unnecessary violations of expectations, they do violate them. They seldom focus on what the hierarchical culture suggests is possible: "Instead, they think first of what is the right thing to do and who they need to involve to get it done."

Second, real change leaders do not start with structure because they realize that changing the structure seldom leads to increased performance and that such changes are highly resisted. "Instead, they use informal, ad hoc networks and find ways to cross functional boundaries and hierarchical levels by focusing on action flows and objectives, not on functions and positions." They find key actors and build committed teams; these teams are examples of what we are calling productive communities.

These two claims suggest that transformational change agents practice a higher level of moral reasoning. In asking, "What is the right thing to do?" they are not asking what is fair, expected, rewarded, or punished within the system. They are asking about the state of the system. This is a perspective that is higher than self. This perspective takes them from the realm of transaction to the realm of principle. In asking what is the right thing to do, they are no longer servants of the system. Instead, they align themselves with the potential of the system. Then they become servants to that system.

Most of us see ourselves as servants of the system. Seeing ourselves as servants to the systems in which we are embedded is quite different. I may have a little girl who will not do her homework or a workforce that will not embrace the new culture. If instead of seeing them as the problem, I see us as a system and see myself as both an actor within the system and also an external servant to the system, I am beginning to take a transformational perspective.

In asking, "What is the right thing to do?" the transformational change agent is asking a second critical question: What result do I want? Such change agents are not asking, How do I get what I want? They are asking, What result do I want? Robert Fritz (1989) tells us that the difference between these two questions is profound. One keeps us on our present unexamined course. The other aligns us with the potential to be empowered and the potential to be empowering to our community. The transformational change agent is willing to go outside his or her defined position and violate expectations in order to originate productive community. Rather than starting with structure they go out and attract other actors to the experience of productive community. In doing so, they initiate a social movement.

### Creating Social Movement

In over twenty-five years of working on issues of organizational change, I have come to the conclusion that most important changes require the creation of a social movement. It is, in fact, more accurate to say that change is social movement. The first step in creating a social movement is having a single actor who asks questions:

- What is the right thing to do?
- What result do I want?
- How do I behave in a more authentic way?

In Palmer's (1998) words, the person chooses to "live divided no more." This is what Peter Block means when he describes the effective change agent.

Our ability to facilitate the learning of others is absolutely dependent on our own consciousness and on our willingness to make our own actions a legitimate subject of inquiry. Allowing the personal to become public is the act of responsibility that initiates cultural change and reforms organizations. Our need for privacy and our fear of the personal are primary reasons why organizational change is more rhetoric than reality. Real change comes from our willingness to own our vulnerability, confess our failures, and acknowledge that many of our stories do not have a happy ending. [Block, 1995, p. xii]

Notice that Block sees organizational change as "facilitating the learning of others." This is very different from seeing change as telling and forcing. Block understands that the most effective form of organizing is productive community and that it emerges as a social movement. The social movement begins when someone, allows the "personal to become public." When the change agent chooses to live undivided, focuses on the good of the system, and becomes a servant to the system, other people are attracted to empower themselves and the system changes.

The central claim in all of this is that when a change requires people to alter ingrained behavior patterns, a social movement is needed. An actor in the system must become a social insurgent, the leader of the movement. For people in formal positions and for people operating at conventional levels of moral reasoning, this is a radical thought. The notion of change driven by authority, and change driven by social insurgency, are assumed to be mutually exclusive, even at war with one another. Authority exists and justifies its existence by resisting insurgency in organizations. Contrariwise, insurgency exists to overthrow authority.

The notion that a CEO, supervisor, coach, or parent needs to model moral power and become the leader of a social movement

is both intellectually and behaviorally difficult to accept. It means we must become servants who are inner directed and other focused. We must put into action the first seed thought: We must envision the productive community. Doing so is the first step in enacting such a community into being.