

Ongoing Discussion “Thought Piece”

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# **The Impossible Has Become the Inevitable**

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## **Observations**

Over the next two decades, we will be redesigning everything we produce to reduce our carbon footprint, toxics use, materials flow, eliminate waste completely, and seriously curb the superfluous consumer disposables. Whether the term we use is ‘Sustainable’ or ‘Green Business’ or ‘Environmentally and Socially Responsible Business,’ or ‘Carbon Neutral’ or ‘Cradle to Cradle,’ or ‘Beyond-Regulatory-Compliance Design’ or ‘Cleaner Production’ ...it won’t really matter what we call it, we have hit a very ugly, high and unyielding WALL. This WALL is a combination of global warming, environmental health crises and ecosystem services collapse. We have brought this upon ourselves, giving over to greed, materialism, short-term thinking and complex, interpenetrating systems that concentrate wealth and power to exploit humanity and the earth.

There is no way around this WALL without redesigning everything we do and the way we do it. A staggering business opportunity: a monumental undertaking that will ask the best of all of us before the day is over. We began the GreenMBA in 1999 because we realized that conventional business schools train people specifically to be increasingly efficient at implementing the status quo, at doing what we have been doing but doing it faster. We engage students to do just the opposite, to learn to observe and think in such a way that they can redesign everything because the WALL is right in front of us.

WHAT we will produce will be exciting and complex in its design. The Europeans, especially the Dutch, British, and Scandinavians are far ahead. The most productive among us will come to understand “productivity” in a much broader context, and understand it very, very quickly. This group will ramp up and welcome the opportunity of radical change and innovation in WHAT they produce. The less productive among us will watch for awhile and wait, and then feel the tire treads on our back as the solar tractors roll over us and our businesses, and it won’t be pretty. There is enough capital in the hands of the more productive to swing the awakening US Government back into action on their own side, (timing is everything, isn’t it?) and those with their faces in the mud won’t get up because their costs will be too high, their path to market too long, and only marginally profitable.

## Implications

That said, the stealth opportunity is to redesign the ‘HOW’ of this future so as to design out the bulk of the dehumanizing ridiculousness, inconsistency, illogic and ineffectiveness of business practices readily acceptable as “standard” today. We all know that these practices have been integral to the conventional way we “developed” our pillage-the-earth-and-the-poor-people consumer/war economy that is the brick and mortar of the WALL before us. The servant has become the master, and our backs are against the WALL. We have to be calm and turn around and face the WALL, and ourselves. We will be the ones to dismantle this wall, brick by brick, if it is to be dismantled at all. Our leaders have to raise their level of vision and consciousness and actually instruct, inspire and model a redesign process with two components: WHAT we need to do and HOW we need to do it. The WALL must come down. We will reclaim mastery or perish. It makes things quite simple, actually.

Caveat: I believe we can only reclaim mastery if the HOW we proceed reflects as fundamental a change in business practices as the WHAT we produce reflects a fundamental change in Energy, Building, Transportation, Food and Fiber Systems, and Health Care. The GreenMBA curriculum and learning processes are designed to engage students in exactly the new HOW of this undertaking along with a broad knowledge of the WHAT. It is nothing short of a revolution in thinking and education.

In the fall of 2006, lots of attention is already being focused on the mechanics of Green Building, Alternative Energy, Organic Foods, Non-Toxic Chemical Substitutes, Redesign of Transportation Systems, Alternative Health Care and Efficiency. The big money boys are eagerly scanning the horizon for where to pour their capital to optimize scalability and reduce risks. Yet, who among those in our corporate board rooms and executive offices is prepared to go after the keys to the kingdom: the redesign of the HOW we will proceed to re-humanize business so that it offers all employees a life worth living? Those leaders who are awake will, and their organizations will wield a mighty sword over the rest. Why? Simply because the workforce of today’s corporate world is totally dissatisfied with the way their job and lives have played out, and the best of them will DEMAND a different HOW or they’ll go to companies where the company consistently mirrors their values. If they can’t find that, they’ll start their own: and then, watch out. It makes things quite simple, actually.

This will be a leadership opportunity, but only for those who are willing to look at HOW we’ve been operating our companies, I mean seriously look at HOW we do what we do without being vested in continuing it that way. These leaders will gaze with an entrepreneur’s joy at a total leapfrogging of the past into a future that only they see, but see with a clarity that is practically blinding. Nothing in business is really quite as thrilling. The HOW to lead humanity from servitude to mastery over the WALL is the scope of this book.

# Getting Specific about the HOW - Three Arenas of Action

## I. Designing Business for Humans

What are we talking about when we are speaking of the HOW? Well, examples have been chronicled in Dilbert's column for over a decade. That we still find it funny is only a testament to our deep hope that sometime in our lifetime, things could be different. There is a totally incoherent and opaque misunderstanding of human nature deeply embedded in the inconsistent business practices that dominate our corporations. We use punishments and rewards to control people, and then spend the rest of our attention trying to out-psych their responses, and find new rewards and punishments. And then we blame staff for what we managers are doing. Alfie Kohn says that the only thing between a carrot and a stick is a jackass, and through our ill-conceived business practices, we have turned our workforce into a nation of donkeys who really want to be caring, inspired, intrinsically motivated humans. We've built systems that reveal a fundamental misunderstanding of human nature, and we need to rethink everything to uproot the dehumanizing false assumptions that lie unexamined deep in our systems. The inconsistencies between what we know to be true in our hearts, and how we practice our business are so profound that we have long rows to hoe before we will hear harmony instead of cynicism.

We don't really want to take Deming's work seriously because of what it says about us as business management. Until we do take it seriously, however, we will not prevail in meeting the challenge of a new HOW. People will moan that Quality is not new: well, I disagree. It is new because we never really got it, we just pretended to get it. We couldn't face ourselves in a disciplined way, we just put on the masquerade and let it go. And because we had the natural resources, we had the advantages of a post-war enthusiasm and power, we didn't have to be our best to be better than the other folks. Yet we never measured ourselves against what we could have been, and that is a tragic self-deception as a nation and as an economy.

We also have made no place in our workplaces for a balance of thinking, feeling, and willing. According to Rudolf Steiner, Austrian philosopher and founder of the Waldorf Schools (home of truly capable, free-thinking high school graduates), the balance and integration of thinking, feeling, and willing is where individual and collective vitality, health and morality emerge. Feeling is refined, artistic appreciation and expression: it is not sentimentality or emotionalism. Thinking, feeling and willing set the stage for a loving workplace where people are self-organizing and self-optimizing: just the kind of workplace where productivity and community networking will be unstoppable economic forces. Love at work? To love people is to give them what they need. They need to live where there is a healthy balance among thinking, feeling, and willing. No sticks hidden in carrots needed or allowed.

## II. Higher Order Thinking

There is a second arena of this HOW we're going to redesign everything: it is the arena of higher order thinking. Because we don't know how to tell a well-reasoned judgment from a poorly-reasoned judgment, we're in trouble. Because we don't know how imprisoned we are by the fact/opinion dichotomy, we're stuck. Because we don't know how to assess reasoning in a fair-minded way, we default to decision-making based on what I call the Four Doors of Default: Power, Position, Politics, or Personality. And then we live with the results, which are sub-par on a regular basis. What was a 'trusted source' for baby-boomers (Scientists, teachers, government) is not a 'trusted source' for GenXers or Millennials. They look to the community as a trusted source, and we need to recognize this shift and help them inform their community's quality of thought.

We have supported public school systems that have systematically eliminated effective thinking from the students' experience and substituted testing and assessment as if that were the same as accountability. Between the committed ignorant and the revolving door of incompetent superintendents who move from district to district perpetuating absurdities on teachers and children, we don't know which end is up. So, we keep building prisons to house the illiterate. The "haves" put their kids in private schools which are only slightly more proficient, and significantly more safe. We have no real metrics of motivation to learn, of capacity to imagine and think rigorously about anything. What we can say about our children is that they know how to shop. That is what their President told them was most important as the dust from the Twin Towers was still settling.

Until we begin to teach children and our workforce at every level how to know if their ideas are good ideas.....to be able to design and self-assess an effective idea, we won't be going anywhere, anytime soon. Whether it is which car to buy, whether or not to marry, or which production line to redesign first, we have to begin. Corporate leaders need to recognize how constrained their people are by the abundance of "content" knowledge they have, and the very limited critical and systems thinking skills that they have in their "knowledge tool boxes." The critical and systems thinking skills readily transfer to new challenges: content knowledge becomes baggage to be carried and weighs down the boat. Yet, what percentage of revenues is allocated to teach these thinking skills?

We can teach higher order thinking: that we haven't done it broadly is not evidence that it can't be done. We've been doing it for six years in the GreenMBA and it enables and inspires students to transform their lives and the work and lives of those around them. We do have the ability, although it has been suppressed. Faculty wedded to their content areas are ill-equipped to raise the standards of thinking among their students. The good news is that we can do it: we just haven't done it. Of course, those who take up this work first, and authentically, will prevail. That is as certain as the sun rising.

### III. Building a Culture of Thinking and Innovation

The third arena of this HOW to turn ourselves from servants to masters of our fate in taking down the WALL before us is the area of culture. HOW will we design and implement and nourish a culture of thinking, innovation, and lifelong learning for all of us? Here are some questions that the best among us will work with:

HOW do we work with time and critical thinking? Can we think critically when we have no “Cow time” to sit and ponder? Do we ask questions that call for a well-reasoned judgment, yet give people no time to reflect? Do we allow ourselves to be seduced by quickness over depth of thought?

Can we expect people to engage when no one expects them to think about the purposes of everything they are required to perform? If they don't know the purpose, we know that they will disengage, yet how much of the activity we undertake is purposeless!

HOW do we design a culture that promotes Curiosity and Curiosity's children, innovations? An innovation is not just a novelty: it is a new way to meet authentic needs that is superior to the past practice, all things considered - especially taking into account its life cycle of materials and energy flows. Innovation requires highly developed observation and trust. Innovation grows where there is true respect of the individual and the community. Innovation reduces uncertainty, and it grows where people feel secure, connected, and excited by the promise of taking down a brick from the WALL.

HOW do we understand the gifts that come from intellectual humility and its relationship to such a culture? What is clear is that we don't know what to do with the WALL. We need to be humble about that, and realize that all of us are smarter than any of us. The WALL's existence lives as apprehension and dread in all of us, and we will figure out how to take the WALL down together, or we won't take it down at all. Intellectual humility is a keystone to regaining mastery of our future, of our fate and the fate of the world as we have known it.

HOW do we keep ourselves from taking a proprietary interest in our ideas, selling them while masking all of their defects? Do we need people to think we are so much smarter than they are? Does the logic of cooperation tolerate the notion of 'ownership' of ideas, or of initiatives that are supposed to be for the common good? Do we choose to live out of abundance or scarcity, realizing that what truly makes us happy is not limited by materialism? We are strongest when we live in trust and work toward our personally defined relationship with shared ideals. Then it is giving, and not taking that prevails.

What does a collaborative community really ask of us, in terms of actual behavior? Why does cooperation trump competition in 99.99% of Nature's actions? The interdependence and symbiosis of Nature are the dominant themes of every ecosystem: competition is but a tiny fraction of a much larger operating system, yet we have idealized and idolized competition, when in fact it is the intensity of engagement that we crave because it makes us feel so alive. The entrepreneurial leaders who can lead us to reclaim mastery of our

fate will have an enormously high ROI from their people: and this is only possible when we treat people like people, and support their cooperation consistently in every aspect of our enterprises.

This is the issue of a growing medium as culture: what do we want to grow? As Bill McDonough, of *Cradle to Cradle* says, we want to grow intelligence, imagination, commitment and compassion. We want to limit the growth of arrogance, ignorance, raw-and-unbridled power, and greed. Seems rather simple in theory, actually. The most awake and competent among us will put the conditions of this new culture in practice.

In the GreenMBA, students love each other and their faculty because we are engaged, consciously, in meeting our shared needs with a vision of the WALL immediately before us. ‘Competitive Edge’ is not useful as a methodology in learning. We work collaboratively through experiential learning, student-driven curriculum and rigorous instruction in higher order thinking. We don’t have grades: we have extensive faculty feedback and the worst result a student can receive is a “Resubmit, please.” Students have to identify their purpose for every assignment, as well as self-assess against their personal objectives. Thus, our standards are very high, but held with compassion and a sense of abundance. We love our students and they know it. We believe the HOW of successful businesses will implement parallel systems. After all, how could a scarcity of A’s serve us if we are all here, investing to do the work, and if the students’ work met their personal standards and aligned with the standards of the program? What is the difference between a 93 and an 87? How much bitterness comes from being branded a “3” on a quarterly review when there is a Bell curve to be maintained and the 4s go to friends of the manager? Does it matter? Are such practices a dehumanizing distraction? How do they serve to inspire us to our best efforts? My view is that the same folks who are vested in increasing power and control at the top are the ones who support such ridiculous ‘performance systems’ that undermine trust, engagement and innovation. Those who blindly implement these systems are unthinking, at best. These systems wound the human spirit and seriously sap the strength of our community.

## Summary of the HOW and its Relationship to the WHAT

- I. We need to redesign and build business for humans: for the people we want to be. This will mean that we stop our reward and punishment approach to life. Rewards and punishments, carrots and sticks of all shapes and kinds demean us to the sub-human level. Because we have the gift of individual consciousness and conscience, we have the potential to honor the beauty of intrinsic human motivation and let it dignify work. In doing so, we will fundamentally redesign the HOW of our business relationships: all of them. We need to embrace Quality Management because it reflects a coherent picture of human nature that aligns with reality. We need to bring all of ourselves to work: our thinking, our feelings, and our will. No longer will it be tolerable to check our values at the door.

- II. We need to engage in a rigorous and liberating course of action that teaches higher order thinking directly, and opens the doors to this new way of thinking (and thus of living) to everyone. We've behaved shamefully in dumbing down curriculum and ignoring the joy that comes from figuring out problems in experiential and inspirational learning environments. There are many well-reasoned solutions to the challenges ahead: our task is to bring forth multiple perspectives and pool all that we know so that the likelihood is increased that we will ultimately accomplish this Herculean task. We've lost our stories and our way, and if we reclaim and recover rigorous, self-correcting, disciplined team thinking as we reclaim our stories, we will equip ourselves to take down the WALL. If we don't, if we shy away and hope that things will go well, there is nothing more certain than that we will fail. No one else can do this for us: we have to do it for ourselves and for our children. The good news is that it is fun and invigorating and it builds community around the pursuit of the truth.
  
- III. We need to develop a culture that respects the complexity of creativity, joyful work, wonder and mutual development in the interests of shared ideals. Culture is the growing medium, and if it is toxic to the ideals that we know are needed to illuminate our path, we will fail. As the human spirit is complex, subtle and precious, so it will take subtle and refined consciousness and constant vigilance to protect it. It is a shared responsibility of the highest order. Yet, as leaders, this is our work.

The exciting news is that all of these arenas, the HOW and the WHAT actually FIT TOGETHER rather beautifully, like a finely crafted pine puzzle. To leave a piece out is to leave the image with a gaping hole, satisfying no one and leaving the rest of the pieces to try to make up for the loss. Obviously, they can't. It is one puzzle, and if we are to take up the leadership of this work, we need to understand this at a very deep level.

I ask you to seriously consider these ideas. I ask you to let them become ideals that may help light the path for you and for those in your profession and community who you love. As we use this powerful word in the GreenMBA, to love is to seek to meet the needs of those we love through our own work. It will take the energies and love of all of us to take down the WALL that stands before us, so let us stand shoulder-to-shoulder, let us join hands and begin.



Jane Lorand has a broad base of experience, from her work as an elementary teacher, a tax attorney, mother of five children, Director for Research at the Center for Critical Thinking and Moral Critique, and as a consultant to the electric industry for public education during California's catastrophic deregulation attempts, working to keep Publicly Owned Utilities out of the regime. She began the GreenMBA as an entrepreneur in education, and with her colleagues has helped it to thrive and move to its beautiful new University community, Dominican University of California in San Rafael, California. Looking out over the Golden Gate Bridge, the city of San Francisco, Mt. Tamapalis, and the Bay itself, we are positioned to grow and meet the needs of business practitioners to help them understand the WHAT and the HOW of taking down the WALL before us all.