

Putting Our DIFFERENCES to WORK



the fastest way
to innovation,
leadership,
and high
performance

Debbe Kennedy

Foreword by Joel A. Barker

author of *Paradigms: The Business of Discovering the Future*

an excerpt from

***Putting Our Differences to Work:
The Fastest Way to Innovation, Leadership, and High Performance***

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Foreword

by Joel A. Barker

For centuries people assumed that economic growth resulted from the interplay between capital and labor. Today we know that these elements are outweighed by a single critical factor: innovation. Innovation is the source of U.S. economic leadership and the foundation for our competitiveness in the global economy.

That's what Bill Gates wrote in the *Washington Post* in early 2007. Without a doubt, leaders around the world understand the leverage of innovation and want a share in the wealth it creates.

Debbe Kennedy has written a book that approaches innovation leadership in a unique way. It focuses on the power of bringing differences together to create new products, services, and new levels of contribution. It is based on her work of the last fifteen years, and every idea has been tested and proven. In a world in which diversity is becoming more important every day, knowing how to use that diversity for innovation is a huge competitive advantage. That's what *Putting Our Differences to Work* offers.

Debbe has developed and refined three themes she uses to create the change that results in increased innovation:

Theme 1. The world and your organization are getting more diverse so you must understand how to deal with diversity at all levels—in the boardroom, in the organization, in the field, in the marketplace.

Theme 2. Leading a diverse organization is very different from leading an organization with high homogeneity. Twenty-first-century leadership is going to be about leading diverse followers. Those who can apply “diversity leadership” have a huge advantage over those who cannot.

Theme 3. If you know how to utilize diversity, you can rapidly reap continuous benefits in innovation—both internal innovations that will make your organization better, and external innovations that your customers will clamor for.

What Debbe has done is create a series of easy-to-follow guidelines, instructions, and suggestions for your organization—and every leader in it—on how to utilize diversity to increase innovation. Every one of her ideas has been tested by her in multiple settings. She’s also included a special section referencing key studies, tools, and other resources for you to do your own explorations.

She has simple strategies that work for organizations of all sizes. She has thoughtful guidelines for dealing with the people issues and the “Not in my backyard” issues. And she has wonderful stories of success told by the “succeeders” in their own words.

And scattered throughout her book are wise observations, some two thousand years old, some fresh off the Internet. They illustrate the depth of thinking and experience that has gone into this book.

While *Putting Our Differences to Work* has something for everyone, it is particularly important for those who would be leaders. Debbe pulls no punches about how bad leadership behavior in a diverse world dramatically damages an organization’s ability to innovate. But, after pointing out the bad behavior, she offers clear, thoughtful instructions on how to overcome the past and develop a leadership style fit for the twenty-first century.

This is a book that you will read and then find yourself going back to again and again, to access its many ideas on innovation, on leadership, and on productivity that results from good leadership and constant innovation.

It will change the way you think about diversity. It will show you how to leverage diversity. It will help you become a better leader.

What I like best about *Putting Our Differences to Work* is that Debbe teaches us how diversity accelerates innovation to everyone’s advantage. This is a win-win-win book in which you and your people win, your organization wins, and the world wins.

Joel Barker

Futurist, filmmaker, author

Paradigms: The Business of Discovering the Future

Note: Also see Chapter 10, “Innovation at the Verge of Differences,” by Joel Barker.

“Out of clutter find simplicity; from discord find harmony; in the middle of difficulty lies opportunity.”

—Albert Einstein

Preface

Do you ever feel like the whole world is looking to you for leadership—even if it’s just your own world? Today we find ourselves in similar places regardless of our business or organization. The pressures are on. Demands for new ideas and new talent are real. Growth seems to be on everyone’s mind, whether it is to grow your business, expand your influence, multiply your supporters, increase your diverse talent pool, or gain market share. And, by the way, make it fast.

A respected leader once shared with me that the word *leadership* has a Germanic origin meaning to “find a new path.” What is encouraging amid all the chaos today is there is a constant stream of achievements rising up from individuals and organizations across the world *finding new paths* that are creatively addressing the problems we face with new thinking and a resurgence of our pioneering spirit as people.

I wrote this book for you to experience walking on some of those new paths and, at the same time, take away everything you need to forge your own. The idea for this book arose out of observation, experience, participation, and inspiration from what seems a lifetime of study and practice that has involved *putting our differences to work*. The most meaningful part of the journey has come from those I met and learned from and with along the way. Writing the book grew out of first asking myself a number of new questions, and now I ask you to consider them, too:

- ▶ Who needs to become a leader today?
- ▶ What skills and qualities do we really need in our leaders at all levels?
- ▶ What role do people and their differences play in our achievements?
- ▶ How well are we utilizing the talent we have?
- ▶ If innovation is the “engine of growth,” what fuels the engine?

- ▶ Where is the greatest opportunity for innovation?
- ▶ How can everyone contribute and reap the benefits of innovation?

The answers to these questions hold the promise of healing, enriching, and transforming workplaces, marketplaces, communities, and our world, and they formed the premise of *Putting Our Differences to Work*. The ideas in this practical guide change the prevailing rules of how to think, behave, and operate as leaders and innovators in three specific ways.

First, we learn that all we already know about leadership is valuable. However, to strengthen our portfolio of skills, five distinctive qualities of leadership are introduced. They fundamentally change the rules in how we think and act. They reframe old notions that no longer work to our advantage in our organizations or wherever we find ourselves having an opportunity to have a positive influence on others. These qualities are needed at all levels of leadership, including individual contributors and aspiring leaders who may not see themselves as leaders. Our distributed workplaces and communities mean that we all step in and out of leadership roles that require new skills to understand, interact, and relate with others different than we are.

Second, the ideas in this book draw together four diverse elements of business and society that have traditionally been handled separately in our work and our thinking—if not by our words and processes, then certainly by our visible actions and practices: *innovation*, *leadership*, *diversity*, and *inclusion*. *Putting Our Differences to Work* reframes how these four elements are connected and proves the possibilities that reside with this powerful foursome. The outcome is measurable with meaningful benefits for individuals, business, society, and our world.

Third, the ideas in the book elevate the significance and importance of people. They put people and all their differences at the forefront of all achievement. We need them—and all of their differences, talents, energy, new ideas, and expertise. Diverse people are the fundamental fuel for innovation to serve business and society, for new levels of leadership in our respective fields, and for realizing the highest levels of achievement for our organizations. Through concrete examples, you will learn how our differences multiply the possibilities for innovation, the “engine of growth.” You will also witness the profound influence that inclusion has to engage everyone, accelerating the process of acceptance, understanding, and ownership for new ideas, as well as new products and services. The ideas in this book ask us to reconsider where we are today and reach beyond the trendy economic jargon that has come into fashion that defines people in terms of *human capital* and tends to overlook the importance of people considerations in the mainstream of our business and organizational strategies.



Everything about this book, from its cover to its content, reflects the results of putting our differences to work. Its pages are marked with many fingerprints. I wanted it to be a book that reflected its title—a true mirror of putting our differences to work. This book holds the wisdom of many thought leaders, mentors, sages, and teachers crossing all segments of society. I’ve had the good fortune to know many of them. Some I’ve never met, but they are very present in this book. When all the differences are put together, it is a virtual gathering of great minds and pioneering spirits coming together across time and distance to share knowledge and know-how with you.

Every action taken in the process of writing this book brought with it echoing voices from all those who dreamed, dared, and sacrificed before us. I’ve heard them whispering across time as I worked on this book. Like all those with a pioneering spirit, one learns that history doesn’t record every name and face, but all of us benefit today from the many who cared and risked and reached inside to find the strength to respond to the call of their generation and time.

Above my desk, seven original paintings stretch across my wall—of Mother Teresa, Viktor Frankl, Martin Luther King Jr., Nelson Mandela, Mahatma Gandhi, Jalaluddin Rumi, and Eleanor Roosevelt. Each face watches over me as I work every day, creating an ever-present reminder of the importance of this journey of continuous renewal that you and I are on at this time in history. I’ve always believed that we can remain in a continual dialogue with leaders like these shining examples if we are open to listen and learn from the wisdom they left for us.

While writing, I heard Dr. King reminding us once again why our efforts have significance: “All life is inter-related. We are all caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied into a single garment of destiny. Whatever affects one directly, affects all indirectly.” Mother Teresa encourages us to

step up and do our part: “Don’t wait for the leaders. Do it alone, person to person.” Gandhi inspires us when we are personally overwhelmed by the magnitude of the struggle: “When you are after a righteous cause, people pop out of the pavement to help you.” Viktor Frankl doesn’t let us escape without recognizing that regardless of how difficult and impossible circumstances may appear, we are in charge: “Everything can be taken from a man but . . . the last of the human freedoms—to choose one’s attitude in any given set of circumstances, to choose one’s way.” Eleanor Roosevelt tests the authenticity of our leadership: “It is not fair to ask of others to do what you are unwilling to do yourself.” Rumi reminds us, on many levels, that this is not a journey of thoughtless action: “Attention to small details, makes perfect a large work.” And Nelson Mandela reminds us that “with freedom comes responsibility.”

I learned long ago that a story is a moment in time you can revisit over and over again. Better yet, if the story contains wisdom and knowledge, it is timeless. Stories can ignite your courage. They can be a catalyst for a new idea. They can bring out the best in your leadership. When I was selecting the “pearls and gems” from my work to include in this book, there were special stories I wanted to share because they had this kind of enduring quality. Each story includes the context and my experience of the leaders. This seemed to bring life into each story that would be somehow lost, if not mentioned.

My greatest hope for *Putting Our Differences to Work* is that it will be one of those books that you read, internalize, put into practice, and keep as a ready reference and guide for using your passions, intellect, knowledge, and skill to pioneer a new era—one that puts your signature on the twenty-first century—opening the way for the human dimension of leadership to reign.

And now the journey begins.

May the returns for your efforts and example in putting our differences to work leave an enduring imprint wherever you are called to lead the way.

I welcome you.

Debbe Kennedy
Montara, California
April 2008

“The difference between what we do and what we are capable of doing would suffice to solve most of the world’s problems.”

—Mahatma Gandhi

Introduction

The Fastest Way

Organizations and individuals all over the world are discovering that putting our differences to work is the most powerful accelerator for generating new ideas, creating innovative solutions, executing organizational strategies, and engaging everyone in the process.

This book is about how to make your own discovery of this truth. It comes with everything you need to get started right where you are.

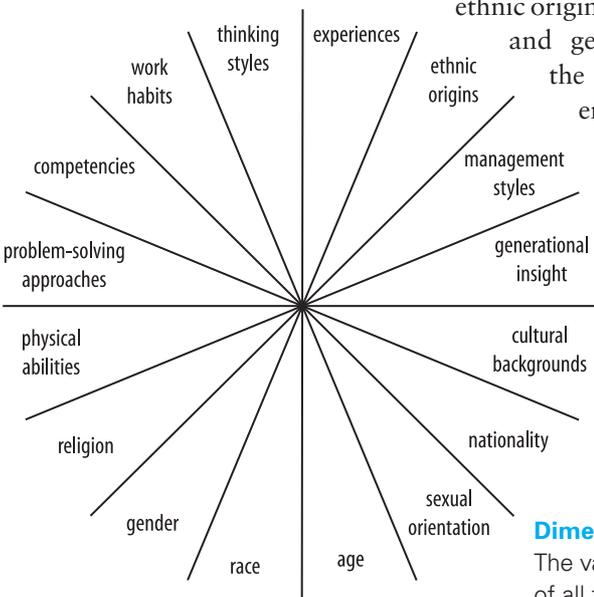
The breakthrough is the essential ingredient of diversity, in its broadest sense. Real value lies at the intersection of our differences. This encompasses everything from our thinking styles, problem-solving approaches, experiences, competencies, work habits, and management styles to our

ethnic origins, cultural backgrounds, and generational insight (see

the Dimensions of Difference illustration). All our

differences give each of us a unique perspective from which

to draw, including gender, race, physical abilities, sexual orientation, nationality, religion, age, and everything that makes us who we are



Dimensions of Difference

The value lies at the intersection of all that makes us different ...

as individuals. The magic begins when we come together. The secret is learning how, when, and where to tap into all the wealth of insight, wisdom, and new thinking to solve problems, create new products and services, and build stronger communities with benefits for everyone.

In 2005, I had an opportunity to get a memorable glimpse into our emerging generation of innovators and the experience of putting our differences to work today. I was invited to speak at an online Leadership Forum hosted by Microsoft on the topic of “How to Get Buy-in for New Ideas.” With innovation commonly being known as “the engine of growth,” I wasn’t too surprised when the Forum drew a crowd. In what seemed an instant, over 550 leaders showed up online. I had no idea at the time that the group was so diverse, because I could only see their names. Later, I learned they came from over twenty countries representing regions across the world, including Europe, Asia Pacific, Canada, Latin America, and the United States, demonstrating that people with new ideas are a universal treasure. They represented major companies from every industry, as well as entrepreneurs, government, military, education, health care, and community organizations. I discovered the group was a cross section of CEOs and senior leaders, managers of every type, as well as educators, business owners, ministers, and consultants. Imagine all this diverse talent coming together, peer to peer, meeting on common ground, because we were brimming with new ideas to bring to our respective organizations. Up front, I asked the group why they came to this particular session. I admit, I was moved by the responses. I recognized there was a deeper level of connection among us that would have been missed if I hadn’t asked the question. Ninety percent described themselves as change leaders or innovators with new ideas to improve their businesses and organizations. Nearly half indicated that, over and above their jobs, they had come because they hoped to change the world. And this was just a small random sampling of leaders at one meeting. I have learned, since this group heightened my own awareness, a growing number of us would describe ourselves and our missions in a similar way.

In this one hour, we accomplished much together. We learned about presenting new ideas and pinpointed common problems standing in the way of innovation, change, and growth in our organizations. The dialogue continued through emails and influenced a series of smaller online conversations that I hosted in the following weeks.

Three main issues generated the most comments, discussion, and correspondence afterward. They are indicators of the gaps that still exist between leaders and employees effectively putting their differences to work to innovate and influence organizational success. See if any of these sound familiar

to you and what other truths you might add to the mix from your own experience:

- ▶ Our company culture isn't open to new ideas; process is more important. There is a lack of interest in change and innovation. Everyone sees the need; no one wants to take the risk. New approaches aren't welcomed.
- ▶ Gender, race, and age still play a role in acceptance of new ideas in our organization. If you think differently or ask too many questions, it leads to losing the respect of senior leaders.
- ▶ Senior leaders/managers take ideas and present them as their own. The focus from our leaders is on execution of strategy; they've forgotten people are leading it for them. It would be great if they showed more interest in what people have to say.

These comments are good examples of common issues that stand in the way of putting our differences to work effectively across any organization. This kind of breakdown in communication erodes trust and impacts productivity and achievement in ways we may not even notice unless we are paying attention. Here is a question to consider for yourself and your organization:

What are the chances you or other leaders in your organization might be leaving similar impressions with those looking to you for leadership?

Most of us go along thinking we are doing a great job, so receiving this kind of feedback isn't fun, often comes as a surprise—never at a good time—and is disappointing to the best of us. No one would purposely want to have members of their teams thinking this way. The important lesson we all need to remember is directly related to effectively putting our differences to work: it isn't what we think we are doing that matters; it isn't what we've said, think we've said, or wish we'd said; it is what others perceive and receive from us that has the sweeping influences—influences we often don't realize restrict both the individuals and the organization from delivering the highest levels of results, innovation, leadership, and performance.

One of our biggest culprits is our language. Putting our differences to work requires that we develop the ability to communicate with the people we are counting on most to fulfill our business and organizational strategies and goals. This means reaching them, understanding what they need from us to be great themselves, so they can accomplish great things for the

Top 10 CEO Challenges Overall Rankings of Challenges of “Greatest Concern”

- 1 Excellence in execution
- 2 Sustained and steady top-line growth
- 3 Consistent execution of strategy by top management
- 4 Profit growth
- 5 Finding qualified managerial talent
- 6 Customer loyalty and retention
- 7 Speed, flexibility, adaptability to change
- 8 Corporate reputation
- 9 Stimulating innovation/creativity/enabling entrepreneurship
- 10 Speed to market

Source: The Conference Board, October 2007.

organization. To do this, we need to become conscious of what we say and how we say it.

Eric Hoffer, a well-known American social writer, summed up this need nicely: “The leader has to be practical and a realist, yet must talk the language of the visionary and the idealist.” In recent years, “the visionary and the idealist” messages that come from a leader’s heart are frequently getting replaced with economic buzz words in sound-byte form. One example of this trend shows up in the results of a survey.

In October 2007, The Conference Board released its CEO Top 10 Challenges, reporting the results of a survey of 769 global CEOs from 40 countries. Each of these challenges is largely dependent on the commitment, ingenuity, brainpower, grit, and new ideas of the *people* behind them. But would you know people were important by the way these concerns are expressed? People were not mentioned as one of the “greatest concerns.” Unfortunately, many of these “people-less” words and expressions become our talking points—and we wonder why people don’t feel more energized, inspired, and engaged. Those of us who can most effectively eliminate inhibitors to putting differences to work

within our teams and organizations will have a decided advantage because we will have developed new mindsets and skill sets about communicating with our people to support our success.

This book is a practical guide for leaders at all levels. It is designed to support any organization’s challenges by bringing out the best in everyone. It comes packed with knowledge, know-how, and inspiration to help you more effectively put differences to work. It establishes the need for change, offers real-to-life stories to prove its premise, and defines five distinctive qualities of leadership to lead the way. To help you map a goal-directed journey, it includes a well-defined process with six action steps, best practices, and both strategic and tactical ideas to foster your thinking and actions in making differences the catalyst for new thinking, new approaches, and new contributions that will serve business and society.

In a kind of paradox, I must admit the idea of putting our differences to work isn't a trendy new concept. There is nothing trendy about it. It is steeped in substance. History is replete with examples that cover every kind of human experience in work and life, yet we still struggle with it.

In recent years, on many fronts, I think it's safe to say that our confidence, our capacity, and our capability have been shaken. We've lost touch with the power we have when we join together, because opportunities to demonstrate it have been moved into the background amid lots of churn and pressures of doing more with less. In most cases, putting our differences to work has been unintentionally shadowed by an ever-increasing demand for the leader's mind share and a time of massive change in the very nature of how we work and live.

What we may have forgotten is that we've proven over and over again that we know how to put our differences to work. In fact, this book has over twenty-five present-day stories demonstrating many of its lessons, qualities, and best practices in action. I'm certain, as you read the stories, you will be reminded of similar experiences you've had or stories with a little different twist. As I write, I've had my own flashbacks.

My first recollection of experiencing the power of putting our differences to work came in my first year as a new manager at IBM. How I got there was a story all its own that sets the stage.

I had a hip, metropolitan life in Los Angeles, California, where I worked at IBM's landmark high-rise on Wilshire Boulevard. I had been with IBM for five years at the time. I visited Alaska on vacation late that summer and stopped by the IBM office. To my surprise, they offered me a job. In what seemed a flash, I accepted and boldly moved to what seemed, at the time, a foreign land: Anchorage, Alaska, a new business frontier.

I arrived in the dead of winter. I worked in IBM's shoddy two-story building with old rusted-out desks and a broken elevator. The view from my new office was a far cry from the bustle of the well-groomed business district I was used to in L.A. Instead, it was a landscape devoid of any colors, except brown and white. It became an ever-present symbol of the drastic change before me. On my desk I kept my welcoming gift, a local book entitled *Life without Lettuce*. It was different all right—a pioneering journey of sorts. The job called upon me to adapt fast, be flexible, focused, and get fired up in this new uncharted territory.

In a short time, in stark contrast to the exterior brown and white landscape, I felt a vibrant energy inside this uncommon workplace. It was fun and full of life with a cast of characters you would never imagine working side by side. Because most of us had been imported from other places, we had no families nearby. It was indeed a melting pot.

We enjoyed the rewards of being the top revenue-producing office in the country in our division; topping all the charts, and getting lots of attention. In a short time, I was promoted to my first manager job, which put me among the first women managers at IBM in the northwest United States. The leadership team that I joined consisted of all men—most of whom could be described as the rough, gruff, rugged, earthy, bush pilot types.

After just four hours as a manager, we were all summoned into a make-shift conference room. The “big boss” from the “lower 48” had flown into town unannounced, and he didn’t look happy. He was the last to enter the room. I still remember how he slammed the door shut, and I recall his exact words: “All indications are that this is a failed corporate audit.” The news shocked me. It was the first time I realized it was possible to be one of the best offices and also one of the most out of control and not realize it. Our mission was then explained: we were to turn the place around if we were all to survive.

Survive we did—in a big way. We involved everyone. Many of us were called to work outside the comfort zones of our own jobs. We tapped into our differences, creatively calling upon diverse thinking styles, problem-solving skills, cultural knowledge, and even expertise in traveling to remote villages. For the most complex issues, we hand-picked the people on the team with a track record for knowing how to solve problems, instead of simply relying on our obvious experts who might be blinded by their own processes and methods, some of which had proven faulty in the audit. Top salesmen teamed with our all-women accounts receivable staff to use their clout, influence, and charm to collect huge sums of money long past due. Our rough and rugged “bush pilots,” familiar with the cultures in the back country of Alaska, partnered with sales and service, hopping in their planes to solve problems at remote customer sites. Technical support people aided those in charge of security to figure out how to better secure the building and the company’s assets. Administrative assistants were turned into analysts, responsible for establishing new business controls. I can still see our branch manager sitting in the “bullpen,” answering phones when it was necessary.

In a matter of months, with a lot of hard work, we were not only a top revenue-producing office but also one of the top operating organizations. Our team was recognized for its dedication to mission and innovative approach; our heroes were rewarded.

The following spring, I was promoted to a regional job in Seattle where I began helping other leaders work with their organizations to put differences to work to solve complex organizational problems. Much to my surprise, a few months into my new job, I was named Manager of the Year for my contributions in Alaska. I mention this only to point out the power and

enduring influence leaders have on their people. What I've never forgotten is the character they demonstrated to me as a young leader. You see, because I had already moved on to a new assignment, consideration for this honor could have easily been pushed aside—you know, “out of sight; out of mind.” In fact, I've always known that choosing another manager for this honor certainly would have been more advantageous for the two managers making the decision. I recently read somewhere that one of the most profound tests of your character as a leader is the way you treat people who can no longer directly benefit you. The message made me think of Joe and Gerry, the two leaders involved. I don't know where they are today, but not only did they teach me how to put differences to work and reward them; they also set a standard of leadership conduct and integrity that left an enduring imprint on me in the years that followed.

The lessons that came from that adventure in Alaska started with my life and work being turned upside down by change. I learned much from our unlikely team with many *differences*—a motley group who found themselves stuck with one another in an unexpected twist of fate with a critical mission to *move mountains*, solving the unsolvable in record time.

Much has changed in the world since then. Looking back, the story looks like just a good example of teamwork, doesn't it? Perhaps at the time, “good teamwork” is all we could see in such an experience—maybe all we needed to see. Putting our differences to work at the level needed today asks much more of us than the obvious, seemingly commonplace attributes of teamwork and considerations of diversity, inclusion, and change that pop out in my Alaska story.

Putting our differences to work takes all we've learned about teamwork to a whole new level. It requires us to become skilled at working together across a broader spectrum of dimensions of diversity, as well as distance with precision, speed, and agility. Moreover, technology continues to reshape how, when, and where we connect, challenging us to remain open and trusting of the unknown and different.

We've fast-forwarded to a whole new workplace reality with few boundaries. Our environments are no longer traditional workplaces, and diversity is now a reality. We're having to learn how to put our goals and shared values into the melting pot of the common good in order to creatively address the problems we have to solve together. In every direction, the problems for business and society call for not only the mind of a leader but the hearts and the consciences of each person.

The demand for leaders with increased knowledge, skills, and conscious people-focused habits is ever-rising as we move further into the twenty-first century. When you look around at the existing turmoil and uncertainty in

the marketplaces, workplaces, and communities throughout the world, there is a sense of urgency about this need.

As I've witnessed and experienced this need in my own work, a repeated echo of wisdom, shared with me in the final days of the twentieth century comes back to me often. In what seemed a by-chance occasion at just the right time, I had the honor to meet Lieutenant General David H. Ohle, then deputy chief of staff for personnel for the United States Army at a special gathering at the Leader to Leader Institute (formerly the Peter F. Drucker Foundation) in New York. General Ohle was accompanied by a couple of officers from his leadership team. I admit that I was a bit surprised to discover the common challenges we shared as leaders and the common solutions we were all seeking. Before the evening ended, the general invited me to spend a day with him and his leadership team at the Pentagon in Washington, D.C.

During our interview, he summed up the challenge for us as individuals and organizations of all kinds. "We are all going to have to move into the future in a new context," he told me. "For any organization, I think the next business revolution is conquering the human dimension of change. We need to bring leader development, training, and quality care for our people forward, so it matches what we have accomplished in creating more efficient, prosperous, and flatter organizations. For some time, we all have been captivated by the books on reengineering, downsizing, and restructuring, and we have done a terrific job applying what we have learned—innovating with technology, transforming organizations, and changing policies—but many of us, perhaps unintentionally, forgot about the people."

This book is also about shaping the future, and it comes with a personal invitation to *you* to join me and other leaders in pioneering a new era marked by mastery of putting our differences to work. The opportunity for each of us, and all of us, is to distinguish the twenty-first century as a time where, through the strength of our differences across the world, new levels of meaningful and useful innovation are realized, transforming business and society.

This may seem a lofty goal, but isn't that the role of leadership—to paint the picture of the future for those who follow us? By claiming this goal, we are destined to leave enduring fingerprints on the beginning of the century. Futurist Joel Barker points out what we have at stake: *You can and should shape your own future, because if you don't, someone else surely will.*

HOW THIS BOOK IS ORGANIZED

Because this book combines the power of first-person storytelling, knowledge, and wisdom, past and present, with that of being an enduring practical

guide with tools and resources, I want to add a few comments about its design to guide your reading.

This book is divided into three parts. Part 1, “Taking Your Leadership to a New Level,” is about the need for change, the leadership behaviors that will lead to success, and a few quick reference tools designed to support your work. It helps you look closely at not only what “putting our differences to work” means but what you already know about it, and what else you need to know as a leader. It points to why a more people-conscious leadership is important today from the perspective of prominent thought leaders and invites you to experience the evidence through the power of stories that prove it works.

Additionally, Part 1 introduces *Five Distinctive Qualities of Leadership* essential for putting our differences to work. Each is defined with key behaviors and actions to help you adapt and integrate them as part of your day-to-day leadership practice. This part also introduces *The Basics*, a set of tools and principles for success to guide your own personal journey of leadership development and renewal. You will be introduced to two helpful tools. First is the Putting Our Differences to Work: Six Steps That Make It Happen model, which shows how phases of change work together to achieve success. Second, the Organizational Snapshot is a simple online and downloadable assessment tool to test your team’s or organization’s readiness. It assists you in creating a reference point to mark where you are starting and in measuring your progress along the way.

Part 2, “Knowledge and Know-how to Guide the Way,” is designed to be an enduring reference for you to navigate your way through each phase of change in putting differences to work. This six-step model is the road map. A separate chapter is dedicated to each unique and interrelated step: *Assessment, Acceptance, Action, Accountability, Achievement, and More Action*. Each of these six chapters provides an overview, first-person accounts, and wisdom from luminaries, as well as illustrative examples. Periodically throughout the book and following the stories, I have summarized key points to take away as well as ideas for putting the learning into practice.

Part 3, “Ever-Expanding Possibilities,” is about moving beyond the basics and looking to the future. By invitation, Chapter 10, “Innovation at the Verge of Differences,” is written by futurist Joel Barker. He introduces new discoveries affirming the link between diversity and innovation that have been the basis for our collaborative work since 2000. In Chapter 11, “Collaboration at the Verge of Differences,” I relate our personal story of mutualistic collaboration with our respective teams and partners, sharing lessons learned. Chapter 12, “The Power of the Virtual Gathering Place,” also offers a unique opportunity to look inside the expanding possibilities

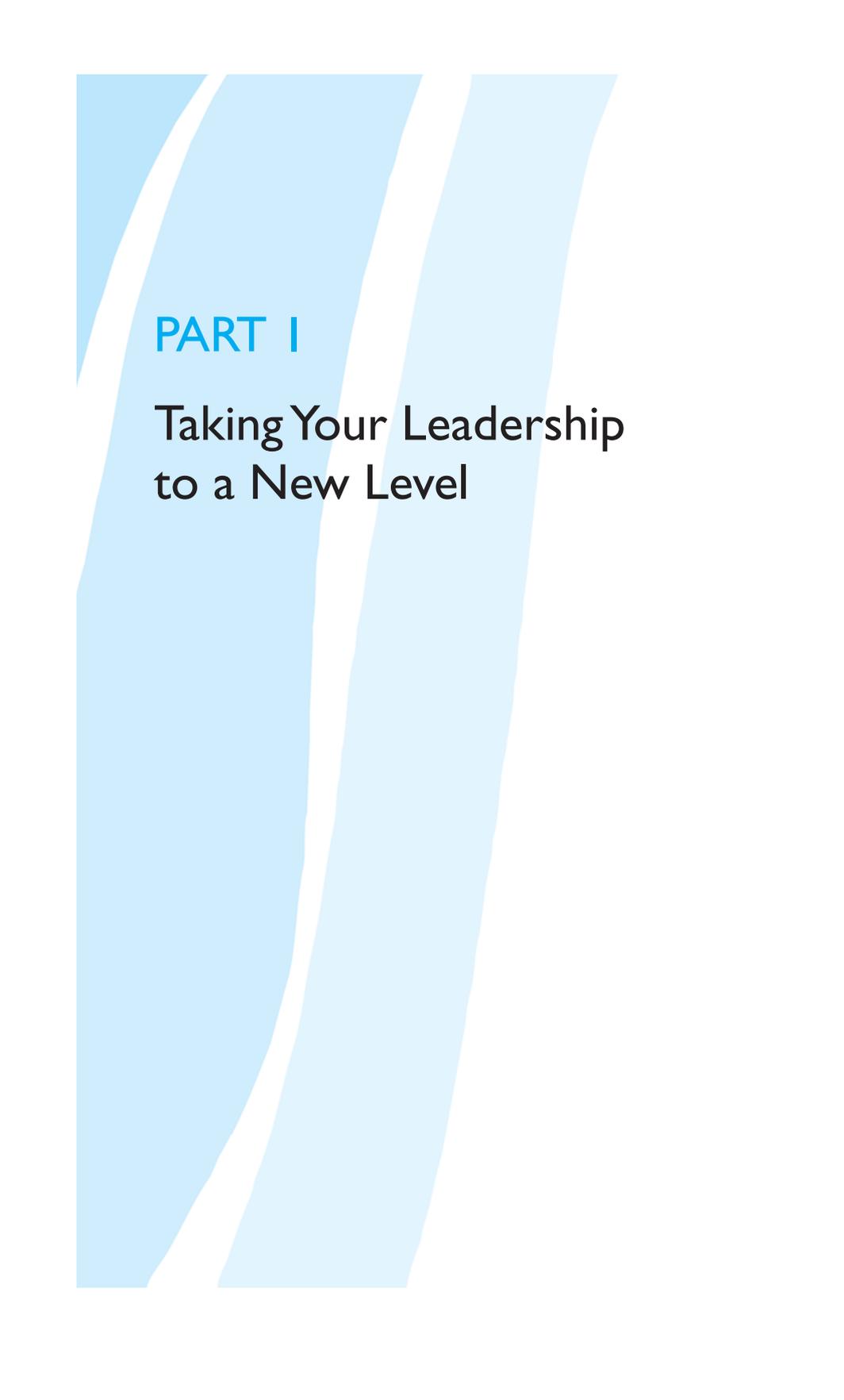
for the role of social networking and other Web 2.0 technologies that are bringing us ever closer to one another in different ways. Trailblazing leaders join me to share success stories and lessons learned in this new frontier in virtual space.

THE FASTEST WAY TO BEGIN

So what's the fastest way to begin putting our differences to work? The answer comes from a simple truth shared with me years ago.

On my first day of our new business, I asked a trusted friend and successful entrepreneur, "What's the fastest way to begin?" "Well," she said, looking at me straight on, "you get up in the morning and you *start*." In the years since, I've realized the power of this simple truth over and over again in my work and my personal life. It is not only the fastest way to begin a business, but it is also the fastest way to begin a new era, to lead a new mission, to solve any problem, to change behavior, to transform an organization, or to seize any opportunity standing before you. *You just begin*. You may not know exactly what's ahead, but there is only one way to find out: Go! Move. Jump. Leap. Open the door and *enter*. It is that first forward-thinking step that holds the promise of a new and different future, as well as the spark of innovation, the influence of leadership, the power of a new more collaborative team or community, or the passion that leads to high performance. Across the world, in big and small ways, we're learning and relearning that when lots of individual leaders step up to take that initial bold move together, the creative possibilities multiply many times, producing results one could only describe as remarkable.

So, are you ready to get started? Come along with me as we begin taking leadership to the next level by putting our differences to work.



PART I

**Taking Your Leadership
to a New Level**

“ It is not the mountain we
conquer but ourselves.”

—Sir Edmund Hillary

New Zealand mountain climber and Antarctic Explorer

First to successfully climb Mount Everest

Taking one's leadership to a new level challenges the best of us. If you are like the leaders and innovators I know, unless we get a chance to slip away to attend a class or a conference or take a long-needed vacation, the demands of life and work leave little time to think about such personal renewal. However, this is a time in our organizations and in the world that requires something different from us all. A new world, an ever-changing reality is sounding its call to leaders at all levels. We are being asked to prove what we can do, what one of my mentors once called "changing our spots." We need to rethink where we are, how we act, where we need to go, and how we're going to get there. Part 1 is designed to get you started.

To set the stage for Part 1 and the chapters that follow, I have chosen a personal story to begin this part of our journey, knowing it will be a relevant theme throughout the rest of the book.

I am a hiker. I say this with a great sense of accomplishment as it didn't come naturally to me. Knowing we've all had our mountains to climb in work and life, it seems certain you will relate even if your mountains have been of a different nature. There are many parallels in my story about learning to hike a mountain and taking your leadership to a new level. The process of raising your capability, capacity, knowledge, and know-how in order to reap the benefits of diversity, accelerate innovation, and boost productivity requires a similar learning curve. As you read it, think about the experiences you've had that asked you to reach inside to grow.

I went on my first hike about ten years ago. It was a new beginning that stretched me mentally, emotionally, and physically. It was an awakening about the world around me. The outdoors was a foreign place at the time. Up to that point, my life and work had been so filled with making my way and surviving that I hadn't even taken the time to consciously notice that trees came in many varieties and mountains had paths upward with vistas that would become a catalyst for new visions, new contributions, and a sense of becoming more.

At first, I was clumsy, and everything about the experience felt awkward and unfamiliar. I had to retrain my thinking and beliefs to conquer even the first mountain peak. The journey required new skills, new tools, new discipline, and new habits. I had to reframe my flair for independence, joining in an interdependent collaboration with two friends, who were dramatically unique in every way. Our collective knowledge, focus, capability, agility, and adaptability were essential to forging unknown trails; each of us found our place to take the lead. We learned that it was our differences that generated safety, well-being, and the shared accomplishment of reaching the top. We learned like trees that grow on the ridge of a mountain, battered by the wind; like them, we, too, gained inner strength as we ascended.

In Part 1, we'll begin the climb of leadership renewal.

In Chapter 1, you'll have a chance to explore the need for change, as well as the what, why, and how of the new business essentials for putting our differences to work. Included are the findings of recent studies, as well as two extraordinary stories that respond to the question "So who says putting our differences to work is the fastest way?"

In Chapter 2, the focus is on introducing the Five Distinctive Qualities of Leadership. Here's where our paradigm gets shifted with five behavior-based qualities that fundamentally change how we think and operate as leaders and innovators, while using what we already know.

Chapter 3 includes the road map, compass, and necessary gear—the Basics. It walks through the process, introduces tools, and offers principles for success to guide your way.



“So it is, in fact, more likely that someone will take it on himself to champion the idea of collective wisdom, and in that way create the conditions that will allow it to flourish.”

—James Surowiecki
author, *The Wisdom of Crowds*

CHAPTER I

The New Business Essentials

We don't have to look too far to see the pattern that has emerged in recent years showing our own struggles as leaders when it comes to putting differences to work effectively in our organizations. As cutting-edge global, market-driven strategies have become essential, it is clear that we, perhaps unintentionally, lost our focus on “people being our greatest assets.” As we've worked to adapt to a changing world, the best of organizations have proven for a time that they are skilled at creating comprehensive worldwide business plans, launching a new strategic direction, blowing everyone away with innovative products or services, and compiling the financials that prove their worth. However, at the same time, *behind the scenes*, deep within the day-to-day operations, we also see genuine concern for people who slip into obscurity.

So how has this happened? Why do we continually struggle to keep a focus on people and putting differences to work, when there are such great benefits? Many would instantly argue that organizations and their leaders today are widely driven by their measures—the short-term bottom line, not what they do with people. True. Others would admit that many leaders focus on what they know how to do, especially when the demands to produce are ever-increasing and people leadership generally isn't a core skill for everyone. So we easily revert to what's familiar—the numbers and processes we can handle. We learned about them in school. We've mastered them. This part of our organizations is pragmatic. No emotion. Just clear and well-defined parameters we fully understand. Best of all, the numbers and processes ask only for our head work, without the inherent heart work

that entangles us when people are part of the mix. Numbers and processes ask much less from us than what we perceive *people* require. We try to be supportive, but it is easy to assume human resources will deal with the bulk of all that *soft stuff*. This perspective is no longer good enough to solve the problems we face today or to meet the challenges ahead in the marketplace, workplace, or community—and our troubled world.

In 2000, futurist, filmmaker, and author Joel Barker shared what he termed a “surprising discovery” as he searched to find the connection between wealth and innovation. I worked with him collaboratively on his groundbreaking film, *Wealth, Innovation and Diversity*. In it, he presents a compelling business case that “*societies and organizations that most creatively incorporate diversity will reap the rewards of innovation, growth, wealth, and progress.*” Having a diversity initiative is important, and great organizations have them in place today, but the integrated approach Joel Barker’s discoveries suggest—with direct links to innovation and growth—reaches way beyond the best in traditional diversity and inclusion initiatives and programs. His findings note measurable benefits, including producing new kinds of wealth, like the wealth of sustainability, reduced risk, predictability, and innovation in addition to economic wealth.

In 2001, shortly after the launch of his film, we wrote an article together for the American Society of Training & Development (ASTD) called “Leveraging Diversity: Putting Our Differences to Work.” In it we offer compelling ideas from our collaborative work about the ongoing struggle both people and organizations have when it comes to sameness and difference, noting seven telling signs that will give you a pretty good indication of what your organization values, not in words but in practice.

SAMENESS OR DIFFERENCE?

Why do we wrestle with sameness and difference as people and as organizations, especially when we have so much to gain by working together? Scientist and author George Ainsworth-Land offered a powerful explanation in his book *Grow or Die*. It is his contention that all things grow and develop within the same three-stage pattern.

For example, we start out focused on our own survival, seeking love, food, and security. In our second stage of growth, starting at adolescence, we begin finding others like us. There are many advantages here. We are validated by others like us. We can accomplish things better together. Since we all talk alike and think alike, decisions and communications are easier.

All of these similarities also increase the level of predictability within our group. We learn to like it. We see equivalent patterns of replication in many of today's organizations for the very same reasons.

So the struggle between sameness and difference is universal. It is part of the evolution of individual and organizational growth—and it is clear as we move further into the twenty-first century, it is time for us as individuals and as organizations to reach for an additional stage of growth. George Ainsworth-Land calls this third stage of growth *mutualism*. In this stage, we come together in different combinations to open the way for innovations leading to new technology, new music, new art, new businesses, new friendships, new cultures, and new opportunities to grow. All of us—east and west, north and south—have to choose between two pathways, and this choice has to be made at every level and in every organization. One way leads us back where *sameness* is rewarded and *differences* are demonized. The other path is toward organizations and communities where diversity, variety, and difference are prized. Why is this so important to our future? Because the people most likely to bring us the paradigm-shifting innovations we need to create new wealth are almost always *outsiders*, people who know little or nothing about the normal way of doing things—people different from us. This is true at every level of every enterprise, community, and country. New wealth is the result of innovation. And innovation is driven by diversity. Diversity is the key that will open the door to the new wealth of the twenty-first century.

Sameness or Difference: What Does Your Organization Value?

Here are seven telling signs:

- ▶ Your leadership team at all levels (including the board) lacks diversity.
- ▶ Old notions, perceptions, preferences, and prejudices still exist; they are sometimes subtle and left unchallenged.
- ▶ Every group or team has its own agenda; efforts are fragmented and lack new ideas from “outsiders” or collaboration for best execution of plans and results.
- ▶ People who are different are rarely hired, developed, promoted, or included; slow progress against stated goals is an indicator.
- ▶ New ideas and innovative thinking are subtly shunned with cynicism, risk aversion, and exclusion or seen as a nuisance—or ignored completely.

- ▶ The words say you value diversity and inclusion, but your actions speak louder.
- ▶ You dismiss diversity and inclusion as a human resource issue instead of recognizing that they are drivers of innovation and new wealth; your business plans reflect this view.

Part of our struggle is our search for the words to have meaning. I'm often asked what it means to put our differences to work. It's easy to rattle off an answer like this when someone insists: "Putting our differences to work means creating an environment where people, naturally unique and different—diverse by nature and experience—can work more effectively in ways that drive new levels of creativity, innovation, problem solving, leadership, and performance in the marketplaces, workplaces, and communities of the world." What's always missing in such a definition is how limiting the words are, how ambiguous they are depending on your own differences and experience, and how absent the human element seems to be.

Definitions have their place, but they're only words until we breathe life into them by our actions and example. Let me paint a more vivid picture. Putting our differences to work at every level within an organization requires a new kind of intention from everybody. It means consciously recognizing one undeniable fact: that people are the number one source of new thinking and new ideas needed for change and the betterment of business and society. Here I'm not suggesting that leaders use the phrase as a rhetorical slogan. Remember "People are our greatest asset"? It lost its magic and meaning when the words and actions didn't align. Now it sits on the shelf with other overused phrases. Leading this charge requires a strong belief in people that is reflected day to day in our work and behavior. It calls for us to creatively utilize the many dimensions of diversity within our organizations, in business, and in society to their full potential.

As we've stripped to "lean and mean" and buzzwords like *human capital* and *talent management* have come into fashion, the rippling influence appears to have distanced many leaders from the very heart and soul of achievement in their organizations: the people. It is the heartbeat, commitment, and hard work of every individual that fulfills a business strategy and brings about innovation, leadership, and high performance for any organization or endeavor. Those leaders who consciously and intentionally focus on the mastery of leading the workplace and building diverse teams will be well on their way to pioneering a new era leadership excellence the fastest way.

Numerous studies have followed Joel Barker's pioneering discoveries and my own early study and practice, both affirming our findings and also

throwing new questions into the mix. This new thinking calls us to step further inside this compelling issue to get a deeper understanding of where we are today and where we need to go.

One significant study that has created a buzz of controversy is the work of Robert D. Putnam, a distinguished political scientist and professor at Harvard University—and, I must add, a champion for the power that people hold when they work together. You need not wonder where his heart is on this topic if you visit the Better Together initiative (www.bettertogether.org), which grew out of his notable work on civic engagement. The website tagline reflects his call to action: “Connect with others. Build trust. Get involved.”

Controversy arose when Putnam’s findings were published in “Diversity and Community in the Twenty-first Century” in the *Nordic Political Science Association Journal* in June 2007 and hit the media in sound-byte form. In reading the study, cover to cover, and listening directly to Putnam’s personal reflections on it, you realize one of the contributions he made in publishing the study was helping all of us see our own *truth*. We don’t trust one another as much as we should, and, consequently, we tend to isolate ourselves, staying with those most like us. Putnam did make these conclusions about his findings in the United States: “It’s not merely a fact that America is diverse, it’s a benefit. America will—all of us will—benefit from being a more diverse, more heterogeneous place. Places that are diverse have higher rates of growth on average. . . . In the long term, waves of immigration like we are experiencing are good for society.”

What came out loud and clear are honest questions we need to ask ourselves in all segments of society: How have our own behavior and actions, as members of society and leaders in organizations and communities, contributed to such distrust of one another? And what are we going to do about it? How can we rebuild trust by getting to know one another better—and putting our unique talents to work? Putnam suggests that it is having shared values or shared identity that draws us together. There is the reference point from which we have to work.

THE GOOD NEWS ABOUT THE BREAKTHROUGH IN THINKING

The need for a shift in building capability for putting our differences to work has been recognized in an increasing number of recent studies and writings. I began pioneering this new level of thinking in my own work in the early 1990s, documenting it in my Diversity Breakthrough! series in

2000, along with others blazing the trail, like Joel Barker and his work on wealth and innovation, Roosevelt Thomas and his new direction, Taylor Cox, Michalle Mor Barak, and others. However, like all new ideas, it takes time for acceptance to begin to take root, and it has, step by step. Ironically, this *acceptance* happened because of the diversity of studies and books on the subject and a wildly changing marketplace, workplace, and community—you might say it was all of us virtually putting our differences to work that began to build awareness, momentum, and acceptance.

In 2003, for example, the need for new critical leadership skills was affirmed in the five factors of leadership showcased in a book built from the results of an extraordinary two-year study by Accenture, *Global Leadership: The Next Generation*, authored by thought leaders Marshall Goldsmith, Cathy L. Greenberg, Alastair Robertson, and Maya Hu-Chan. Accenture's study validates that knowledge and know-how will be the primary sources of value in the twenty-first century. This means by putting our differences to work, we can multiply the value. The study also contends that the ability to lead people whose backgrounds and values may be radically different from ours requires new skills for leaders at this time in history, including thinking globally, appreciating cultural diversity, developing technological savvy, building partnerships and alliances, and sharing leadership. This isn't enough in itself. In the summary, the study's authors suggest:

No one leader can be good at everything, which leads us to the conclusion that shared leadership across a team of leaders will be the way in which excellent global companies do business in the future. . . . Future leaders must know their particular strengths and how to draw upon the complementary strengths of others—sharing leadership roles as needed.

This, too, is a big step forward, but in a distributed workplace in the global marketplaces and workplaces across the world, we need leaders at every level with skills and behavior that are adaptable, putting differences to work wherever we find ourselves.

The good news about building capability for putting our differences to work is that it doesn't require all new skills. To the contrary, it has much more to do with applying what we already know to this challenge, refocusing our attention and reshaping our habits.

I discovered this truth from Peter Drucker, known as the father of modern management. It came to light when I was writing my first book, *Breakthrough! Everything You Need to Start a Solution Revolution*. In his book *Post Capitalist Society*, Drucker points out that most of us tend to classify what we know into specialized areas of knowledge, instead of applying the

strengths of all our knowledge to different problems—looking at the problems we face and asking, “What do I know? What have I learned that I might apply to this task?” In a way, this says that we want to put the differences in all our areas of knowledge to work to solve problems. Drucker’s wisdom has been a central part of my ongoing work in helping individuals, teams, and organizations around the world put differences to work to create diverse, inclusive environments ever since. I have witnessed over and over again that what it takes to draw differences together is mainly utilizing what we already know about leading change, calling upon the strengths of our experience, *with a little different twist*.

KEY POINTS: PUTTING OUR DIFFERENCES TO WORK

- ▶ People are the number one source of new thinking and new ideas needed for change and the betterment of business and society. Putting our differences to work means learning to work more effectively in ways that accelerate our capacity to innovate, influence, and bring value to the marketplace, workplace, and society. It is our intention and behavior that breathe life into the words and give them meaning.
- ▶ It’s time for individuals and organizations to reach for a new stage of growth, where we come together in novel and different combinations to open the way for innovations leading to new technology, new music and art, new businesses, new friendships, new cultures, and new opportunities to grow. Diversity has measurable benefits; it produces new kinds of wealth—the wealth of sustainability, reduced risk, predictability, innovation, and economic wealth. (Joel A. Barker)
- ▶ Currently, we don’t trust one another as much as we should; because of this, we tend to isolate ourselves, staying with those most like us. However, diversity benefits society. We need to connect with others. Rebuild trust. Get involved. (Robert D. Putnam)
- ▶ Future leaders must know their particular strengths and how to draw upon the complementary strengths of others. (*The Global Leader*, Accenture study)
- ▶ Everybody in a distributed workplace in the marketplaces and communities of the world is a leader; we all need to be prepared. Every day each of us has the opportunity to influence someone or something.

WHO SAYS PUTTING OUR DIFFERENCES TO WORK IS THE FASTEST WAY TO INNOVATION?

To answer this question demands more than an explanation, data, or conclusions from studies. Talk and theory don't meet that standard of proof of what we are capable of doing today. So I searched to find work-in-progress stories that had meaningful concrete results. I hoped to find examples that would also clearly demonstrate that putting our differences to work is in fact the fastest way to innovation, leadership, and high performance. There isn't a shortage of illustrative stories. This book alone has over twenty with great lessons, best practices, and inspiration from which to draw. Finding the right ones as convincing evidence of what putting our differences to work can produce, however, took time, and I set the bar high.

What I wanted most was to identify a couple of pioneering efforts that would set the stage for our discussion in this book, linking leadership and diversity directly to innovation across industries, communities, and the world. There were considerations of inclusion, too. At best, the illustrative cases needed to be broad enough that you and other leaders would find them relevant to your work with issues of common interest to us all. I identified two that create a panoramic view of what we can do together, establishing a new reference point for us all.

The first story, "The Habitat JAM," is one that I personally experienced and in whose rippling influences I continue to be involved. The second story, "Global Innovation Outlook," is one that I didn't discover until I was in the final stages of writing this book. It popped out of nowhere one day when I wasn't even looking. Both stories started with visionary leaders braving new territory. The common ground they share is that diversity and dialogue were key components. Between the two poignant global examples, as you will see, everyone is included in some way.

THE HABITAT JAM

Some doubt that putting differences to work could possibly be the fastest way to get to innovation, leadership, and high performance. At one time, I might have sided with them. Results of the many studies call such an idea into question, including some of Putnam's findings previously mentioned. After all, look around and you don't need a study to show we have our problems getting along and working together. However, when there is bold, visionary leadership, things can be different.

Great *firsts* in history start with an idea and belief in the unseen. Sometimes new possibilities are observed. Sometimes they go unnoticed. Always

they cross a threshold, opening the way for more innovation to follow. What I know for sure is that people have the capacity to work together. They can move with speed, dream big, and achieve way beyond what most of us expect. How can I make such a claim? I witnessed it. I was part of it. History recorded it.

On December 1, 2005, nearly forty thousand people logged on to participate in the Habitat JAM, a seventy-two-hour global experiment, when the people of the world came together in an unprecedented online dialogue for the *first time*.

The idea behind the jam was to engage people from all walks of life, including architects, business leaders, planners, teachers, activists, NGOs, bankers, government leaders, slum dwellers, ministers, experts, thought leaders, doctors, entrepreneurs, and visionaries young and old, poor and wealthy all over the world. The goal was to get us working on the most pressing problems of our day for cities around the world. Seven unique forums framed the most critical issues:

- ▶ Improving the Lives of People Living in Slums (two forums)
- ▶ Sustainable Access to Water
- ▶ Environmental Sustainability
- ▶ Finance and Governance
- ▶ Safety and Security
- ▶ Humanity: The Future of Our Cities

An invitation to participate was open to anyone with something to say about the cities in which they live. The intent was to give people an equal voice to share their thoughts on issues affecting their lives. The plan was to give the people of the world—not the experts—the opportunity to set the agenda for the World Urban Forum III hosted by the Government of Canada in June 2006. Everyone’s ideas were gathered, sorted, and refined with a quite miraculous outcome.

The Habitat JAM was a courageous experiment sponsored by the Government of Canada in partnership with UN HABITAT (United Nations Human Settlements Programme) and IBM. The experiment was innovation at its best. It put differences to work for the common good. We talked with

Habitat JAM Who Showed Up?

Architects, business leaders, planners, teachers, activists, NGOs, bankers, government leaders, slum dwellers, ministers, experts, thought leaders, doctors, entrepreneurs, and visionaries young and old, poor and wealthy, all over the world.

Source:
Habitat JAM Summary Report.

each other. We shared and explored ideas. We began putting talk into action.

Together, we etched an indelible mark on history during those unforgettable days, where visionary leadership, technology, and people around the world crossed a new threshold of communication and connection with one another, pioneering a new level of collective problem solving on issues critical to the sustainability of our cities and our planet.

It was serendipitous that our organization got involved. In 2004, I founded the Global Dialogue Center, the newest entity of our Leadership Solutions Companies. It is an online virtual gathering place for people throughout the world (www.globaldialoguecenter.com). It has an intentional focus on leadership, professional, and personal development with the belief that by thinking, questioning, and exploring new ideas together, we can be a catalyst for creating a better world than we know today.

So when I received an email from London from someone I didn't know, introducing the upcoming Habitat JAM, it caught my attention. The vision, possibilities, and the empowering example of leadership ignited a kind of enthusiasm we couldn't deny. It made our whole team want to be part of history in the making. Members of our community found big and small ways to get involved. We did lots of blogging and promotion to spread the word. Eight distinguished thought leaders from our Global Dialogue Center community served as "subject-expert jammers" during the event for the Humanity: The Future of Our Cities forum. No one with a pioneering spirit turned down the invitation.

In a podcast recorded and published before the event, Charles Kelly, Commissioner General of the World Urban Forum III (WUF), the visionary leader who saw the opportunity and went after it, described how the Habitat JAM happened:

CHARLES KELLY

I discovered the concept of *jamming* reading a *Harvard Business Review* article, talking about IBM's experience with their ValuesJam that engaged 300,000 of their employees in 160 countries. What impressed me was the focus on ideas to action. That is in essence what the World Urban Forum is about. This will be the first time that citizens of the world will have the opportunity, without the filters of national governments or repression, to state their points of view.

The Habitat JAM

December 1–3, 2005

We talked with each other.

We shared and explored ideas.

We began putting talk into action.

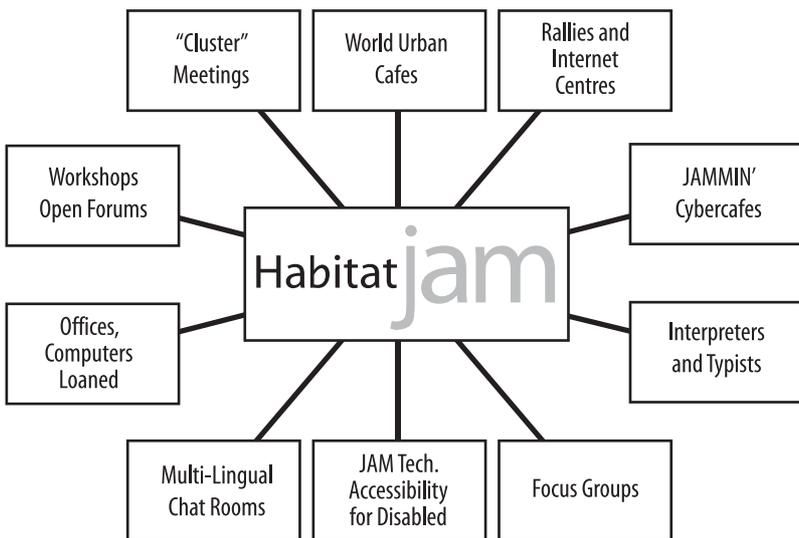
We etched an indelible mark on history.

In that same podcast, Charles Kelly extended the invitation to participate, one I couldn't overlook. He likened what was soon to take place to being present at some important moment in history, such as October 4, 1957, when the Soviet Union successfully launched *Sputnik I*. NASA cites that, the successful ninety-eight-minute orbit around the Earth, as an event that ushered in new political, military, technological, and scientific developments. I wasn't there in 1957, but how many times in one's life are you invited to be present when some threshold of innovation is being crossed? It was a must.

Also in the same podcast, Mike Wing, Vice President of Strategic Communications for IBM added the perspective of a pioneering spirit, telling about what was to be:

MIKE WING

Jamming is genuinely revolutionary. It is a kind of dialogue, a kind of interaction, a kind of idea discovery and opportunity that simply has never been possible before on Planet Earth. Our experience with jams at IBM has been overwhelmingly positive. It is a trust-based and trust-generating medium. It empowers people in ways that previous forms of organizational communication simply haven't done. . . . We don't know what is going to happen in Habitat JAM. It is an experiment. It is a fascinating one and one we are very hopeful about.



Habitat JAM—Coming Together: Breaking Down the Barriers.

If you had an idea, there was a way to share it. Everyone's ideas and points of view were added to the Habitat JAM database during the jam.

At 17:00 P.M. Greenwich Mean Time, the official clock on the Habitat JAM website began its job—tracking the seventy-two hours we had to participate in the world’s largest Internet dialogue on sustainability (see the illustration on the previous page). The world showed up with participants from 158 countries.

Although Habitat JAM was my first jamming experience of this size, I’ve learned since that there was something very special about this one. It wasn’t just the opportunity or the technology or the people showing up that made this jamming experience stand out. There was a distinctive human care and consideration in every detail of how people were included; in how the event was produced; in the way it generated involvement and action around the world; in the way it was directed, facilitated, communicated, and documented.

Not one aspect of the whole event was ordinary. It was extraordinary. Gayle Moss, director of international marketing for Habitat JAM, and her team of committed people-focused innovators created an experience for everyone involved before, during, and after the event that honored the many dimensions of diversity.

Gayle Moss reflected on the experience in a commemorative cover story, “Connecting the World,” in *Backbone* magazine (November–December 2006).

GAYLE MOSS

Of the over 39,000 people who participated, many had never touched a computer, but through facilitation and interpretation their voices were heard. We had three makeshift Internet cafés in slums in Africa where facilitators would type on participants’ behalf. People were so passionate about getting their voices heard, they found ways to get it done.

Dr. Anna Tibaijuka, an Under-Secretary-General of the United Nations and Executive Director of the UN Human Settlements Programme (UN HABITAT), one of the visionary leaders for the Habitat JAM, shared her personal perspective about what she witnessed and experienced during the event:

ANNA TIBAIJUKA

Kenya had the second-highest number of registrants participating in the Habitat JAM. The fact that thousands have been willing to patiently wait in line, sometimes for hours, in order to be able to contribute to this debate has been a profoundly moving experience for me. The fact that the debate on slums has moved from the academic world to streets and cities such as Nairobi, Dakar, Cape Town and Mumbai, Rio, Lima, and Manila is in and of itself a powerful signal to world leaders on the need for concerted action.

Habitat JAM Results Achieved

The Habitat JAM was an outstanding success in terms of its inclusiveness and global reach. What is even more remarkable is the number of actionable ideas that came from it. More than four thousand pages of discussion and ideas were captured; six hundred ideas generated; and seventy actionable ideas chosen, researched, and summarized in a workbook and CD for the World Urban Forum III, an international UN HABITAT Event on Urban Sustainability held in Vancouver, Canada, in June 2006 with fourteen thousand people attending from around the world.

Charles Kelly summed up the miracle that took place:

World Urban Forum III (WUF) was unique, reflecting a rather embryonic process that UN HABITAT, under the leadership of Anna Tibaijuka, Executive Director, initiated to bring civil society into the decision-making and sharing about setting the agenda for UN HABITAT. WUF wasn't a policy conference this time. It was a gathering of practitioners from civil society and the private sector, exploring these questions: What things have worked? What have we learned? What mistakes have we made? How do we do things better?

The Rest of the Habitat JAM Story

The goal of the Habitat JAM from the beginning was “ideas to action.” The seventy actionable ideas chosen for the World Urban Forum III didn't stop there. One example is the Global Urban Sustainability Solutions Network (GUSSE; www.gusse.org), an online network designed to connect municipal government, NGOs, urban professionals, researchers, business, and citizens—a place where the world is invited to collectively discuss, review, and apply the best ideas for sustainable cities. Many of the ideas were not grand programs with huge budgets. Some were just simple, down-to-earth suggestions that emerged out of necessity to bring unlikely partners together.

I know the spirit of the Habitat JAM still lives. I led a forum called “Being a Good Neighbor.” I wanted to talk with others about what it meant to be “good neighbors” to one another. I did. Together, we built a list of attributes, explored creating a charter for cities, and shared ideas on how to keep momentum alive. Bill Tipton, project manager for Hewlett Packard (HP) and contributing author at the Global Dialogue Center, wrote me during the jam expressing what it meant to him to find the Habitat JAM accessible as a blind person: “This is so exciting it makes my hair stand up on end to see and talk with all people with disabilities online.”

The Good Neighbors dialogue made the top ten themes in the Humanity forum (see the illustration on the next page). A small group formed to

Habitatjam

1. Education
2. Youth Impact
3. Planning
4. Grassroots Women
- 5. Good Neighbors**
6. Children
7. Housing
8. Role of Government
9. Woman's Issues
10. Getting Youth Involved

Habitat JAM— Top Ten Themes

global,” connecting HP people across the world. Eric Hellman championed a dialogue at the World Urban Forum III on spirituality’s role in sustainability, and he continues to lead dialogues in his community. Avril Orloff turned her artistic talent to graphic illustration to enhance meaningful dialogues for community and business organizations. And me? One contribution was to create a commemorative visual learning exhibit at the Global Dialogue Center’s Knowledge Gallery, “We Came to the Habitat JAM: Celebrating Three Remarkable Days in History,” to share the experience with people around the world. Come visit at:

www.globaldialoguecenter.com/habitatjam

The second story, the Global Innovation Outlook, provides a compelling glimpse into the results of a diverse group of cross-industry thought leaders putting differences to work. It again proves people are the fastest way to innovation, leadership, and high performance.

turn talk into action. Two years later, many Good Neighbor actions have been taken. We meet about every other month for two hours via Skype from the United States and Canada. Early on, we made a decision that the best way we could promote the idea of “being a Good Neighbor” was to use our unique differences in our own spans of influence and support one another in whatever endeavors we chose.

Each of us took a different direction: Carol Roberts accepted an assignment with the U.S. Trade and Development Agency in Kenya related to information communication technology infrastructure. Bill Tipton accepted a leadership role for HP’s people with disabilities employee network group. Under his leadership, they’ve “gone

Putting Our Differences to Work Insights from the Good Neighbor Group Inspired by the Habitat JAM

It’s important to value and honor others as a way of valuing and honoring yourself.

—Carole Roberts,
United States

Despite our differences, we discovered we care about many of the same things.

—Eric Hellman, Canada

You need to create a caring, open environment for others to share unique ideas.

—Bill Tipton, United States

When hearts and minds are open, we find friends and allies everywhere!

—Avril Orloff, Canada

GLOBAL INNOVATION OUTLOOK

Imagine the power of 248 thought leaders coming together on four continents to talk with one another—a group representing 178 organizations from nearly three dozen countries and regions, in sectors as diverse as aerospace, agriculture, chemical, consumer packaged goods, education, electronics engineering, energy and utilities, environmental services, finance, food and produce, health care, industrial manufacturing, information technology, insurance, logistics, mining, shipping, sporting goods and apparel, telecommunications, and more. This phenomenon occurred at the second gathering in the fall of 2005 of IBM’s Global Innovation Outlook (GIO), which hosted a worldwide conversation about the changing nature of innovation.

Participants from over twenty-two industries met in San Francisco, Zurich, São Paulo, New Delhi, and Beijing. Together, in fifteen so-called deep dive sessions, thought leaders from businesses large and small, the public sector, academia, citizens’ groups, and the venture capital community explored emerging trends, challenges, and opportunities that affect business and society.

This global dialogue centered on three focus areas: the future of the enterprise, transportation, and the environment. Each discussion brought out far-reaching new ideas. It was clear that new ground was broken on every front. The insights emerged from a broad range of topics: from the power of social networks to innovation as a mindset; from small business in going global or finding a niche of success working locally, to a new generation of leaders being prepared for the distributed and virtual business landscape; from innovative transportation breakthroughs for emerging economies, allowing them to “leapfrog” Western nations, transcending old paradigms with new approaches, to noting that the needs of the environment depend largely on the changing behavior of individuals, business, and society—and this is just a small sampling.

One provocative topic that was up for discussion gives a glimpse into the richness of the conversation. It was a discussion around rethinking the idea of “the enterprise,” noting it may be outdated and the time ripe for a different approach. Other participants challenged the ideas of “employer”

Global Innovation Outlook—Fall 2005 Who Participated?

- 1 Academics and university leaders
- 2 Business partners and clients
- 3 Government and public sector officials
- 4 Independent experts and thought leaders
- 5 Industry analysts and consultants
- 6 NGOs and citizen interest groups
- 7 Venture capitalist community
- 8 Other thought leaders

Source: IBM GIO 2.0 report.

and “employee” as we know them today. Imagine something more flexible, perhaps a collection of loosely formed collaborators who come together on an “opportunity-by-opportunity” basis. From Latin America a bold new vision emerged. The suggestion was that the future might consist of a billion one-person “enterprises”—people moving freely from project to project as their skills and focus shift. In this brave new approach, the traditional enterprise might change its role to include orchestrating and facilitating individuals or groups. With this kind of provocative new thinking came the realization that such collaborative, contribution-based environments would also need new collaborative standards to foster and support such arrangements.

Besides being an exceptional example to fuel our discussion in this book, I find the Global Innovation Outlook particularly meaningful, because it demonstrates the willingness for a corporation to change its ways of conducting business and to also share this work openly with the rest of us. IBM’s Chairman and CEO, Sam Palmisano, admitted that the Global Innovation Outlook “marked new territory for IBM itself.” He goes on to share that, like many businesses, IBM had previously always conducted its own inside business forecasting. He described the value of these ongoing global dialogues that explore a wide range of topics in this way:

We learn from our interactions with one of the world’s richest and most diverse business ecosystems, and the members of that ecosystem benefit by coming together to tackle difficult issues and to learn from one another. It’s a new approach to problem-solving and it works—because the participants understand that their best ideas will only get better by being part of a larger conversation, where they can be debated, vetted, expanded and improved.

His closing words in the Global Innovation Outlook report echo what is also central to this book: “My hope is that you’ll find here provocative ideas about the nature of innovation, business transformation and societal change ideas that you can build on and make your own.” (See the Resources and Studies section for more information about the Global Innovation Outlook 2.0 report.)

Abraham Lincoln spoke his wisdom about what achievements like these two examples hold for the future, when he said, “That some achieve great success is proof to all that others can achieve it as well.”



“After years of telling corporate citizens to ‘trust the system,’ many companies must relearn instead to trust their people—and encourage their people to use neglected creative capacities in order to tap the most potent economic stimulus of all: *idea power*.”

—Rosabeth Moss Kanter
Author, *Change Masters*, and professor,
Harvard Business School

CHAPTER 6

Step 3—Action: Moving Forward

The primary action that will unleash the *idea power* in businesses and in society is dependent on putting our differences to work. As we are learning, for most of us this will require personal actions, including a shift in how we think, behave, communicate, take personal responsibility, and make decisions with everyone’s interests in mind.

Moving into action challenges the best of us, because action itself is a paradox. On one hand, it is the hallmark that has preceded every innovation, act of leadership, and accomplishment since the beginning of time. Think about one of your own achievements, great or small. Remember that first important step forward. It was freeing, wasn’t it? It felt good to be in motion. Heading in the right direction. *Doing*, at last!

On the other hand, at times even the most action-oriented find themselves temporarily paralyzed by the thought of taking action. Even very talented leaders sometimes get stuck. This happens many times after they have made a personal investment in taking a deep dive into the organization to assess where they are. It happens even after these skilled leaders miraculously pull off getting full sponsorship to proceed. Something happens. A hesitation. A panic over the feeling of vulnerability and risk of actually moving out, knowing you are holding the accountability for results. At this common occurrence, the excuses we come up with are often wild and many. This might not be a reality we openly discuss with others—or

admit even to ourselves out loud—but I’m sure you’ve felt it yourself. It’s that moment when your screen goes blank. The courage you bolstered up last week, convincing all your sponsors, disappears. The brilliance of the new people-focused strategy you designed and all those great ideas suddenly become suspect. The risk of mobilizing has great power over us and often helps us find a detour.

I was working once with a talented young manager, leading a business-directed change initiative with a focus on putting differences to work across a global organization. She had done an exceptional job in influencing bottom-line results over the period of a couple of years. The organization had reached a place where the senior leaders wanted to focus on one key issue—teaming up diverse sets of talent to better serve customers. They felt this creative concentration would boost customer relationships, while adding more value to their offering with a direct positive impact on business results. So they commissioned a group of senior managers to look closely at this specialized kind of collaboration and teamwork from the vantage points of their individual businesses across the world. The goal was to come up with a plan of action that put a new brand of excellence on teamwork to drive success. The senior leaders chosen were the “A-Team.” The day we spent together resulted in analyzing each of their businesses, doing some computer modeling, and spending time in dialogue around how to effectively put differences to work throughout the organization. The plans for moving out were solid by everyone’s admission. However, at the last minute, one leader suggested they pull together a “sub-task force” to study the issues and senior leaders’ plan of action to make sure it would head them in the right direction. There was immediate consensus. The sub-task force they pulled together was huge, representing all their organizations worldwide. It took a whole year for them to make their analysis of the senior leaders’ plan. When finished, they presented their findings, validating everything that had been concluded in the session that the senior managers had held one year earlier. The forward-thinking ideas were then *one year* behind in getting implemented.

Why is it that we so quickly take such a detour, rather than the bold action we know needs to take place? What is it that keeps us at the threshold of *doing* when it has so many benefits? All indicators point to one answer: Taking action requires more of us. It often requires paving a new path. Risking. Doing something we know little about or that maybe has never been done. So we often shelter ourselves with talk and task forces. Because the longer we talk, analyze, work to crystallize the perfect words to describe our unique issues (the bigger sounding and more complex, the better!), the longer we avoid having to *act*—having to figure out what to do, whom to trust—and then risk doing it.

There has always been the call for leaders to become more. The wisdom of Michelangelo sheds light on the true risk: “The greatest danger for most of us is not that our aim is too high and we miss it, but that it is too low and we reach it.”

However, what is different about the notion of *action* today from what it always has been? A quick look at the state of need in almost any direction suggests there is certainly no place for a leadership practice of *shrinking* that takes us on detours well off the direct path. We can see the urgency for innovation, leadership, and high performance in every field needing our attention. This is a time to accept that *we* are writing the rulebook for this new era. This requires that we pay attention, so we can gain understanding of how the landscape is fundamentally changing every day. Every action and behavior has to be considered so that it is strategically and tactically aligned, so we aren’t working against ourselves. Albert Einstein described three of the most valuable tools leaders at all levels have to “cut the brush” for new innovations. Leaders at all levels possess them:

“The only real valuable thing is *intuition*.”

“Logic will get you from A to B. *Imagination* will take you everywhere.”

“The only source of knowledge is *experience*.”

We have to be courageous to reach beyond the traditional—take the best with us from all we have learned—and develop a new sense of curiosity and openness that lies in the potential of people putting their differences to work to change the course of history in the marketplaces, workplaces, and communities across the world. We hold the responsibility to build a future, where meaningful innovation in our respective products, services, and means of collaboration is governed by mutualism being the final arbiter. Imagine what we could do if leaders at all levels, in thousands of organizations, across the world, put their intuitions, imaginations, and experience to work at their full potential. Now, there is a vision!

RUMOR HAS IT, WE’RE READY TO TRUST OURSELVES

There are more and more indications that a growing mass of pioneering leaders wants to take responsibility and rely on our own knowledge, know-how, and judgment. Dr. Peter J. Nicholson, President of the Council of Canadian Academics, set the stage for us in a captivating message he delivered to The Fields Institute for Research in Mathematical Sciences in June 2006 entitled “Harnessing the Wisdom of Crowds: The New Contours of

Intellectual Authority.” What he says speaks to all of us across disciplines, cultures, and generations. He sums up the realities of a new world we can’t ignore. He also reveals how he fits into the picture and invites us to change with him, while imagining the promise of our choice to do so:

People today are much less prepared to defer to the experts. But at the same time, we are being swamped with data and information—a glut that cries out for analysis and summary. So there’s a dilemma. Who to turn to? Increasingly the answer is—Well, to ourselves of course, as individuals empowered by a world wide web that has rapidly evolved into a *social* medium. More specifically, it is a medium that today supports *massively distributed collaboration* on a global scale that—we can only hope—will help us make sense of it all.

Let me say at the outset that I am not particularly comfortable with the future I foresee. I am, after all, a charter member of the “old guard” and will never really belong to the new. But I am also an optimist and a realist. The world has changed—and so must we.

Technology and the Internet are expanding the possibilities we have to put our differences to work in empowering new ways. As we learned in Part 1 with the Habitat JAM story, both differences and technology are accelerating the influence of our actions. New possibilities continue to unfold at breakneck speed. Are you on board yet?

“By 2008, almost 60% of organizations are likely to have some sort of social media program in place.” These were the findings according to a well-documented 2007 global study, “How to Use Social Media to Engage Employees,” conducted by Melcrum, a global research and training organization with a focus on internal communications (www.melcrum.com). The study provides an inspiring overview of the state of social media and how organizations are using it to connect with their constituents. It includes inspiring case studies from companies like Microsoft, IBM, and the World Bank headquartered in the United States; ING Group, BT, and Unilever in the United Kingdom; Atlana in Germany; and Nortel and the National Research Council Canada.

Web 2.0— What Is It?

Online technologies and practices that people use to share opinions, insights, experiences, and perspectives with each other. Social media can take many different forms, including text, images, audio and video. Popular social mediums, include blogs, vlogs, message boards, podcasts, and wikis.

—Wikipedia

What is exciting about this Web 2.0 evolution is that there is an energy that comes with this new sense of freedom and connection—and companies are rapidly

and wildly opening up new possibilities for collaboration we never imagined. This isn't something I've read about or studied in the distance. I am hooked myself and have been pioneering new ideas in virtual space for over a decade with our team, our Global Dialogue Center community, and also with customers. I heard a keynote speaker say not too long ago, "We've got to spend more time 'knee to knee' in dialogue." At the time, I was just opening the Global Dialogue Center, our online virtual gathering place for people throughout the world. At the time, I truly had no idea what was in store. More importantly, in just a few years, I marvel how social media in its various forms has transformed the idea of dialogue "knee to knee." I couldn't have imagined how it would change work and life as I have known it, while deepening my ability to serve customers and communicate, collaborate, innovate, lead, and reach for high performance in a whole new dimension.

THE GREATER IBM CONNECTION

One example of companies mobilizing to put differences to work is one of my new online communities: The Greater IBM Connection, a business and social collaboration network for IBMers, past and present. It is an exciting place bubbling with new ideas and opportunities for innovation. There are multiple ways to connect through Web 2.0 technologies, including its own IBM wiki, news, reports and briefings, a special group message center, a blog, plus opportunities for collaboration on innovative projects to make a difference. It also has a magnificent online 3D complex that is being built by IBMers at the Greater IBM Islands of Innovation on Second Life. It is an amazing place. Through Debbe Dae, my avatar at Second Life (depicted in the illustration), I attend events, meet other IBMers all over the world, and continue to see innovation from a whole new perspective.

Whether it's attending a meeting in 3D or some other kind of a gathering of early explorers of this new Web-based dimension, you can't help but see and feel the potential



IBM Innovation Center at Second Life.

Debbe Dae, a.k.a. Debbe Kennedy, watching an innovation video.

for bringing talent together across the world. It is a more hip IBM, more open, with the friendliest people. You can sense that it is a “simmering pot” with a hearty soup being made with nearly unlimited potential for nourishing, nurturing, and engaging talented, innovative minds. In a very personal blog message on the Greater IBM Blog, Flor Estevez, Operations Manager and Producer for the Greater IBM Connection, shared the story of how the Greater IBM Connection was created. It started first by communicating with alumni, listening to what they wanted and responding. The ideas took the notion of an “alumni network” to a whole new collaborative adventure inside and outside IBM.

FLOR ESTEVEZ

This community didn’t “just happen,” you know. Before we launched the Greater IBM Connection, we hired a research firm and traveled to five areas of the world, asking former IBMers, like many of you, whether you would find value in a social and business network based on your IBM affiliation.

One of the first things we learned: you don’t want to be considered alumni. You said you still felt an important emotional tie to the company and its people, your old colleagues, and maybe some still working here. So, we aren’t an “alumni” group; we’re Greater IBMers.... I love it when we correspond and talk; it makes everything feel more human.

As organizations and communities are pioneering such new ways to engage and connect with others, you and I—all of us—have to move out with a new boldness, consciousness, and openness in our actions, big and small. We have to find our own creative ways to put differences to work. We have to step up our curiosity and be willing to explore new ideas, to talk with one another through technology and other forms of collaboration that bring us together.

As we make our way further into the twenty-first century, two truths put the spotlight on the mobilizing force of action: The front runners will be those who *act* now. The organizations that will become the new breed of champions in their respective fields will be those that have built diverse and inclusive environments brimming with differences that reflect the people, the markets, the skill set needs, while mirroring the communities they serve. They will be organizations positioned to understand, relate to, and respond to changing needs, cultures, relationships, and situations that will be very different from what we can possibly even imagine at this time. All of this will be greatly influenced by sweeping changes in how we connect, collaborate, and solve problems.

Dr. Nicholson helps us set the frame for the action by describing the context symbolizing the new paradigm we all are experiencing: “This new

framework is shaped by technology—primarily information and communications technology; by globalization; by post-industrial affluence; and by a culture which, as never before, celebrates and empowers the *individual*.”

*Then you better start swimmin’...
For the times they are a-changin’.*

—Bob Dylan

THE FASTEST WAY IDEAS FOR STEP 3—ACTION



Organizational Snapshot Prompter

Before filling your mind with others’ ideas, take a quick organizational snapshot. It will give more meaning to the best practices stories, strategy, and tactical ideas that follow (see the Resources and Studies section).

As you get moving, it is important to emphasize that one of the powerful realities about putting our differences to work is that doing so is a paradox. At first glance, it might appear that what is meant is for us to all join together in a fest of consensus. It does call for us to come together, but to the contrary, it invites us to arrive maintaining all that makes us unique—our own brand of diversity—including our thinking styles, approach to problems, experiences, intellect, views of the world, values, and our distinctive creative minds. This point is affirmed by James Surowiecki in his book *The Wisdom of Crowds*: “Groups are smartest when everyone in them is acting as much like an individual as possible... but in organizations there is a real tendency to try and stress consensus... which makes groups less intelligent.” With this reminder as a backdrop, as you prepare to move into the action step of putting differences to work, remember the goal is to bring out the best in people—new thinking, new ideas, knowledge, and know-how—and, at best, to help one another.

The magic of mutualism is in the combining of elements that are very different to create new ideas that offer great advantage for all the participants. Don’t forget: Without diversity, mutualism is impossible!

—Joel A. Barker

Futurist, filmmaker, and author,
Wealth, Innovation & Diversity

What could we learn about action, innovation, and putting differences to work from an individual leader, who saw new possibilities and was willing to brave new territory in virtual space worldwide, long before *Web 2.0* was ever coined as a term? What could we learn from a leader willing to devulge a mistake and the lessons learned? What could we learn from a corporate executive turned small-business owner about learning to trust people? The following stories serve as inspiring examples from three passionate leaders—innovators in their own right—who have made putting differences to work a key driver of their success.

Best Practice—Corporation

The budding of innovation began shortly after 2000. Dr. Sidalia G. Reel, Director of Diversity and Inclusion for HP, was an early trailblazer in using virtual space with the intention of putting differences to work across HP. She was then Manager of Diversity Education at HP, with a well-known, dynamic personal flair for bringing a wide range of diverse people together and creating memorable experiences for everyone. She was on a mission to explore creative possibilities to expand HP's diversity learning portfolio beyond the traditional awareness classroom programs. I had the good fortune to be working with the organization as it continued to expand the influence of HP's diversity and inclusion initiative as a key driver of business success across the company. We teamed up for what became, unexpectedly, a thrilling “magic carpet ride” into a new frontier that changed us and a lot of things. It required us to put our differences to work, so we could enable a whole bunch of people across HP to do the same thing.

It began as HP's virtual classroom was beginning to catch on for presentations and meetings. After attending a few pioneering training adventures held by other trailblazers, I realized it was clear there was something there, and Sid Reel saw it, too. It was the opportunity to take the basic virtual classroom and bring it to life, creatively changing the human experience—from a one-way, “mute your phone and listen” passive experience, to a center for meaningful, interactive dialogue across the world at HP.

Instead of getting all wrapped up in complicated plans, we decided to follow the advice of Aristotle: “The things we need to learn, we learn by doing,” a motto the Diversity and Inclusion organization had adopted to forge other new paths. Sid led the way by landing dedicated virtual space. We built a simple vision and plan: (1) build a distinctively branded virtual space to give it significance; (2) create a meaningful one-hour experience, using all the bells and whistles that the virtual classroom offered and engaging people from the start; and (3) inviting HP people to attend an interactive

“open house” in three time zones across the world to introduce the opening of the “Global eSpace: HP’s Center for Cross-Cultural Dialogue and Invention.” Sid personally took over development of the content, getting the word out and handling the logistics. It was fun to watch her pioneering leadership passions at work, cutting the brush to develop this new idea herself—no delegation here.

There’s no substitute for hard work.

—Thomas A. Edison

I took on the branding and development of the dazzling slides we agreed would be used to set the tone for something new and different—and we collaborated on the tiniest of details.

Sid wanted to ensure the first-ever dialogue event in virtual space was a role model of inclusion. So it wasn’t a surprise when she invited HP’s Diversity and Inclusion webmaster, Paul Schoemaker, to step outside his job description to join us as one of the facilitators for the *maiden voyage* to the Global eSpace and back. How could he resist? Paul took on some key parts, also adding his male voice to the mix. The blastoff to three time zones was like being in a virtual spaceship.

SIDALIA REEL

The first event can only be described as elating. I remember the surprise of watching some fifty, sixty, one hundred people log on from all over the world in an instant, managers and employees, coming to learn, share their ideas, and see what the new Global eSpace was all about. We used a beautiful world map to have participants show us where they were. Now this practice is quite common, but at the time, it was new, and there was something so moving about seeing all those dots show up on the map, representing people who wanted to connect with one another—and they did. People fully participated in a meaningful dialogue, exploring the questions, and weighing in on polls, and then spreading the word for others to check it out in our other events in different time zones that same day.

I loved observing in others the moment they realized the power of the eSpace. It was diversity and inclusion at its best with different perspectives, languages, and dialects and even learning from local colloquial phrases from across the world. The one I remember was a woman from the UK, sharing she thought the Global eSpace virtual open dialogue added a “bit of ginger” to the conversation. The whole concept transcended physical space to create a level of intimacy in the moment that sometimes is not achieved when a group of strangers are in a room together.

One of the assets of virtual dialogue is that it is a great equalizer. There is anonymity for those who need it and the opportunity to speak up and be heard. Today, the eSpace is an active place for dialogue. The advances in technology have greatly enhanced its capability—and we keep getting better at using it. Few remember its beginning, but it remains with me—a time when a small group of people at HP opened up a pathway across the world for us to learn more about one another.

KEY POINTS: SIDALIA REEL'S STORY

- ▶ Pioneering efforts in putting differences to work are not always recognized when the ground is broken; it takes time for new ideas to reach their potential.
- ▶ Virtual space is a new frontier still unfolding with powerful tools to connect us across the world. You can get a lot accomplished together in a short time, involving everyone. “Learning while doing” accelerates talk into real action.
- ▶ The building and launching of HP’s Global eSpace is a shining example of the Five Distinctive Qualities of Leadership put into action. It began with diversity as an organizational priority. It enabled everyone to get to know others and their differences with rich communication. Personal responsibility was the fuel to make this experiment one that endured; it was a win-win-win for the people, the organization, and rippling influences across the world.

The best leaders find new paths and set the tone, the example, and the priorities. The next story shows how a leader’s actions can have less-than-favorable implications but still pave the path for putting differences to work that bring valuable lessons.

Best Practice—Corporation

When we least expect it, people show up to have a lasting imprint on your leadership growth. For me, it started with an invitation to participate in a first-time-ever event designed to put differences to work sponsored by the Academy of Management. The academy called together twenty academics and twenty practitioners to spend a weekend exploring innovative possibilities for the future of management. It was a powerful gathering of people meeting at the verge of their differences. The two groups couldn’t have been more different with, what seemed initially, a wide unspoken crevasse of

preconceived notions separating us from one another. At first, we kept our distance, staying in our familiar groups. Through a rich dialogue and exploration of ideas, we came together and did remarkable work.

The special meeting was held at the world-renowned GTE training center and hosted by Jerrold V. Tucker, then Assistant Vice President, Learning Solutions, GTE Service Corporation. I didn't personally talk with Jerry until the last twenty minutes of this remarkable experience, but I had witnessed him in action. Since then, I've learned he is a pioneer of mutualism. He lives it in his coaching, sharing, and belief in and care about others' success and well-being.

When I was writing my Diversity Breakthrough! Series, he shared a story that has had a profound influence on me and others. It is a story in which many have seen themselves, because it mirrors happenings in some organizations today. What is unique is his willingness to tell the truth, expose the unintended consequences of straying from our values, as well as sharing three lessons learned from bolting into action and later having the opportunity to start again.

JERROLD TUCKER

Sometimes our major triumphs in leading change in organizations emerge from painful lessons. Often the most important learning comes from unexpected teachers. So it was for me at GTE's management development center. The center was out of control by any business measurement at the time. GTE had commissioned a study by a major consultant to assess what to do. The recommendations were in. I was brought in to turn the situation around—to implement the recommendations from the consultant.

On my first day, as Chief Learning Officer, we laid off nineteen people. If I had to measure the way I handled it, I would have to say it was poor. The methodology was to call people up to one of the conference rooms. The message was "Your job has been eliminated." Then we directed them into the next room to hear about their HR benefits, followed by security escorting them out the door. It was a terrible process. Most of all, the recommendations from the consultant didn't fit GTE. It is a family-oriented organization. Laying people off in this manner was not part of our culture. Afterward, the rest of the organization was paralyzed in fear. We reduced the budget. We reduced head count—but instead of making improvements, we set the organization back further.

This mistake took about two years to fix. We started by first changing our focus to customer service and making sure every person understood their important role in our success—every dishwasher, curriculum developer, waiter, administrator, housekeeper, manager, and faculty member. We tried simple, creative ideas, like job swap

days, so at all levels we understood what and how we each contributed. What we did best was unleash the talents of our diverse team of people, a dynamic group representing over fifteen different countries and cultures. Together, they created one of the premier management development centers in the world. There were many leadership lessons learned. Three stand out: Listen to input, but decide for yourself what is right to do. Preserve human dignity in all situations. Put your trust in people, they have the answers.

KEY POINTS: JERROLD TUCKER'S STORY

- ▶ Sometimes major triumphs in putting our differences to work rise out of painful actions and lessons learned. Listen to input, but decide for yourself what is right to do.
- ▶ Preserve human dignity in all situations.
- ▶ Put your trust in people; they have all the answers.

Best Practice—Small Business Entrepreneur

When I first met Charles Blodgett, landscape artist and owner of the Burgundy Group, I was sitting across the desk from him at IBM. He was my new boss. I was considered an up-and-coming young leader. To me, he was a kind of wild and crazy guy with a bowtie. He was intense, spirited, and knew the business down to the tiniest detail. He was also fun, suspect of your every move and intention, and operated with a contentious style with everyone. Being a brother with four sisters, he also took an interest in me and earnestly tried to serve as mentor. He challenged me, chided me, inspired me, and taught me things about being an innovator I've carried with me all these years. I learned more about putting differences to work under his leadership than from anyone in my career—not so much because he was exceptionally good at it, but because it was necessary for survival.

Much later, I worked for him in a second tour of duty, and again, he taught me the value of meeting at the intersection of difference to drive the highest levels of excellence. Since he left IBM, he discovered new meaning in putting differences to work as a small business entrepreneur. I had the chance to talk with him about his personal leadership transformation and what he has learned in the process. Sometimes the action we need to take to reach others different from us is first personal. Chuck teaches us that as leaders change, that evolution opens the way for us to engage people at a whole new level:

CHARLES BLODGETT

Sometimes the greatest learning comes the second time around. A few years ago, after retiring from IBM, I started a second career. My company is located near Atlanta. The Burgundy Group specializes in creative, innovative landscaping. After an experience I had working to build houses for the poor in Mexico with my church, I decided that my new business would employ Mexicans who are new to the United States, who were struggling to support families.

Over time, I recognized how valuable this experience has been for me as a person. I have always been a great talker, and suddenly I had to learn to listen more and communicate differently with my employees, who spoke only Spanish. Without having all the verbal communication, I find that the outcome is even better. There is a great deal more eye contact between manager and employee—and a feeling that you are in sync. You have to really pay attention to each other. You learn to convey you are pleased with what they are doing or to read whether they are trying to please you. You find understanding without talking about it. In a short period, a very strong trust is built. Somehow, we soon understand how we benefit each other by what we do. I provide an opportunity and good working conditions. They do excellent work. It doesn't take long to become simpatico.

As an IBM manager, there was never an assumed trust on my part. As an employee, you had to earn it from me—and because I was the manager, I expected people to come to me. In this business, I have had to trust people because I can't talk about what I want or always be with them with several jobs going at one time. In my entire IBM career, I was incapable of just letting people go—creating a common understanding of our mission and then allowing people to do their best. I always had to be in control—or wanted more control—or thought my ideas were better. Maybe the change has come from a combination of things. I've mellowed. I've learned people work best if given some freedom. Also, my employees have been great teachers. They taught me to trust.

KEY POINTS: CHARLES BLODGETT'S STORY

- ▶ Effectively putting differences to work is a human process built on trust; sometimes the first action you take begins by changing yourself.
- ▶ Getting to know people requires more than words; you have to find ways to synchronize your differences to reach for new levels of excellence together.
- ▶ *Mutualism* as the final arbiter for your actions and decisions creates a win-win-win: You win. I win. The customer wins with rippling influences to others all around you.

In all three stories, we can see the Five Distinctive Qualities of Leadership shine through the actions of each of these leaders. As we all work to carve out our important contributions in the global community of the twenty-first century, we are its pioneers. The foundation we lay for putting our differences to work in creating diverse, inclusive organizations, workplaces, marketplaces, and communities across the world will indeed shape our own lives and work, as well as the lives and work of others now—and those who follow us.

As the possibilities for innovation, leadership, and high performance become clearer, futurist Joel Barker's insight describes the nature of this pioneer's journey. At one poignant moment in his film *Paradigm Pioneers*, he is standing at Independence Rock in Wyoming, revisiting the one-third point going west on the Oregon Trail. The names carved into the granite echo the courage of the pioneers who opened the way for all of us. Joel concludes, "It's one thing to sit in your easy chair and watch the future being conceived in the distance. It is quite another thing to load up your wagons and help in the labor of its birth."

ACTION: **Strategy and Tactical Ideas**

Here are three ideas to inspire your action that can be cultivated both virtually and in person. Together they demonstrate how simple ideas can be, how they can be integrated into day-to-day business with a productive purpose, while planting the seeds for building relationships, developing people and helping them practice putting differences to work.

- ▶ **Keep tactics simple.** The best-laid plans get changed. Much time is wasted in analyzing and creating elaborate plans for creating diverse, inclusive organizations. Elaborate plans often produce disappointing results. Like any business planning effort, you can only focus on a few actionable goals at a time. Select two or three specific goals, establish a doable target date(s) for completion (a little stretch is good), and put your heart into achieving them. Don't allow failure to be an option. Review what you learn. Do more. This approach works for many reasons. What you can see, you can achieve. What's doable is not overwhelming. What you put your heart into achieving remains a priority. Action results in progress. Your success in meeting a few specific goals will build your confidence and fuel action for next steps—what you need to do next will become clear in the process.

- ▶ **Make it *cool* to get involved!** Ask the people to help you figure out how to put differences to work more effectively in your organization. Use the Five Distinctive Qualities of Leadership to set the framework for their thinking and action. If leaders are engaged and involved themselves, it sends a message of importance. By involving others, you accelerate the acceptance process, and having a united group mobilizing is a powerful force.
- ▶ **Learn to listen; learn to trust.** Committed people get involved. So how do you foster commitment? A Saturn assembly team, when asked, “What’s the first thing you would tell a boss to do to get commitment?” reportedly responded in unison, “Tell them to listen.” To keep things interesting, use a variety of different formats. Here are a few ideas: (1) Try one-on-one and small-group conversations. A little personal time with people goes a long way in helping you know people better, imprinting positive messages, and—most important—listening to what they have to say. (2) Incorporate social media into your people communications plans (e.g., virtual meetings with you, blogs, and forums). These new technologies are proving to have great benefits for improving employee engagement, fostering internal collaboration, building internal communication, and creating two-way communications. This may be a new avenue for you, but over time, we’ll all become masters of new forms of communication that make it possible for us to put differences to work. (3) Set up telephone hot lines that offer both anonymous and two-way replies.

ACTION: **A Call to Action**

“The journey of a thousand miles begins at your feet.”

—Lao Tzu

A big part of putting our differences to work begins with a first action. The unique translation above of Lao Tzu’s well-known wisdom reminds us and also places the responsibility where it belongs—with each of us.

One of the most meaningful gifts that technology has afforded to those working in virtual space is that it sometimes allows us to take that action step that connects us across the world with people we were destined to *meet*. With Wendy Luhabe, Chancellor of the University of Johannesburg, our meeting was just a brush by one another in passing. She was a keynote

at the ec06 Conference in Zurich, Switzerland. The Global Dialogue Center sponsored and hosted a preconference online dialogue on corporate responsibility and socially responsible investing with conference keynotes. Wendy was not able to attend, but we connected through email, finding common ground. I learned of her remarkable record of achievement and influence as what she terms a “social entrepreneur” with honors, including being named one of the fifty leading women entrepreneurs in the world in 1999 and recognized by the World Economic Forum as a Global Leader for Tomorrow. She also authored a wonderful book entitled *Defining Moments: Experiences of Black Executives in South Africa’s Workplace*. It is from this contribution that I draw for this call to action.

In the front of her book, Wendy wrote a personal note to every reader in her own hand. It begins:

I offer this book to help you appreciate that as we embrace the knowledge economy, what will really give substance to it are the personal and life experiences of each of us. They offer a perspective that moves the world to an economy that has a human face, an economy where the value of people, not just their minds, matters. . . . Our real value lives in our hearts.

As I have taken in her message and the stories she shares in this work, it has again caused me to sort through a lifetime of actions, big and small, in many aspects of my life and work. I see a common pattern in the experience of fulfilling a goal. There were visions of success that ignited passion. There was a lot of hard work, learning, risk taking, and mistakes. There were supporters greatly appreciated—*of every sort and type*—and dissenters to convince across many dimensions of diversity. There was always a firm belief in possibilities in the face of passing adversity. There was a deep sense of drive to make a difference. In the end there was the thrill of victory but rarely a cheering crowd. It was, instead, a moment in time when things felt really good inside. In the end, fulfilling a goal was most often a new beginning, not a finish. There were always new hopes that led to the next challenge.

I felt this pattern in the stories in Wendy Luhabe’s book. One case study, entitled “Investing in People,” really touched me. The insightful closing message, although written for South Africa’s leaders, speaks loudly to us all across the world, as we work together to make our important contributions in putting differences to work for the good of all:

Ultimately, as human beings, we are more inspired by witnessing our own people achieve levels of success that seemed unattainable. These are the pioneers and every society has them. Pioneers can have two entirely different effects on a society. They can unlock momentum

that motivates a greater number of people to success despite obstacles. Alternatively, they can make people less capable and more inadequate. The challenge for us in South Africa [and nations everywhere in the world] is to cultivate a culture where greater numbers of us are inspired and encouraged by the success of others to achieve our own, to make ourselves willing mentors, coaches and sponsors for those who follow in our footprints.

It was in this reflection of South Africa's leaders that I realized, if we could meet and talk about your experiences of taking action, we would also find a similar pattern. In fact, if we stopped to examine the most meaningful actions that have changed the world, we would also find common ground. Why? Because this is the journey of problem solvers, change leaders, and difference makers, past and present. *Keep going!* Your organization and the world need you.

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