

## PAMPHLET 74

### THE ERA OF THE QUICK FIX IS THE END NEAR?

By

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The lesson is this: personal comfort is not the only thing worth seeking. I have the will to suffer. I do have that. There are no shortcuts.

Lance Armstrong

Cancer survivor

5-time Tour de France winner

Research shows that the maximum life expectancy of corporations can be in the hundreds of years but the actual sustainability of Fortune 500 companies pales at less than 50 years. This discrepancy between potential and actual life expectancy models the worst of any species on the planet and reflects an inability to adapt. Our ongoing pattern of cosmetic, addictive, and quick-fix personal and organizational change efforts ensure that this discrepancy will endure. It has been the decade of "fixes that fail."

We have an attention deficit society. We like the excitement of beginnings and endings but pay little attention to what occurs in-between those moments. We want change to be instant, painless, and to come from the outside. We want a fad, a program, a miracle, a technique, a magic pill to make painful symptoms go away--quickly. We want shortcuts. People who will sell those things to us abound.

We want to lose weight, fix our marriages, change people and organizations, and transform nations without thoughtfulness, difficult choices, commitments, and personal accountability. We often deny the emotions that dictate our choices and make mindless decisions.

We spend billions annually on fads, diets, divorces, reorganizations, change programs, geographical moves, and leadership development. We exhaust ourselves to create the appearance of progress and to avoid the real work of change that

endures. We live in a world where we find it easier to conform than rebel, easier to destroy than create, easier to run than to face ourselves, easier to fight passively than cooperate authentically, and easier to suppress symptoms than create real solutions to problems. This is not a world that will create a sustainable future.

Unlike the champion Lance Armstrong, we do not want to suffer or sacrifice—not even a little. And we will quickly attack anyone who threatens to make us suffer—even a little bit. Personal comfort seems to be the only thing worth seeking for so many. The quick-fix demonstrates that doing what feels good can quickly lead to feeling bad. Where did we get the idea that we are entitled to feel good all the time?

Change programs--the Prozac of the times for people and organizations—medicate and distract us. So many inside and outside of organizations want to be entertained, are intellectually lazy, cannot focus on the long-term, and live disconnected from their deepest purpose and highest values in the addictive pursuit of relief that only increases their anxiety.

Our fixes offer to help us. Instead they make us act against our self-interest and become addictions. Quick-fixes endure because they ask so little of us. The quick fix acts as a fatal attraction in times of chaos and uncertainty when impatience and the desire for relief from anxiety can overpower good judgment

Life isn't about quick-fixes, mediocre performance, being entertained, and living in fear of losing a purposeless job producing and selling the many worthless products that clutter our malls, minds, and attention. The constant purchase of the quick-fix in all areas of life makes villains rich. The naive get fat, sick, tired, and laid-off.

We do not find happiness in quick-fixes—personally or professionally. We need to wise up. Quick-fixes may be our nature and are taught by our culture, but with mindfulness, consciousness, and responsibility we can evolve beyond them. We can choose to act differently than we do and evolve in the process. We must if we want to be a sustainable species.

In the September 2003 issue of *FastCompany* magazine, James Champy, co-author of *Re-engineering the Corporation*, wrote: “Many managers, including people in very high places, just don't seem to have any ambition or much of an appetite to do something big within their companies.”

One of those Mr. Champy sees as ambitionless wrote to me:

Death of spirit is the casualty of the war I fight. Alone. The battle for the heart is a subliminal, insidious, solitary battle. The will of the many is slowly being subverted to serve the collective greed of the many. I am a warrior in this struggle while, simultaneously, I am a mercenary for my opponents. So, thus, I am at war with myself. I have nearly lost my voice.

Such despair emerges from a decade of mindless and addictive, quick-fix change efforts. When he asks, "Where has all the ambition gone," Mr. Champy asks the wrong question. Rather than blame the employees who themselves collude with leadership that diminishes them, institutional leaders, consultants, academics, and the dumbed-down business press (all colluders in their own ways) should look in the mirror and ask: "What is it in our leadership that creates such despair in the people in our organizations?" Employees might ask themselves: "Why do I work with and for people who do not inspire my best efforts?"

Mr. Champy wrote that many leaders are almost cynical about new ideas. I don't think they are "almost" cynical. I believe they are deeply cynical. And why would they not be after the disappointments of the past decade? At some point mistrust grows so great that people will not believe anyone.

But the cynics are in error to reject new ideas. The fault lies not in the ideas or the theories; the fault resides in the lust for the quick-fix, the desire to get something for nothing and to be rewarded for laziness. And the responsibility for this deep sense of entitlement lies within the leaders themselves. More than new ideas (we haven't understood and used the ones we have) we need selfless, authentic, and courageous actions that connect ideas to reality and to a vision for the future of the team, organization, nation, and/or world. Then we will feel alive and ambitious.

People do not lack the natural drive to bring forth their potential; after a decade of addictive and failed change efforts capped by corporate corruption many are in the despair of meaningless--the precursor to renewal and deeper authenticity. More and more people each day are ready to go within and do the hard work of leadership.

To truly live is to accept life's challenges and jump into our potentials and possibilities, in the world or within us, aware there will be fear, pain, and anxiety and no guarantees of outcome. Our purpose is to strive to achieve noble and idealistic goals despite our fear, anxiety, and imperfections. Our choices should help us learn, add meaning to our lives, and bring the most humanity to life. Through our choices we change the texture of life, for better or worse.

We need to ask more of ourselves. Robert Greenleaf wrote that the tragedy of our education today is that we teach easy solutions--be complacent and have peace of mind. "No," he wrote, "wrestling is the issue; facing the challenge is the issue."

Our challenge today is to stand up to evil and look death, danger, and ourselves in the eye. Alive people live brave and are responsible for themselves. We can choose to seize the opportunity to feel new emotions, to be better than mediocre, and to learn and achieve new goals. We can live with some measure of abandon and artistry and be thoughtful and reflective at the same time. It is time to ask more of ourselves. Why would we not do this?

This is the true joy in life, the being used for a purpose recognized by yourself as a mighty one; the being thoroughly worn out before you are thrown on the scrap heap; the being a force of Nature instead of a feverish, selfish little clod of ailments and grievances complaining that the world will not devote itself to making you happy.

George Bernard Shaw

Can we evolve beyond the quick-fix? Will the mythical "Hundredth Monkey" (see Pamphlet 4) soon tip the scales of our culture? Have all the failed change efforts produced the insight, knowledge, and willingness to do the hard work of life and leadership? Do we have the will to suffer in pursuit of our deepest authenticity? Will a renaissance of relationships evolve our world? I don't know. I hope so. There are no shortcuts.