

innovation
begins
here.

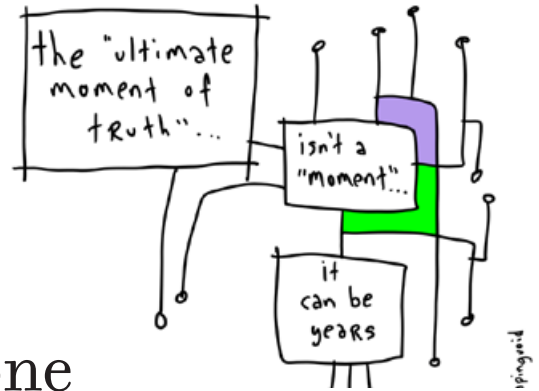
How to Become the Hero in the Hero's Journey
Brian Solis



@gapingvoid

Come gather 'round people
Wherever you roam
And admit that the waters
Around you have grown
And accept it that soon
You'll be drenched to the bone
If your time to you
Is worth savin'
Then you better start swimmin'
Or you'll sink like a stone
For the times they are a-changin'.

—BOB DYLAN



Take a moment to go back through Dylan's words. Feel what it is he's really saying. Picture the person to whom he's speaking. Imagine the look on their face as they wonder whether or not they believe these lyrics will help them. Do you see it? The connection? The gap between those who need to change and those who realize they need to change?

You're probably smirking because you already visualize the fate of those who stand in the way of progress. Or maybe you're sitting back and wondering what this means for you, your friends, and family—what it means for your future. Either way, this is a time when there are supposed to be more questions than answers. It gives us purpose. And if we do not strive to answer them, someone else will set out to uncover the path forward. Maybe it's easier to leave it alone. Perhaps this really is a puzzle for someone else to solve. But I don't believe that you accept that to be true.

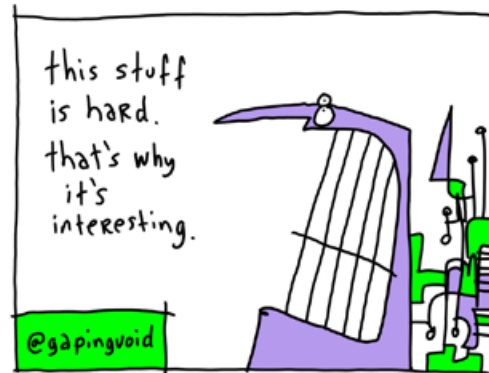
Dylan's lyrics were gifted to the world in 1964. Almost 50 years later, this message still rings true. Think about the meaning of his words as they apply to the challenges you face today, and then take a breath.

Yes, times they are a changin'. The words carry a message that's personal, and often brutal and humbling, when accepted. But, this... this is our time to not only learn whether or not we will sink or swim, but to set out to do something more, something amazing, something transformative.

Welcome. You've officially arrived at the intersection of reality and possibility.

Take comfort. You are not alone. There are many standing with you at this junction. But each of you has his or her own path to follow, and what you do next is yours and only yours to define. While that may sound either trite, abstract, or both, the future does in fact begin with you and will be defined by you.

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Question Everything

These are disruptive times indeed. You get it. I get it. So why is it so difficult for others not just to see, but to believe to the point where taking action is a natural reaction? Perhaps more is said in the inaction of today's leaders, and perhaps this is a dilemma wrought with a lack of evolved perspective or vision. Think about it for a moment.

The reality is that a majority of today's world and business leaders come from a very different time—literally. While they may have adapted to certain changes over the years, there are those coming up behind them that are now old enough to make a significant economic impact and they have only known the world the way it is today.

Consumer behavior is changing because of technology's impact on what we hear, learn, think and do... all without ever having to leave a screen. Innovation is the root of a new disruptive gene that spawns from digital DNA and it's connecting societies, demanding new media literacy, amplifying consumer sentiment, and increasing expectations. We're becoming an entitled, impatient, yet informed civilization. And the irony is that institutions, governments, educational institutions, and the very things our forefathers built to organize and improve our lives are now outdated, broken, or in desperate need of reinvention. We either don't yet know how to do

this, or we do and intentionally downgrade evolution and transformation toward lower priorities in favor of shorter-term concerns and outcomes.

I suppose it's natural to look at the world from the comfort of our personal pulpit. The throne from which we sit offers a tremendous vantage point for what should be done differently. You see it. You feel it. I'm asking you to harness your opinions, sentiment, belief, and vision. Take this perspective, take a stand on your platform, and be the change you wish to see in the world.

Someone has to take the lead, right? If not you, then who?

You. Are. The. Change. Agent.

I believe everything starts with questioning what is so we can become to explore the possibilities of what could be. For example, the saying, "be the change you wish to see in the world," sounds familiar right? These are the sagacious words of Gandhi, which serve as an aide-mémoire that change begins with you. While these words are significant, they do not belong to Gandhi; at least not in those exact words.

Brian Morton, director of the graduate program in fiction at Sarah Lawrence College, investigated the sources of many famous quotes that we often share and see and the result was nothing short of awakening.

Sure enough, it turns out there is no reliable documentary evidence for the quotation. The closest verifiable remark we have from Gandhi is this: “If we could change ourselves, the tendencies in the world would also change. As a man changes his own nature, so does the attitude of the world change towards him. ... We need not wait to see what others do.”

As Gandhi really did say, we need not wait to see what others do. And so, it begins.

The Big Wheel of Disruption

I make my living by studying disruptive technology and its impact on business and society. My quest is to learn how customer decision-making evolves and to surface the nuances of influence and the new touch points, technology, and other enablers that facilitate it. My job is to then help businesses adapt to meet the needs and expectations of customers in each critical moment of truth.

Change, of course, isn't relegated to the business world. Change, or at least agility, is something that becomes a necessary trait to effectively navigate everyday life. But there are a few pressing questions:

- How can we stand so firmly on grounds that tremble with disruption?
- How can we get stuck in our ways in a time of rapid innovation?

Everything is changing. We are changing. But take a look around. Are our philosophies, processes, and systems changing along with it? More importantly, is our vision and our aim acclimating in these new environments?

If ignorance is bliss, awareness is awakening.



The big wheel of disruption is upon us, and its progression is unpredictable yet continuous. Mobile, social, cloud, real-time, the biggest technological disruptors are just that... disruptive. It is in how we embrace disruption that allows us to better understand, and in turn, react to it.

Although disruptive technology is the bearer of tremendous opportunity, it is equally a harbinger of obsolescence. Technology's impact on society and business is substantial. As technology continues to become part of everyday life, it becomes a continuous disruptive cycle that forever evolves how people communicate, work, and connect. Keeping up requires perpetual investment because innovation is constant—and it's only accelerating.

Change is, therefore, imminent and essential to survival.

This is a time to take a step back to recognize where we are and where we need to be. We must examine our strategies and current initiatives, review our investments and opportunities, and consider new areas for change or new pursuits.

Part of the challenge is knowing how to recognize the difference between trends and bona fide opportunities. Although it's easy to get caught up in the hype, there is a gap that exists between current needs, evolving pains, and the myriad of solutions hitting desktops, smart phones, tablets, and digital appliances on a daily basis. The problem is that many organizations aren't designed to be adaptive. They're designed to optimize efficiencies and processes, but times have changed and disruptive technology isn't as easy to recognize or capitalize on without a greater mission and purpose or an infrastructure to identify trends, experiment, learn, and scale.

Herein lies an opportunity. By competing for relevance, you're effectively competing for the future. Doing so allows you to leapfrog a survival strategy to establish an exceptional competitive advantage.

Competing for relevance and the future requires a full assessment of how some of the biggest trends in technology impact your business today, and how they will influence behavior in the future. While this Wheel of Disruption keeps on turning, it will alter, expand, or contract based on your industry. The image above is representative of a moment in time and it should provide a glimpse of just how expansive the landscape is. While every technology is affecting the bottom line today, elements are beginning to change the way decisions are made, transactions unfold, and ultimately how people work with one another. At the very least, the golden triangle of cloud, mobile, and social provides a hub to begin the evaluation of both technology and human behavior.

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To chart a new course toward relevance, here are five initial steps to consider:

1. Assume that there is a surplus of confusion among users and decision makers within organizations and customers on which technology is trending versus technology that is showing signs of becoming, or already is, disruptive. Discovering the difference and prioritizing what's important is critical.
2. Understand that the roles of the CMO and CIO (Chief Information Officer) are becoming closer than ever before. With marketing investing a significant percentage of the overall technology budget now and over time, the "I" in CIO may need to represent innovation to help lead more informed decisions from the inside.
3. Task an existing organization or external partner, or develop a new task force to evaluate technology and improve the infrastructure of how your business works, cultivate relationships with customers, employees, and stakeholders, and design better products and services that demonstrate competitive advantages.
4. Deploy this team to measure technology against a myriad of factors that are important to your business and assess which technologies are worthy of implementation, financial investment, acquisition, or experimentation.

5. Realign the team against a renewed vision and purpose, and train employees to use these technologies to achieve desired objectives at the enterprise, LoB (line of business), and functional levels to meet customer and employee expectations and steer delightful experiences.

These are the times when getting caught up in technology, value, and new technology is often mistaken for innovation. There's no need to invest precious time and resources in the wrong technologies. Pay no attention to the hype that's usually presented as the "top 10" ways to grow your business with said technology, platform or gimmick. That's a distraction. And, to succeed, you cannot divert your attention to accompany those who are prone to distractions. The real focus should be on the development of formal methodologies and systems that cause impact. Then you can prioritize resources accordingly.

Building a process for disruptive technology sets the stage for a culture of innovation and adaptation. As the change agent for your organization, as the hero in this journey, you will lead your organization toward meaningful and scalable transformation. And, in doing so, you will help your business earn relevance now and in the future where success is measured in revenue, profitability, relationships, and shared experiences.

Keep Calm and Innovate

I woke up this morning... gasped... overwhelmed by anxiety and confusion, I questioned who/where I am and what I'm supposed to do next.

I took a breath... closed my eyes... and accepted that my future is the pursuit of bridging the distance between who I am and who I want to be.

The question is, who are you and who do you want to be? As Leland Stanford, the founder of Stanford University, once wisely wrote, "Man cannot create what he cannot imagine."

How we see the world and how others see the world may, in fact, be different and quite possibly contrasting. This is natural. The difference between success or collapse is humility and empathy. You must first believe you have something to discover and also demonstrate the desire to see things through the eyes of another.

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The way you've learned to see the world and orient yourself within it is a result of your life's experience. And it is these experiences that we bring with us to the table when we make important decisions. This is true for anyone. However, many of today's leaders may already face a dilemma where their experiences work against them when defining a strategy to compete for relevance in the future. Disruptive technology eludes them, yet it is like air or water to growing legions of connected consumers.

I'm old enough to remember what it was like to have to get up from the comfort of a sofa to manually change the channel on a television. I clearly recall the days of using a DOS prompt to run a word processor or play a game on my old, pre-Windows PC. My daily workout was not in a gym, but instead in the carrying of a deadweight bag that housed my portable cellular phone. My social network was a bulletin board service (BBS). My Twitter was AOL and Yahoo IM. A pager was my txt msg. To me, privacy was, in fact, something that was maintained and guarded outside of the public spotlight. It was something that was actually cherished.

Like most, I learned how to use every technology that became disruptive over the years... even if I didn't understand it at first. I learned how to find comfort outside of my comfort zone only to realize that this would emerge as a repeatable process over time.

You have done the same.

But today's Millennial and the Generation Z that follows them (perhaps this is you) know life differently. Whereas my generation and those before me lived an analog-first lifestyle over the years, today's generations are born digital-first. Whereas older generations view the role of screens simply as displays, those coming of age today swipe, pinch, and touch glass and expect it to react. While we're learning to adjust, this is all they know.

My point is that we can't solely rely on our experiences to compete for relevance or the future.

To make informed decisions about the experiences we have not yet felt or embraced requires the ability to see the world through the eyes of another and to walk along the path of those individuals we normally do not follow.

Before we say or let anyone else say that change isn't in the job description, that "it's not my job," there is no turning back. Someone must lead change. Someone must be the hero.

This is where you come in...

Change is you. Change is because of you.

This is a time when we must question everything.

This is a time when we must learn.

This is the time to experience new experiences, to design new experiences.

Innovation begins here. Innovation begins with you.

You are the change agent. You will help influence an uprising that overturns the prevailing culture of management into that of leadership and innovation.

It's not easy, but it's within your ability and reach.

It takes courage to do what others will not.

It takes vision to see what others can't.

It takes empathy to feel what others experience.

It takes persistence to overcome resistance.

It takes patience to allow the time necessary for your work to bloom.

In the end, it takes you.

Where you are and where you need to be is separated only by your vision and also your actions and words.

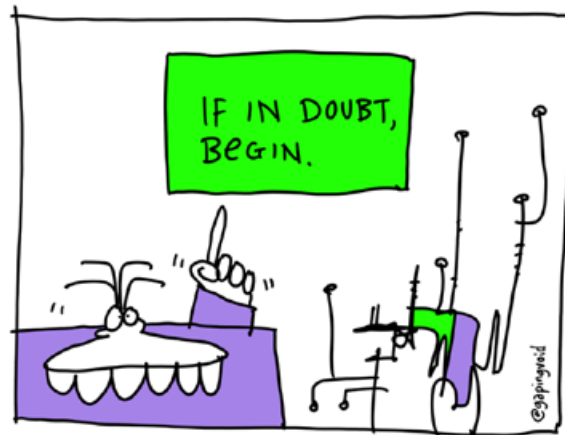
Savor this moment. And then do something about it.

It is the first steps that count for everything. The question now is, in which direction are you headed?

Take solace in the words of Nelson Mandela who boldly stated in his 1994 inaugural address, “Our deepest fear is not that we are inadequate. Our deepest fear is that we are powerful beyond measure. It is our light, not our darkness that most frightens us.”

But wait. Remember, also, to question everything. Like in the Gandhi example earlier, Mr. Morton’s research also uncovered that these words do not represent an excerpt from any known address by Mr. Nelson Mandela. In fact, these wise words belong to self-help guru Marianne Williamson . Nonetheless, they are powerful and inspiring. Embrace the light. Lead change. Build a culture of innovation.

If in doubt, begin. 📌



Info



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ABOUT THE AUTHOR | Brian Solis is a principal analyst at Altimeter Group.

He is also an award-winning author, prominent blogger, and keynote speaker.

Solis has studied and influenced the effects of social media and disruptive technology on business, marketing, entertainment, and culture. Brian works

with enterprise organizations to research market trends, disruptive technology,

and emerging business opportunities. He also works with executive management and social media leadership to develop new strategies and align teams around initiatives that enable business objectives and priorities. Over the years, Brian has also led new media business and marketing efforts for Web 2.0 startups and celebrities.

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