



LEADING THE FUTURE:

A CALL TO ACTION IN 2012

January 2012



PLAY BIG, INC.

INSPIRED BRAND VISIONARIES

HAPPY 2012!

It's here - the year of transformation!

*“You can't trust
your judgement if
your imagination is
out of focus.”*

- MARK TWAIN

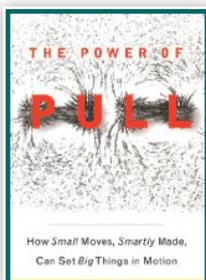
Whew! It can't come fast enough, can it?

While the Mayans may or may not have called it right, it feels pretty clear that the world we all knew and counted on is breaking apart. Certainly the Arab Spring and Occupy movements are a part of this. But there is plenty more to come. At a recent event hosted by The Economist, the one thing three top-notch financial leaders could agree on is that we are so close to a potential global recession that something big simply has to change.

Creativity, compromise and conviction will finally break through inertia and a new dawn is beginning to emerge. Yes, we are sitting in a pile of disruption, confusion and change. But there is also a palpable shift taking place. New paths are opening for positive, sustainable, and truly audacious change. Collaboration and contribution are becoming our new compass markers. Can you feel it? If not, listen closely – *it's coming.*

And it needs YOU!

Author and Deloitte analyst *John Hagel* wrote one of my favorite blog posts recently when he discussed how periods of great uncertainty, unfortunately, back many into corners of strident beliefs when what we need most are those willing to explore:



We can't tolerate divergent views when we [feel] under attack. Uniformity of thought and perspective is highly valued and rewarded. This pressure to conform reduces the potential for creative thinking and new ideas, which further reinforces our sense that we live in a static world with a given set of resources and wealth. The passion of the explorer gives way to the passion of the true believer. Once again, we find reinforcement for a short-term mindset.

Oh, how we need more Explorers willing to look at the horizon!



An Inspired Life

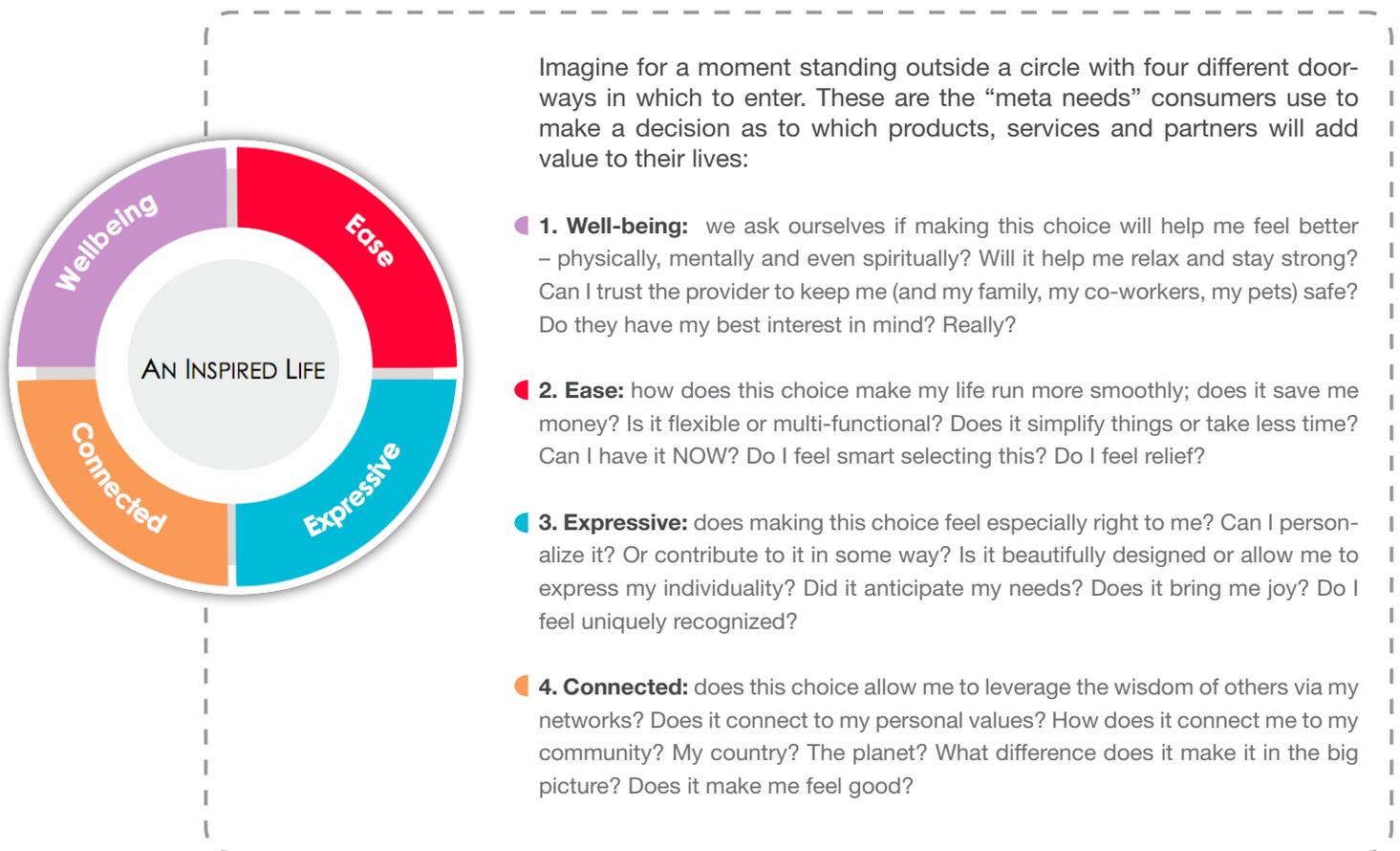
How do consumers feel? And our employees and partners?

Both life and business are moving ever faster. Technology is changing, information is growing and culture is shifting *exponentially*. As it all transitions so quickly, how can we anticipate – and prepare for – what’s coming next?

As you consider the needs of the future, what do you notice? We are all looking for MORE: information, transparency, value, personalization, innovation, the ability to have what we want, now! And we increasingly expect it all for LESS: time, money, energy. Plenty of tension here.

And every decision is becoming more complex, causing us to feel increasingly overwhelmed and unsure of whom to trust or what choices to make. As we sort through this, we want our lives to work better and feel more fun somehow. At the heart of it, we want to live the best life possible and constantly calibrate how close or far we are from that reality.

Here’s a simple model we developed to show us where we can create value for our stakeholders:



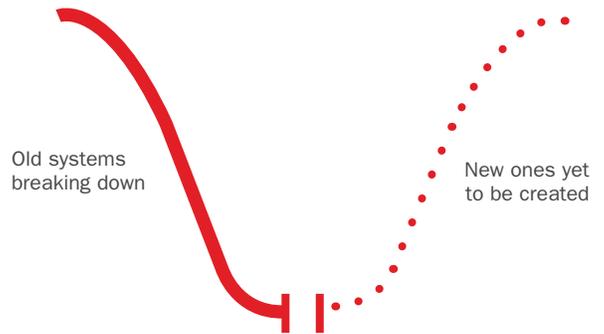
The brands and leaders that understand and genuinely want to meet these needs are miles ahead of the rest. And are thriving in what others consider to be tumultuous times. They sense the vast possibilities ahead and are confidently marching toward them.



So why the gap?

If that seems so simple, why are so many companies feeling overwhelmed by change and unclear where to move next?

Because, to be fair, it really is all changing so fast. And often consumers are far ahead of the brands that have historically served them. Leader brands are most challenged by all this. Futurist *Mary Ohara Devereaux* has been warning that we are in the middle of a great (and predictable) shift from one economic and cultural era to another and heading into what she calls the “badlands” of transition. What does it take to get from one side to the other intact? How can we confidently let go of old models and take a leap to a more meaningful, relevant vision?



Playing with courage

In the new book *HOW*, author and values-leadership evangelist, Dov Seidman makes the point:



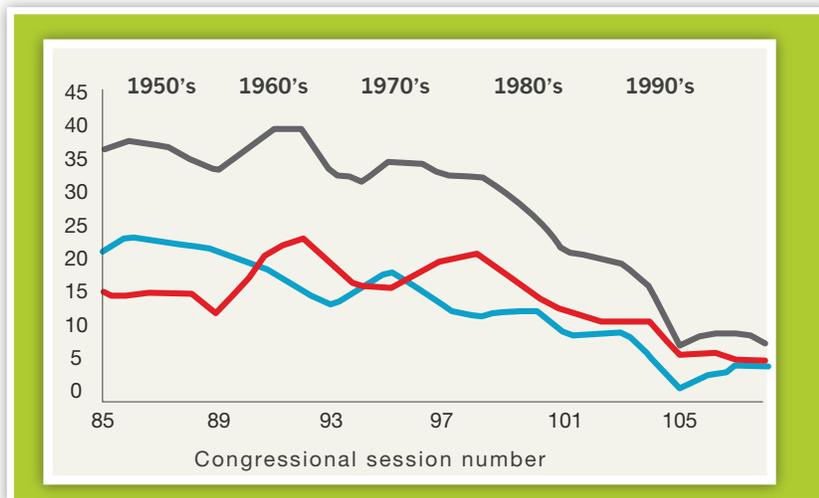
Long term, sustained success is directly proportional to your ability – as a company or an individual – to make Waves throughout evanescent networks of association, to reach out to others and enlist them in endeavors larger than yourself, and to do so while everyone watches you.



uh, In case you're wondering as we did, “evanescent” means to dissipate or disappear like vapor.

And this was a chilling find; as this graph shows, the number of “party non-conformists” in the Senate over the past 50 years is at an all time low. Just as John Hagel described in this blog post, right? Certainly feels that way in Washington, DC – and in many companies, too. Seems many are still trying to recalibrate and cling to yesterday rather than boldly invent tomorrow. Clearly, leading in perpetual ambiguity is not easy. But it is the new normal. And it requires a completely different tool belt.

Number of party non-conformists in the Senate 1953-2004



Source: The Creation of an Endangered Species: Party Nonconformists of the U.S. Senate, Richard Fleisher and Jon R. Bond, 2005.

■ Republicans ■ Democrats ■ Total



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Some inspiring examples

Counting every blessing for the extraordinary work, inspiring people and truly big ideas we've been gifted with this past year, we can say with certainty that the future is in some brilliant hands.

Forbes recently ran a cover story about *Jacqueline Novogratz*, founder of the non-profit Acumen Fund. She is the real deal and alongside their breakthrough investments in underserved communities around the world, Acumen has developed an in-depth Fellows program which teaches those truly committed to positive change to become leaders of moral imagination. I'm personally learning so much from her and her team about leading with what I have come to label "humble audacity" – creating great change with humility, love and collaboration squarely at the center of all action. And yet with a clear belief that breaking through seemingly intractable, complex problems is not only possible, but is our obligation.

Similarly, here's an inspiring little video from one of our favorite agency partners: *Barkley*.

My favorite line:

“ if you're serious about making the world a better place, add something good to it. ”

Letting go of what has worked so well before is not easy. But creating new is more possible than we imagine. Have you seen this :46 video clip of Steve Jobs our friends at Brainpickings unearthed? Much more powerful to watch but simply stated:



When you grow up, you tend to be told that the world is the way it is and that your life is just to live inside [it] . . . That's a very limited life. Life can be much broader. One you discover that everything around you that you call life was made up by people that were no smarter than you. And you can change it, you can influence it, you can build your own things that other people can use. Once you learn that, you will never be the same again.

Your invitation for 2012

So there you have it. A call to visionary leadership in 2012. The trick is to keep your eye on two clocks at once: addressing immediate needs both inside and outside your organization with genuine insight and empathy, while also looking toward the horizon for the chance to truly transform your company, your industry and – along the way, quite possibility – the world. From both perspectives, we're all looking for an inspiring vision, a reconnection to what really matters, a chance to be a part of something bigger than ourselves. And an invitation to use our unique talents.

Thank you for all you're already doing! Now, take a deep, cleansing breath. Invite Imagination and Contribution into your strategic plans. And enjoy creating what only you can. Playing big feels so damn good. (And, yes, we are always here to help.)

Xo,
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Nancy Giordano
CEO + Brand Futurist, Play Big Inc


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Inspired Brand Visionaries
Austin • Los Angeles
nancy@playbiginc.com

www.playbiginc.com | @nancygiordano