Paradigms by Joel Barker, summaries of his main ideas...


THE BUSINESS OF PARADIGMS

Joel Barker says people shoot down good ideas because they assume that the future is merely an extension of the past. Many things we accept today once met substantial resistance from thoughtful people. People resist change when they operate within old paradigms. These paradigms establish boundaries and provide the rules for success.

People tend to filter out information that doesn't fit the paradigm. Barker calls this the "Paradigm Effect." This can block creative solutions to problems and the ability to see the future. To illustrate, Barker tells stories of triumph and disaster resulting from paradigms. Here's one:

Question: What nation dominated the world of watch-making in 1968?
Answer: Switzerland, a country renowned for over a hundred years for watch-making excellence. In 1968, it held 65 percent of the market.

Question: What nation dominates watch-making today?
Answer: Japan, a nation which, in 1968, held virtually no market share.
Reason: The introduction of the quartz watch.

Question: Who invented the quartz watch?
Answer: The Swiss. The Swiss were so certain that it was only a novelty, they showed it promiscuously at a trade show. The Japanese came; they saw the idea; they conquered the market. The Swiss failed to see the potential because they had a financial and emotional investment in the old paradigm.

Barker says: "When a paradigm shifts, everybody goes back to zero. It doesn't matter how strong your reputation, or how big your market share, or how good you are at the old paradigm."

Barker makes these key observations about paradigms:

(1) Paradigms are common. They apply to all areas of our lives.

(2) Paradigms are useful. They show us what is important.

(3) A warning: Sometimes paradigms become THE paradigm ---- the only way to do something. Thereafter, any new idea is rejected out of hand. Barker calls this "paradigm paralysis." It's a terminal disease that has destroyed many a mammoth.

(4) The people who create new paradigms are usually outsiders. They are not part of the established paradigm community. They need not be young, but they are people who are not invested in the old paradigm.

(5) The paradigm pioneers must be courageous.

(6) You can choose to change paradigms ---- to see the world anew.
PARADIGM PIONEERS

[source: http://vasthead.com/Articles/pioneer.htm]

The paradigm shift is the key ingredient in understanding change. A paradigm shift means fundamentally altering the way things are done. The future does not belong just to the people who create a paradigm shift. It belongs to pioneers--the people who are willing to accept high risk and open a new trail to the future. They put the new paradigm into practice.

The pioneers of the American west were such people. They trekked into new territory, mapped it, and helped make it safe. The settlers followed the pioneers. The settlers didn't pull up roots until the pioneers had mapped the new territory and taken the first risks.

In the twenty-first century, it will be the settlers who are at risk. The new century calls for pioneers of time rather than place. They are the paradigm pioneers.

According to Barker, paradigm pioneers possess these characteristics:

1. Intuition. The ability to make good decisions with incomplete information.

2. Courage. The willingness to move forward in the face of great risk.

3. A commitment of time. Shown walking alongside a covered wagon, Barker says, "It's a long walk to Oregon. Paradigm pioneers understand how much time it takes to go from a rough concept to a working paradigm."

Pioneering has its risks. But staying away from the leading edge is an even greater risk: "Those organizations who know how to pioneer are gaining huge leverage over those who do not."

It makes no difference whether it's an individual or an institution, a corporation or a community. We must learn to be unafraid of uncharted territory to step up to the edge and not turn away. . . For the paradigm pioneers it will always be 'wagon's ho,' time to discover the opportunities that await on the other side of the horizon.