



LEADING CHANGE IN AN AGE OF CHANGE

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The twenty first century has become a world of constant and continuous change. This is not only true for technology. It is also true for life careers. In the US, the top ten jobs today are not the same as the top ten jobs of the previous decade. With advances in health science, my stem cell doctors tell me that 50 years from now the average age of human beings will be 150 years. It is totally foreseeable that our species will discover how to perpetually stay young, attaining that very elusive fountain of youth.

Our bodies may become forever young but can our minds, hearts and souls be as youthful? I say this because we also live in an paradoxical age. While we push the frontiers of space there are cultures that insist that their women be totally shrouded in black. There are societies that kill because of skin color, religious belief or sexual preference. There are nations that refuse to share their knowledge and skills to grow food, to heal the sick and to bring people out of poverty in order to protect their business interests. These cultures, societies and nations still belong to an era long gone. However, they still walk the earth as zombies of today. They are tethered to the past and have not learned to enlighten themselves. They have not learned to remove their yokes of ignorance and embrace the concept that we are one human race, living in one planet, trying very hard to become the best that we can ever become.

As a professor and administrator, I had devoted 25 full time years and seven part time years to the Asian Institute of Management. My biggest battle here at AIM was how to make the institution more responsive to the changing needs of a changing environment. In the seven years of my part time teaching, I was working heavily with government and non-government organizations, with people's self help groups and associations, with international aid agencies and philanthropic corporations. I realized that the world outside AIM was not all business, not all about financial bottom lines but about social returns and environmental sustainability, not at all concerned about competition but about collaboration. The world out there cares.

A year after I returned full time to AIM I proposed that we design, develop and offer the Masters in Development Management. There was violent resistance from the not-so-wise old men but, slowly, a group of eight faculty painstakingly created the MDM under the mentorship of then dean Gaston Ortigas Sr. With his backing, the faculty en banc came around to accept that AIM is not just a business school. It is a management school that must answer to the different fields of endeavor where management expertise is needed. It was an arduous fight with a long process of voting and revoting. I didn't realize that our top management and Board of Trustees were mainly composed of dyed-in-the-wool MBAs from Harvard, Stanford, Columbia, Wharton and NYU. They must have been thinking "why is this brass young faculty member changing the nature of things? We are an MBA school and forever we shall be one".

The next battle was even more furious. While I was crafting an economic paper for former President Fidel Ramos, it struck me that in 1992 there were only 2,000 large firms in the country. This was the major market being targeted by AIM. This was barely 1% of the total number of firms. What about the 99% composed of mainly micro, small and medium firms who wanted to grow and prosper like the big ones? Why isn't AIM responding to them? That's when the insight hit me that we need to offer a Masters in Entrepreneurship course but AIM was not yet academically ready to plunge into that. However, in 1995, the faculty agreed to fund my research proposal to write case studies and text on Asian entrepreneurs cutting across the continent from India to Indonesia.

In 1999, the ME was born. It was a Caesarean operation. Why offer a course that did not require high GMAT or AIMAT scores? Well, because entrepreneurs are not the nerdy types. They have completed their college degrees and are running businesses relatively well. They have great EQ if not fantastic IQs. Why run a course without exams and quizzes? Well, because the rigor of the course is in applying what students learned to their business. They will be evaluated according to their profitability, productivity, professionalism, people upliftment, paradigm-shifting and professional transformation. To make a long story short, the course was reluctantly allowed to run. Everybody was surprised that almost 100 enrolled.

At about the same time the MBA began to suffer enrollment declines, particularly from the Philippines and other Asian countries except India. I was also elected dean in 2000 and I examined the statistics. The ME was not cannibalizing the MBA because the student profile was very different. But there was one major variable that changed. Cheap long term student loans were no longer available for the middle class who could not afford the steep tuition fees. I pointed out to the Board that AIM's competitors have gone a long way while we were sleeping at the panciteria. The top MBA schools around us were all heavily funded by their governments, such as IIM, NUS et al. In these schools, 100% of the faculty had doctorate degrees while AIM had less than 30%. In the broader world scenario, MBA enrollments were falling. Students were seeking alternative paths to prosperity or to career variety. The IT field was blooming with billionaires. The culinary arts was not just for kitchen cooks but for gourmet masters. So why did AIM fall asleep all this time? It went to further stupor when it decided to close the ME down. We, the gurus of ME, were welcomed at the Ateneo where the course is thriving.

I had tried to introduce other management degree programs such as health and education because the managers of these institutions were enrolling in our short courses in droves. Again, AIM said that is not our core competence. But the world was looking for courses that would translate their respective disciplines into the language and spirit of hard-nosed management. I even recommended an Executive Doctorate in Leadership and Management geared towards AIM alumni executives with vast practitioner experiences. AIM rejected that but the Development Academy of the Philippines bought my unique doctoral design but aimed at presidents of universities and colleges. I was flabbergasted when 49 enrolled, the largest single doctoral

enrollment I have ever encountered. De la Salle University also accepted my doctoral design for the 210 superintendents of the Department of Education. But why was AIM resisting the change?

An author I read called it educated incapacity. It is harder to change highly educated people because they tend to latch on to what they had learned during their time. They refuse to accept that the world has evolved. Another author called it a fixated mindset. As people become older, either one of two things happen. One, they become wiser, more expansive in their worldview and inclusive in their relationships with all sorts of people. Two, they become grumpy and cranky old persons who are intolerant about everything new and are forever harkening to the good old days. The first secret, therefore, to surviving in the Age of Change is to be very open to new knowledge, new learnings, new discoveries. We should be perpetual students who possess that timeless beginner's mind. The second secret is to have an expansive, inclusive, and may I add, a sacred worldview. It is expansive because we should not put any limits on ourselves. After all we all have a 100 billion neurons that are largely underutilized. It is inclusive because we want to be part of all humanity, whose yearnings and aspirations are very much part of us. It is sacred because we value all existence. We all espouse the universal values of truth, love, happiness, justice, equality and harmony. People are not commodities. The Earth's resources are finite and not just meant for us but for future generations.

So how does one develop the proper worldview for the Age of Change? To do this, one has to answer several philosophical questions. Who am I and what is my role and purpose in this life? What does life and living in this world mean? How do I view people and humanity? What do I do with the talents and resources given to me so that I may become the best I can ever become? To answer these huge questions an Indonesian student of mine gave a metaphor. When asked what was his worldview, everybody in class laughed at his answer. "I am a pond, a small water pond." I was curious and asked what he meant. "You see, the water falls from the mountain tops and flows into rivers and streams. Down near the foot of the mountain, some water flows into my pond until it overflows. The water finds downstream rivers and creeks until it reaches the ocean. But the sun evaporates the water into clouds that find their way back to the mountain, where it flows down again to my pond." Explaining further, my student said. I am a perpetual learner in life, trying to absorb everything that comes my way, but not for the purpose of hoarding knowledge. It is to share all that I know and am with one and all, so that, in return, I will get back and give back a million times over. Such a beautiful worldview. Such an expansive, inclusive and sacred mind.

To be open and ready to accept change is one thing, to initiate and become an active leader of change is another. For the leader of change, three fundamental change drivers must be put in motion. First, change can be driven by an unwanted situation, an environment so toxic that people want change to happen. As a country we have been suffering from such a toxic state of affairs but nothing much has changed. Perhaps that is because the second element of a unifying vision and direction set by a willful and

determined leader who has a winning line of attack to achieve that vision is not there. The vision per se is nothing without well-crafted, well-executed strategies. After our so many EDSA revolutions, what? Where is that promised land? How exactly do we get there? What might be missing is the third driver of change – values. An external vision that is not purely internalized by deep-seated values is empty. People want their leaders and their key people to be role models who walk the talk. No exemptions please from classmates, gangmates and playmates. Values come from our emotional, not just cognitive, yearnings and aspirations. They express our true wants and preferences and, hence, become our endless source of leadership energy. We, as a people, are still waiting for these values to descend in tongues of fire upon our leaders.

But change does not have to happen in big ways. We can all begin with ourselves. One day at a time. Then we can help others change. For me, I see students as vessels of transformation. Some begin as arrogant, cocky vessels. You have to humble them in order to learn. You have to deploy a shock and awe strategy. They will test you and taunt you, but you just have to be on top of the game, always a few moves ahead. Some are shy and lack confidence. They are harder to transform. They must see that you really care for them even while you push them beyond what they think their limits are. Some are indifferent and blasé. The best way to get to them is to probe what they value the most and take it from there. Start from where they are not where you are coming from. The most challenging students I've ever taught were out-of-school youth from Baseco, Tondo, a very poor community indeed. They lacked the proper basic education and did not have the social exposure and wider experience of AIM students. Our mission was to find them gainful employment through our courses on technopreneurship. We partnered with an ME graduate who conducted the technical skilling part of the course while we did the entrepreneurship. To assure employment or self employment, the same ME student had a franchise network of 200 shops who could absorb our graduates. The hardest part of the endeavor was making learning materials they could easily relate to. One of the materials was on operating a hair salon. I tapped the services of an AIM MBA graduate to do episodes of a gay salon owner conversing about the business and their customers with his gay manager. All the episodes were in Pilipino, in the form of an epic poem in rhyming quatrains. It was a hit. We started where the students were, using their language, their humor, their mannerisms. By the way, we have a 96% employment rate in those courses.

Perhaps I will end this already long speech with an anecdote. I wrote this paper reflecting occasionally on my Japanese garden. In the middle of the garden stands a seven-foot tall, seven-foot wide bonsai shaped like an umbrella on top of our small fishpond. I will not sell that canopied majestic kamatsile for a million bucks. I bought the plant when it was one foot high from the aetas of Zambales. I put it on a pedestal in one corner and it grew ugly. Thorny branches and twigs sprouted wildly from the trunk. There was no pruning and wiring that could beautify it. In my frustration, I took it out of its pedestal and plunked it at one end of the fishpond. Slowly it took shape, following the circular shape of the pond. The water evaporation from the pond was shaping and molding my ugly bonsai into a majestic umbrella. It even flowers every so often, bursting

into blue blooms. Some pruning here and there and my ugly has transformed itself into my most treasured possession. There must be a lesson there somewhere about the management of change in a changing environment.