

How Technology is Changing Our Business Culture

by Jon Craighead

I recently completed three books that brought more clarity to me regarding our rapidly changing business culture at warp speed that I would like to share with you. The titles are: *The End of Big* by Nicco Mele, *The End of Power* by Moises Naim, and *Give and Take* by Adam Grant. Each theme addresses new technological and cultural transformations which affect the way we operate our business and how we must relate to each other differently than in recent past.

Mele begins his work with the following: “Bloggers rather than established news outlets break news. Upstart candidates topple establishment politicians. Civilian insurgencies organized on Facebook challenge conventional militaries. Engaged citizens pull off policy reforms independent of government bureaucracies. Local musicians bypass record labels and become YouTube sensations. Twentysomething tech entrepreneurs working in their pajamas destabilize industry giants and become billionaires.”

Naim begins, “This is a book about power. Specifically about how power – the capacity to get others to do, or to stop doing, something – is undergoing a historic and world changing transformation.” He continues, “Power is spreading and long established big players are increasingly being challenged by newer and smaller ones. And those who have power are more constrained in the ways they can use it.”

Adam Grant, the youngest-ever tenured professor at the University of Pennsylvania, says that in his ten years as an organizational psychologist and Wharton professor he has made a study of reciprocity at work and has distinguished the mind set of two kinds of people he calls takers and givers. “Takers have a distinctive signature: they like to get more than they give. They tilt reciprocity in their own favor, putting their own interests ahead of others’ needs. Takers believe the world is a competitive, dog-eat-dog place. They feel that to succeed they need to be better than others.... Garden variety takers aren’t cruel or cutthroat; they’re just cautious and self protective.” Of givers, he says they are a relatively rare bread in the workplace. “They tilt reciprocity in the other direction, preferring to give more than they get. Whereas takers tend to be self-focused, evaluating what other people can offer them, givers are other-focused, paying more attention to what other people need from them.” It is their attitudes and actions toward other people, as opposed to money, that differentiate them.

In my consulting work I have seen elements of all three themes. First, one of the most difficult conversations to have with business leaders is to have them consider that what has been successful for them may not be the needed approach for the future. It is completely understandable that they may be reluctant to change. After all they have their success to prove they know how to get it done. A recent study was made of some two hundred English companies with storied pasts that failed because their founders were unable to make the adjustments to the new realities. Three of those companies are still market leaders due mainly to a change of leadership with a positive relationship to new technologies. Many managers I talk with have real difficulties relating to the life styles of their employees, particularly younger ones, because they find their values different from their own. They are often melancholy for the return of the way things used to be – resulting in their genuine, basic dissatisfaction with the way things are today. The dissatisfaction is also shared by their subordinates who feel disassociated from their leadership and, ultimately, the company in general.

One of the first laws of strategy is offering a unique value proposition to your prospective customer. The proposition defines how you are going to contribute to their success and satisfaction. Yet I find that many entrepreneurs are focused on profits. While it is not disgraceful to want to be profitable, what qualifies these people as takers is that being profit-centered is all about you, and no one is more aware of this than your potential customers – which makes you an unattractive vendor. In my travels throughout the business community I am constantly present to the most hard working and caring people on the planet. They work long hours, handle many unexpected contingencies and don't give up. Which is why I love the work I do to provide insights that business people may not have time to notice because they are so committed to success. A strategic inquiry provides new alternatives and stimulates resurgent efforts to their success.