

Whiteside

The Phoenix Agenda

POWER TO TRANSFORM YOUR WORKPLACE

omne



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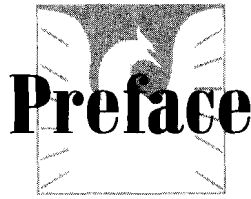
**POWER TO TRANSFORM
YOUR WORKPLACE**

John Whiteside
with Leatrice McLaughlin

omneq

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The Book at a Glance

The mythological phoenix arose from its ashes every 500 years. In this era of revolutionary change, corporations must get on a faster track to rebirth. *The Phoenix Agenda* provides that track.

For hard-pressed managers desperately seeking new skills that will enable them to aid in the rebirth of their corporations, *The Phoenix Agenda* offers an exciting choice:

You could work like this:

Administer bureaucracy.

Resist change.

Crave comfort.

Collapse the business.

Follow the rules.

Be a prisoner of fixed
assumptions.

Or this:

Manage for action.

Show courage.

Take risks.

Renew the business.

Be a master of possibility.


Create new assumptions.

Preface

Exist in fear.	Live in freedom.
Manipulate and control others.	Attract and empower others.
Perpetuate pain.	Forgive enemies.
Conduct business as usual.	Start a whole new ball game.

The choices on the left reflect the old way of managing. Those on the right embody the new way. In *The Phoenix Agenda*, readers will learn how to manage in the new way by following a step-by-step program for corporate rebirth. They will:

- ❖ Learn a powerful new management approach in “Mindsets at Work.”
- ❖ Gain new action skills in “Tools for Transformation.”
- ❖ Design and implement grand strategy in “Advanced Strategies for Workplace Transformation.”



Acknowledgments

Perhaps a thousand people's contributions are expressed in this book, which has been 10 years in conception. With many of you, a kind of electricity has passed between us, an excitement and a sense of shared purpose. This may have occurred as we sat next to each other on an airplane, worked together, interacted at a professional conference, met at my office or home, or participated in a seminar. You know who you are, and you will see your contribution in the pages that follow. Thank you so very much for taking the time to interact with me and thereby influencing the course of this book.

Leatrice McLaughlin brought an extraordinary and unexpected perspective to the message of this book. We met by chance, in April, 1992, at the retirement party of a mutual friend. A conversation over refreshments led to my mailing Leatrice an early copy of the manuscript for *The Phoenix Agenda*. She read it and as conversations ensued, we agreed that she would join me as a full partner in my new management consulting firm, Industrial Revolutions, Inc. Leatrice saw, in the early draft, resonance with her own interests in Asian philosophy and applicability to women's issues. Leatrice has edited every word of this manuscript and has taught me her craft of writing. When necessary, she also conjured up for me the confidence to continue the project when all seemed hopeless. As we continued our collaboration, it was clear that her perspective and thoughts were becoming totally enmeshed with my own in the

Acknowledgments

manuscript, so the only appropriate course of action was to acknowledge her on the cover as a true collaborator in the creation of *The Phoenix Agenda*.

Many other wonderful colleagues have worked intensively with me in the development of the ideas here. The main catalyst for all this work is John Bennett, my friend and collaborator of a decade. John says quiet words that can change your life, if you listen. He spoke to me in such a way in 1984 at a professional conference in Loughborough, England, sparking my interest in contextualism and the possibility of workplace transformation. Since then he has been my collaborator in teaching and writing, as mentor and coach, and has contributed enormously at every level and every stage of this book, especially in the areas of sensitivity to language, high-level design, and crafting of details. We have remained best friends even though separated by the land between coasts.

Dennis Wixon, my friend and associate, helped in many ways, most especially in working out the theory of common workplace mindsets. The idea of workplace mindsets is probably the most intellectually original material in this book, and discussions with Dennis over twenty years helped clarify this notion and bring it to life.

Sandy Egli, who works miracles at American Express, has also worked miracles on this book. She was an early supporter and understands the theory of the book thoroughly. Sandy has contributed original insights to the underlying theory.

Lou Cohen has also been an inspirational and guiding influence in my corporate life. Whenever corporate life and politics seemed without merit or purpose, I would talk to Lou and would see, afresh, the dignity of work.

Peter Conklin and Russ Doane were enormously influential in working out the ideas in this book, as well as being very supportive of me personally as we were experimenting with and honing these approaches in various corporate settings. Peter's area of mastery is operational excellence and he has been my coach and teacher in this and other areas of business. Russ taught me many things, but most especially he helped me see the power of acknowledgment.

During my corporate career, I was fortunate to have managers

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who were gracious and generous in sharing of themselves and who acted more as partners and coaches than as bosses. Bill Zimmer was enormously influential in my corporate growth and education and was always selfless about giving acknowledgment to his people, me included. Tom Harris, a gifted and visionary manager, helped me build a world-class research and development group. He supported and funded me in innovative projects at risk to his own career. Corporate America could use more people like Tom. Ron Schaefer, a manager of great courage, befriended and believed in me at a difficult time in my career, when I was trying to promote the ideas in this book to an unreceptive audience.

Patti Anklam, Julie Farr, Ron Schaefer and I worked for David Stone, then vice president of software engineering at Digital Equipment Corporation, for two heady years. David was a masterful manager, brilliant in every respect, and a gifted teacher. During these years we honed many of the ideas in *The Phoenix Agenda* by putting them into practice in a large organizational setting.

Bob Shearer, Karen Force, and John O'Leary, all management consultants, gave totally of themselves to teach me, over a period of two years, that philosophy and ethics could be effectively applied in business.

William Keating, Lou Cohen, Nancy Reiss, Christine Bullen, David Marca, Linda Wells, and Marcus Wilson were all most helpful in reviewing early versions of the manuscript. Later drafts benefited greatly from thorough reviews and discussions provided by Patti Anklam, Walter Birge, Tony Della Ferra, John Fergeson, Lionel Fray, Claudia Mueller, Stephen Young, and Peter Conklin. Applying the ideas in practice with Marcus Wilson, Nick Montoya, and their associates at Intel has also been most helpful and has improved the book.

Trust, decency, professionalism, and desire to help create a successful book were accorded me by my agent, Michael Snell and my editor, Jim Childs. And comparing notes with other authors has convinced me that Mike and Jim are the best in the business. Every author should be so lucky as to have fine people such as these to work with.

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Apple Computer and Microsoft Corporation have worked together to create fabulous tools to aid people who are writing books, and when doing many other computer-supported activities. What a joy to have lived to see the age of word processing, desktop computing, spreadsheets, and advanced telecommunications.

The most special thanks of all are due to my wife of 20 years, Holly Whittelsey Whiteside. This has been a difficult book to write and, at times, the cost to the family has been high. Holly has been unswervingly supportive and I owe her an unpayable debt of gratitude.

Contents

Why Shift Mindsets? • What Is a Workplace Mindset?
The Six Laws of Mindsets • Four Common Workplace Mindsets
Exploiting Workplace Mindsets • The Transforming Workplace
Mindset Shifts and the Phoenix

Contents

3 Workplace Transformation 57

*Mindsets and Workplace Reality • Breaking the Rules
of Workplace Reality • The Source of New Reality
A Powerful Alternative Reality*

PART II

TOOLS FOR TRANSFORMATION: THE PHOENIX AGENDA 79

4 Language for Transforming Reality 81

*The Language of Transformation • The Building Blocks
of Transformational Language • The Phoenix Agenda*

5 How to Launch and Sustain Projects at Work 99

*1. Generate Trust • 2. Uncover Context • 3. Invent the Future
4. Articulate Strategies*

6 How to Drive Action and Achieve Results 127

*5. Source Action • 6. Exploit Moments of Truth
7. Maintain Awareness • 8. Realize Results*

7 How to Make Work Rewarding 163

*9. Create Wisdom • 10. Transcend Addictions
11. Complete the Past • 12. Acknowledge Freely*

PART III

ADVANCED STRATEGIES FOR WORKPLACE TRANSFORMATION 195

8 Turbocharging the Agenda 197

*Benefits of Using The Phoenix Agenda • Two Sides
of Communication: Presentation and Reception*

Contents

*Design of Powerful Communications • Examples of Using
the Agenda • Dealing with Communication Obstacles
Putting It All Together*

9 Transformational Scheduling 227

*A Radical Approach to Schedule • Workplace Mindsets
Applied to Time • Time and Moments of Truth
What It Takes to Create Time*

10 Transformational Coaching 245

*Benefits of Coaching • Life Without a Coach:
The Lone Ranger Syndrome • The Need for Coaching
Overview of the Coaching Role • Rules of Thumb for Successful Coaching
Managing, Consulting, and Coaching • When to Get a Coach*

11 The Dark Side of Transformation 269

*Warning • Careless and Damaging Communication
The Art of Destruction • Workplace Mindsets and Addiction
Burnout • The Threat to Identity • The Saving Role of a Coach*

12 The Phoenix Rises 287

*The Three Themes of The Phoenix Agenda • Putting the
Agenda to Immediate Use • Mastering the Insights
That Empower Your Vision • Ethics of Transformation
Coaching for You, the Reader*

Notes 299

Recommended Reading 303

Index 309

The Phoenix Agenda



Introduction

A Great Day at Work

I wrote this book because I care about those of us who work for a living. The book is about sharing with you a vision and the tools for a productive, caring, and constructive transformation of your workplace. We spend over 80,000 of the hours of our lives at work. Our work is a constant theme, perhaps even preoccupation, in our lives. We all deserve work that is deeply rewarding, allows us to accomplish and learn, and brings contribution and satisfaction.

Yet, as we strive for rewarding, meaningful, and profitable work, all around us the rules of the workplace are shifting. The U.S. and multinational corporate world of today is in considerable turmoil and faces declining profitability, the breaking of implicit “lifetime employment” contracts, ever-increasing rates of change in technology, and relentless corporate downsizing. Top managers are, in MIT professor Peter Senge’s term, “bewildered,” and their salaries are under scrutiny by government and the press. Middle managers, including many of my associates and friends, sense a loss of corporate leadership and vision. They are scared, and don’t know what to do. At the same time, tremendous opportunities come with the current broad business movement away from hierarchical manage-

Introduction

ment by authority toward cross-functional teamwork, flat and fluid corporate structures, and management by mentorship, coaching, networking, and positive, open persuasion. This is unsettling, and also exciting.

The fact of these changes, as is true of any crisis, presents tremendous opportunities for us all. The decentralization of corporate authority also means the possibility of greater autonomy, productivity, and self-expression for individuals in the workplace. Unprecedented numbers of us have it within our grasp to transform our workplaces into environments that bring large portions of accomplishment, learning, and satisfaction, for everyone. The purpose of this book is to provide you with the insights and tools to create, for yourself and those around you, a workplace of significance, meaning, accomplishment, contribution, growth, and happiness.

Three Keys to Transformation

TRANSFORMATION MEANS THE SHIFTING OF ASSUMPTIONS, VIEWPOINTS, AND MINDSETS

The phoenix is a mythical bird, with a melodious song and magnificent red and gold plumage, that repeatedly transforms itself. It does this every 500 years by burning itself on a pyre of flames. Out of the ashes arises a new phoenix, even more magnificent than the one before. Thus the phoenix is an ancient symbol for death and rebirth, for the endless cycles of change and transformation.

In *The Phoenix Agenda*, what dies are old ways of thinking, old assumptions, and old mindsets. Transformation is each individual shifting to a mindset that empowers and enables reconstruction of the workplace.

Introduction

**THE PRICE OF WORKPLACE TRANSFORMATION IS NOT MONEY.
IT IS PERSONAL COURAGE.**

Anyone who has lost a career, and has later discovered a new and better one, understands and has lived through the cycle of the phoenix. People who have been through this transition understand the fear, the reluctance, even the grieving that accompanies putting to rest a tired way of doing business, yesterday's opportunity. They also know the new possibilities on the other side of the cycle. Yet, the fear of the fire traps tens of thousands of bright, capable people in companies that are obviously in profound business difficulties and that are laying off employees in sickeningly monotonous waves.

Part I of the book, "Mindsets at Work," begins the shift of mindset necessary to use the tools of The Phoenix Agenda powerfully. This part introduces the core concepts and promises of the book—how to use language to shape reality, how to create new assumptions and mindsets, how to drive progress through the deliberate creation of crisis, and how to overcome the ever-present danger of crippling addiction to one's own beliefs and forms of organization. It also shows that the cost of realizing these promises is not counted in money, but in courage—the courage to openly and honestly question deeply held beliefs and assumptions.

Part I can be read on at least two levels. On one level, it presents concepts and background necessary to use the material in parts II and III effectively. At another level, part I is designed to actually produce a shift of mindset. This shift, this "Aha" experience, happens in different parts of the book for different readers. For some, it occurs while reading part I. For others, it occurs later in the book. But in order for there to be a chance for this experience to happen for you, I recommend that you read part I at least once in a spirit of exploration and openness.

Chapter 1, "The Phoenix Burns," starts with the recurring theme of eyewitness accounts of great corporations in periods of decline. It shows, through poignant and true incidents, that poor business

Introduction

results, such as the loss of 80 percent of one corporation's market value over a three-year period, are ultimately traceable to self-imposed restrictions on deep and difficult freedoms: the freedom to question yesterday's success formula; the courage and freedom to redefine core philosophy, mission, and political structure; and the ability of responsible individuals to redefine the meaning of their corporations.

Chapter 2, "Mindsets in the Workplace," shows, by many compelling examples, that most of us live out our business lives following assumptions and rules that we neither invented nor understand. It develops a theory of mindsets in the workplace that gives insight into why everyday events within corporations occur as they do and where the leverage point for deep change is. The chapter gives a systematic way of understanding management practice. Most modern management is invisibly and deeply rooted in 18th-century philosophy, is handicapped by ignorance of this, and consequently has only limited access to more modern alternatives. It is time for a transformation to modern, productive ways of thinking and acting.

Chapter 3, "Workplace Transformation," gives you the key to altering your workplace reality. Though the rest of the book can be profitably read as a set of "how-to" instructions for coping with changes in the business assumptions and workplace directions around you, this chapter goes beyond "how-to" toward mastering the art of creating new assumptions that improve business results. Even without reading this chapter, it is possible to become an apprentice or journeyman in this art of transformational management—with it, plus the tools in parts II and III, you can become a master.

LANGUAGE IS POWER

The insights and lessons in *The Phoenix Agenda* will show themselves in your life, not as some difficult-to-define and evanescent motivational change, or as some hard-to-measure attitude shift. Rather,