

Robert D. Gilbreath

SAVE YOUR- SELF!

**Six Pathways
to Achievement
in the Age**



Save Yourself!

**Six Pathways
to Achievement
in the Age of Change**

Robert D. Gilbreath

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*To Lt. Col. Joseph A. Levy,
U.S. Army Special Forces, 1971-72.
Thanks for helping me save myself.*

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Preface

A voice came to me in the middle of the night and asked me to write this book. It wasn't a dream or a vision, but more like an information-age epiphany. It was two in the morning and I was in the CNN studio in Atlanta staring into a camera. I was appearing on their "Newsnight" program as part of a book tour promoting my most recent work. In a live broadcast throughout the United States, Europe, and Asia, I was being interviewed about the business impacts of change. After a few minutes of discussion the call-in phone lines were open to viewers and that voice was in my earpiece.

"I'm working for a company that's just been bought, and I need to know how to protect my job. What can I do to save myself?" I was taken aback, so used to dealing with corporate change, culture change, and business transformation as a topic that I was unprepared to give individual advice to the very people affected the most. More questions from other callers followed. "My division is going down the tubes and I've got the feeling I'm the only one who cares"; "I want to make changes around the office, but my boss is resisting"; "No one knows what the new computer system will mean"; "The parts I've made all my life are going to be made in Mexico"; "I'm being _____ and I don't know what to do." For the blank in the last sentence, substitute "laid off," "promoted," "transferred," "outsourced," "decentralized," "automated," "off-shored," "attritioned," and any other current euphemism for personal job change.

The CNN show was the first of over 50 television and radio

appearances on my schedule. Over and over, in city after city I heard the same message: Everything is changing and I'm caught up in it. What do I do to save myself? Now, after more than three years of speeches, lectures, and consulting assignments (all devoted to the subject of business change) throughout the United States and in more than twenty foreign countries, I'm ready to give some answers. Not new corporate strategies, not new organizational theories, and not simply another voice in the chorus that's been crying, Change is coming! Change is coming! I'm ready to tell you *what to do in a changing business world*. What steps to take, what techniques to use, what to watch out for. How to survive and succeed. How to save yourself when change is either around the corner or on top of you.

I'll share what I've learned in factories being automated, utilities being deregulated, banks being consolidated, stores being sold, government agencies being cut back, insurance companies reorganizing, airlines merging, subsidiaries spinning off, and massive information systems being installed. I'll include what I've learned from board chairpersons, chief executive officers, chief information officers, presidents, directors, and manufacturing engineers; from sales people, teachers, hospital administrators, shop supervisors, union stewards, and armies of white-collar workers lined up behind computer terminals, service counters, and drafting tables. You won't hear all their stories, but rather, my synthesis of what their stories mean. You'll hear echoes of their complaints, fears, hopes, and challenges. You'll receive the net result in an organized, concise way. One that you can put to use easily, quickly, and effectively. You'll learn the fundamental skills needed to make it in a world under transition, the world in which we all work.

I'll also tell you what can go wrong, and why. You'll be able to spot changing situations instantly, prepare for their impacts on you, and reconnect with meaningful, rewarding work. But the rules for such work may be new and unfamiliar to you now. I'll make them understandable. Above all, you'll be able to discern between rules that worked in the age of stability,

the past, and the ones that are absolutely essential for the age of change, our age.

The first step is important. You've got to accept the fact that the way to succeed in the past may be the way that leads to frustration, failure, and permanent damage to your well-being today. All these changes—competition, globalization, information technology, deregulation, quality and service campaigns, productivity pushes, mergers, changing demographics, and more—have combined to make our working conditions and concerns very different. *A new world of work requires new rules and new survival techniques.*

So expect some surprising or even upsetting messages here. I can't make change any less threatening or powerful, and I can't play down its reach. Everybody either *is* being tested by it or *soon will be*. I want you to pass the test. I want you to win by winning *through* change, not by fighting it or ignoring it. It won't go away. If you know the new rules and practice the new techniques, you'll protect your job, your sanity, and your future. If you don't, you could end up a victim.

The focus of this book is on six central, critical abilities which I call *Pathways*. Once mastered, they work together to help you triumph under the conditions we all face now and will continue to face for the foreseeable future. If you are among the millions of employees and managers in the middle of change or in its path, you'll benefit from the key skills contained here. You'll put them to work immediately, and you'll see almost instant payoff and protection. This book is for you, the person who cares about his or her job, knows that change is the rule and not the exception anymore, and wants to take active steps to respond to it. The tricks you learn might not be called on right away, but when the time comes, when you're taking the bus or the train or driving your car to work and wondering what's going to happen next and what it means for you, you will remember them. You'll be able to *save yourself*. And I'll have answered the question that came in the middle of the night, the one that has haunted me since.

About the Author

As the president of Change Management Associates in Atlanta, Robert D. Gilbreath has served as a consultant to major corporations and governments throughout the world, among them General Motors, Kraft Foods, Johnson & Johnson, Aetna, Phillips Petroleum (Norway), the Parliament of the United Kingdom, Carnation, and Chiyoda (Japan). He is the author of three management books, including *Forward Thinking* (McGraw-Hill, 1987), and has written for leading periodicals, appeared on scores of radio and television programs, and lectured at leading universities around the world. Gilbreath is also the creator of more than 200 management and business seminars, which have been presented in over 20 countries. He is currently appearing as the expert commentator on the AMA's *Winning Through Change* videos.

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Introduction: Welcome to Crunch Time

If you're feeling some anxiety and concern about your job, your company, and your future, you're not alone. These are common symptoms in our changing, jerking, spasmodic business world. They reflect major transformations that have been under way for some time and from which no company and no individual can escape. Business is getting tougher, work is more demanding, and uncertainty is rampant. Fasten your seatbelts. The ride is just beginning.

If people can suffer schizophrenia and sudden mood swings, so can businesses and entire industries. The reasons are now all too familiar: competition, deregulation, technology, demographics, and globalization. These and many other "change drivers" are turning the once predictable, secure, and even enjoyable world of work upside down. And like Casey Stengel once said, "The future ain't what it used to be." General Electric's chairman Jack Welch has labeled the next ten years the "white-knuckle decade." Thousands of workers,

supervisors and middle managers let go by his policies might phrase it differently. At the very top, few, if any, worried about saving them. They had to *save themselves*.

America Is an Unsafe Place to Work

The early part of this century was dominated by risks at work—getting mangled in the machinery, dropping from exhaustion in sweatshops, being poisoned by industrial chemicals. But don't think that just because you don't work in a sausage factory or a garment garret that you're now safe. The risks have changed, but they haven't gone away. We've got new ones now.

We're no longer mangled by machinery—we're mangled by mergers. We're not poisoned, we're "repositioned" to lower-paying jobs with fewer benefits and lessened security. We're not made lame in the factory, we're laid off in a "funds management" manipulation.

No, we no longer work in sweatshops, we work in "fearshops"—waiting for the next shoe to drop and sweating bullets until it does. The most dangerous occupations aren't mining and steelmaking—they're white-collar jobs, middle management, sales, production, staff, service.

Forget the old statistics—*the most dangerous job is the one you have*, no matter what it is. The most important person, the one you should be fighting to save, is you.

Any time two or more idiots can scrape up enough nerve to convince a moneylender they know best, your entire company is in for new ownership, and you're in jeopardy. Any time a greedy manipulator sees more profit in turning your organization into salable parts, the glue that binds your corporate culture suddenly loses its hold. When thieves steal a new Lincoln or Mercedes and take it to a chop shop, a beautiful machine is cut up into replacement parts for the black market. The same thing happens to companies. Only the names are different—you don't go to a chop shop, you go

through a downsizing, a reorganization, a divestiture. Some parts get sold off, some get cut up, and some get trashed. And you're powerless to do anything about it. Until now.

Victims of Change

Victims of change are everywhere: steelworkers shut out of closed plants, taxi drivers with advanced degrees in psychology, government employees laboring under wage restrictions and over an increasingly unskilled work force, and managers facing twice as much work with half the staff and half the time to accomplish it...Or contingency workers with no benefits and part-time employment...Or even the successful survivors—the ones who must learn new jobs quickly, manage disgruntled or disenfranchised workers, and satisfy upper management that itself doesn't know what it wants. And those wants and demands are apt to change daily.

The Game Is Turmoil

One word best describes it: *Turmoil*. It's also the name of a video game in which objects, opponents, and challenges are thrown at the player at ever-increasing speed and in ever-greater numbers. The more creatures you destroy the faster their mutant replacements attack you. The sooner you learn the tricks the faster the tricks change, and the more exotic they become until you reach the inevitable conclusion and the end of the game. You crash, you give up, you become a victim. We are all playing a game of Turmoil. Boards of directors, senior executives, and top management have consultants, contingency funds, white knights, and golden parachutes to protect them. The rest of us aren't so fortunate. We're left to our wits, our courage, and our luck. And as with the video game, we've got to employ them at ever-increasing speed.

The Quick and the Dead

There is no standing still. You either move forward or downward. And moving forward means moving fast. None of us can afford slow, plodding, gradual accommodation to change or even advancement. The world is moving too quickly. We've got to go *fast-forward*. We've got to be smart and quick to survive and succeed, to *save ourselves*.

The chapters that follow are designed to help you do just that. In a systematic way, you'll learn how to adapt to the world in which you operate, how to detect change before it comes, how to find and solve problems quickly, how to become resourceful—using what you have to get what you need or want. And you'll discover the secrets of innovation within you and put them to use. You'll strengthen your natural talents for change, learn how and when to respond to the business aliens and missiles hurled at you and how to lead others through the maze of change that characterizes our chaotic conditions. No person, no corporation, no union, and no professional association is providing a safety net if you should fall. You've got to *save yourself*. I will show you how.

Between a Rock and a Hard Place

Whether you're just entering the job market or are a veteran, whether you're a middle manager or an executive, you need new skills for this new world. The tricks and techniques that worked before are liable to kill you or, at a minimum, frustrate and confuse you. Most of us are now caught between a rock and a hard place, between an irresistible force and an immovable object. The irresistible force is *change*—the new environments and the new rules. The immovable object is a stubborn combination of formal and unwritten rules, regulations, and standards that are left over from the old world. Or it's the reluctance or refusal of those above and below you to

adapt. Either way, you're caught in the squeeze. *Crunch time* has begun.

What's So New? What's So Powerful?

Business commentators, myself included, have been noting dramatic shifts for several years. Increased competition is the most obvious one. I recall my plebe year at West Point and the dreaded boxing class every morning. When the first day of sparring came, I was fortunate enough to be paired in the ring with my best friend, Dan Jackson. We were supposed to lay into each other, really punch and really do damage. Jackson and I danced around a little and gave each other knowing winks. The message between us was clear: Cooperate and survive, play along, take it easy on me and I'll take it easy on you, we'll make it together. After two rounds of thinly disguised powder-puff pugilism, an unexpected blow landed on the side of my head and I fell to the canvas, unconscious. When I came to a minute later, I noticed Jackson, about ten feet away, on his back and knocked out cold. Standing above us was the boxing instructor, Mr. Joe.

Mr. Joe had seen through our act, snuck into the ring, and clobbered each of us from behind. "Nobody leaves this ring until I see a bloody face!" he screamed down at us. When Jackson and I wobbled to our feet, there was no knowing wink, no implied cooperation. All deals were off, it was a new match. We proceeded to beat the hell out of each other—with passion.

Who's Climbing Into Your Ring?

In case you haven't noticed, several Mr. Joes have stepped into our business ring and are clobbering us from behind.