
*To
Peace, Strength, and Victory
the Perfect Musical Force
a Lily of the Valley
and the Watchtower of course*

*A Lion in the Garden
A Mother with her Fold
Initiatives Assembled
that these stories can be told*

A life lived in fear is a life halflived

—Baz Luhrmann

INTRODUCTION

YOU'RE DOING THAT WRONG

"That's not how this works."

"You're doing this all wrong."

"Don't reinvent the WHEEL!"

"You have to do it THIS way."

"That is a TERRIBLE idea!"

—Testaments of a job well done (probably).

Let's take this from the top

The world is a pretty screwy place. (I'd like to say that in a far more colorful manner, but frankly my mom will probably read this book, so we are going to endeavor to keep it PG-13.

Hi, Mom.)

As a population, we cling to ideas we hate, fear things that are benign, embrace stuff that will actually kill us, and as a whole obsess over reality TV (not sure if this last point is relevant, but it certainly goes to my “world is a screwy place” concept so ... let’s roll with it).

We claim to crave innovation while often being utterly punishing to those who dare try to innovate. We conflate, confuse, and contradict terms with other ones, making effective communication more or less impossible. We standardize our education system to mandate the process of getting the answer, not the ability to do so. We reward all participants to dull the pain of the “loser,” and in doing so effectively eliminate the reward for the “winner.”

Even the so-called “innovation” companies that flood the beltway in the D.C. area, or thread through Silicon Valley, tend to wrap themselves up in rigid systems and policies. Bureaucracies and self-imposed limitations effectively strangle what they insist on calling “innovation”—a buzz word they don’t seem to understand.

Statements ring out like “unlocking innovation” or “disrupting industries,” when what they tend to mean is: “We build gadgets, widgets, and tech that you never knew you

wanted.”

We have access to more information at faster speeds than we have at any point in history ... so how is it that we find the truth harder to reach? A baseline of understanding moreorless impossible?

The 1948 Nobel Prize winner TS Eliot said in his play “The Rock¹”:

Where is the wisdom we have lost in knowledge?

Where is the knowledge we have lost in information?¹

... and HERE’s the issue.

Our schools teach a rigid system structured around finding a solution to—not an understanding of—the problem.

“CHILDREN! SHOW YOUR WORK!”

Society favors the best followers, best employees, best students, and those who work best within the system. We only

¹ Eliot, T. S. (1934), *The Rock*, p.1 London: Faber & Faber

really herald the outliers of success and punish those who dare try and fail for ever daring to step out of line.

“KNOW YOUR PLACE!”

We tell children they can accomplish “anything” ... then tell them what **THEY** want to accomplish.

Teacher: *You can be anything! An astronaut, a doctor, a lawyer, THE PRESIDENT!*

Student: *I want to restore and service vintage cars!*

Teacher: *Ugh, a mechanic?! Aim higher! You can be anything!*

Student: *But ... I really love engines and working with my hands.*

Teacher: *You are selling yourself short! You'll never be really successful as just a mechanic!*

Somewhere along the way, wealth became the prime goal and money the universal scorekeeper. But we lost sight of where wealth comes from.

Peter Drucker, the Austrian-born entrepreneur and management consultant often lauded as “*The Father of Modern Management*,” said it best:

*“We know now that the source of wealth is something
specifically human:
Knowledge.*

*If we apply knowledge to tasks we already know how to do,
we call it ‘**productivity.**’*

*If we apply knowledge to tasks that are new and different,
we call it ‘**innovation.**’”*

Only knowledge allows us to achieve these two goals.”²

If I might deign to throw my two cents in with T.S. Eliot and Peter Drucker, we have been leaving out **perspective.**

If knowledge is the pinnacle of wealth and in many ways the cornerstone of humanity, a single piece of information, equipped with the knowledge of three equally intelligent people and strained through their individual perspective, will often yield three significantly different nuggets of wisdom.

² ¹Peter Drucker “Landmarks of Tomorrow” 1959 p263

Jack Ma, former CEO of the Alibaba Group and noted Chinese billionaire business phenom and philanthropist, said what has become one of my favorite quotes about perspective:

*“Intelligent people need a fool to lead them. When the team’s all a bunch of scientists, it is best to have a peasant lead the way. His way of thinking is different. It’s easier to win if you have people seeing things from **different perspectives.**”³*

Knowledge, wisdom, information, innovation can all easily be trumped by a fool’s perspective.

For today, I’m your fool

My perspective isn’t anything special it just happens to be mine. I was in my thirties before I realized that my difficulty in school, social awkwardness, failure to work in certain environments, and paradoxical relationship with authority all stemmed from one common source—my general world outlook was “wrong.”

³ Caroline Frost, “Jack Ma, The Richest Man In China, Stepped Down As Alibaba Chairman,” 2019 Markets Insider

I have a weird relationship with social cues. I've been told I read people fairly well, and I try to emulate common behaviors in most situations, but I have difficulty being "myself." I've come to understand that this struggle reads as awkward, or even intimidating in certain situations.

My lifelong study of communications, facial tics, body language, and both verbal and nonverbal cues has served me particularly well at operating within most social structures. However, I have also struggled my entire life feeling "comfortable" or "at home" almost anywhere. I survived in part through emulation and striving to make myself a giant mirror. I don't have what others often refer to as a "self-identity."

Due to an adolescent established passion for films, a round of film school, and some hard time in Tinseltown, I've seen in excess of 15,000 movies in my life. To that end, much of my social programming came from film. I pick the character who fits a situation ... and I go for it.

I "medicated" my awkwardness with catharsis.

As a military brat, I moved constantly and never found ground with a particular group of friends or social structure.

I learned everything I needed to know about groups of friends from *Sand Lot Stand by Me*, *The Goonies*, and *Hook*.

For my entire young life, I assumed my perspectives, the way I processed information, and the way I had movies and media playing in my head twenty-three hours and forty-five minutes a day were just how it was for everyone.

But I have since been assured that I actually see situations a bit differently from other people. My brain is nothing special nor noteworthy; I just process information a little differently—my perspective is “off.”

In fact, I consistently struggle to see situations as “the group” describes. I see odd logical fallacies and irrationality in the status quo, but there’s a remarkably good chance you do too.

I see humor and inconvenience where others seem to see unsurpassable problems. To colleagues and coworkers’ chagrin or at least annoyance, I see success where they see failure, and most significantly I sometimes see FAILURE where they see SUCCESS.

As much as I’ve tried to fit in, I find that more often than not *I’m the fool surrounded by scientists.*

Where are we going ... and what's with the handbasket?

We were taught, trained, and indoctrinated by people who meant well ... but didn't know.

Our companies, corporations, and government use data from one set of results and proudly apply it to unrelated principles. We show deference to systems put in place long ago by our wizened progenitors for reasons we deign not question lest ...

we ... be ... punished ... or ...

I don't know! But people seem to think questioning the systems is really bad, so stop it or ... again, I'm not sure the consequences, but I'm promised that some exist.

Society defines success for us, despite the fact that success is completely subjective, relatively ineffable, basically unconfomable, and completely distinct for each individual. Benchmarks, touchpoints, and grades are culturally assigned as a way of standardizing education, success, and progress, despite the fact that, again, education, success, and progress are ultimately unstandardizable (← for me, pretend that's a word).

Which leads us to ...

If something doesn't look, sound, or feel *right*, it must be *wrong* ... even if it works ... even if it works better ... even if it makes far more sense, is less expensive, easier to do, and more or less *right*, it has to be comfortable or it's *wrong*.

It has to look like how we used to do it.

If it doesn't ... there are consequences ...

... **ghosts**, *or something* ...

No one has been able to really tell me what will happen if we break with tradition, but the outcome must be really bad.

A friend recently told me something that spoke very plainly to this:

"Tradition is just peer pressure from dead people."

I'm here to add my Nancy Reagan to the mix:

"Just Say No."

I figured it out:

My perspective might be “off.” I very much might see the world “wrong.” But I don’t think I’m nearly as alone as I’ve been led to believe. A lot of us are “*weird*.” But we shouldn’t care that we are. We don’t have the time to conform to someone else’s definition of success.

We shouldn’t spend the energy striving for the outcome WE are looking for in a form that is more easily recognizable to other people.

There isn’t nearly enough “give-a-damn” (← real noun) to have us pass by our own goals to meet the goals that our dearly departed forefathers in all their apparent wisdom laid out for us decades in advance.

I don’t want to ruffle feathers just to ruffle feathers.
But I want to do the best I CAN. Not the best someone else can do by having me do their job.

I found a secret, the signal, some significance.

This notion sounds definitively counterintuitive, but I discovered that when someone criticized an idea by either referencing its nonconformity or being unable to specify why exactly it was “wrong,” the reason was because it wasn’t.

It just activated some deeply rooted social programming they probably didn't know they were perpetuating. So let's talk about how some of these criticisms really translate:

"That's not how this works!" This expression is a great signal that you might have found an opportunity.

"You're doing this wrong!" This statement begs far more questions than it does adequately signal an incorrect action.

"That's a terrible idea!" This one is my favorite, as unless the person actually thinks you're an idiot, this statement is the best to indicate you've discovered a radical transformation. (If they DO think you're an idiot, this is a cast-the-gauntlet type of opportunity.)

My next statement is going to sound glib and fairly incomplete, but as that's what the rest of the book is for, I promise to explain:

*The person who encourages, cultivates, and fosters your
"bad ideas"
is the person who wants to see you succeed.*

The more I told people my discovery that "bad ideas" are good, and good ideas are forgettable, the more I found people

were either excitedly activated with the possibilities, or inexplicably and disproportionately negative and unwilling to even hear any matter of explanation.

As a remarkably obsessive individual, that reaction kept me up nights. (*Full disclosure: I'm an insomniac—I was already up at night, so this just gave me something productive to do.*)

And so I began my multiyear journey that became this book; I'd like to take you down my favorite paths:

PART 1 — The History of Thinking: We'll start at the beginning of society and discuss the concepts of conformity, evolution, neuroscience, and memory, just so we have the same baseline.

PART 2 — Make Friends With the Mouse: We'll tear apart innovation vs. invention and show that IDEAS, KNOWLEDGE, PROCESS, and PERSPECTIVES are the truest forms of wealth, and money is just a byproduct.

PART 3 — Release the Kreative: We'll unwrap the idea that the biggest obstacle standing in your way is **you**, running programming you didn't know you had. Fact of the matter is: you are brilliant.

That isn't a platitude or a "special snowflake" statement. You are brilliant, or you could be ...

But our culture standardized us, our brain is betraying us, and our family is lying to us.

If we *Release the Kreative*, we find our way home.

Perfect ... another book on "nonconformity"

No. Not directly.

One of my top five favorite thought leaders and authors is Adam Grant. His book *Originals: How Nonconformists Move the World* helped me understand a lot about myself.

In his book, Grant demonstrates and uses a great deal of academic research to talk about "Originals" in the third person—like Jane Goodall about chimpanzees, or Dian Fossey of *Gorillas in the Mist*. He does phenomenal work to unpack and dissect what makes a nonconformist "tick," from an outside, anthropological standpoint.

Originals is one of my all-time favorite books, and the admiration and respect I have for Adam Grant knows no bounds. But where *Originals* "fails" is in identifying how to

navigate a world of nonconformity when you aren't choosing to be one.

I'm on the right track, baby
I was born this way (Born this way)
—Lady Gaga

Originals explains nonconformists and empowers nonconformists to be such. But it acts as a guide to navigating nonconformity, by expressing its merits. It doesn't as much guide a person who isn't trying to buck the system, but rather honestly doesn't see the system, understand the system, or agree with system.

Nonconformity is most often disregarded as a defiant choice. A decision to kick against the norms. However, if anything, conformity is kicking against one's intelligence, perspective, and personal beliefs, all out of fear of losing "the group."

This isn't a book about "nonconformists" nor would I classify myself AS one.

It's about conformity ... and why we care.

After three years passively researching and seeking to understand, I dove deep to dissect this concept. I spent a year

researching innovators, creatives, disruptors, philosophers, and academics. I interviewed people who broke paradigms, changed industries, rebelled against the standard, and most of them did so with ideas, simply changing the way they looked at a problem.

I am not an anthropologist, psychologist, sociologist, or any other such “-ist” that would give me any particular credential, which is why I called every expert with a phone number to make sure I wasn’t crazy before I wrote this book.

They couldn’t assure me of my sanity, but I left each conversation with a fair amount of confidence in my data and insight, as it is not my data, and I had my insight checked by people who are smarter than me for a living.

“I’m not crazy; my mother had me tested.”

—Sheldon, *The Big Bang Theory*

This book is an account of having a unique perspective on something, like *you* do. This book acknowledges and dissects the myth of *the way it’s done*.

This book gives you permission for what you never needed permission for: to have an opinion, to be noticed, to

challenge *the right way*, and to recognize recognition when it matters.

This book makes no apologies for irreverence nor self-reference, and more than anything, this book challenges the statement “That’s not how this works” with the simple question: **“According to whom?”**