

**SAVING SOULS
ON PARK AVENUE,
K STREET, AND
GREENWICH, CT**

BY JANE GENOVA, The Jersey City Kid

Through the Internet ... markets are getting smarter – and getting smarter faster than most companies [and people].” From “The Cluetrain Manifesto,” by Doc Searls et al.

INTRODUCTION:

The new power brokers and influentials are usually not those old-line guys –and yes they were/are mostly guys – who work at trophy addresses like Park Avenue in Manhattan and K Street in Washington D.C. as well as all of Greenwich, Connecticut which houses some of the prime movers in the financial sector.

They’re more likely once-nobodies like me who saw that power and influence could be developed with digital know-how, alertness about the new flat playing field in relationships, and by assuming nothing. We might be called Digital Hustlers.

The old guard doesn’t understand all that. That’s why they are asking us Digital Hustlers to come save their souls. Their souls are important to be saved because they represent the lion’s share of capitalist wealth which, of course, is going to be passed along to their wives and children. If their souls aren’t saved, neither will be those of their networks by marriage and blood.

Let’s not oversimplify. It isn’t the Internet per se which is creating a new elite. Many Internet-literate companies and individuals with the best IT services are perceived as lost

souls, wandering the world of atoms not even realizing that they need to be found and redeemed. Moreover, the young, surprisingly, aren't faring any better than their fathers. Simple digital skills no longer have anything to do with a competitive edge – unless we intend to earn our living as a word processor or master of PowerPoint Presentations.

The new elite excel because we can grasp and apply the ways in which digital communications have re-engineered the DNA of communications. That includes the tone and just about everything which goes into the content of influence and power. That umbrella covers:

- ❖ How we attempt to sell – be it ourselves on a job interview, our services to a prospect or the e-gadget we invented

- ❖ Our message about global warming to the legislature or nutrition to the obese

- ❖ The pitch to venture capitalists about a startup

- ❖ Why giving to our good cause makes more of a difference to giving to another cause

- ❖ The need to acquit our client who isn't guilty of murder.

Currently, we are in the minority, at least among the traditional power players and even the emerging generations from the best schools. I know. I live and I work in two of the most affluent areas of the world.

The usual suspects are losing their earning ability and sphere of influence primarily because they are held hostage to their hefty investment in the status quo. They are exactly the ones who have been taught to observe a code of conducting business that once, yes, was quite effective. That dominant pattern of how people were supposed to comport themselves essentially embodied White Anglo-Saxon Protestant assumptions about how professionals get what they want or need. Many of us, including me, had to unlearn much of that. You might have to also.

In this book, I, that is the Jersey City Kid from a downtown tenement, heavily ethnic values, and some jailbirds in my pedigree, will help you come to terms with the guidelines for getting what you want, halt a downward trajectory in your organization, career or business, and send you off with something to hold onto during this era of digital upheaval.

The book is free. The catch is that you have to approach with an open mind and heart. The corridors of new poverty, new underemployment and the new inability to launch a career are crowded with bodies, some toned at the best of gyms. That's because most of the old guard, their privileged offspring, and the insecure working/middle class can't

break open. They cling to yesterday's success formulas, determined to implement them better than the previous generations.

**Chapter 1 - WHAT GOT YOU HERE AND WHAT HAS BEEN EVEN PASSED
ON TO NEWBIE PROFESSIONALS IS OBSOLETE**

All of us over-40 got where we are essentially by following the same rulebook about how to get others to do what we needed/wanted them to. That Bible was one we honored. No wonder too many have been treating it as sacred scripture. Well, let's stop it.

But before we can let go of our professional belief system, we first have to uncover its assumptions. Here are some of those assumptions – and they're lethal to our careers. Just ask the dethroned players in media, financial services and even high-tech.

Here are some of those assumptions:

- ❖ Understatement or the muting of a personality indicates pedigree, therefore the talker/writer isn't hungry and can assumed to be honest.

- ❖ Emotion is a bad thing, very bad. In addition, it's messy and can't be easily or smoothly controlled.

- ❖ Over-documentation or over-arguing a point demonstrates the Protestant work ethic of being a no-nonsense professional. Show the world how hard we labor.

- ❖ Professionalism entails no intrusions of non-business matters, such as a personal life, or comments which reflect humor, wit, personal observations, speculation or any sign of the human being behind the talk/writing. Call this the “Wizard of Oz” syndrome of the disembodied voice behind the curtain, full of authority.

- ❖ Control over the message is mandatory. The more control the better. Reduced control merits firings.

- ❖ All communication is top-down. At the top is the infallible. Everyone else is not at the top. The goal is to be on the top or pretend to. Non-vertical communication implies lack of authority, power, confidence. Therefore, never act like we’re not on top. To the day our company tanks or we file for bankruptcy, appear to be on top.

- ❖ Intimidation, ranging from temper tantrums to more subtle types of abuse, is highly useful. The challenge, though, has recently become how to avoid being sued or your rants leaked to the media. Currently there has been a pile-on of paranoid onto the bullying.

- ❖ Reward loyalty, punish disloyalty. A network is forever. Those who escape or even are critical must be ruined.

- ❖ Never ever ever inform the Emperor he/she is in error. Do that and we have no shot at being on top ourselves.

- ❖ Never allow anyone to know you're/we're in error.

- ❖ Attacking the messenger will set things right.

Currently, those assumptions, which most former winners aren't even aware they're assuming or that such a code has such a hold on them, are driving once powerful men and women into my office. There is no swing to their step. Usually they have gained weight and look older than their age.

“Jane, the magic is gone.” After the old-guard ritual of polite chit-chat about the family, golf and home-remodeling, that's what comes out of their mouths, slowly, in a depressed monotone.

This recounting of their fade-out from the big reputation, great promise, and high earnings is what they tell me. They are well-defended enough and surrounded adequately with assorted sycophants to be relatively clueless about *why* this has been happening to them.

Well, why this has been happening to them is that the Internet is here. It became mainstream. It's fun. It's cheap. It's dynamic. No newsflash, communications changed in a flash and won't stop changing. Another no newsflash, all power and influence – globally – have been thrown into play. Anyone with a grasp of how this new world of communications worked had and has a good shot at all the professional goodies once reserved for the well educated, pedigreed or those who simply had down cold the WASPY rules of the career road and never broke them.

We the new elite include a God's Plenty of earlier failures, misfits, geeks, working class folks proud of their rough-around-the-edges ways, underemployed, and geezers as well as some long-term tycoons. Meet some of them:

- ❖ Ana Marie Cox who was too young to have lost so many jobs. But she certainly did lose them. She had her ticket punched when she was employee of Gawker.com. Her job was authoring The Wonkette.com which chewed on delightful morsels of Inside-the-Beltway sex gossip. The Established media such as TIME Magazine chased her with offers. TIME made one she didn't refuse. At Gawker.com she only earned about \$20,000 and needed her husband's medical

insurance. But these new persuaders have the confidence to make the investment in building digital credentials. Cox can get a plum job anywhere.

- ❖ Me. I was a geezer who couldn't believe that at the age of 58 she lost her lucrative executive-communications boutique. The perfect storm of the 2001 recession and the Enron scandal were making executives go underground. That blew away her professional identity, her 401K, and her brandname. But, not to worry, Genova found a natural bridge between the conversational tone of speechwriting and blogging. Her objective in operating two syndicated blogs <http://janegenova.com> and <http://lawandmore.typepad.com> is not to earn money directly. Rather she toils at her keyboard to use blogging as her primary new-business development tool.

- ❖ Shel Israel was one more geezer who lost everything in the 2001 downturn. As he told Atlanta, Georgia marketer and blogger Toby Bloomberg for her site www.divamarketing.com, there was really no choice but to get up the courage to learn digital. And learn he did. Along with Robert Scoble, Israel wrote the now-classic "Naked Conversations" about social media. His consulting gigs are global. Bloomberg conducted that unique research project to find out why people started blogging. The most frequent response was that they had simply run out of other options in their career and so took the plunge. Many were over-40.

- ❖ Matt Drudge was a joke. He lived in a studio apartment and wore strange attire, such as his fedora hat, as a badge of maverick honor. The laughing started to stop when the digital news aggregator he launched in his studio apartment -- DrudgeReport.com -- broke Monicagate. Currently Drudge is rated the most powerful journalist in the world. Checking out his site hourly has become a must-do.

- ❖ Rupert Murdoch saw the future and it was a conversation on steroids. He started his extreme makeover of old media with Dow Jones. Although he's in his 70s, he will probably live long enough to retrofit print media for a digital world.

- ❖ Paul Chaney grew up in Mississippi. He entered digital communications through his interest in marketing. With digital, the importance of location is lessening. In marketing, Chaney spotted social media as the low-cost way to brand and actually sell anything. Companies keep making him offers he can't refuse. But my bet is that Chaney will return to running his own shop. Meanwhile he travels the global coaching organizations in the strategies and tactics of social media. The last time I talked to Chaney, he was still a bit stunned that he was making more money than he had ever made in his life and he was setting the terms and conditions of his employment.

- ❖ After college, Laurel Touby came to Manhattan from the South to become a freelance writer. Assignments were few for someone like her with no old-media network. So she was forced to create a new type network. The first step was off-beat parties, sort of salon-style. From party-goers she got the advice to start a website for communicators. Then she got the advice to grow that website through venture capital. She did just that. In 2007, she sold that site MediaBistro.com to Jupitermedia.com for \$23 million.

Chapter 2 - WHAT THE NEW ELITE HAVE DOWN COLD AND WHAT TAKES COURAGE/CONFIDENCE FOR LOST SOULS TO LEARN

What do we understand about communications that our frightened, underemployed, unemployed and otherwise stuck colleagues don't? Here are the highlights of the mindsets and behavior of this emerging elite. It's connecting that doesn't look, smell or even sound like the old ways of influence and power:

- ❖ Business is a conversation. Conversation is lateral, that is, flat or horizontal. It's not vertical. That means talking down, talking to, talking across are not only ineffective but counterproductive. Business as a conversation replaces selling to and pushing at.
- ❖ Conversations have the tone, pacing and actual content of humanspeak. That means corporatese, rigid formality, high-blown rhetoric, clichés, windy arguments,

thorough documentation, lack of a human face or a strong voice, extreme objectivity are all over. The old format of persuasion has given way to human-on-human talk.

- ❖ As our mothers always taught us, the center of the conversation is the other person. The audience is king and queen. In our conversation with prospects, job interviewers, potential investors, clients wanting to leave, and employees, our attention is 100-percent on them. That means we are glued to their responses on our/their blogs, in their facial expressions/body language, and in the actions they take.

- ❖ There's no expertise like the human heart, human spirit, and human experience. This trumps all the over-paid designated experts. Sure, citing some research or appropriate leader in a discipline can close the deal. But that's not where the momentum of the pitch should come from. The rhythm is established by the pace of human connecting with human.

- ❖ Frequent contact is everything. The pace of conversations has been accelerated by the ease and real-time aspects of digital communications. That means we can't put a message out there and then relax. Connecting is dynamic. That's why we constantly monitor the Internet, mainstream media, and on-the-street word of

mouth about what others are saying about us. That's why we constantly are talking through our blogs, websites, podcasts, YouTube, mainstream media, on our feet, newsletters, snail mail, ads, sponsorships of causes, and phone calls. Incidentally, Google, which has been dubbed "The Wisdom of Crowds," rewards frequent postings with high ranks.

- ❖ Wagging a long tail gets noticed. WIRED editor-in-chief Chris Anderson coined the term "the long tail" to describe the profitable phenomenon of niche markets. Thanks to digital technology, any well-conceived niche can become profitable, no matter how small. For example, an author who promotes a non-best-seller on blogs, websites and podcasts over 10 years can probably outsell his best-selling colleague over time. The lesson here is to identify niches to address and then reach them in customized ways. This is extra work that's worth the effort. The cause which focuses separately on 15 niches will gain more of a share of mind and raise more funds than one which uses mass-marketing techniques.

- ❖ Nothing is forever or even long-term. Folks get together for a goal, achieve that goal and then disband or transform the group into another type. Think the March of Dimes which had to change its mission when polio was eradicated. That continual fluidity requires us to boost our emotional intelligence about entering, taking the pulse of, exiting, and gaining access to other groups. A quick tutorial: When new to a group, hover on the outside to discern the rules; when the group is

disintegrating, phase out since things will probably get nasty; and use intuition to calculate if the cost of membership outweighs the benefits. The new form of power is the ability to join into temporary alliances.

- ❖ Free is the smart way of doing business. This isn't new. Gillette made this a standard marketing practice when it distributed razors free in order to sell blades. What is new is the expectation by those we're trying to persuade to be offered a freebie. This started with high-tech enterprises which allowed free software downloads to newbie subscribers to their services. When we don't provide something of value free, our competitor who does throw in something free will win out.

- ❖ Remain a professional free agent. At the top of the list is not getting married to digital. There's a lucrative world of opportunity offline. Almost as important is not becoming an evangelist of any technology, brandname, school of thought, or a high-tech or low-tech hero. That only puts us in a box that could be very hard to get out of.

- ❖ The only way to earn is to learn. The web is forever a work-in-progress. The players, software, trends in hot topics, and readership all keep changing. If we're not involved in those changes – preferably putting some in motion – we're on the

way to becoming yesterday. Think of the world, both online and offline, as continually mutating.

- ❖ Don't waste time being surprised by the so-called unexpected. That attitude has become naïve, plus being in shock delays action. Reality is that mankind essentially can't control or predict much of what happens to us. So argues uncertainty expert Nassim Nicholas Taleb¹ but we sure can control how we respond to both those opportunities and obstacles. How we do that involves all the new guidelines on persuasion for digital times such as to be alert, be open, have courage/confidence, initiate action even without all the facts, and do constant course correction.

Chapter 3 – A FATHER ASKS FOR HELP FOR HIS UNEMPLOYED SON ON THE GOLD COAST, CT

The first documented success story as a result of this book came half by luck, half by my recognizing I needed to set loose some canaries in the mine.

The luck part was that I live near the Gold Coast, CT. Name any quaint New England town or suburb here and you will find growing pockets of those who never envisioned they would be laid off, forced out the companies they had founded, unable to start profitable enterprises, or unemployed after four years of Ivy. Of course, it's the New England ethos to maintain a calm façade. Most of these cases are way under the radar.

The alert part was my seeing the opportunity in a man's 120-second sad march toward my friend's house one Saturday. My friend and I were getting exercise shoveling some fresh snow. Let's call the man William and his son Jonathan. I have known him for about 12 years.

"Jane, how is your nephew Anthony doing? He will be graduating college soon, right?" That was the lead-in, of course, to discussing his own son. By his droopy body language I had a hunch the talk was going to be agitated.

"Bill, frankly we're concerned about how my nephew Anthony will be able to earn a good living in a professional marketplace with a glut of just about every skill. We can't default to the usual 'go to law school' because there are way too many lawyers and too much volatility in even the brandname law firms."

"So, what do you think Anthony will do? In fact, what are you doing with a glut of every kind of communications firm around?"

What I had prayed for was happening. "To start with, Bill, I am encouraging all my relatives to read about the Internet and Society and figure out how all technology could be changing the work world they'll be entering. Next, I have just completed the first draft –it's pretty rough – of a short e-book on how my family and yours, my colleagues

and yours, and you and I can keep from becoming obsolete in a digital world. For those under-30, it's the challenge of breaking in and being able to stay in.

Bill shook his head in agreement. Then he opened his heart. It was half-broken.

“The other day Jonathan announced that he was going to apply to law schools. He's smart, we all know that. So when he took the LSAT he made the upper 95th percentile. That scared me. It scared my wife. All we need is for more education for Jonathan in a field which, as you say, is glutted.”

I nodded sympathetically. Bill sighed, then continued.

“He's been out of college about 18 months. Of course, he's discouraged about not landing a job. I sense he's just going through the motions in applying. Maybe it's even some of the Full Monty – he takes the train into Manhattan, pretending to have an interview.”

“What do you think would get him moving again – and in a promising direction?” To me that question I threw out was rhetorical.

Bill didn't answer. So, I answered for him. “The book I wrote is very short. Maybe you and Jonathan can flip through and get ideas.”

Bill was wary. I sensed he feared making the situation worse by in any way pushing advice onto Jonathan.

I jumped right in. “Reading the book, Bill, has to be *their* idea. What about if you read the book. That shouldn’t take more than 90 minutes and do a gush, but not put on too heavy, for your family. For instance, say you’re rushing to Kinko’s tomorrow to make copies for everyone in your department.”

Bill was still wary. “Come on inside my friend Peter’s house here,” I told him, “and I will email the draft to his computer and print it out for you.” A few Buds and there sat before me a man with hope.

On the way out, the hard copy of the book draft under his arm, Bill cocked his eye, “Are you going to have your family read this?”

I stared at Bill. “Not now. Not until they suffer enough out there. They’ll have to hit a bottom in their job hunt or ideas for a business before they’ll be ready to see the world as it is.”

“Hopefully, my son has reached that place.”

I shrugged. I had given up trying to predict when anyone was going to take that leap into the unknown and try things differently.

That evening around 6:30 P.M., I am told, Jonathan picked up the book. He became absorbed enough to take it to his room. He went through it twice. The household was hushed, afraid to even anticipate that maybe, just maybe, there was going to be a breakthrough in how Jonathan was searching for suitable employment.

Chapter 4 – WHAT A YOUNG MAN LEARNED – Hint: Ditching self-loathing, Seeing the world through the employer’s eyes, Putting together a new story

First Bill and then Jonathan told me bits and pieces of this 180-degree turnaround. Here’s what they gave me or, at least, how I connected the dots.

Despite his youth, Internet-savvy, and an education to kill for, Jonathan was caught in the classic digital-age downward trajectory. Everything was moving so fast, with new technological, economic and political developments daily, and seeing the winners winning more and more, Jonathan went from Golden and Confident to self-hating.

Fortunately for him, the situation didn’t have a chance to harden. That’s why he could break out and break open so quickly. Many of those I coach are older, have lost too much success, and are lower on hope than newbies to careers. They’re harder nuts to crack. But in 87 percent of cases, break open they do – once they have reached what for them is their bottom.

People like Jonathan, those who come directly to me, and even some of my brandname colleagues are digitally literate. In fact, they probably know more software programs than I do. The missing piece isn't knowledge. It's understanding, acceptance, and willingness to take action.

Here's my take on how this happens. Frightened by the accelerating volatility, they avoid taking the time to think about how the Internet has mutated the patterns of how we reach out to, get someone's attention, and have that person cooperate with us. Instead they jump inside themselves and hold on for dear sanity to the old ways of influence.

Jonathan was trying mighty hard to follow the game that had gotten his father to where he was. Typical, he didn't notice it wasn't working.

What Jonathan was doing absolutely wrong was this: Although he was only 23, he was living in a pre-digital universe. It was a world in which influence tactics were built on a vertical platform. The objective of that old-line game was to persuade people through top-down messaging. That had an infinite number of forms. Just some of them were, and unfortunately, still are:

- ❖ Intimidation or the creation of fear that the people would lose what they had, ranging from credibility to a life's savings, or wouldn't get what they want or should want. This mind-messing was played by just about everyone who found people to mess with.

- ❖ Making others feel less-than. That wasn't too difficult in a nation in which self-hate and class insecurity are epidemic.

- ❖ Convincing others that they would be better off by buying the products, services, or just friendship of the ones on top. That's the premium branding ethos.

- ❖ Brutal forms of exclusion. Teenagers excel at this. Some never outgrow the Lord of the Flies mentality. Jonathan had acquired a mean streak.

- ❖ Forcing others to comply with those on the top modes of communicating, even though those were frequently tedious, boring, sloppy, and not at all what they were hyped as. The classic offenders are professors, too-large companies, declining institutions such as network television, and politicians.

- ❖ Talking from set scripts of boilerplate ideas, cliché language, and tired promises. This still dominates much speech-giving as it does applying for jobs. Jonathan's resume and cover letter were as stale as last year's Easter chicks.

When Jonathan saw these tactics detailed on the page of this book, he came face to face with his own counterproductive ways of presenting himself in a resume, cover letter, phone calls, in-person interview and follow-up whatever. He got it: He had been either

assuming the role of the person on top or defending himself too aggressively against those who were still acting vertical. You bet, he saw the ugliness, realized he didn't want to be that kind of professional, and didn't want to work for organizations which still treated people in those vertical ways.

No question, after years of living in an affluent community, socializing with his father's colleagues, and enduring the arrogance of much of the Ivy League, Jonathan had internalized vertical communications patterns. Along the line he had also made himself a promise never to find himself among the oppressed. He sought control, at any cost.

"I felt that I was vomiting up years of self-hate, fear, delusion that I could always be on top or even would want to be," Jonathan called me to tell me the following Thursday. By his example, his new behavior is helping others get with the Internet age, including his father.

Jonathan then settled in that long night to digest a world of communications that is horizontal. In that new universe, we don't have to want to have a conversation with everyone. That's why there are so many diverse communities on the Internet. We don't have to like everyone. The Internet is a web of niches. But we have to be able to respect them. This is antithetical to all the pre-digital patterns of communicating. These new values bleed into every aspect of human life, ranging from our one-to-one relationships to how we expected companies to treat us. When companies don't we now sue them. That's why the number of employee lawsuits is surging.

What did Jonathan learn about a world of communications that is absolutely flat? Here are his own words, the “likes” and expletives deleted.

- ❖ “We are ourselves, or learn to be a self or find a self. That in itself gives us power. Sure there will always be fine-tuning. Maybe my lockjaw upper-middle accent turns off employers. So I listen to normal people talk and adjust some of my pronunciation and word choice. But that’s minor. With so much emerging diversity, that is, so many people daring to be themselves, there will always be spaces for who I am. Yeah, Jonathan likes Jonathan now.” [On the other hand, I have refined some of my fave working-class phrases such as “you can’t fight city hall.” I now opine, “Maybe it’s not worth taking on this power structure head-to-head.”]

- ❖ “We let others be themselves. That saves us all the trouble of trying to change them, especially by intimidation. No wonder there’s that cliché about the futility of trying to teach a pig to sing. The pig doesn’t get the hang of it and winds up very angry. Maybe world peace can come from Internet-age values.”

- ❖ “The real me and the real others out there interact in real ways. One benefit is that we can profit from each other’s strengths, good ideas, well-thought-out

opinions. This in itself is continuing education. No wonder the new-economy companies can produce such breakthroughs.”

- ❖ “It’s disrespectful to ‘over-sell,’ isn’t it. That underestimates other people and doesn’t value their time. I got it that my resume said too much and communicated too little about how I could be of use to an employer.”

- ❖ “In the fast-moving, message-heavy Internet age, I have to become creative, persistent, patient and opportunistic about putting myself out there as a job candidate. Incidentally, Jane, isn’t rejection a gold mine of information on how I can do this better?”

During that night, Jonathan redid his resume. He created six new ones. Instead of fragmented bullets of data, he told six different stories about himself in a way that each communicated to a different type of employer what he could do for the organization. For six new cover letters he extracted the strongest parts of those narratives to bring to the attention of the employers. Lots of the facts about his background fell to the cutting room floor. What emerged was a human face on pieces of paper that was standing equal with the employer. There was neither boasting nor groveling. Employers want someone to help them figure things out and execute action in a marketplace that presents more questions than answers. They want a peer but one who knows how to follow.

Jonathan went on Monster.com and CareerBuilder.com and answered 46 ads with his new mindset. He approached cold about 200 employers with websites. He took the time to look on the site for the appropriate name to send a cover letter to. He fine-tuned each cover letter for that particular possibility. On Sunday, he went with his father to Kinko's to make copies of this book for dad's department and 10 for himself and his friends.

On Monday morning, Jonathan turned on his computer. There were four requests for phone interviews. Jonathan received six actual job offers in 10 business days. He selected a high-tech startup where he was sure he could "be himself."

Chapter 5 - HOW WE CAN CHANGE AND KEEP CHANGING

If Merck or Johnson & Johnson invented a pharmaceutical solution for how we can change – and quickly – that would be the blockbuster drug of all times. If I knew the secret to how I can change or help anyone else change, including my contract employees, underemployed family members and out-of-work colleagues, I would be on the speaker circuit. That talk would go for \$300,000 a pop.

Here is the little I've observed from my own changes over the past few years and changes I've witnessed clients making.

Willingness to change, it seems, comes from pain. We don't consider changing, which is an uncomfortable process, if we're hitting homeruns. A neighbor who is in a 12-step

program told me, “Jane, I didn’t start going to church basements three times a week because I had the world by the tail. My world was shrinking in terms of professional opportunities, people, health, peace of mind.”

Our goal might be to respond to the first signs of distress and not have to wait for an emotional coronary to say to ourselves, “Things aren’t going so hot. Maybe I should take an inventory of what’s working and not working and then do something or at least try out somethings.”

That vague signal for change usually turns out outward. We start watching others who seem to be life’s winners. We ask ourselves:

- ❖ What seems to be their outlook on life? Open? Closed? Smug?

- ❖ What are they doing now that they weren’t a year ago?

- ❖ Do they seem positioned in the past or present?

- ❖ What do they have in the way of economic success and brandname that I envy?

- ❖ What do they talk about and how? What doesn’t come up in their conversations?

- ❖ If I could ask them to help me modify how I approach my work, what would they suggest, hopefully gently?

- ❖ If I sat down with myself and did an analysis of my strengths and weaknesses, what kind of lists would I come up with?

- ❖ What am I willing to try out from others' patterns of success? Am I ready to jump in right this minute?

That's a start. I did that during the 2001 recession. My boutique was in trouble. From that self-inventory or examination of the state of the self I found out plenty. For instance, it was obvious that I was insulating my professional world with the same kinds of people. That homogenous grouping meant we were all breathing the same fumes.

A colleague, also doing her own inventory, suggested we both learn more about networking. That helped. From Duncan J. Watts² I picked up the benefits of reaching out beyond our own professional, social, and class boundaries. The now-classic research of Mark Granovetter shows that professional opportunities frequently come from left field – that is, outside our usual networks. That finding explains how the old-style

machine pol like Jersey City, NJ Frank Hague gained so much influence and power. He cultivated everyone, equally.

There's a growing number of pioneers who are busting boundaries by being hired in oddball or even survival part-time or weekend jobs. To even get in the door, you bet, they had to change their everything. Once on the job, they have access to everyone's stories, lifestyles, and dreams. That's how one of my colleagues starting writing his first novel. Tentatively he's titled it, "M&M Peanut." It's about the employee breakroom in Home Depot.

Along these lines, I'm considering setting up a salon in which God's Plenty participate. The max number should be about 25 and diverse lines of work, from scientist to plumber, should be represented. Together, we can drill down into how are people here on planet earth getting what they need and want.

Once out of my comfort zone, I sort of soared in pattern-breaking. I got into the habit of getting breaking news from DrudgeReport.com, not the TV. I picked up "The Elements of Copywriting" by Gary Blake and Robert W. Bly. That got me thinking about prose in terms of promotional copy vs. the stodgy white papers and testimony my shop used to produce. I even read, three times, "Realty Blogging" by Richard Nacht and Paul Chaney. Although it's directed at the real estate industry, it talks to all of us in professional services.

What was amazing is that after changing even that handful of patterns, everything else began to open up, effortlessly. Not that I'm totally there. But it seems there's been enough re-wiring that I am aware when I'm thinking or behaving pre-digital. Then I ask myself: Is this a keep or throw away? No, we don't have to toss whatever immediately. Again, it's the pain component. When we're in enough distress from that mindset or course of action, we'll change.

What else? No one needs to be reminded that nothing fails like success. For every new account, promotion, pay raise, or prestigious media interview we get, we should mandate ourselves to experiment with one new thing. That's exactly how a one-time all-print colleague began blogging. She just won a contract to oversee a startup upscale publication. Realizing how simple it would be to default to smugness she pushed herself into a digital zone. Through an American Marketing Association ListServ, she obtained the name of a blogging coach. Now she has one of the most popular blogs in communications. Her next goal is to learn video.

One more thing. It's self-forgiveness. That was Jonathan's initial step out of self-hate. I sort of got the hang of this when I attended a mini reunion of my high school in Jersey City. One of the in-crowd finally noticed me. "Weren't we two a mess back then, eh Carol," he said to me. Wrong name, right take. I got it: We're all a mess, sometimes in our life we're more of a mess than at other times.

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¹ Good reads are “The Black Swan: The Impact of the Highly Improbable” and “Fooled By Randomness: The Hidden Role of Chance in Life and in the Markets.”

² His 2003 book “Six Degrees: The Science of a Connected Age” is a heavy read but worth it.