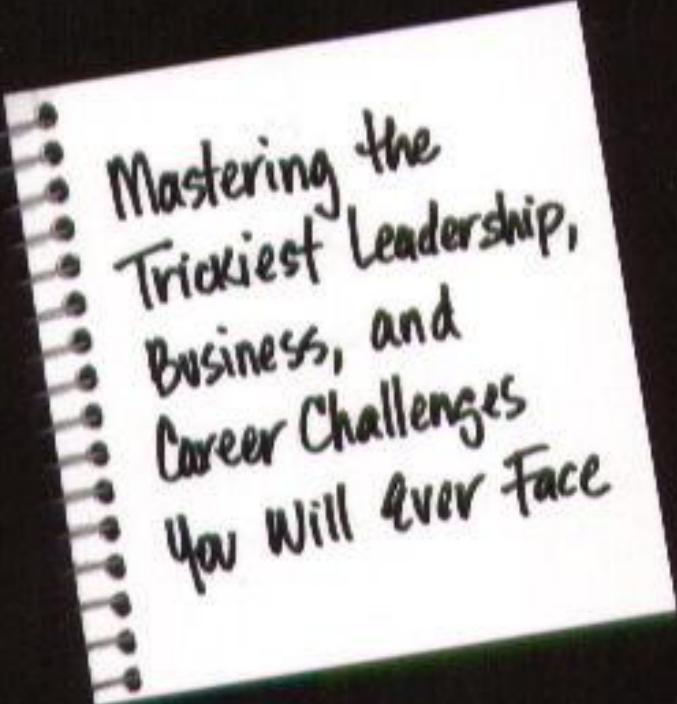


YOUR COACH

[IN A BOOK]



Mastering the
Trickiest Leadership,
Business, and
Career Challenges
You Will Ever Face

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Chapter 2.

Declare an Impossible Future

That Captures People's Imagination



SITUATION: How do you transform a climate of profound resignation into a climate of inspiration? What do you do with big aspirations and small resources? How do you shift from “running the business” to “creating the business?” *Let us be your thinking partner here.*

Robert in a Coaching Conversation with an Executive Vice President of an Oil Company

I am sitting in the main salon of Richard Severance's forty-five foot boat, Wind Dancer, located in a marina on the Gulf coast near Houston, Texas. The charismatic "Severance," as he calls himself, is the President of ConocoPhillips North American Downstream. In my mind, he would be played by Tommy Lee Jones in the movie version of "Big Oil," except unlike Tommy, Severance has only one arm and bears a hook that he is so adept with he can cut a hangnail with a clipper.

"Hargrove," he says looking at the spot on my Bobby Jones sport shirt with the remains of a lunch of crawfish soup, "you're an insult to good clothes."

"Well, Severance, that's what you call eating with gusto; my compliments to the chef. But let's see if you are as good a leader as you are a chef." After a bit more good-humored repartee I say, "In the ordinary course of events there are two kinds of leaders, those who take a stand for a vision of an Impossible Future and make things happen to bring it to pass, and those who take a stand for a predictable future and are thereby swept along by history. What kind of leader are you going to be?"

"Now just hold it right there!" he protested. "What's the point of going for a future that is impossible, when by definition, it's never going to happen?"

"Just a minute now," I say, "if you look at history, whether in politics, business, or science, all great accomplishments—the building of the Panama Canal, the invention of the telephone, the first Ford Model T factory, the invasion of Normandy, or the creation of the Salk vaccine—looked impossible. The problem with most leaders and managers is that they tend to get lost in a sea of predictability."

“Well there’s a good reason for that,” he explains, “we have to meet our earnings forecasts for Wall Street. And to do that, we keep doing what were good at, *buying, boiling, and selling oil.*”

“I think there is another reason why this happens that is just as important,” I countered, “Most organizations have what I call a ‘winning strategy.’ Your winning strategy is the source of your success—but at a certain point, it becomes the source of your limitations. It’s like a box that, once inside the box, you can’t dream, think, or act outside of it.”

“I see what you are driving at,” he said, “Instead of setting high goals, you set goals that you can achieve based on your winning strategy. Instead of thinking about what could be, you keep thinking in terms of what has been.”

Yes, and instead of coming up with game changing ideas, you keep polishing up the existing assets through continuous improvement. Instead of welcoming innovative ideas, you suppress them and end up creating low morale in the company. That winning strategy will never take you to an Impossible Future, only to a probable future. Nor will it test the mettle of your organization.”

“So how do you break out of the box?” he pondered, “and at the same time deliver on your results today.”

“Setting high goals is one way to expand beyond your winning strategy, because these goals cannot be realized within it,” I said.

Severance talked about the possibility of creating an Impossible Future at his next executive team meeting—a three-day powwow that happened every month. I said, “That’s a lot of time to spend together as a group. Just what do you create at those meetings?” Severance eyes opened wide in response, as if coming to a moment of true insight, “We don’t create anything at those meetings. We run the business.”

“Perhaps the way out of the box of your winning strategy is to not only set some high goals for yourself, but also to begin to think in terms

of 'creating the business' versus 'running the business.' Instead of seeing your business as limited to your current business model of *buy, boil, and sell oil*, see your business as an capacity to create new wealth by staking out new areas of opportunity that represent getting different, as well as getting dramatically better at what you are already doing."

In the following months, I coached Severance and his group to create an Impossible Future based on some BHAGS (big hairy outrageous goals) that were designed to both transform a climate of resignation into a climate of possibility and opportunity, as well as to take people beyond the dessert of "buy, boil, and sell oil" into a gusher of new opportunity. With that strategic challenge clear in our minds, the next step involved holding a CollabLab where we brought an extraordinary combination of people together to brainstorm on how to deliver on it.

The strategic architecture that came out of the CollabLab involved a business incubator for innovative business concepts, a leadership development program based on Masterful Coaching, a Six Sigma quality program, and an organizational renewal process.

In speech after speech, Severance preached his Impossible Future, creating the context of a truly inspired organization. Hundreds of leaders went to a whole new level through the application of both executive coaching and team based coaching.

Innovative business concepts were experimented with that had the potential to create new sources of wealth. Six Sigma quality resulted in dramatic efficiency improvements to the tune of \$200 million while giving individual at every level the experience that they could make a difference.



TEACHABLE POINT OF VIEW: Leaders create an Impossible Future; Administrators maintain the status quo.

*Tell yourself “Anything I can imagine is possible.”
Let your mind test the limits, “If only..., If only..., If only...”*

If you wake up every day and go to work and ask yourself, “Is this all there is?” you are probably not spending enough time creating an Impossible Future and too much time in the dull process of administrating the status quo. Perhaps your epitaph would be something like this: “He made his budget 27 times, shrunk his organization, and played the corporate politics pretty well.” Now imagine a new epitaph: “(Your Name) accomplished the seemingly impossible feat of... and changed the world of (your industry) irreversibly and for the better, while enriching his organization, after which, he sailed off into the sunset.”

Create your own 2004 version of a “man on the moon” goal for yourself and your enterprise.

Declare an Impossible Future

By declaring an Impossible Future, you create a context that breaks the grip of profound resignation that plagues most organizations and creates opportunities for people to grow, as they stretch their minds and skills in the pursuit of high goals. Instead of paying attention to what you can

predict based on history or your organizational winning strategy, pay attention to what you can declare. Start by asking yourself the following questions: What would you like to accomplish, if only it were possible? What change would you like to bring about, that looks impossible, but if it could be done would change everything? What do you passionately care about so much it would be worth reinventing your entire self?

Find people and businesses who are living in the year 2014 already and emulate them.

Shed Your Winning Strategy

To create an Impossible Future, you will definitely need to shed your organization's winning strategy. Your winning strategy is what has allowed your company to be successful in the past, but has become a source of limitation—whether its selling PCs, Maxwell House coffee, package delivery, or car insurance. It is important to keep in mind that just because one approach has reached its limits, doesn't mean there isn't an alternative way. Look for people already living in the future and emulate them. Don't sell PCs, sell service (Dell). Don't sell coffee, sell ambiance and a new me in the morning (Starbucks). Don't sell package delivery, sell world wide logistics and supply chain solutions (UPS). Don't sell insurance, sell speedy claims (Arch Insurance). Don't do operations, do Six Sigma quality (Motorola). But don't be the second or third to sell services instead of PCs or ambiance instead of coffee unless you see away to do it dramatically better than the first mover; find you own new answer and create your own new market.

Design, Build, Test a Structure for Fulfillment

You create an Impossible Future with passion, courage, and commitment. Yet you also create it by designing a structure for fulfillment that will allow you to actually bring it to pass. Start with the dream, then ask yourself: Where are we now with respect to it? And most importantly ask yourself: What's missing that will make a difference? This is a whole different question than asking what's needed and wanted—such as time, money, or whatever. What's missing is what will produce what's needed and wanted. For example, what's missing might be an innovative business concept. What's missing might be a new business process not based on paving the old cow paths. What's missing may be wiring your customer into your database. Your structure for fulfillment comes out of putting all the missing pieces together, keeping in mind that you need to optimize the whole, not just the parts.



Template for Action

1. Ask your team if they feel they are pursuing a future that is inspiring, empowering, and energizing. At your next team meeting, pull out your organization's goals and ask people if the goals represent an Impossible Future or predictable future. Also ask if these goals really energize the organization or, "yawn," allow it to fall gently to sleep.

2. Distinguish your organization's winning strategy. Ask yourself or your group: What is our organization's winning strategy? How is it the source of our success? How does it limit us? What impact does it have on the goals we set, the plans we make, the actions we take? What can we do to break the grip and excel beyond it?

3. Define an Impossible Future based on exciting new possibilities, not just goals. Creating an Impossible Future should start with imagining new possibilities for your organization that then become the basis of goal setting. Ask yourself, “What would be an Impossible Future in the area of business concept innovation? In the area of production? The supply chain? People and culture?”

4. Set some high goals that raise the bar for your entire organization and stretch people’s minds and skills. Create one to five BHAGS (big, hairy, outrageous goals) that help move the possibilities you have declared from just that to a reality. I like setting high goals for an organization, not only because it creates a context that pushes people to achieve what is really possible rather than predictable, but it also tends to become the cauldron for human transformation.

5. Bring various people together to create a “strategic architect” for achieving the goals. Based on the premise the two heads are better than one, bring various people together with different perspectives and begin to look at how you will create the Impossible Future. Pick four or five major components—projects, initiatives—that you will put into place. This then becomes the strategic architect.

About the Author

Robert Hargrove is a world-renowned, revolutionary thought leader in the field of talent development and coaching. His motto is *Better Leaders, Better World* and he believes that coaching leaders to achieve an Impossible Future is the fastest, most powerful way to achieve both.

Hargrove is the founder of Masterful Coaching and served as a Director of the Harvard Leadership Research Project. He has been awarded for Distinguished Public Service by the United States government for his coaching work with political leaders.

Hargrove has also played a pivotal and instrumental role in rebranding campaigns in companies like Adidas, Philips Electronics, Estee Lauder, and the National Hockey League.

Hargrove's coaching approach is one of the only methods which delivers real ROI. According to one client, "*We pretty much stuck with the Masterful Coaching approach and it made the company hundreds of millions of dollars.*"

Hargrove is the author of best selling business book *Masterful Coaching* and many other books on leadership, coaching and collaboration.

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