



Brian Reich

Shift & Reset

I am angry. There are real problems facing the world, and we, as a society, are not doing enough to address them in the right ways, not the ways we know are possible. The old way isn't working, and we know it.

We continue to reward the same behaviors we have rewarded in the past while expecting different results. We profess interest in really doing things differently but settle into routines that are comfortable and safe, and we are fooling ourselves. There are lots of excuses for not making real, demonstrable changes in the way we live, work, and how we interact as individuals and engage in groups/communities. I have heard them all. I have used many of them myself. But they are bullshit. All excuses are. A person either truly, deeply, genuinely cares about changing things or he doesn't. You can step up and do what it takes, in whatever way you can, or you need to acknowledge your limits and accept the results.

What might be possible if we were really committed, as individuals and as a society? I've thought a lot about this, and instead of remaining angry, I choose to embrace the question and figure out how I can use the anger to make things happen.

“What might be possible if we were really committed, as individuals and as a society?”

I won't apologize for making my opinions known. That may not be the best business strategy—to dispense tough love—but I think it is necessary. I don't have any more tolerance left for people who suggest they are interested in changing, exploring, experimenting, and innovating but aren't willing to stay committed when things get bumpy. I have no interest in working with people who want to do the same old boring stuff. I refuse to keep quiet when I see something that I believe is important—and needs to change—heading in the wrong direction. There will always be compromises, sacrifices, and choices to be made, but there is no need to settle.

So, while nobody wants to hear that they are failing—myself included—sometimes it has to be said. And right now, we are failing.

Help! A Giant Meteorite Is Approaching!

Close your eyes... okay, well, open them so you can keep reading, but pretend they are closed for effect.

I want you to imagine that you are standing outside on a beautiful, warm, sunny day. You've been working hard to raise awareness about a pressing issue or promote the good work of your organization on behalf of an important cause. Suddenly, the sky begins to darken. An ominous-looking shadow blankets you and your surroundings. The ground beneath you begins to shake. A giant meteorite is approaching. If it hits, everything you know will be affected. Everything you know will change—and not in a good way.

The meteorite in this story represents all the challenges that you face in addressing serious issues in today's connected age. For brands and marketers, the meteorite represents the control that customers now have over their information experience—the knowledge that there are other products besides yours that meet their needs. For political organizers, the meteorite represents all the anger and frustration felt by citizens and the apathy toward voting and activism that it fosters. For nonprofit organizations and charities, the meteorite is the lack of resources and interest that potential supporters are willing to give to your efforts. If we don't do something, that meteorite is going to strike the planet, and everything it hits will be destroyed. Your organization will fold. Your customers will disappear. Your job will no longer be necessary.

While a giant piece of rock from outer space might not hit the Earth anytime soon, the metaphor is useful because the problems are real. People face unconventional threats every day and must continually find solutions to altogether new challenges.

We can knock this situation (our proverbial meteorite) off course, even just a little, and see dramatic effects. And if we knock the meteorite off course by just one degree, just a tiny little shift, two things happen that are really exciting. First, we save the planet; crisis averted. Your organization is saved, your job is safe, and there is once again a possibility that we can address the issues in a meaningful and measurable way.

Now consider the second benefit of knocking the meteorite off course, and keep in mind that before a meteorite finds its way through the atmosphere, it is just a piece of rock moving through space (albeit at speeds upwards of 30,000 miles per hour). It is a rock is being propelled by a series of wonderful gravitational pulls and when that giant piece of space rock is knocked off its course, even just a little, new and powerful things happen. Its gravitational forces start to spin in different ways, opening up all new sorts of possibilities.

Similarly, when you expend energy toward changing a situation, new markets can be created, new solutions can be forged, new ideas can be developed, and new partnerships can be explored. Countless game-changing opportunities are created when a meteorite is thrown off course.

Eliminating the fear of the impending strike and the hesitation that comes from the fear can provide you with the ability to radically change how you think about everything from marketing and communications to operations and funding, as well as the way you engage and support your customers and audiences and the way you behave as individuals and interact in communities. Everything can change.

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So how can we incite these changes? We can convene the best experts and most successful practitioners and seek their input. We can avoid locking ourselves into one platform and commit to constantly changing and innovating. We can build and rebuild, and make adjustments to everything we do in real time.

But even before those things, we need to adjust to thinking differently. We need to shift the way we communicate, organize, operate, and interact before the opportunity for change materializes. We need to embrace and establish new roles and responsibilities for ourselves and for the institutions that govern and lead our society. Once we shift our way of thinking, we then need to reset everything we know about how to address serious issues in a connected society and act.

Blamestorm. I know we can solve real problems, we can address complex issues and embrace life to the fullest at a point in history that is riper with potential than any ever imagined. But that's not enough. The important stuff is not happening right now. Not enough is getting done. But why not? Well, there is plenty of blame to go around.

I blame the media for telling the wrong story—promoting what drives attention and delivers ratings, instead of helping people to understand and take action.

I blame politicians for making promises, but not living up to them, and sending a message that politics is more important than public service.

I blame government for passing laws and promoting policies that don't do enough to help people, instead of connecting and serving the needs and interests of the community.

I blame corporations for saying they care, but not changing (enough about) how they act—at a time when they could serve their customers, contribute to the world, and make money.

I blame nonprofits for not doing enough to advance their causes—for mistaking awareness for action and tools for answers, for being afraid to try new things when they have the great potential to educate, engage, and mobilize people to action.

I blame the people who fund projects, invest in ideas and promote new ventures for maintaining the status quo and sticking to old ways of doing things, instead of making it possible for new things to happen.

I blame our elementary schools, high schools, colleges, and graduate schools for not teaching people differently—for not adapting quickly enough to changing times, and preparing the next generation of leaders, innovators, and activists.

Most of all, I blame you. If we used our individual and collective power, for purchasing and advocating, for organizing and educating, none of the other institutions and organizations could resist the call to change. I blame you for not using your creativity, your passion, your technological prowess, your business acumen, your experience, your insights, your vast networks, your significant influence, and your bold ideas to do more, to fix the problems that exist in the world and address the challenges that continue to challenge our society.

And, of course, I blame myself for not thinking differently and using the channels and platforms that are available to me—and emerging every day—to promote new ideas, ask tough questions, challenge assumptions, ask for help, work differently, change my behavior, and much, much more.

In order to break cycles of inaction, organizational structures and approaches that are currently in place to support ventures and foster innovation must be abandoned. Instead of measuring success by attracting a mass audience for a simple offering, we should look to build ventures that benefit from the unique and powerful commitments that small, dedicated, passionate audiences can make.

We should look at how to shift and adapt the commitments that organizations are making, and how they share them with the world. We should examine how the reach and influence of the crowd can help individual companies, as well as communities, to achieve their desired results. We should look for more opportunities to bring together disparate ideas, across sectors and disciplines, so the silos that exist within organizations and sectors (and the self-reinforcing beliefs that stifle true creativity and change) can finally be abandoned.

If we do this—if we think bigger and stay committed—we can make innovation a shared interest and common opportunity and not just the domain of a handful of people and groups.

After the Impact. Imagine if we continue not being effective at solving the world's most pressing problems. The economy continues to worsen and organizations are unable to raise enough money to continue operating. Thousands of nonprofit organizations and charities are forced to shutter. What little remaining confidence or trust that people have in government, and our political leadership around the world, is exhausted as gridlock and political acrimony worsen. Voter participation plunges. Volunteerism and civic engagement all but evaporate. Customers feel taken advantage of by major corporations and abandon their loyalty to certain products and services, forcing even the most successful and widely regarded brands out of business. Communities—both real and virtual—begin to dissolve. Individuals pursue only the most self-serving actions—driven by fear and selfishness.

If the infrastructure and interest for addressing the serious issues that exist in our society disappears, the issues—poverty, hunger, cancer, climate change, and more—remain unsolved, and their effects become more disastrous.

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Because we know (or have faith) that our proverbial meteor is probably not going to hit, we have the benefit of using our imagination to try and think of ways to stop the disasters I just described.

Major institutions of all kinds will likely be able to weather the continuing economic crisis and the social shifts that are occurring. But it doesn't mean there's no reason for alarm or a critical and urgent need to act.

The world may not end anytime soon and the path that we are on may not lead to certain disaster. But there are real dangers that exist due to our inability to capitalize on changing technologies to improve our individual lives and society as a whole. And there are opportunities to knock the meteor off course—to shift and reset our thinking, and the way we work to address serious issues and complex problems. There is an opportunity to avert what is, it appears, certain disaster ahead. And the new possibilities and opportunities are out there waiting to be explored.

People are living longer, healthier, more active lives than ever before. Communication and collaboration technologies continue to transform how individuals and communities thrive, socially and economically and how skill and resource needs are met on a global level. And there are experiments being run even now that are demonstrating that different options exist and will offer powerful results. Innovation almost never pays off immediately. Patience and money are almost always required to generate ideas that over time may turn out to be breakthroughs.

New approaches don't always yield good results. But even the wrong ideas provide learning all the same. Change is painful, and slow, sometimes messy, and always exhausting. But the benefits far outweigh the sacrifices in the end.

If we truly want to solve the problems that exist in our society, we need a whole new approach, a dramatically different structure for the social, economic, political, organizational, communications, and personal efforts we undertake. We need to shift our thinking, reset our operations, and establish a way of addressing serious issues that is designed for the current realities, not for the past.

We need to go beyond awareness and deepen our knowledge of how to address serious issues. We need to truly engage with individuals, and as communities, and take actions that do more than expand the size and reach of an organization or campaign. We need to fix what's broken about our current systems, close down organizations that aren't getting the job done, remove staff that aren't performing and end partnerships that don't make sense. There are examples and opportunities for every type of organization, in every sector and industry, to learn from. For brands and businesses, it means going beyond marketing and committing more than money in the name of good corporate citizenship. For nonprofits and political organizations, it means moving away from building e-mail lists and social media followers and instead focusing on creating meaningful relationships and functioning communities of supporters and advocates. For the media, government, educational institutions others it means challenging every decision

and choice, and overcoming the fear that keeps us from putting ourselves out of business by solving those problems. For everyone, it means making the unpopular choice, sacrificing personal interests in favor of greater benefit, and going deeper instead of growing larger and reaching more broadly.

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Before we can do anything else, we need to reframe the debate. We need to change the conversation, by bringing together those who are outside the circles of the usual suspects to create new expectations and standards for success. We need a new way of thinking, a new kind of language, new strategies and tactics, and an overall different way of operating. We need to embrace the idea that our increasingly interconnected world is fueling the need for a new era of real citizenship. Not just in words, but in real, meaningful, measurable actions and results.

The serious issues that our society faces today are, in almost every case, too big for one charity, company, or government to end. But each individual and collective effort, when focused appropriately, enabled and accelerated sufficiently, and directed effectively does have an impact. This is a small piece, the beginning of the conversation, the smack upside the head and invitation to act. But the real work to create tangible solutions begins after you finish reading this essay. And it should continue every day, all the time, in everything you do. The world needs people who have no fear of failure, people who can bring others together in new, innovative ways. It needs people who can work hard, be smart, and commit to driving real change—people who can shift and reset everything for better results. The world needs people to start right now, without delay or hesitation.

So what does the world really need? I'll let you in on a little secret. It's you. You are the person who can shift and reset everything for better results. There is nothing preventing you from rethinking how we address serious issues in a connected society. You just have to start by making a change. We all do.

Consider this your challenge—now it's time to change. 📌

Info



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