



**WHY WE MUST  
EVOLVE OR DIE**

**Tom Triumph**

# Here are a couple of simple truths.

**Change title to *Evolve or Die*?**

**Or change text for accuracy?**

The world is changing rapidly due in part to the ever-increasing advances in technology. Your ability to adapt and learn is more important than ever. The title of this manifesto says it all: *Evolve or Die*. It's somewhat blunt, and it is an exaggeration. But my belief is that it's closer to the truth than many people realize.

It might seem trite to write this, but (in reference to Henry David Thoreau) you weren't meant to settle for a life of quiet desperation. That's said with confidence because—nobody is meant for a life of desperation. To continue succeeding in this new world, you'll need to continue learning, innovating and creating. You'll need to evolve.

It's better to learn from the champions, practice like your life depended on it (to an extent it does), and come out strong and punching above your weight (because you can).

You've got a lot to offer this world. We all do. I'm in your corner, offering guidance and cheering for you. Get in the ring, come out swinging, and fight the good fight.

# Evolve or Die

First, the bad news. Chances are your company is probably going to go under. Whether large and successful, or small and nimble, the odds are your company will remain focused on the business at hand. Chugging forward with its current way of doing business, selling those products and services that have served so well. It works. Sometimes for a long while. Until it doesn't.

“Unlikely,” you're saying. “The company has done well for (5, 10, 50) years!”

But, ahead (somewhere) lies a treacherous curve. And because your company is like other companies (comprised of people with habits and needs and shortsightedness), the organization is basically resistant to change—despite the “we think out-of-the-box” platitudes. Senior management doesn't know what it doesn't know. Why should those managers be different from anybody else? And the future has a way of blindsiding most of us with change.

**The ironic thing is that the company likely succeeded in the first place because it was innovative and drove change. Yet its successful run makes continued evolution difficult and counterintuitive.**

It's easy to find examples of companies that failed to evolve, missed the twists and turns in the journey, and headed into difficulties. Oftentimes, entirely missing the new world order. Like the proverbial buggy whip manufacturers. Decreasing market share. Lost revenue. Oblivion.

Think about companies and industries that were doing exceptionally well ... until they weren't—Blockbuster Video, Motorola, Kodak, Blackberry, Sony, Myspace, Xerox, and Polaroid.

And what's the good news? For one, while it's not easy to successfully navigate through the technological and societal changes ahead, neither is it impossible. Some companies are able to

reinvent themselves; to move from one business model to another. Even if you're not the one steering the ship, you can be an influencer.

Maybe you can work on a project that's not officially "sponsored." It's not uncommon for dedicated (stubborn) employees to spend a portion of their spare time on skunkworks, until such time that the work matures and the company realizes it needs what you have. It happens in great companies all the time, which is in part why those companies are great—because some of the people pushed ahead and did what they thought needed doing.

Maybe the even better "good news" is that you are not your company. While it's hard to influence a company's direction, you have complete control over yourself. Meaning, you're free to study what's happening around you and not be one of the many people holding the buggy whip inventory when nobody's buying.

*"What's dangerous is not to evolve." —Jeff Bezos*

Change means doing things that are new, and forgoing things that are familiar. It means discomfort and uncertainty, and the real likelihood of being wrong. All in all, it's scary. It really comes down to a decision. You either ride things out, fight for the status quo and hope the changes you're sensing are going to slow (they won't), or you think about where the world is headed and change to get yourself there.

The journey is difficult, but the direction is clear. Evolve or die.

The future has a way of blindsiding most of us with change.

# Ten Myths of Innovation

There are a lot of myths about innovation. And not a single one involves chocolate. On the contrary, perhaps one of the most satisfying suggestions about being innovative is to have a chocolate bar in your pocket. There's concrete evidence that doing so had a huge impact on harnessing new technology into a product that had global impact. And we can thank American physicist Percy Spencer for the sweet lesson.

Percy was born in 1894 and had a difficult beginning as a child. When he was a baby, his father died, so his mother sent him to live with his aunt and uncle. Then when Percy was just seven, his uncle died. At the age of 12, Percy quit grammar school and began working 12-hour days in a local mill to support his aunt and himself. And that was the end of his formal education.

When he turned 18, Percy joined the Navy. While on night watch duty, he began reading whatever books he could find on the topic of wireless communications. He kept reading and taught himself calculus, chemistry, physics, and metallurgy.

After leaving the Navy, he went to work in 1939 for Raytheon. It was there, in 1945, that Percy and his chocolate bar made a discovery that changed the world. While he was working on a device called a magnetron, which generates short-wave radio waves, Percy noticed the chocolate bar in his pocket melted whenever he stood in front of the equipment. He had no idea what caused this, but soon discovered that it was due to microwaves. So he began modifying the equipment and, after several alterations, he built the first microwave oven.

So, chocolate is not only high in antioxidants and a cancer-fighting food, but it's also fundamental to technology commercialization. I like it more. It certainly worked for Percy, who went on to receive 300 patents and numerous awards. All this was accomplished without a formal education, but with a curious mind, a desire to self-educate, and a chocolate bar.



**So, take a bite of your chocolate bar and consider these myths about innovation.**

- 1. Geniuses work alone** | The world is full of solo inventors, but it's difficult to take technology to market by working alone in a basement or garage. Collaboration, teamwork, and feedback are often invaluable in creating something remarkable. Even if the initial idea originated from a visionary genius, having others contribute is essential to bringing a more evolved product to fruition. Marie Curie, Thomas Edison, and Alexander Graham Bell were all geniuses, and they worked alongside others.
- 2. Innovation happens somewhere else** | For whatever reason, human nature often inclines people to think that great ideas or inventions happen "somewhere else." The reality is that inspiration for the idea—and the blood, sweat, and tears to bring the idea to life—can and does happen everywhere from A to Z. The Saturn V rocket was designed and built in Alabama, and the steamboat was invented in West Virginia.
- 3. Innovation happens in a flash of inspiration** | Great ideas often happen in a flash, but execution doesn't. Albert Einstein wrote in his Autobiographical Notes that when he was 16 years old, he wondered what a light waveform would look like if he could observe a beam of light while traveling at the same speed. That thought experiment played a memorable role in his future

Marie Curie, Thomas Edison, and Alexander Graham Bell were all geniuses, and they worked alongside others.

and the development of the theory of relativity. While an idea or inspiration might come quickly, as it did for young Albert, the final solution (or product) typically takes significant effort and time to fully develop. The first wheels turned pottery in 3500 BCE and weren't used on chariots for three centuries. And monks were flying gliders a thousand years before the Wright Brothers' first flights.

4. **Only large companies with vast resources can innovate** | Actually, often it seems big companies are the least likely to innovate. Blockbuster Video could have come up with a better means of distributing DVDs (like startups Netflix and Redbox), but instead the company at its peak went from over 84,000 employees and 9,000 stores to bankruptcy. Or why didn't an internet company of Google's size and brainpower put several engineers on a project to create a text messaging-based platform like Twitter. Or consider the once dominant Kodak and its lack of innovation in digital cameras. The list of big companies that failed to innovate goes on and on.
5. **You need to be educated by a prestigious university** | Percy Spencer did not have an auspicious beginning or a formal education—yet he was a great innovator. Benjamin Franklin was the son of a candlemaker and had only two years of formal schooling, but he was ambitious, worked hard, was resourceful, and was a great American inventor, scientist, and statesman. Ralph Lauren dropped out of college and never went to fashion school—yet his designs are considered iconic and his business savvy established him as one of the wealthiest people in America. Thomas Edison had three months of formal schooling, and attained over 1,500 patents and founded 14 companies, including General Electric. Steve Jobs, Mark Zuckerberg, and Bill Gates all dropped out of college. This by no means is an argument against education at a premier university, but rather a simple reminder that education can happen everywhere.

*“What we have to learn to do, we learn by doing.” —Aristotle*

6. **Your history indicates your future success** | The world is full of countless examples of people who continued to invent and innovate, despite their earlier failures, until they succeeded. It's actually difficult to find successful innovators who didn't repeatedly fail.
7. **You can't "turn on" innovative thinking** | Actually, to a large extent you can "turn on" creative thinking, and many people and organizations do exactly that. Bell Labs, Palo Alto Research Center, IDEO, Google, Nike, Apple and thousands more work at being creative and then work even harder to make ideas a reality.
8. **Set aside your emotions to innovate** | Emotions are integral to humans and should be utilized in a manner that assists with creativity. Emotions can be increased through music or movement or visual imagery (real or imagined). Find what works best for you, and bring a measure of emotion to your work.
9. **A stimulating environment will stimulate thinking** | Actually, wherever you can think freely and deeply is the best place to innovate. You don't need a pinball machine or a room full of beanbags nearby. Simply going for a walk or brainstorming with a few colleagues is sufficient inspiration. You might just need to be inspired. J. K. Rowling came up with the idea for Harry Potter while riding on a noisy, four-hour, train ride.
10. **The best innovations are new creations** | On the contrary, some of the greatest inventions ever are those that combine things that haven't been combined before. Combine a steam engine with steel wheels and you've created a locomotive train. Mix a telephone with a printer and you've got a fax machine. Marry a wireless communications system with a computer and you've got a smartphone.

**So, take another bite of chocolate and get started!**



# The Only Four ways You Can Ever Fail

I often think of the powerful words that Milton shouted into the wind on May 25, and I want those words to reverberate in my own head. Milton was 82 years old at the time, but I'm certain he yelled the words in a strong unwavering voice. A voice that carried the emotional mixture of joy, pride, wonder, and awe. And probably some fear and a bit of disbelief.

He shouted to be heard above the noise from the wind and the loud 12 horsepower, internal combustion engine straining right next to him. But mainly he shouted because of the pure exhilaration coursing through his being.

Milton Wright was the father of Orville and Wilbur, the famed American inventors and aviation pioneers who built, tested, and flew the first controlled "heavier-than-air flying machine" in 1903. It was just several years later, in 1910, that Milton shouted out the stirring words during the one and only time he ever flew.

If you get the chance, you should visit North Carolina and walk the grounds at Kill Devil Hills near Kitty Hawk. It's where the brothers spent month after month, year after year—assembling, testing, crashing, repairing, making slow incremental progress before doing more assembling, testing, crashing, repairing. It was there where the brothers first flew, and where we grew wings. We added the third dimension to our world. It's hallowed ground.

Early flight was dangerous, pioneering work and Milton had made his sons promise to never fly together. He couldn't imagine losing them both during a flight crash. Over the subsequent decades, aeronautical engineers and historians have thoroughly studied and chronicled what the Wright brothers did to succeed. Searching "Wright brothers" on Amazon yields 1,628 books.

But, when considering what contributed to the success of these bicycle mechanics and self-taught engineers, both of whom didn't even graduate from high school, it's also important to consider what they decided not to do.

**Here are the four things they didn't do.**

- 1. Obsess over milestones** | Their intent was to fly. But they had no real idea how long it'd take to work their way through the innumerable challenges. For one thing, they calculated they'd need a minimum of eight horsepower from an engine that weighed less than 200 pounds. There was no such engine available at the time. So the brothers set about building one. Not to mention the other innumerable obstacles involved with creating a lightweight wood and cloth structure that would withstand the forces encountered while flying; or how to alter the shape of the wing surfaces so their flight could be controlled. The only thing greater than the unanswered questions and problems was their commitment to get it all figured out. What they didn't have was an unrealistic schedule.
- 2. Work haphazardly** | Anders Ericsson is an internationally recognized professor of psychology at Florida State University, who has spent a lifetime researching and studying human achievement and performance. He's studied world-class experts in a variety of areas, including athletics, music, chess, medicine, etc. What Professor Ericsson has found is that the best way to improve and become a master in your life's work is through purposeful (or dedicated) practice. He has authored several books, most recently *Peak: Secrets from the New Science of Expertise*, published in 2016. Simply stated Ericsson describes purposeful practice as having four important primary components: a specific goal, intense focus, immediate feedback, and frequent incremental improvements. The Wright brothers are nearly a perfect example for all of these components.

**3. Chase someone else's goal** | Their objective of flying wasn't assigned to them. It wasn't the goal of some wealthy industrialist who pressured the brothers to solve the challenge of flight. It wasn't a directive from an existing business enterprise looking for a new way to transport paying customers.

Learning to fly was their goal. The seeds originated in 1878 when their father brought home a small toy helicopter for Orville and Wilbur, then just seven and nine years old. The boys played constantly with the rubber band-powered toy until it broke, at which point they built their own.

**4. Quit** | Enough said.

Although Milton made his sons promise they'd never fly together, there was just one exception ever made to that rule. Orville and Wilbur flew together on May 25, 1910. The brothers landed safely. Afterwards, Orville took up their father, Milton, for his one and only flight. The 82-year-old Milton climbed aboard the flyer and held on tightly as it accelerated across the ground.

As Orville powered the aircraft upward, Milton looked down and watched everything he'd ever known in all his 82 years, slowly fall away. He saw the clumps of grass and the leaves on the trees merge into blocks of solid colors. He saw plots of land. He saw how the fencing created lines across the terrain below. He watched a small flock of startled birds take off from a field and fly under the Wright plane. Everything Milton had ever known was below him, as though it were spread out on a giant, flat canvas.

I wonder if his first and only experience flying generated a glimpse of a new world of possibilities. If at some point during the flight, Milton sensed a transition. Certainly the Wrights knew their invention would result in enormous changes in the world below.

During the flight, Milton turned his head, and looked at his son, Orville. So that Milton could be heard above the wind and the engine noise—and the din of the beliefs and limitations that held our bare feet to the warm, hard earth over the millennia—Milton shouted to his son.

**“Higher, Orville, higher!”**

## What It Feels Like to Punch Fear in the Face

Seems like most everybody makes excuses. Or is afraid to wrestle with themselves until the old self lies exhausted in the dirt, yelling “uncle” ... and the new self stands up, walks away, and doesn’t look back. Here’s one person who doesn’t make excuses and continues to punch fear in the face.

Chuck Close is a world-renowned artist. He paints large-scale portraits, measuring several feet on each side. And his portrait paintings are so impossibly and unimaginably detailed, that they’re mistaken for photographs.

But, even if Chuck Close knew you as a dear and close friend, he probably wouldn’t recognize you. Close has what neurologists call prosopagnosia. It’s believed to be caused by lesions that have damaged the brain. It’s also called face blindness. Here’s what that means. Chuck Close isn’t able to recognize faces. It’s why, even after years of being married to his wife, Close didn’t recognize her.

You'd think this rare condition would make it more difficult to paint portraits. But according to Close, that thought didn't even occur to him. Close said,

*“I was not conscious of making a decision to paint portraits because I have difficulty recognizing faces. That occurred to me twenty years after the fact when I looked at why I was still painting portraits, why that still had urgency for me. I began to realize that it has sustained me for so long because I have difficulty in recognizing faces.”*

And if that weren't enough, there were other major difficulties that would impact his ability to create art. In 1988, after delivering a speech in New York City, Chuck Close had what he has come to describe as “the incident.” A spinal artery collapse resulted in him having a seizure. It was cataclysmic, and Close lost essentially all movement from the neck down.

Close worked hard for months in physical therapy, but only regained a minimal amount of movement in his arms. He would have to spend the rest of his life in a motorized wheelchair. But his desire to create burned within him, and, fortunately, Chuck Close was driven to try. So he strapped a paintbrush to his wrist and went to work using what little movement he had. As is the case with all real artists, his work evolved.

Close continued painting portraits on large canvasses. But now he had an assistant begin by dividing the canvas into small grids. And with a brush strapped to his wrist, Close utilized paint and paper in each grid to create a small work of art. And each grid contributed a piece to the overall portrait. The resulting image was pixelated—and compelling.

Here's what Chuck Close can teach you about what it feels like to stare down fear.

*“Never let anyone define what you are capable of by using parameters that don't apply to you.”*  
—Chuck Close

**It Takes Courage** | Imagine this. You have honed your skills to the point where you can paint a face on a nine-foot by seven-foot canvas with such exacting detail, that it is mistaken for a photograph. Then you lose all those skills. And yet somehow, you have the wherewithal to make the decision to start all over again, fully knowing that whatever you do, will have to be done with a small fraction of the capability you once had.

The magnitude of courage necessary to move forward is frankly hard to fathom. To better understand how daunting this must have been, imagine other professions that require decades of neuromuscular training before attaining world-class performance—ballerina, football player, or race car driver—and after experiencing what Chuck Close did, they decide to begin again.

**Success Is Uncertain** | Of course it is. That's why you're afraid.

**It's Hard** | Ditto. Maybe unimaginably hard. Begin the work.

**Nobody Can Do It for You** | Nobody could pick up a brush and paint while Chuck Close sat nearby giving instructions. That's coaching or teaching, not painting. What's more, nobody but Close could experience the struggle that would shape his work into something entirely new.

**It Leads to New Possibilities** | What a loss it would have been if Chuck Close stopped making art after his incident. Instead, he strapped a brush to his hand and continued. In the process, he created a new way of seeing and thinking about portraits—and created hundreds of new paintings.

**There Is a Choice** | Looking over some of the paintings Chuck Close has done since his incident, it's kind of impossible to imagine that he might have made the decision to not paint. But, of course, he could have made the understandable decision to never paint again.



It's good he made the choice to continue. And not just because the world is inspired by his work. But because it would certainly have been a dire world for Chuck Close if he did not make the decision to continue to create.

*"I don't work with inspiration. Inspiration is for amateurs. I just get to work." —Chuck Close*

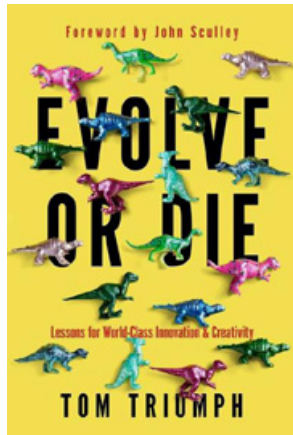
## It's Never Over (As Long as You're Alive and Creating)

Although Chuck Close is nearly 80 years old (he was born in 1940), he's still on the journey of reinvention. In the past couple of years, he has separated from his wife, relocated to a geographic area far from the comfort and support of his many friends, and he continues to experiment with his art to the point that he's dismayed art critics and confounding friends.

And here's what Chuck Close knows. **Life isn't about finding yourself. Life is about creating yourself.** 📖



# Info



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### About the author

Tom Triumph helps companies grow by collaboratively helping them reinvent their business, product development, and marketing. Along the way he's helped large organizations act nimbly and small companies scale. He's been a participant in two global technology revolutions—and has been part of some remarkable success stories (and some misfires), and he's the author of the book *Evolve or Die: Lessons for World-Class Innovation & Creativity*.

He fulfilled a childhood dream of living aboard an ocean research ship and tending to the mini-sub (Cousteau was on the Board), wrestled in the Olympic trials, and helped oversee the design and fabrication of the largest composite hovercraft ever built in the US. He resides in North Carolina and is an ultrarunner who envies Tom Hanks' long run as Forrest Gump.



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