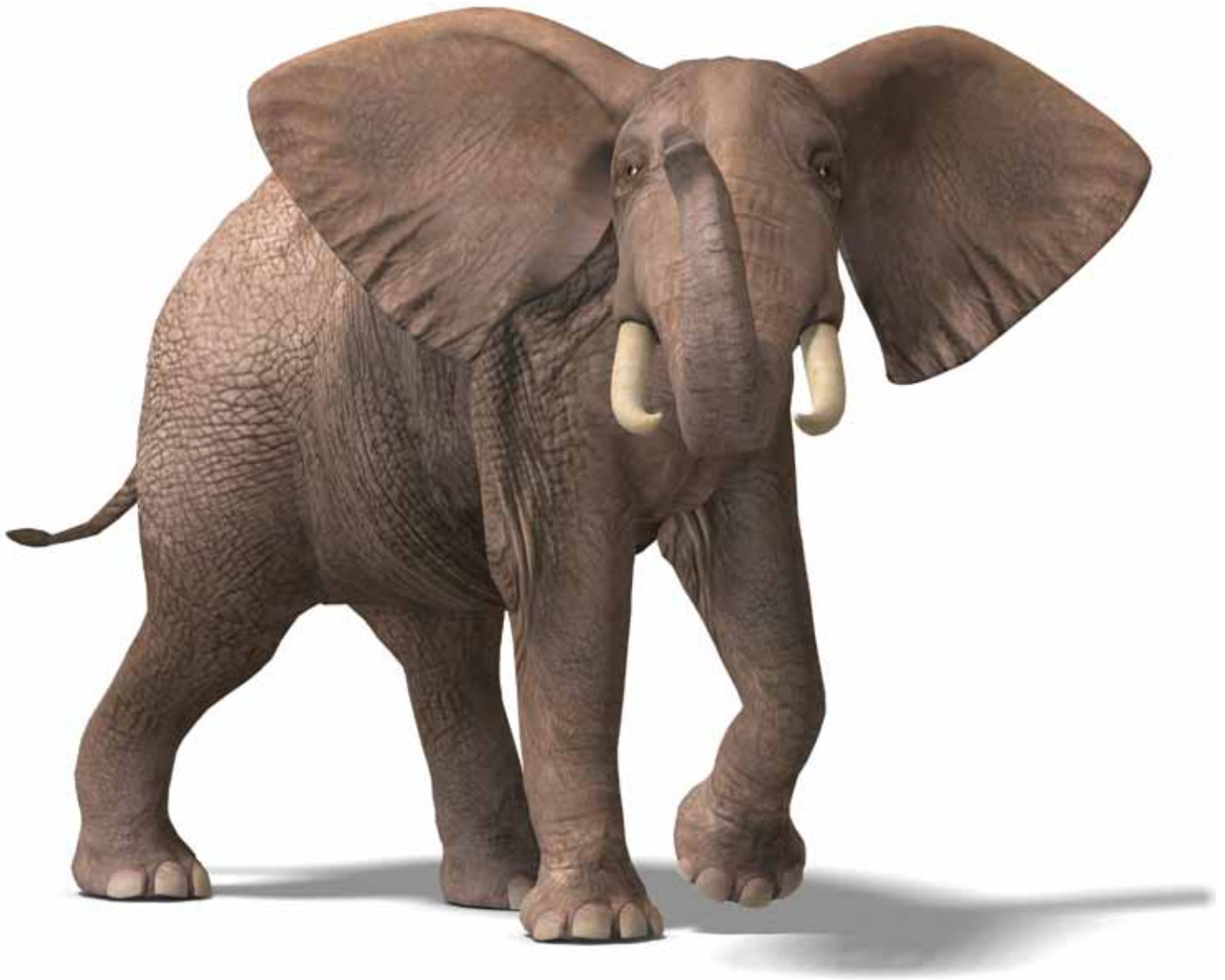
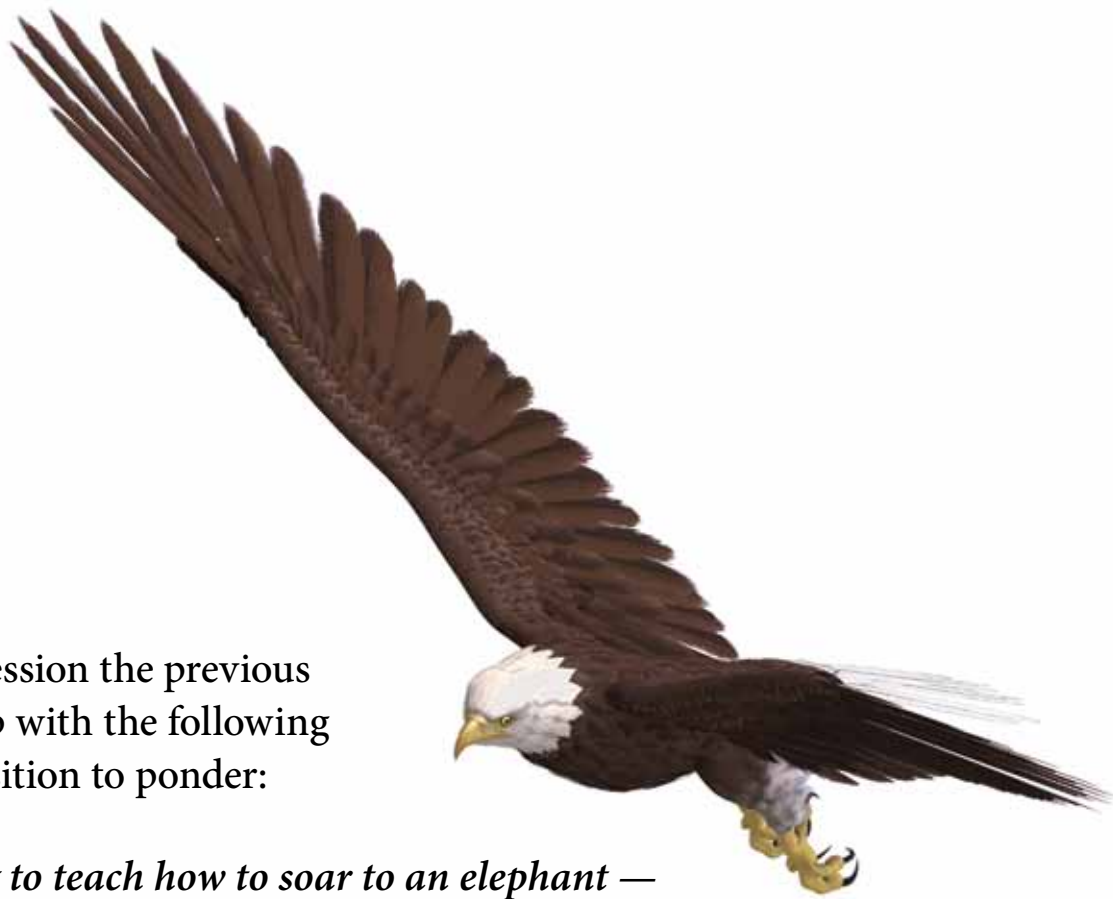


# Considering **the PARADOX** of the **New Business Environment**

BY TOM WENTZ





At the end of the session the previous day, I left the group with the following paradoxical proposition to ponder:

*“It is wrong to teach how to soar to an elephant — yet the mother eagle never needs to teach the baby eagles how to soar — and she is very smart.”*

A paradox is a statement or proposition that is absurd or contrary to conventional wisdom, but when resolved or understood, reveals a significant truth. It is absurd to think that anyone would try to teach an elephant how to soar and it is true that the Mother Eagle does not train her babies how to soar.

In trying to resolve a paradox many people get caught up in oscillating strategies. It is the reason that diets don't work. People start a diet by not eating then they get hungry and start eating the same food again. You can't "eat" and "not eat."

People who hate their jobs think about quitting and then decide to stay for fear of not finding a new job. Smokers stop and start. The quit-and-stay and stop-and-start dilemmas are signs that paradoxical paralysis has a grip on a person or an organization.

*As an aside, golf is very paradoxical. I am reminded how many times my golf partner swore he'd never play again after a disastrous round and showed up the next day ready to go again. He always said, "I figured-out what I was doing wrong." Every time he tells me that, I tell him that in golf, slow controls fast. He has yet to understand the truth of that paradox.*

The paradox of business today is the same as golf; an organization can only go as fast as its slowest person. If the *slow* are like elephants, the organization will have very little ability to *soar* to the next level.

There are many absurd thought processes confronting every president today. It is a challenge that is beyond all their experience from the past. The paradox of the elephant and the eagle was a simple test. Let's see whether they resolve it and what truth emerges.

### **Seeing Potential**

Joe had difficulty sleeping. He read the comment about the elephant and the eagle and quickly resolved the paradox by seeing that an elephant has no potential to soar while the potential to soar is intrinsic to being an eagle. Resolving some paradoxes is very simple. It is sometimes very easy to see the potential in a situation, yet some are very difficult as the resolution is hidden like the picture — the *vision* — behind a hologram.

For Joe the resolution made perfect sense and many people would have quickly completed the assignment and gone to bed. Not Joe. As he pondered why I asked the group to think about such an absurd thought as teaching

# He was bothered by the thought that *he* was possibly trying to teach elephants how to soar in his company.

an elephant how to soar, he was bothered by the thought that *he* was possibly trying to teach elephants how to soar in his company. Worse yet, because he had struggled to achieve the next level that was expected of his company, that *he* might be the biggest elephant and that soaring was not within his ability.

## The Inner Voice

When I checked my e-mail the next morning, there was a message from Joe that was marked urgent. The message read:

Tom and Mr. Hock:

I'm having trouble sleeping as my intelligence that you tell me is deeply infected with false metaphors is keeping me awake — so here is what it is saying — sorry if it is not legible as it is 3 a.m. and I'm not really sure it makes any sense — what's keeping me awake is the thought about teaching elephants how to soar — what an absurd thought, yet that is exactly what I am trying to do at my company — I am the elephant with my MBA degree and that doctrine has been deeply imbedded in me — plan, organize, control — and I have successfully executed that doctrine in actual practice for over 25 years — I have been promoted many times for exquisite accumulation of enough for most of my career — and I have been handsomely paid for my tenacious and aggressive and determined approach to getting enough — and I have been told in leadership development workshops many times that this approach is scientific — and in the real world of cause-and-effect, these simple principles will achieve the desired results of getting enough — and to veer from these principles is to take my eye off the ball — and by treating those who are negatively affected by the execution of these principles with kindness is to invite a lack of discipline which will compromise my career — that I must sacrifice everything including my happy home life to the certain reality and pursuit that execution of these principles brings regardless of consequence — then tell me, kind sir — why should I listen to you when you tell me that my intelligence is wrong and my behavior must change — furthermore I have spent thousands of hours with my best friend — the only one I can really trust — my own intelligence — thinking about how things need to be “more efficient” and “er,” and I have over my career come up with some brilliant new approaches that have produced amazing results and rewards for my brilliance — so to tell me that “more” and “er” are not appropriate is ridiculous — I know how to “more” and “er” our ship through the rough times — yes it's not working right now, but I'll do it again — now you tell me that's wrong — as I ponder the next

level reality of real time mastery that is being imposed on us elephants — maybe we are too slow and maybe we need to learn to soar — maybe it is true that I'm guilty of causing my company to be slaughtered as Mr. Wagoner did at General Motors — but that the key ingredient that Mr. Hock suggested is to be concerned about how I treat people as things and costs to be controlled — we spent a fortune on teambuilding — a fortune on new technology to make their work easier — on seven-habit stuff and logistics — on human performance development — I have invested heavily in the growth of our people — we have great benefits — we give them food clothing and shelter — and they have obeyed my wishes for years in hopes of retiring with adequate food clothing and shelter — the inside people obey — the salespeople don't — I don't know how to execute the command for our salespeople to make their quotas — they don't obey that command — they want “more” and “er” — everything seems to change rapidly — there is no constant — the young people struggle with how they are treated by some managers — they won't settle for the food clothing and shelter — they are tweeting between themselves about the meaning of their work — work should not have any meaning beyond the results at the end of the month — they say we should change the culture — that California crud is back — we tried that once and the group hugs turned into a lawsuit — but if we don't change the culture they will tweet that we are an unkind place to work — I actually don't know how to feel like they feel — I've never allowed myself to feel as that is a sign of weakness — my body is aging prematurely and my cardiologist tells me to learn to relax — relax — Are you crazy — I've tried to relax and delegate — the people are not committed to getting things done on time — my HR specialists have warned me that I am dealing with people who have feelings and hurting their feelings will cause them to quit — that I need to be with them — I don't have time to be with them — furthermore I don't want to be with them — now you and Mr. Hock tell me that they are very ordinary and that I should entrust my career to them — I frankly don't know how to do that — rather I don't want to do that — I'm really not interested in knowing how to treat them as I need to be convinced that I should want to treat them — we did that empowerment stuff and it all failed — we hung in ropes and went to retreats together and nothing worked — more skill on how to be nice to people tomorrow is not what I want — I have to buy into want-to not how-to — I know things are different today — but I really don't want to trust others — I don't want them to know that I don't know how to lead them — how can that be a possible solution to my problems — I'm going back to bed — I hope I can sleep now that I got this out of that intelligence that you tell me is obsolete — hope you can help me in the morning!

Have you ever lain awake with the stream of consciousness that will not stop? I have coached many people to simply get up, write it down and *let* the paper you wrote it on have what's troubling you. Get it out of your mind, then go back to sleep and review it in the morning. You will be amazed how this letting-go process will somehow — we really don't know how — cause your mind to relax and let you go to sleep.

As you will see, the key leadership skill is to let and allow people to move on from the past. We will call this *visioning*.

Joe arrived early and asked, "Did you get my e-mail?" Rather frantically he said, "I don't know why I pushed the SEND button. I shouldn't have sent it. Please don't share it with anyone — they'll think I'm crazy."

"I got it, and I won't share it with anyone unless you want them to learn from your experience."

"What could they learn from me staying up all night worrying about teaching elephants to soar?"

"I suspect there were others who had that same experience — if they will admit it. We ought to find out."

He just looked at me and said, "What did you just say?"

"Your inner self conversation is exactly the same as every president I've ever met who will tell the truth. We all have a leader self that is trapped behind our manager mind."

"That's what makes going to do that to us

"I'm sorry to start to learn to resolve current business *Mass and customized* is a massive paradox for many people." I paused and started to walk him over to the coffee bar as he really needed a shot of caffeine. He may have gone back to bed, but he didn't look like he had much sleep.

"Joe, for right now the bottom line is that every person in a position of authority has this inner voice conversation with themselves. I've heard versions of it from many people. It is our leader self — your 'A' leader self — wanting to emerge. It is trapped behind your manager mind. The good news is that your story contains a lot of energy that can be transformed to propel you to 'A.'"

As he was pouring his coffee, I said, "Joe, it's way too

early to start the workshop for today, but did you happen to read any of Dee's book *One From Many*?"

"I glanced at that chapter about the ordinary people."

"Once you read the book, you'll see Dee's stream of consciousness that he calls his *Old Monkey Mind*. It reveals the same story you've told in your e-mail. It almost caused him to quit many times."

I laughed a little and said, "Joe, you'll be a great leader once you recognize that your people have a deeply imbedded energy field that will enable them and your company to embrace the new Energy Age with enthusiasm and commitment."

As he poured me a cup of coffee, he wanted to ask more questions, but others were beginning to arrive. I said, "As you drink that coffee, think about allowing me to use your e-mail as an example with the group this morning."

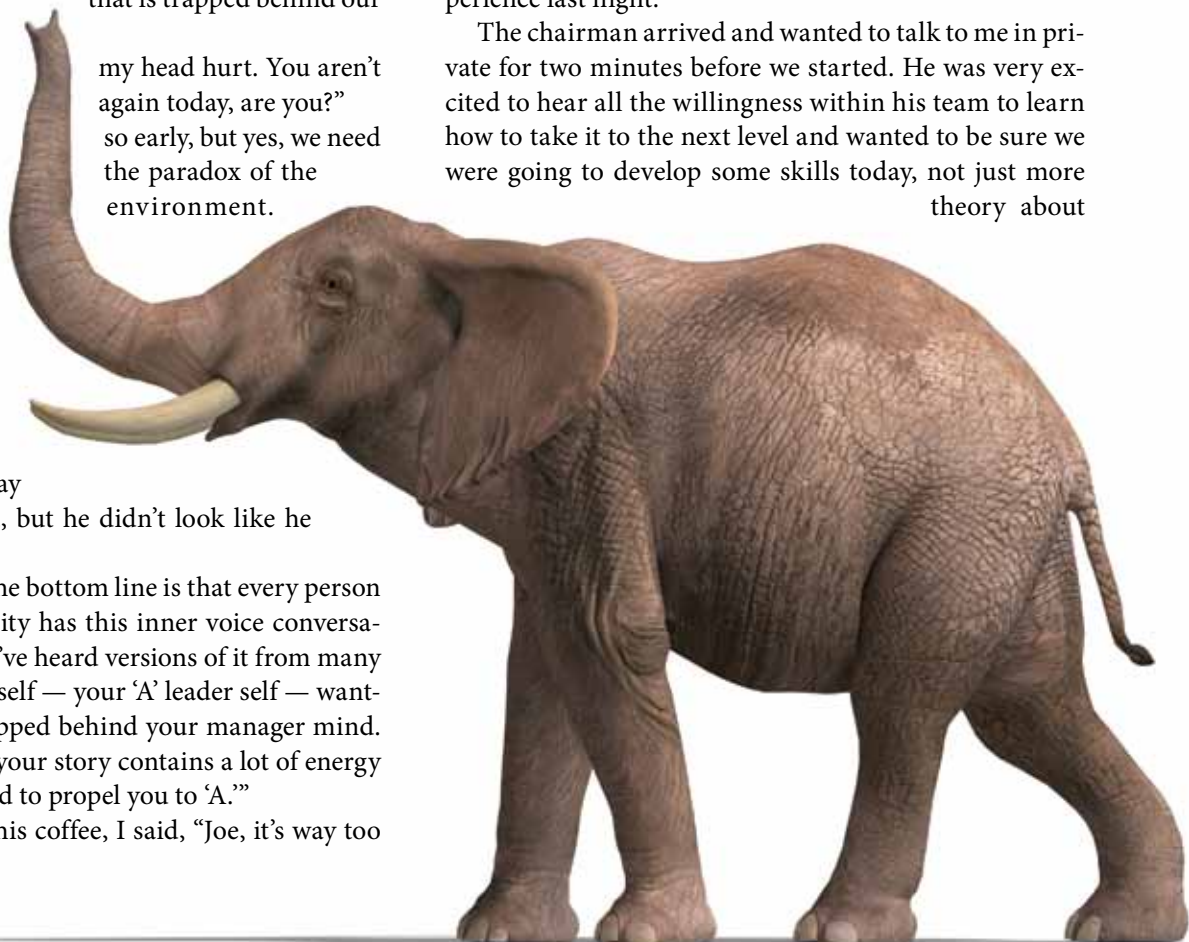
He was unable to respond. "Just think about it — it is a powerful example of the energy field that we need to transform."

Bob and Brian were jousting for the coffee. Brian said, "Your elephant trainers are here. I hope you can teach me how to get my people to pull that little stake out of the ground."

I looked at Joe and said, "See? They had the same experience last night."

The chairman arrived and wanted to talk to me in private for two minutes before we started. He was very excited to hear all the willingness within his team to learn how to take it to the next level and wanted to be sure we were going to develop some skills today, not just more theory about

my head hurt. You aren't again today, are you?" so early, but yes, we need the paradox of the environment.





the next level. I told him, “Skill development has already started. You’ll see it as we begin the session.” I also encouraged him to remain silent as his people begin to process their awareness.

Joe came back with copies of his e-mail, but he was afraid that passing it out would be embarrassing. I suggested, “Joe, the very first step in learning how to become an ‘A’ leader is to allow yourself to be vulnerable, and that would start by sharing your experience with others so they can learn from it. If you are an elephant — you won’t. If you want to soar — you will.”

Once again he just looked at me and said, “You’re trying to tell me something — right?”

“As my friend David McNally said many times: *“Why does the thrill of soaring start with the fear of falling?”* Being an ‘A’ Leader is a very difficult choice, but your potential to be an ‘A’ hinges on your choice as to what to do with that e-mail.”

### Resolving the Paradox

After all the morning chatter, there was a major focus on teaching elephants to soar. Everyone was reading Joe’s e-mail. He had passed it out. Bob yelled across the room, “Joe, what’s this thing?”

Those who had not seen it immediately began to read. To take the heat off of Joe, I said, “Joe sent me that e-mail and I suggested he risk sharing it with you. That makes him a little vulnerable, but one of the how-to skills that we will cover today is to self-disclose and make yourself vulnerable with your people — and as Joe has done — with you, his peers.”

I allowed the reading to continue for a minute and then said, “As you read Joe’s e-mail, you will see that a

stream of consciousness does not occur in sentences or with paragraphs. Random thoughts string together, often-times disjointed, and there is no main theme to the thinking.”

As they finished reading, there was some levity toward Joe, and it was the typical defense mechanism from others who do not want to admit that their reality is exactly the same.

Suddenly, Bob broke the humor by saying, “Joe, you must have been in my head last night. I gave myself the same lecture, but I did not write it down. It kept me awake for a long time. It was like I’d had three cups of coffee. Why did you write this? It’s the same story I had — especially about that culture change thing — but I didn’t write it down. I wish I had recorded it. You’d be amazed how similar it was.”

Brian jumped in and anxiously said, “I’ve got elephants standing at those little stakes waiting to be told what to do. They could pull that little stake out with a simple tug, but for some reason they just stand there.” He paused and said, “I was thinking that I’m an elephant trainer also.”

For the next 10 minutes almost everyone in the group shared their elephant stories. They all had similar experiences as they retired for the evening. Joe was very relieved that he was not alone. I regained their attention by saying, “Every president I’ve ever worked with in trying to achieve next level results has had this conversation with themselves.”

The chairman volunteered, “I beat myself up for many years with this story. It was worse before the gimme putt experience with Tom and it is just now starting to be silenced as I’m driving ‘3.’”

There was an eerie feeling in the room for the chair-



*“The fake-it-till-you-make-it mind-set prevents them from asking for help.”*

## “In the Energy Age we need to legitimize soaring by using leader skills of visualize, enroll and align.”

man to admit that he had an inner voice — that seemed so insecure for a man in his position.

Once again, Bob broke the silence, “Roger would have never confessed to having this story. He was always confident he had things figured out.”

“I’m sure that Roger had his story — but people like Roger will never admit it to anyone. That makes them vulnerable to attack, and as I told Joe, allowing ourselves to be vulnerable is one of the first how-to skills we need to learn today.”

Carlos asked, “Isn’t this admitting to being very insecure?”

“Carlos, that is a great question, and as we will see, the paradox of the new business environment — the inability to take an existing business or organization to the next level — is making almost every business and political leader very insecure right now. The *fake-it-till-you-make-it* mind-set prevents them from asking for help.”

The chairman asked, “Why is it this way? Why are we all very capable and knowledgeable leaders and there are days when our people act like elephants? We tell them to soar — we encourage soaring — we’ve spent a fortune on what I would consider soaring workshops — you know, teambuilding — and as Joe said in his e-mail, we’ve spent a fortune on new technology to make soaring easier — what is causing this, or is this inner-voice thing just some illusion in our subconscious mind?”

Everyone was relieved that the chairman asked that question. I paused for what seemed to be an eternity, then said, “The first thing we need to recognize is — and sir, this will feel a bit like the gimme putt confrontation — the Mother Eagle does not need to send the baby eagle to soaring workshops — nor does she have to equip them with soaring technology.”

There was a rather long silence as the group had never experienced the way I am now able to speak candidly with the chairman. The chairman looked at the group and said, “Sometimes the truth hurts — but that is what we need if we are going to soar.” He motioned for me to continue.

“The truth is that the underlying structure of plan, organize and control that has been the driving force — the mechanistic rule set — the manager’s skill set — as Joe’s inner voice confirms — the scientific foundation of

the Industrial Age business model — has been ingrained in us for one hundred years. If we can resolve this paradox, then and only then will we be able to learn and apply the new skills of leadership.”

The chairman said, “Then what you’re saying — if I get this right — is we see the potential of our people to soar — but our management techniques treat them like elephants.”

“That is true — but rather than elephants — who do have an important role to play in the circus — people are seen by executives like Chainsaw Fritz as *costs* to be reduced or eliminated. Simply stated, we can not exercise control and expect people to soar. In the Energy Age we need to legitimize soaring by using leader skills of visualize, enroll and align.”

We had taken a rather circuitous route, but we had arrived at the perfect point for today’s discussion “Let me explain a little deeper. Executives, managers and people in authority at all levels exercise control — by granting or withholding authority to decide. You know this — Joe’s e-mail is all about his brilliant ability to distribute authority — that is why he — and you — are presidents. He talked about delegating and many other ways that he gave people authority, but in the end, the people were like elephants chained to their stake — their office or cubicle — authorized to execute their function — spend what was in the budget — but nothing more.”

Joe said, “Then I cut their budgets and I told them to be ‘more efficient?’”

Brian said, “I sent them to the teambuilding workshop and told them to go work together in a conference room. We did this drill. That’s what we called a culture change — and it didn’t last very long.”

As I said a moment ago, the Mother Eagle doesn’t need to authorize the baby eagle to soar — she just pushes them out of the nest when their time has come — as she recognizes that they have the potential to soar — then all she has to do is teach them how to find food.”

Brian cynically said, “So we should push our people out of their cubicles and tell them to go to lunch?”

Everyone including me laughed at that comment, “Brian, you are a very quick study and that is partially true.” I paused, “And — here is the important part — in the Energy Age business model — soaring is a constant. Bri-



## “Numbers will never reveal the mystery of the energy field.”

an, you'll only need to push them once.

From that point forward, soaring is a given — it is an energy field — like gravity — that is always present — it is the way an eagle is designed to function. *Once you resolve this paradox, you will design your companies to soar — not command them to soar.*”

Bob said, “That’s sounds so simple — why can’t we see it that way?”

“Bob — great question — there are two reasons we can’t see it. First, it is the paradox of the Industrial Age business model. The Industrial Age business is *designed* to be in control and executives — apparently like Roger — could see when things were in control or out of control by looking at spreadsheets.” I paused, “*Numbers will never reveal the mystery of the energy field.*”

“Second, because Industrial Age managers deal in what they can see — the numbers — they believe that the problems of the business are in the people — the visible and physical elements. This causes them to believe that the problems are psychological — or worse yet the culture — people issues like attitude and different styles of people — and cultures — where everyone is in their bunkers and not communicating. Conflict always dominates the HR agenda.”

Everyone agreed that they had all fought the internal conflict battles. “And, the solution that was most often applied — to make the getting along easier — was to buy new technology — as you have indicated you’ve spent a fortune doing.”

“Take a look at the quote on page twenty of your workbook. It is by Robert Fritz from his great book *The Path of Least Resistance*. Robert was one of my mentors years ago. Robert states:

“To attempt a psychological (or cultural) solution to what is really a structural phenomenon does nothing to change the underlying structure.”

“This quote is confusing so let me give you an example. Let’s just suppose —for some reason — you wanted the water in a lake to babble — would you stand on the shore and yell — BABBLE!!!!” My scream startled them. “Of course not — yelling at the water would be considered insane. You’d change the behavior of the water in a

lake or a swamp by changing the underlying structure of the land — kick the end out and the water would babble.”

Brain said, “That’s what I do with my kids — I yell at the water and they don’t even listen to me.”

I laughed and said, “Brian, if you think about it — the water really doesn’t care.” I paused for almost 10 seconds to let that thought sink in. “People in any organization — like General Motors — who have been yelled at a lot and still have their jobs — really don’t care. It is merely Chainsaw Fritz yelling again — they ignored him.”

“Resolving a paradox — whether in business or at home — almost always requires a structural change — and the change we must make in your leader behavior is to change the plan, organize and control structure of the Industrial Age business model.”

Once again Bob said, “This sounds so simple — why can’t we do it?”

“Bob — once again a great question. Now that we can see it — it will be possible to try to *do* it — and that is what we will begin to do after lunch. But, let’s be really clear — it is not *easy*.” I paused and said, “Recall Joe’s inner voice where he talked about the brilliant strategies of “more” and “er” — and how he was tenacious and aggressive and determined to get *enough*. Frankly, no one will ever play professional golf by trying to hit the ball “harder” or “better” or with “more” determination with the muscle memory of a baseball swing.”

When I paused, the chairman said, “Or by buying a new driver every year.”

His comment brought the serious conversation to a humorous halt.

We had to take a break. During the break, Russ approached me and said, “The people who I have a difficult time tolerating are the ones like Roger who won’t admit that they have this inner voice — are only focused on the numbers — and always yelling at the water — is that right?”

I was about to laugh, but the rhetorical nature of his statement was serious. “You’re right — there are many people in positions of authority who will not admit to having an inner story like this — and they cover it up by intimidating people with numbers — or yelling.”

He said, “Roger had a very intimidating swagger.”

“The ones like Roger who are most vulnerable often

develop an outward swagger. It is an effective tactic in a win-lose game — but in a win-win game — nothing fails like swagger.”

I needed to post a new thought on the flip chart, so I told Russ what I had told Joe, “*The thrill of soaring starts with the fear of admitting that you have an inner voice.* Think about it. It is the first how-to skill that we have already learned today.”

### The Structural Pillars

After the break, I summarized their new awareness by saying, “As we now know, the elephant has enormous energy stored in its body. It can be released by the elephant trainer on command. This same energy is stored in your people and while you think of yourselves in a negative way — right now — the truth is that the new Energy Age leadership model will allow you to let go of controlling them and allow them to soar.” I paused for a moment as their minds reengaged and then said, “It’s a paradox — *never forget the Mother Eagle is very smart.*”

I turned to the flip chart where I had posted the four structural pillars of *Personal Mastery: The Invulnerable Self, Win-Win, World of Abundance and Commitment to Continuous Learning*. On a second flip chart I wrote the underlying structural opposites that tend to dominate many Industrial Age business managers: *Vulnerable, Win-Lose, World of Scarcity and Completed Learning*.

I briefly described the four pillars on both flip charts and gave some real life examples of how each one was important to developing their ‘A’ leader skills.

I summarized by saying, “Our inner voice is not a sign of illness or inadequacy, rather it only knows the stories from yesterday. *It doesn’t know the future.* It can only speculate about the future, and — in the middle of the night — your speculation will likely be a dismal extension of the past — and that is never the agenda of an ‘A’ leader.”

With Joe’s permission I asked everyone to take 10 minutes in small groups and identify which of the personal mastery pillars were expressed in Joe’s inner-voice e-mail.

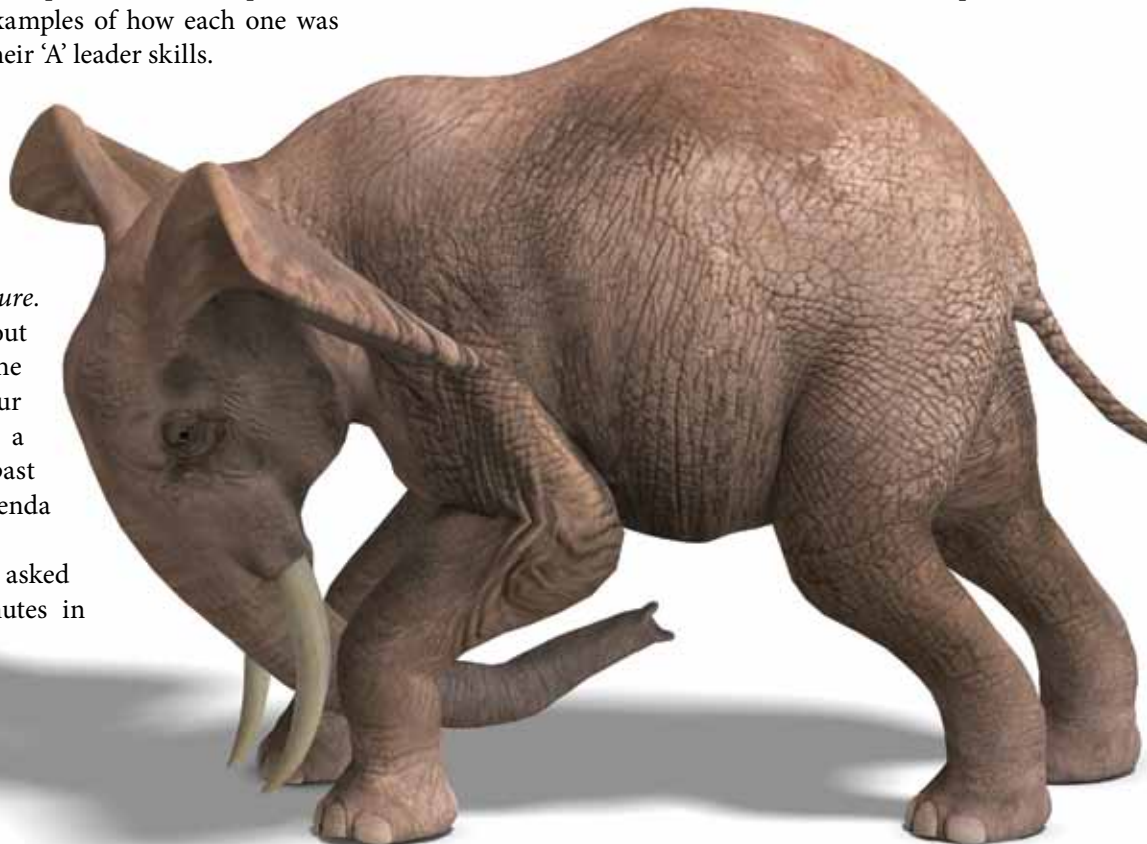
The room came alive as they once again had fun kidding Joe about his inner voice. But, by now everyone realized that Joe’s inner voice was similar to their own.

They could easily see the vulnerability and win-lose orientation of the Industrial Age pillars. They weren’t sure about completed learning, and Bob asked for an explanation. I said, “Note how Joe was told that plan, organize and control was scientific. When you’ve been promoted because you’ve mastered scientific management — beyond that point your brain will merely validate that all future learning is similar to what you already know — you’ve completed learning.”

I paused and added, “That is why much of the team-building and sales training doesn’t work — people validate that they already know how to be a team player — they know how to sell — and they won’t admit that they need to learn something new.”

The Chairman said, “That’s several — maybe all — of our sales managers.” His comment received a nod of agreement from almost everyone.

Scott had been quiet all morning but seemed to be very active in trying to understand the four pillars. He asked, “The scarcity thought seems to be very dominating today. All we ever hear is that we’ll run out of oil someday and — I guess I’m a scarcity guy because I constantly tell our salespeople that if we don’t get our market share up, a competitor will get it. Can you give me several real life examples of





the world of abundance? It just doesn't seem to compute for me."

"Scott, that's a great observation. Scarcity is built on the assumption that there is a finite amount of something and when it is gone, there will be catastrophic results. This is the basis of getting enough. The world of abundance pillar is based on the first law of thermodynamics which says that energy cannot be created or destroyed — it can change form and it can flow from one place to another, but in any isolated system — company, person or ecosystem — the total energy will remain the same. We will never run out of energy — there is always an abundance of energy available to you at all times." I paused and asked, "Is there a mechanical engineer in the room?"

Steve confirmed the first law and proceeded to tell them about entropy — the second law — and how it was affecting all the elephants that are chained to stakes.

"Steve, that is a great example but let's take one law at a time. We need to know that Joe had a lot of energy last night — even though it was negative and keeping him awake — and Bob, you confirmed that your energy felt like you'd been drinking multiple cups of coffee." Bob nodded agreement and I had to raise my hand to silence his desire to retell his saga.

### The Rest of the Story

"Let me tell you the entire story that you will hear in the world of scarcity." I asked them to refer to Joe's e-mail. "Do you all recall the famous radio series, Paul Harvey's *The Rest of the Story*? Joe's story starts with not enough and proceeds on through four additional stages: *just as soon as, oh ain't it awful how, poor me* and ends in, *it's hopeless*."

For the next half-hour I gave them many examples of this sequence, especially how we become *poor me* and *hopeless* fans of a sports team that will never win enough games to make the play-offs — and everything will be okay *just as soon as* next season — but *oh ain't it awful how* we start again next year with the same players — and we just hired a new coach who came from a *hopeless* team and ...."

The chairman interrupted and said, "You mean the *hopeless* Chicago Cubs fans?"

I laughed along with the two Cubs fans in the room but then had to warn them of the seriousness of this structural reality. "We can joke about many scenarios in the not enough scarcity game, but unfortunately, it is an addiction, and the end of this programming is sometimes suicidal."

Bob said, "Joe — are you okay?"

Joe was really catching the meaning of what I told him earlier. "You said this inner story is really masking the

'A' leader I want to be — that I don't know how to let my leader emerge. That's the skill I want to learn."

"Let's break for lunch, and when you come back, we'll begin the skill development of the 'A' leader that you all want to be."

After everyone left the room, the chairman came up and said, "This is amazing. I really didn't think you'd survive Joe's inner voice thing. I was afraid that they'd ridicule Joe and we'd spiral out of control." He paused and in a rather introspective way said, "I've still got it — that fear of losing control — don't I?"

"Sir, we all have an inner voice and it is generally driven by fear. The key is to know when it surfaces — like you just did with that remark. That is a how-to skill that we will begin to develop after lunch."

He nodded and said, "I've probably been guilty of yelling at the water with them. I've held a lot of 'same page' meetings to get my point across."

"It takes some guts to confront a paradox. I'm sorry if I embarrassed you earlier — it was like the gimme putt — I thought you'd be able to take it."

He said, "It was perfect — that is why I'm here — they need to see that I am in this with them."

"The arguments for violating the truth behind the paradox can rage on for decades, even centuries, and if we don't confront the paradox — as we've talked many times, gimme putting can become a cultural norm — and that game will never allow a company to go to the next level."

Mass Customization is a paradox to the Industrial Age mind of plan, organize and control. The new rules of the Energy Age are very complex — yet very simple. In our next article, we'll rejoin the chairman and the presidents as they learn the **one skill** of the 'A' leader. ☞