The Social Capitalist: William Taylor

Never Eat Alone co-author Tahl Raz interviewed the agenda-setting writer, *Fast Company* co-founder, and entrepreneur Bill Taylor about his acclaimed book, *Practically Radical*. Dan Pink calls it "the most powerful and instructive change manual you'll ever read." Taylor has shaped the global conversation about the best ways to compete, innovate, and succeed. Among Taylor's radical insights, you can expect to learn: five new rules for starting something new, five habits of highly "humbitious" leaders, and how what you see shapes how you change—the virtues of "vuja de."

This is an edited transcript from a Social Capitalist Live Event. The Social Capitalist is sponsored programming of myGreenlight, the only comprehensive online learning platform for critical relationship development skills. The interactive interview series is dedicated to delivering in depth discussion on relationship science with the best and brightest thought leaders in business and academia.

TAHL RAZ: Bill Taylor's our guest today. He is a founding editor of *Fast Company* magazine, where he got an close-up look at some of the most innovative and successful organizations and entrepreneurs of our era. *The Financial Times* has called his last book, *Mavericks at Work: Why the Most Original Minds in Business Win,* "a defiant act, a bold and idealistic declaration of faith in the power of business at its best." His new book, *Practically Radical*, is, in his own words, "a manifesto change, and a manual for making it happen." I'm pleased and excited that Bill Taylor is joining us for this episode of the Social Capitalist. Welcome, Bill.

WILLIAM TAYLOR: Hey, Tahl, great to be here. Hello to everybody out in webcast world.

TAHL RAZ: So let's get started by talking about something you and I share: a great fascination with and passion for the idea of change. I can now see change happening rapidly on every level, individual and organizational. I've also realized that I have a deeply personal relationship to the topic of change. Aside from the meta-narrative, what personally accounts for your 15-year, passionate obsession with the topic?

WILLIAM TAYLOR: Actually I think that if I were to choose a word, it would be "value" rather than "change." For the past 15 years I've been passionate about trying to demonstrate to people in all walks of life – young startup companies, big established companies, nonprofit civics groups and so on – that there is a direct connection between the value you would raise as a human being and the economic value you create in the marketplace.

The thing, I think, that links us in terms of our interests is the idea of *connection* that I try to clarify in the world. This in itself is characterized by dramatic change, new ways of technologies, cultures of communication, and expectations from customers.

Among all of these changes unfolding before our eyes over the past 15 years, what gets me excited and what makes me glad to be doing what I'm doing is when I can see, document, and learn from the connection between human and personal

values and the creation of outsized economic value. I think, in some sense, that that's really business, leadership, and innovation at its best.

TAHL RAZ: *Fast Company* was created, quite exquisitely, to be used as a manual or handbook for change agents. Is this also the mission of the book? Can you reflect a little bit on what you previously "got wrong" about change and values in the years prior to this, and how your book now advances the conversation?

WILLIAM TAYLOR: It's funny, because I was giving a talk yesterday at Hartford, a huge insurance company, and one of the first things I told them was that back when we started the magazine 15 or 16 years ago, I was kind of a young, snot-nosed kid. Back then my thinking was, "What *is* it with these big, long-established organizations? Can't they get with the program? Can't they work with the times?" I also assumed that all these startups in Silicon Valley and Boston were making "clean their clocks" kind of deals.

These days however, I have really come to appreciate the effort it takes to make deep-seated, meaningful changes when transforming organizations. It really is the hardest work in the world. But organizations born in one era of technology, markets, and cultures can still remain important and relevant in a leadership position in the new era of a technology market by transforming in deep and profound ways.

When I think about *Fast Company* or even *Mavericks at Work*, I think that a lot of the material has always been about organizations that were basically starting from scratch, or newcomers set to win a business, or upstarts in an industry who were really trying to change the game and shake the industry's very foundations.

Practically Radical, to a large degree, is really written both about and for leaders of organizations that have essentially been around for a long time. They have been reasonably successful over that period of time but now sense that there are massive shifts going on in the world and are trying to summon the urgency and the intensity to wrestle with those shifts and create the next great wave of opportunities.

So I think I was wrong in not really appreciating how difficult it is when it comes to making meaningful change, as opposed to, "Hey look, sell off the business," or "Let's just do a program." In this book I've tried to learn from leaders and organizations that have made truly meaningful changes, with an eye towards helping lots of other people do it as well.

TAHL RAZ: If it's possibly the hardest thing to do, let's get into the mechanics of why it's hard and talk about some of the tactics that you used to overcome it.

One of the most difficult aspects of change is figuring out how to ensure that what you know and how you act today doesn't limit your thoughts and actions for tomorrow. You write about a skill called *vuja de,* to help overcome that problem. What is that?

WILLIAM TAYLOR: First of all, full confession: I stole the language from the late great George Carlin, the comedian who, in his Las Vegas acts of the 1970s, was probably heavily under the influence of LSD. He used to come out to the audience and say, "I'm experiencing a sense of vuja de," and everybody would laugh like they knew what he was talking about.

He's probably rolling around in his grave since I'm using his phrase as a management pundit, but what he explained by this was this: While we all know the expression *déjà vu*, how the unfamiliar seems strangely familiar – for example, you walk into a room and you feel like you've been there before – *vuja de* would be the opposite of that, meaning, the familiar becomes strangely unfamiliar.

So my question then is, can you look at an industry that you've been in for 20 years, at a company you've worked in for a decade, or at a set of customers you've been involved with for years, and then somehow look at them as if you've never seen them before? Can you, with that fresh line of sight, develop a whole new point of view about the future?

Strangely, the challenge to trying to make change in an industry or in a company or in a setting that you've been part of for a long time, is your expertise. Obviously, expertise is a great, great thing, who would argue against it? However, the challenge, often the undetected challenge for a lot of people, is not to let that expertise get in the way of innovation.

The challenge is not to let what you *know* limit what you could *imagine* about: the new services you could offer, new ways you could engage your customers, and the new strategies you could embrace to achieve what you want to achieve.

It's especially hard for people who've been in reasonably successful organizations. If you're in a deep crisis, and you've had a "near-death organizational experience," a lot of stuff can be shaken up. However, when you're in an organization that's basically doing okay, but you feel deep down that you could be achieving far more, have more relevance, and become more effective, then it can be particularly difficult to overcome the kind of tunnel vision that expertise imposes upon us.

TAHL RAZ: It's an incredibly profound thought that "what you see shapes how you change." If someone were to actually contemplate how they could build this into the design of their own work life, could you give us an example of how they might go about it?

WILLIAM TAYLOR: Sure. I think that one of the key things is that you need to look outside of your own company. Even more importantly, you should look outside your own field or industry for new ideas, techniques, and strategies. They might be routine somewhere else but when you migrate them into your company, they can seem really revolutionary.

There's a hospital in Seattle, the Virginia Mason Medical Center, a big, traditional, honking, downtown urban hospital,

with 5,000 employees, 600 docs, more than a thousand beds. Then a guy named Dr. Gary Kaplan took it over 10 years ago. At the time Virginia Mason was the type of organization I just described. It was doing fine and it wasn't about to go out of business next week or anything like that, but it wasn't anything to be really proud of either. In other words, it was just another big city hospital.

Kaplan and his colleagues said, "We really want to do something more than that," but they quickly realized that they weren't going to get very far comparing themselves against or studying other hospitals. The fact of the matter is that the healthcare and hospital industry in the United States is a mediocre business when it comes to strategy management and treating patients well.

So they asked themselves 10 years ago, "What is the greatest organization in the world when it comes to quality, efficiency, smart solutions, and productivity?" They concluded it was Toyota, so they immediately and ferociously went to school on the Toyota production system.

Kaplan sent groups of 20 Virginia Mason employees at a time – doctors, nurses, orderlies, account receivable clerks, and frontline people – over to the Japan. They would stay there for two weeks, study in the classroom, and get lectures from all the masters at Toyota. They would spend a week working on the factory floor, building cars and components, pulling the red levers when there was a problem and solving problems on the spot. They did this for roughly two and a half years.

Kaplan sent about 500 people, and he got completely roasted by the Seattle press who said, "This hospital's barely breaking even. What the hell is this Kaplan doing sending all these people to Japan?"

However when hundreds of people from this hospital got outside of their normal comfort zone and conventional wisdom and saw how the greatest organization in the world did things with respect to quality and efficiency, they revolutionized how the hospital was organized.

They cut down the amount of time it takes from when you draw blood, to when you get your lab results, to 85 percent. The nurses changed how they do their jobs. As an example, they used to spend 35 percent of their time by the patients' bedside. Now they spend 90 percent of their time there.

But here's the part that I think is the most important. I had a fun conversation with a guy named Dr. Robert Mecklenburg, Chief of Medicine for Virginia Mason. He said that early on, he didn't want to go to Japan. He's a typical surgeon. His hands save lives. He asked, "How can I go and turn a wrench out on assembly line? What if I break a knuckle or something like that?" But eventually, he went.

Since he was a "big cheese" at Virginia Mason, he had to go with a current project in his back pocket. His project was, "Could they reorganize some of the stuff on the campus to make room for two new operating rooms without having to add a new wing or a new building?"

He would work every night after the normal day with the Sensei, the Toyota Quality Master, who was "the expert of experts." He tells a story about how he unfurls the blueprints for Virginia Mason and the Sensei, who is very facile in English, sees a room on the blueprints marked, "Waiting Room."

Of course at Toyota, nobody waits for anything. Everything is just on time. The Sensei says to Mecklenburg, "Doctor, what is this thing, the Waiting Room?" And Mecklenburg says, "Well, that's where patients come to while they're waiting to see the doctor. They'll wait for their appointment." The Sensei says, "Really? And how long do they wait on average?" And Mecklenburg says, "You know, let's say 45 minutes."

The Sensei asks, "Really? Is this the only waiting room on the Virginia Mason campus?" And Mecklenburg, not thinking about it, says, "Oh, no, no, no. Look, we got lot of buildings. We got lots of office complexes. It's a big campus. I'd say there's probably a hundred waiting rooms on the hospital campus."

Meckelburg says that he sensed the Sensei at that point standing up, and he saw the blood draining from his face. The Sensei says, "I just want to understand this. What you're telling me is that there are a hundred rooms on your hospital campus and people come there and they're sick and they're worried and their families are anxious for them and it's routine for them to wait 45 minutes on average to see a doctor?"

Mecklenburg, not thinking anything of it again, says, "Yes, that sounds about right."

The Sensei looks down at him and asks, "Aren't you ashamed?"

Mecklenburg says that throughout his entire career, he'd always seen the world with the attitude of, "Hey, I'm the doctor. I'm the one who suffered all day and night and went to med school. I'm the one whose hands save lives. Of course people wait for me."

It took an encounter with somebody who was completely outside of his industry and who saw the world with a very different set of eyes to make him realize he got this whole thing backwards. And as you can imagine, Mecklenburg went back to Seattle, a man on the mission, and he really led the program to try to get to zero waiting time on the Virginia Mason campus. With the help of Internet reservation systems, email, text messages, and Tweeting, now you can go out to your customers or say to your patients, "Hey we're running 10 to 15 minutes behind."

For me that was just a very personal, very moving story of someone truly world-class in their field who couldn't yet see the obvious opportunities for dramatic change that were hidden in plain sight. Their expertise had been blocking how they made sense of the world.

It's a little story about what happens when you take an organization or group of leaders and let them see the world through a very different set of eyes.

TAHL RAZ: Tell me if I'm wrong, but I think you're making two fundamental and interrelated points around the mechanics of change with vuja de and with now this story. I think the points are one, what you see shapes how you change, and two, where you look shapes what you see.

If you're continually looking at your industry with other people who are within your expertise and with little diversity, then little change can happen because few new ideas can surface. Is that right?

WILLIAM TAYLOR: Yes, I'd say two quick things. I got a funny comment a few months ago when I was giving a talk. People often complain about their bosses. Someone said, "My boss always says to me, 'I want really creative new ideas but I only want the ones that have been proven to work already.'" Everybody laughed and I laughed too. It's a funny oxymoron, right?

It turns out that it really isn't an oxymoron. What I've seen is that ideas that are proven, routine, and almost mundane in one field, can look really revolutionary when innovated in another.

If you migrate those ideas from another industry over to your industry, or companies' ideas that are already proven to work in one place, like at Toyota, they can really seem shocking or revolutionary when you move them over to Virginia Mason.

In fact, Virginia Mason has now changed the game so thoroughly in healthcare that they have an operation where hospitals come to them in the same way that they went to Toyota, to learn all about what they do and how to do it.

The second thing I'd say, and this was a surprise for me, is that for organizations that have been around for a long time, doing something new, bold, and exciting doesn't mean breaking away from your history, or turning your back on your history, and disavowing your past.

Oftentimes, it means rediscovering your own history and learning about the ideas, urgency, and creativity that made you so great 50, 60, or 80 years ago, but which got lost in decades of incremental caution and bureaucracy. Sometimes, the best source of confidence for creating a radical new future can be looking not necessarily outward to other companies, but backwards into the history of your own organization.

Another one of my favorite change stories for *Practically Radical* is about the Girl Scouts of the USA, when a woman named Kathy Cloninger took over as CEO about eight years ago. Now, the Girl Scouts were not in crisis. They were doing fine. They were a ubiquitous, all-American, heartwarming brand. Yet Kathy and her colleagues sensed that something wasn't quite right. The membership growth was really slow, and it was particularly slow amongst segments of the population, like the Hispanic community and others where population growth was really high.

While the brand was ubiquitous, nobody thought of it as compelling, cool, hip, or anything like that. Cloninger realized that the Girl Scout performance, the programs they were offering, the opportunities to engage with the organization, the uniforms, in short *everything*, was just not right for this new era of technology, communications, and culture, so they made some really dramatic changes.

Today, for example, you can see all the new Muslim troops they have, or the incredible new relevance Girl Scouts bring amongst Hispanic mothers and daughters. There are also troops called Girl Scouts Beyond Bars, which are Girl Scout troops for mothers who are incarcerated and their daughters, so they can come and do Girl Scout activities.

There was this front page piece in the *Boston Globe* a few days ago on the new generation of Girl Scout badges, like badges for doing organic gardening, the Inventor Badge, the Money Management Badge, the Social Entrepreneurship Badge; they're really upgraded and are relevant to the program.

Now, it was really hard to make this deep-seated transformation. It's a very conservative organization, and a lot of the volunteers who were Girl Scouts themselves 20 or 30 years ago, said, "Hey, this doesn't seem like our kind of way." So one method Cloninger and her colleagues used to create the confidence to make all these future changes was to revisit their own past.

They went back and reread the earliest writing, a kind of the mission statement written in 1912 by Juliette from Juliette Gordon Low, who was the Founder of the Girl Scouts. Low was an incredible social activist, a firebrand, and a rebel rouser who started the Girl Scouts in 1912, a time before women in the United States had the right to vote.

They concluded that if Juliette Gordon Low, this incredible feminist and advocate for empowering girls to be just as gifted as boys, came back to life today and saw how cautious, plain vanilla, and kind of "namby pamby" the Girl Scouts had become, she'd have been absolutely mortified.

The problem wasn't taking risks and doing something bold, the problem was how timid and cautious Girl Scouts had become. So the folks of the organization would actually wear the buttons "WWJD?" – not "what would Jesus do?" but "what would Juliette do?" The question became, "What would this organization look like through the eyes of the founder?," who until then everybody had admired and paid lip service to but no one really knew or understood. The rediscovery of the organization's history, interestingly enough, helped wear down a lot of resistance to creating a different future.

If you're in an organization where you feel like you're trapped by the status quo and conventionalism, one solution is to look far outside your company, far outside your field for ideas that are working well on others. Another is to rediscover and remind yourself of the ideas, values, energy, and the urgency that helped create this organization and ask,

myGreenlight™

"How do we reinterpret that original DNA for the era of technology, culture, and markets we're living in today?"

TAHL RAZ: You know, as I worked my way through the book, it occurred to me that the word "change" (and you may certainly disagree with this) didn't really embody the full meaning of your message. Remember, just for the purpose of our audience and myGreenlight, oftentimes I was applying your framework and ideas to individuals and professionals rather than organizations.

The phrase **"change field"** is almost too transactional or static, moving from one thing to another, when what you seem to be prescribing is the need in this age for continuous self-renewal and evolution. I have a question connected to that, but would you agree?

WILLIAM TAYLOR: Yes, absolutely. I think that for me, what's most enriching encouraging about organizational life, and it's easy to be cynical and discouraging about it, is that it does, at its best, create the opportunity to grow with people, grow with leaders, grow in terms of the impact that we can have on our colleagues and the world around us, and the legacy we can leave.

TAHL RAZ: Okay, so predicated on the need to grow, change, adapt, and not be reliant on one narrow view of what you do and your expertise, is there a need for a different kind of learning? It seems absolutely critical, yet right now our educational system is doing a downright shitty job. So it seems that the models for a continuous learning of this type are going to

have to come from a "do-it yourself" attitude or from others who are creating it now.

With that understood, could you give us examples of leaders you came across whom are terrific at doing this, and tell us how they do it? Would you also go into the actual details of whom they're talking to, whom they rely upon within their network, and how they use different forms of media? Could you begin by describing how you would do it today?

WILLIAM TAYLOR: Let me start with the other people, because they're a lot more interesting than I am, and then I'll come back to my own approach.

I'd say a couple of things. The first is that several years ago I heard a really fun one-liner question from Gary Hamel. He said that the big question facing leaders today is, "Are you learning as fast as the world is changing?" I think that very simple yet profound question connects our discussion about change to our current discussion about how we grow as individual.

If you're being honest with yourself, the question "Am I learning as fast as the world is changing?" should apply to everybody on this call and for everyone in the position of leadership within an organization. It's really the question you sign up to answer if you choose a path of leadership or entrepreneurship, or if you're trying to do something interesting and important in the world.

IBM did a study a few years ago trying to address the simple question of what distinguishes the technologists, engineers, and leaders at IBM who have had a really huge impact on the company from other engineers and technologists, who, while excelling, haven't had that same kind of impact.

They were looking for that type of mindset, work ethic, and approach to life that distinguished those who are really successful and have an impact from those who are less so. The word they tumbled to was *humbition*. Now what the heck is humbition? Humbition is made up partly of ambition: being really fired up, energized, and evaluating yourself highly in terms of the impact you might be able to have on your team, in your organization, on the world around you. And then, humbition is also having a genuine sense of intellectual humility.

For me this is the big mindset. They understood that if you want to have an impact today, your job is no longer to be "the smartest person in the room," and your job is not to solve every problem and identify every opportunity. Your job is to ask yourself, "What does it mean to be a leader? What does it mean to be an entrepreneur? What does it mean to be an impact player in a world where nobody alone is as smart as everybody together?"

The people who keep leading *and* learning are the ones who save themselves. They are not the people who say, "Oh, I've got this great idea. What's my top-down style of communication to move it out?" They say to themselves, **"**I need a great idea. What is my *architecture of participation* – I

The Social Capitalist: William Taylor

The Social Capitalist: William Taylor

17

myGreenlight.com

took that phrase from the world of software – so that I, on an ongoing basis, can tap into the hidden collective genius of my colleagues and all the customers and business partners who surround me? Many people are interested in what I'm doing and would love to share a little bit of their brain power, if only I would make it easy for them to do it." This is the kind of "group genius" that I speak of. Nobody alone is as smart as everyone together.

Let me just take two minutes and tell you about one of my favorite characters along these lines. This is a very tangible, very specific story, but you can see how this mindset works. There's guy named John Fluevog, and he's a very celebrated shoe designer. He's got his own company, Fluevog Shoes, that he's been running for 40 years. He's got a real presence among the young and the fashion savvy, and the MTV crowd. People like Madonna and the group Black Eyed Peas wear his shoes. He's got boutiques in every major city in North America, one in Newberry Street in Boston, Fifth Avenue in New York, and all that kind of good stuff.

Now Fluevog tells a funny story, and this is kind of the mindset about a leader becoming the learner. He says that he would be in an airport and that fashion fans of his would say, "Oh, my God, you're John Fluevog." This happened all the time since he's a very flamboyant-looking guy. Then they would point to their feet, and they'd be wearing his boots and say to him, "Oh, have you ever thought about designing a knee-high boot with this kind of buckle? It would make me so happy!" Or he would be having dinner in a restaurant and someone would walk by his table and put down a cocktail

napkin with a sketch of a nice shoe with a certain kind of high-heel and say something like, "Please design this shoe."

For many years, like a very egocentric leader, he would get annoyed by this and ask, "Why do people keep interrupting and bothering me?" Finally though, a light bulb went on and he said "Wait! This is not a nuisance, this is an incredible source of learning." He went to the Fluevog website, which is very popular among his customers, and sent out a message to everybody. He said, "Look here. I'm going to call everybody's bluff and I'm going to make very simple templates available to you for download. If you really have an idea for a shoe that you think would be great for us to introduce to the market, feel free to interrupt me at the restaurant, I don't care. But sketch out your shoe and submit it to our website. We'll look at it and make sure it's reasonable to turn to something we could actually manufacture. We'll put it up on the web and we'll let customers all around the world vote on which shoes they would like us to make. We'll do one a quarter. We're not going to go crazy; we're able to do one every three months and we'll see what happens."

He said that there was the most amazing unleashing of energy, creativity, and brainpower that he had ever seen. Thousands and thousands and thousands of design ideas came into the company, and they started doing one a quarter.

I saw him probably a year ago now in Boston, where I live on Newberry Street. He was there and so I went down to meet

him and spend some time with him. I learned that several of the best selling shoes from his store were not ones that he, the all-knowing John Fluevog had designed, but that his customers designed.

It's a silly little story I grant you, but it's a story of a guy who's recognized as a genius in his field who concluded one day, "You know what, I'm surrounded by brilliant people, in this case brilliant and talented customers who would love to share their ideas with me if only I ask them to." He made this architecture of participation fun, easy, and creative in order to do just that. That's a very tangible example and I think it's the kind of the mindset we all need to move to.

The challenge for all of us is how do we become the kind of smart people that other smart people want to share their ideas with, help succeed with, and help bring their ambitions to life? That's really a mindset shift, a way of conducting yourself to attract the most number of ideas from the most interesting people you encounter.

TAHL RAZ: So you do make a point, and let me push you on that, when you say that this economy doesn't reward you for being smart at many little things, you need to be "the most…" of something to stand out. Can you talk about that?

WILLIAM TAYLOR: Well, I think this is true of organizations, but it's also very true of individuals. It's very easy, particularly in these kind of fast-changing, risky times, to get comfortable operating in the middle of the road. That's what feels safe and secure and that's, in theory, where all the action is. So you say, "Okay,

I'm in the hospital business, I'm in the airline business, or I'm in the banking business. I know there's a conventional playbook for how to be in that particular business as a company, and a conventional playbook for what an executive or leader in that industry looks like, so that's what I'll follow. Then I'll just try to be three percent smarter or five percent faster, and I'll chip away at the margins."

The trouble is that everybody wants to be "in the middle of the road," but today, when there's so much change, so much pressure, and so many new ways to do just about everything, the middle of the road really has become the road to nowhere. Instead I urge organizations and individuals to say, "It's not good enough anymore to be pretty good at everything." You really have to become "the most …" at something. It could be the most elegant, the most simple, the most exclusive, the most affordable, the most brash and colorful, or the most easily accessible. You've all got to make your own choices.

One of the "funny but true" homey pieces of Texas wisdom is the idea that the only things in the middle of the road are "yellow lines and dead armadillos." I think that's true on a Texas highway, and it's also true for all of us as leaders, innovators, and individuals. You've got to figure out, "Why am I interesting and compelling to people? Why should people want to hurry up, get energized, and figure out how to help me succeed at whatever endeavor I'm trying to do? How do I conduct myself as the kind of smart person that other smart people want to rally around, support, and contribute to?" Seeking the answers to these questions

requires you, at some level, to be "the most" of something in whatever environment you're in.

TAHL RAZ: I think the rejoinder to that is your own, terrifically written post in *HBR* recently, "Values Proposition: Do Small Things with Great Love," because although I like the idea that on the one hand, you want to be "the most" of something, few of us ever do "great things" that remake company or reshape industry. But all of us have the capacity to do small things with great feelings and an authentic sense of emotion.

WILLIAM TAYLOR: Yes, and that, by the way, is evoking the spirit of Mother Theresa. In one webcast I've now quoted from George Carlin and Mother Theresa, either which should win me an award, or should banish me from any of these things in the future.

I'm not sure I'm with you on that last point. I think I would say two things. I think the blog post you're referring to was called "We is Bigger than Me," and it was taking the *Fast Company* to task for "the brand called *You.*" Many years ago, we had this notion that we're all personal brands and we're all supposed to be fabulous and flamboyant, and to conduct ourselves in ways that are impossible for people to ignore.

I'm suggesting that everybody we encounter in life, from our direct colleagues at work, partners in our business, friends, neighbors, or people we know in church, have a million different activities, projects, opportunities, and people vying for their attention. They could choose to pay attention to you or not. It depends if you believe that your value as a person, as a leader, and as a successful learner is a function of how

many people voluntarily choose to engage with you, to share their ideas with you and support you. Are you the type of person who, if they hear about what you're working on and then they're driving when something occurs to them, they're actually going to take the time to send you an email or give you a call saying, "You know, I was thinking about that project, here's a thought that might help you on the way?"

People have to actively choose to do that, and they're only going to choose to do that with people that conduct themselves in ways that they find appealing, interesting, and worth affiliating with.

That doesn't mean you should conduct yourself like a human billboard or think of yourself as a personal brand or an art project. It may well mean doing lots of small things that come naturally. You might make small gestures and acts of generosity and human kindness, which, in this world being reshaped by technology, really resonate with people who are the recipients of those acts. This might persuade them, in return, to go out of their way to help you succeed, help you do things better, help you learn faster. I think that's how I would explore that circle.

TAHL RAZ: We just have a few more minutes until we're out of time. I'm going to take a couple of questions coming in from the audience. Bob Deninger asks if, in your opinion, Steve Jobs was the ultimate ambitious leader?

WILLIAM TAYLOR: My answer is no. I actually wrote another post in HBR, a year or two ago, long before Steve Jobs passed away, called "Steve

Jobs: Trust the Art, Not the Artist." I didn't mean this in any way, shape or form then, as now, as any kind of personal attack on Steve Jobs. Given his recent passing, it would be very bad for me to be saying things like that. I did, however, suggest that the risk of admiring and studying Steve Jobs – and I both admired him greatly and studied him deeply – is to think that the lesson we should take away from it is "be more like Steve Jobs."

The lesson I took away is that I will never in my wildest dreams be like Steve Jobs. There are very few people on the planet who have the combination of creativity, technological advancement, and counter-cultural observations to do the kind of stuff that Steve Jobs, almost through the force of his own individualism, was able to do.

The idea is this: There are a small number of people who truly are at all times the smartest person in the room and are capable of hurling thunderbolts from on high and changing the world. Steve Jobs was obviously one of those people. Very few of us are, though, and so when I actually looked at the legacy of Steve Jobs and the work of Steve Jobs, my conclusion is that I can never be like Steve Jobs. So the question is, how can I have *one-one-millionth* of his impact by being true to who *I* am?

This, to me, reinforces the value and virtue of humbition. Steve Jobs was about as far away from a humbitious leader as there could ever be, but it worked for him precisely because he was Steve Jobs and the rest of us weren't.

TAHL RAZ: I'd like to end by talking about your "five truths of corporate transformation." One of the truths that you write about is that the job of the change agent isn't just to surface these high-minded ideas but to sum the sense of urgency inside and outside the organization and turn it into action.

That's one of those insidiously inspiring quotations, because it sounds wonderful but it doesn't really provide the nitty-gritty, pretty details of how our listeners can use in their own company. Can you talk a little bit about what it means to act with "a different kind of urgency" and to turn it into action, in the context of all that you've talked about today?

WILLIAM TAYLOR: Well, it's hard in the short time we have left to really give an in-depth answer. It might have to be a whole other webcast! Here's my observation. It is true that the most successful companies and the most successful individuals really do think differently from everybody else. Steve Jobs is a perfect example. That's a lot of what I've spent the last 16 years of my life trying to do.

However, as I researched more deeply into various organizations for this book, I came to appreciate that although it might sound very simplistic and grandiose, the most successful organizations also genuinely *care more* than everybody else. They care about customers, colleagues, and about how they conduct themselves in a world with so much opportunity to cut corners, compromise on value, and do things that are at odds with their ideals.

To me, that's what urgency is about, and it's a lesson I learned and relearned during this long economic crisis. I believe that the job of leadership today, a huge piece of the job, is to recognize that your strategy is really your culture and that your culture is really your strategy.

You can't be compelling, original, and distinctive in the marketplace unless you create something compelling, original, and distinctive in the workplace.

The questions are: What separates you from your competitors in the market? What holds you together as colleagues in the workplace? What is your sense of shared commitment? This shared commitment is not just employee to customer but from colleague to colleague. It's the idea that the shared sense of what we owe each other in the workplace is the thing that creates the energy and urgency and creativity which allows us to succeed.

Obviously it's hard in 30 seconds to describe how to get there, but I believe that that's the link between the intellectual side of strategy and the implementation of being a leader who every single day inspires a group of people to wake up with confidence and be filled with creativity and energy in a world which on most days, circling back to where we began, seems more tumultuous, more uncertain, and faster changing than ever before.

TAHL RAZ: Our time's up. On behalf of all of us at myGreenlight, I want to express our gratitude for taking the time to teach and share lessons and insights of what I think is an extraordinary

book. Even this wonderful Webcast didn't capture the depth of it. I therefore recommend that all of you buy a copy or three of *Practically Radical*. Thank you, Bill, we really appreciate it.

WILLIAM TAYLOR: Thank you so much. It was loads of fun. Thanks everybody.

TAHL RAZ: All right, until next time, bye-bye.

For more information about myGreenlight, visit www.myGreenlight.com. For more information about the Social Capitalist events, visit our blog at www.blog.mygreenlight.com/category/sc/, where you can sign up for notification and recordings of future events.

For more information about Bill, visit www.williamctaylor.com.