

YOUR

# JOB

# SURVIVAL GUIDE

A MANUAL FOR  
THRIVING IN CHANGE

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## PREFACE

# We Surely All Will Die

*Security is mostly a superstition. It does not exist in nature, nor do the children of men as a whole experience it. Avoiding danger is no safer in the long run than outright exposure. Life is either a daring adventure, or nothing.*

—Helen Keller

In 1869, Major John Wesley Powell, a one-armed Civil War veteran and self-made college professor with a passion for exploration, organized a team of nine other men in four boats to tackle one of the last uncharted wildernesses of the United States. They traveled almost 1,000 miles down the Green River and the Colorado River into the heart of the Grand Canyon. In open boats, without life jackets, they made difficult portages around the most dangerous stretches. Sometimes the sheer, towering cliffs prohibited portaging or even scouting. Then, they picked up their paddles, shoved off, and hoped for the best.

This journey proved so harrowing that after two months of battling the river and dwindling rations, three men from the party decided to take their chances overland. At what became known as “Separation Canyon,” the men took their leave, saying, “We surely

all will die if we continue on this journey.” What manager or employee in today’s fast-changing organizations hasn’t had this same thought? With outsourcing, mergers, reorganizations, and the double-Venti-latte pace of work, the dangers are ever present. Surely, there must be a safer route than remaining on this turbulent whitewater river.

A reasonable person might have agreed with these men who parted company with Powell. Continuing downstream appeared to be certain death. But the men who abandoned the group were killed on their way out. A few days later, Powell and his remaining five crew members made it safely back to civilization, long after the world had given them up for dead. Getting out of white-water does not necessarily lead to greater security. As Helen Keller said, avoiding danger sometimes is no safer than outright exposure. Sometimes the best path is through the rapids—but you can improve your chances of success with the right skills and equipment.

The two of us, in recent years, separately followed Powell’s course down the Colorado River, and each of us benefited from advances in river-running equipment and skills. Greg traveled in a dory designed for this water, with a good life jacket and supporting rafts. Rob paddled a kayak that allowed him to roll (most of the time) when the rapids flipped him. Massive motor launches now cruise like tour buses through the biggest water in the Canyon. In the 80 years after Powell made his journey, a mere 100 people followed his path—and some of them ended up in rough graves along the shores. Today, more than 18,000 visitors per year take this journey.<sup>1</sup> The right skills and equipment make all the difference.

In the same way, ordinary people equipped with the right mind-set and skills can successfully navigate the uncommon turbulence of modern organizational life. Living and working in this crazy,

rushing world, you might feel at times like the explorers at Separation Canyon. You might be presented with precious few, and decidedly unsavory, options. Proceeding downstream seems to risk disaster, but the route overland, if it even exists, may be no better. As we show in this book, you not only can survive, but you can truly enjoy the journey.

This book started a few years back when Rob attended a session on organizational change that Greg taught at the Wharton School. Greg described this current environment as “permanent whitewater,” using a phrase from Peter Vaill.<sup>2</sup> Rob, who has paddled kayaks since he was a teenager and written business books throughout his career, understood what Greg meant by paddling whitewater. It means learning to be comfortable in an environment that scares the hell out of most people. It means developing skills, some counterintuitive ones, such as hanging upside down in your boat while underwater rocks pound on your helmet and your oxygen runs thin. Skills such as the Eskimo roll can convert a nail-biting plunge to oblivion into an exciting adventure.

You need a different way of thinking and acting for this world. First, you need to accept change. Spencer Johnson offered a simple but effective fable about mice and cheese that made this point.<sup>3</sup> But, to accept change is just to start. Today, somebody did not just move the “cheese.” The cheese bobs down a river of permanent whitewater; it races over drops and churns through holes. Pity the poor mouse who chases after it—unless, of course, this voyager sits snugly in a kayak, wearing neoprene, a PFD, and a helmet, ready for anything. Once you accept the relentlessness of change—that the cheese keeps moving—you then need to develop the right skills for this new world.

Today, you might feel swept down a rushing, roiling, and seemingly unending river. You are in permanent whitewater. Like Powell, you can’t slow or change the pace of this river. But you

can change how you look at the river as well as how you react to it. You can pick up your paddle and learn to master the mindset and the skills needed for this turbulent environment, this permanent whitewater world. This book will help you do just that. You hold in your hands a survival guide for your real job: change. But survival is not enough. This book will help you thrive.

Gregory Shea, Ph.D.  
Robert Gunther

## CHAPTER 2

# Working the Eddies

## Pace Yourself to Preserve Your Sanity

*Row, brothers, row, the stream runs fast,  
The rapids are near, and the daylight's past.*

—Thomas Moore

The new CFO of the European division of a large, U.S.-based multinational company understood and savored the fact that he had taken on a uniquely challenging job. The senior corporate leadership wanted to transform the division's financial operations from "just" pure finance and accounting to provide in-house consulting to field operations. He and his people would not confine themselves to keeping score. They would also help field executives improve their scores through better understanding of financials and their drivers. The CFO and his staff would help the field executives improve their financial game. His group was to provide coaching to operations staff in the field, especially to those parts of the division that struggled. He knew that this work would require considerable time—to develop new consultative and teaching skills, to travel, and to develop broader working relationships with the field. He knew that he and his people would also need to address the introduction of the Euro, the evolving EEU, and the rapids of increasing globalization. All this, and continue to do their day job of managing regional finances.

The company gave him many jobs, but he didn't let them distract him from what he believed to be his true job, namely, change. He knew the internal and external changes could swamp his organization. He knew he needed to find a way to reduce the flow. His group spent considerable time every month collecting data for monthly reports sent to senior corporate managers in New York—this seemed a likely target for simplification. He asked his staff how many data points they collected regularly. They reported approximately 3,600. Next, he asked his staff for the bare minimum number of data points that they felt were needed to fulfill their professional obligations. Just 600. Time gained: 40 to 60 percent (not more, because of the lack of numerical redundancy and the accompanying need for special care and extra checking of the 600 numbers).

The CFO then flew to corporate headquarters in New York City. He proposed to senior management that they narrow the 3,600 data points by a sixth, to 600 measures. This would cut staff time and free them up to tackle their pressing challenges of change, both at hand and down river.

The CFO made a compelling argument to senior executives. He pointed out the folly of trying to do everything. They would burn out staff and erode their ability to deliver on their key transformation initiatives. But the senior managers told him that *he* didn't understand: They wanted their numbers...all of them...*and* they wanted their change, "son." The CFO continued his negotiations over the next three days. Power breakfasts, power lunches, power cocktails, power dinners, power post-dinner drinks. He drew on his reputation. He worked Manhattan's corridors of plate glass and stainless steel as well as he could. In the end, the corporate powers still wanted their numbers, "son." All of them. And they wanted their change.

The CFO considered resigning. He firmly believed that continuing on the ordered route would drown his people. He could see the loss of staff, failure of the change initiatives, and burnout.

Between this rock and a hard place, he made what might be considered a courageous decision—or a very foolish one. He went back to his staff and told them they needed to come up with algorithms to generate the 3,600 points of data from 600 core data streams. They needed to do it with a maximum of 1 percent variation whenever he chose to test them: historically, currently, or in the future. Using these algorithms, they would only have to collect 600 data points but could report all 3,600 to the CEO. The staff developed the algorithms in two weeks, and they worked well. (Note that he was not “cooking the books,” just coming up with a complete set of reliable numbers by a more efficient method. This also took place before Sarbanes-Oxley.) Extreme conditions, he believed, sometimes call for extreme measures.

The CFO then met with his 14 direct reports and told them to use these algorithms to complete corporate reports from that day forward. He requested that they not volunteer information about the new approach, but, if asked, they should answer truthfully. He wrote a memo outlining the way to complete the reports henceforth, signed his name, and publicly gave a copy to each of his direct reports. He provided them cover even as he put himself into their hands. Any member of his staff with an ax to grind could have gone to a fax machine, dialed corporate finance, and taken him out right then and there. None of them did. They appreciated that he had their backs in managing the amount of change on their plates...and that they, as they showed, had his.

He bet that handling change well over time mattered most. He bet that the algorithms would buy him and his people enough time (six months he figured) to make enough progress on the change that corporate would forgive his trespass. He also bet that to try to do it all would mean failure. He bet that he could pick the 20 percent of his job that mattered most, which would account for 80 percent of his success. He placed a big professional (and personal) wager, but to do nothing was to bet that he could continue to do everything even as the pace and volume of

change in his environment increased. That was a fool's errand, he decided, and too dangerous for his direct reports.

The new method generated no questions from anyone in the organization. Perhaps no one noticed. Perhaps no one cared. What corporate leadership did apparently notice and care about was that the crucial organizational change went well. The CFO successfully transformed his operation without the kind of ill will and employee attrition that too often accompany such initiatives. Furthermore, he saved the energies of his people for the ongoing challenge of conducting business in a changing Europe.

Did the CFO do the right thing in this act of "mutiny?" He circumvented a direct order from senior corporate executives. If you think his job is to obey orders, he obviously did the wrong thing. And if you think his job is to keep track of numbers in the same way it has been done in the past, he was clearly in the wrong. This is the kind of action that might have been in his job description. But if you think that his real job is *change*, then he proved himself to be a superior leader, perhaps even better than his organizational superiors. He recognized the limits of his own resources and those of his staff. He recognized that the danger of bending the rules came to less than the danger of burning out himself and his staff. He did what it took to get the job done, the job of change.

This CFO also saw that he no longer travelled aboard an ocean liner, where the orders of the captain could be cheerfully relayed to the engine room and carried out. On an ocean liner, his actions were clearly mutinous. But they were not on a ship on the open seas. They were paddling together in whitewater. He had to keep his team afloat and keep them from exhaustion. That was the highest priority, because if the whole operation went under or he began losing people along the way, they wouldn't achieve any of their goals or survive the rapids they were sure to meet downstream.

This is not to advocate breaking rules, and certainly not breaking laws. Every manager needs to decide where to draw this line. But you cannot act like a sailor. You cannot blindly follow orders or do your job as it is written in your job description. Besides the moral risks, you might simply perform the wrong job. Updating your job description might occur once a year, but your job (and the challenges it presents) will change much more quickly. If the organization is gasping for air or flying over a waterfall, it won't make much difference that you were just following orders. It is not your real job to follow orders. Your real job is change.

He bet that handling change well  
over time mattered most.

## ALL HANDS ON DECK

The ocean liner organization sets its pace by controlling its passage through the environment. Except for emergencies, employees take turns in clearly defined watches. In contrast, the always-on, 25/8 environment of whitewater has no natural breaks in the action. Unless you control your own pace, you will be swept headlong downstream, battered, bruised, and burnt-out. You cannot control the relentless pace of the environment around you, but you can control your passage through it by learning the skills of effective pacing. You can be *in* the turbulence but not *of* the turbulence.

Kayakers work the eddies behind rocks to move slowly down a fast-flowing stream (see sidebar "Working the Eddies"), standing still while the river rushes past. The CFO did the same thing. He couldn't slow down the world around him, but he could set his

own pace moving through the turbulence. He realized he was no longer in a world in which you could rally followers for an exhausting push through perilous waters and then rest and lick your wounds. There is no bottom. Change follows change, relentlessly. He needed to pace himself and his team. He understood that in whitewater environments, you need to learn to pace yourself, and pace your people.

In whitewater environments, you  
need to learn to pace yourself,  
and pace your people.



### WORKING THE EDDIES

Kayakers can control their movement downstream by moving in and out of “eddies,” the quiet or upstream-flowing areas behind large rocks or other obstructions. As the river flows past these obstacles, it creates a current that moves in the opposite direction of the main current. A novice might be swept straight through the section of river, but a more experience kayaker will move from eddy to eddy, making slow and measured progress though a very rapidly moving environment. This use of eddies allows paddlers to rest, and to scout the area ahead for obstacles and places to play.

Paddlers can control their movement downstream, even though the stream itself may be uncontrolled. The trick is to recognize that a rapidly moving environment creates these quiet spots—you must know to look and where to look for them. You must also know the wisdom in putting them to good use. Enforce weekends and vacations, even one day.

Take your lunch. Negotiate schedules. It will be more efficient in the long run than rushing pell-mell downstream into who-knows-what. Paddlers develop skills in eddy turns and peel outs to navigate between the eddies and fast-moving currents beyond the eddy line without capsizing. Similarly, we can find ways in organizations, such as the “not to do list,” that create these quiet spots and breathers, allowing us to control our pace through a racing, uncontrollable environment.

## WE ARE DROWNING IN CHANGE

Demands swirl. They collide against the constraints of time and energy—yours and others’. The list of “to do’s” can grow forever as realities change, intermingle, and change again. Sylvia Hewlett and Carolyn Luce discuss the “dangerous allure of the 70-hour workweek.” They describe the rise of so-called “extreme jobs” with unpredictable workflows, 24/7 client access, heavy responsibility, and travel. Their survey found that 69 percent of 25- to 34-year-olds in these jobs felt they would have better health if they worked less, and 65 percent said they would turn down a promotion if it involved more work.<sup>1</sup>

Many of us are sleep deprived. We operate at the edge of exhaustion. Doctors recommend that adults get 7 to 8 hours of sleep per night. Are you getting that much? The National Sleep Foundation found that less than a third of us are getting 8 or more hours of sleep on weeknights (as shown in Table 2.1). A study of lunchtime in America found that 55 percent of employees took lunch breaks for less than 15 minutes, 63 percent skip lunch at least once a week, and 39 percent took no true break at all. The fact that the researchers even considered a span of under 15 minutes as a “break” is telling in and of itself. This is no way to run a river, a railroad, an army, or anything for very long—much less our own lives.

**TABLE 2.1 Weekday Sleep Hours**

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|              |     |
|--------------|-----|
| Fewer than 6 | 15% |
| 6-6.9 hours  | 24% |
| 7-7.9 hours  | 29% |
| 8 or more    | 30% |

---

National Sleep Foundation's 2002 Sleep in America poll

Those Starbucks cafes on every corner with high-octane beverages provide just one of many signs of the ways this business environment is taking its toll. Caffeine is now the second largest commodity by dollar volume after oil. America really does run on Dunkin'. (And we worry about our dependence on foreign oil! Perhaps we should be less concerned about OPEC and more concerned about Juan Valdez.) We push for higher and higher levels of caffeine to get the jolt that we need to keep up the relentless pace we think we need (see Table 2.2).

**TABLE 2.2 Caffeinated Competition (16 oz.)**

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|                |        |
|----------------|--------|
| Common Joe     | 100 mg |
| McDonald's     | 148 mg |
| Dunkin' Donuts | 211 mg |
| La Colombe     | 241 mg |
| Wawa           | 251 mg |
| Illy           | 265 mg |
| Starbucks      | 322 mg |

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\**Philadelphia Enquirer*, p. F3, 12/2/04

Caffeine is not the only drug we use to prop open our tired eyes and fill the gaps in our physical and emotional resources. We have taken to using more serious drugs such as amphetamines to keep going. All this works for a while, but at the end of this crazy road is burnout. Between 2004 and 2005, the percentage of people who arrived in ERs with symptoms such as confusion and

convulsions from nonmedical use of stimulants rose by more than 33 percent.

For years now, we have asked participants in executive education programs how many have experienced at least one of the following four events in the last year:

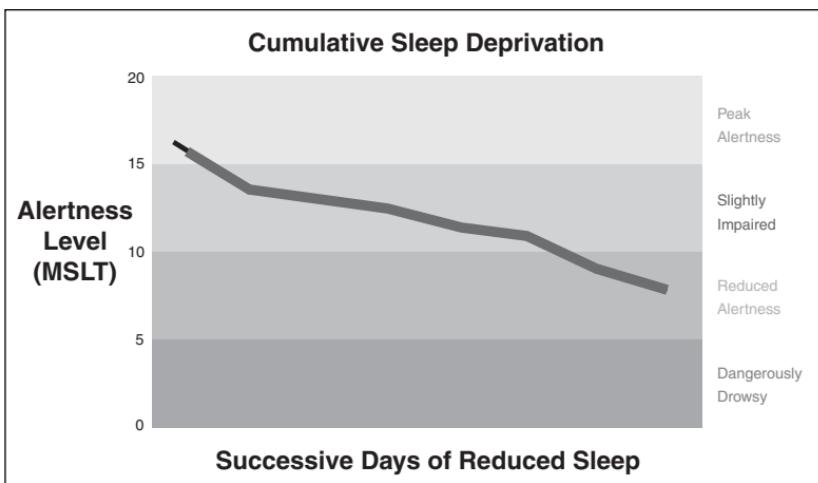
- Same staff but at least 10 percent more work without any increase in compensation
- At least 10 percent less staff and no diminution in workload without any increase in compensation
- Responsibility for an additional geographic area without any increase in compensation
- Responsibility for an additional functional area without any increase in compensation

Regardless of industry, 50 to 75 percent of the hands go up. When asked who has experienced two or more of these events, more than 33 percent raise their hands, and there are nearly always at least a few people who have experienced three or four. Ask yourself the same questions. How has the pace of your own company and industry increased over recent years? Do you have any reason to believe that the pace will not continue to quicken? Have you adjusted your own pace in response?

Many of us are sleep deprived. We operate at the edge of exhaustion. Doctors recommend that adults get 7 to 8 hours of sleep per night. Are you getting that much?

## The Impact of Exhaustion

A few extra hours with your head off the pillow may seem like a small price to pay for increased success. The price is higher than we think...and the price may, over the long run, actually hinder securing whatever we prize. We suffer and our organizations suffer from fatigue. Fatigue significantly impairs performance. Wakefulness for more than 24 hours impairs performance as much as a blood alcohol level of 0.1 percent. After a day of reduced sleep, we become slightly impaired (as shown in Figure 2.1). By the sixth day, we suffer from noticeable reduced alertness and head toward being dangerously drowsy.



**FIGURE 2.1** The cumulative effects of sleep deprivation

Sleep deficits can prove cataclysmic. The total cost of lost sleep to the U.S. economy runs at \$45 billion per year, including lost productivity, health care expenses, and motor-vehicle accidents.<sup>2</sup> There are, very likely, much higher indirect costs. The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration attributes more than 100,000 crashes, 71,000 injuries, 1,500 fatalities, and \$12.5 billion per year to driver fatigue alone.<sup>3</sup>

Many high-profile disasters have fatigue and sleep deprivation at their center; so do many less visible corporate meltdowns. In *The Twenty-Four-Hour Society*, Martin Moore-Ede attributes the Three Mile Island, Bhopal, Chernobyl, Exxon Valdez, and Challenger disasters at least in part to human fatigue and “a fundamental conflict between the demands of our man-made civilization and the very design of the human brain and body.” Concisely stated, we “were designed to hunt by day, sleep at night, and never travel more than a few dozen miles from sunrise to sunset.”<sup>4</sup> Automation has increased productivity so that the same work requires fewer human hours, but we struggle mightily to keep ourselves up to the tasks before us, indeed, to honor our biological limits as well as our organizational responsibilities and technological possibilities.<sup>5</sup>

Individuals and organizations alike make choices about how to handle sleep deprivation. Take the example of the sleepy physician. A physician in a Boston area hospital fell asleep while driving home from an extended shift. Her car struck a pole. She was relatively unscathed, but the hospital decided it needed a new policy to prevent such accidents by weary doctors. So, they came up with a fix—not a solution, just a fix: Instead of ensuring that their physicians had more sleep, the hospital decided to offer tired medical staff vouchers for taxi rides home! This solution amounts to the perfect Band-Aid (pun intended). It addresses the symptom of sleepy drivers, but does nothing to address the underlying cause. Patients, of course, might be more concerned about the impact of weariness on medical practice than on driving. How long before falling asleep at the wheel (or in the back of a cab) might a physician have prescribed potentially lethal medications, determined a course of treatment for an acutely ill patient, or had his or her hands inside a patient’s chest cavity?

In fact, physicians who worked one to four marathon sessions (longer than 24 hours) in a given month were 3.5 times more likely to make fatigue-related errors. Those who work five or

more marathon sessions are 7.5 times more likely to make fatigue-related errors and three times more likely to make *fatal* errors than when they did not work marathon shifts.<sup>6</sup>

Others besides patients suffer ill effects from sleep deprivation. The situation is unhealthy for the person missing the rest and rejuvenation. Lack of sleep contributes to diseases and obesity. Death from all causes is significantly lower for adults sleeping 7 to 8 hours per night. A study reported in *Harvard Men's Health Watch* concluded that: "Over nine years, men who took vacations were 29 percent less likely to be diagnosed with heart disease and 17 percent less likely to die than those who did not take regular vacations."<sup>7</sup> Exhaustion can kill.

The cycle grows vicious. You fall further behind; you skip vacations and work through weekends. You consume more caffeine. You multitask, dropping another 25 to 50 percent in performance.<sup>8</sup> You are less efficient and make more mistakes, so you work even longer hours, sleeping still less. Your key relationships at work and at home strain under the grind of the sand of unaddressed issues and unresolved struggles. Your pile of work deepens every day. You are drowning in it. Literally, drowning in it.

"Men who took vacations were 29 percent less likely to be diagnosed with heart disease and 17 percent less likely to die than those who did not take regular vacations."<sup>7</sup>  
Exhaustion can kill.

## STRATEGIES FOR PACING

Every day, new requests came in to the chief information officer of a health care company. The U.S. health care industry was in turmoil. Technology was in flux. Managers of the company's business units who streamed into his office needed new systems, software, or upgrades, constantly—and they needed them now. The CIO knew that this type of relentless pace often leads organizations to swamp and drown their people, creating high rates of turnover and burnout.

He addressed this challenge by developing a strategy to manage the pace of his work using internal contracts. When a new request came in, he would only take it on if other assignments were completed or removed. How did he get away with this? He had an unassailable track record. He was almost always on time and on budget, and often early and under budget. Performance gave him a large store of credibility. He also benchmarked at least every three years so he could demonstrate that his department fell in the top 10 percent of IS departments in the nation. This helped him repel attempts to overwork his people. He found a way to govern pace in an otherwise unpaced industry.

But one Monday morning, his boss put this system to its greatest test. The CEO called him in and dropped a major project on him. The CIO began pulling out his folder of contracts, but the CEO stopped him. "I know about the folder," he said. "Great tactic and it usually works, but it won't work today. No contracts. No folder. I need to get this done in six weeks." No fool, the CIO put away his folder and began to take notes. He would need five people on this project for six weeks, and even at that, this would prove difficult.

That afternoon, he assembled a team and told them about the project. "We've got a big one here. From the CEO. It's a must-do job." Given the urgency, his next words were surprising. He then told the team that they would not start on the project until the

following Monday at 7 a.m., a week later. “In the meantime,” he said, “today, tomorrow, and Wednesday, I want you to clean off your desks. Delegate, postpone, or cancel. You know I *hate* to break a contract or a commitment, but we have no choice here. If you need any help from me to do any of that, let me know. End of day Wednesday, I want everything off your desk, and I want you gone.”

What he said next was even more surprising. “Thursday and Friday, you are on vacation. Free. It’ll come out of my account, no PTO charge to you. Also, no e-mails, no phone calls, no pagers. Go home. Rest up and enjoy yourself. Starting Monday at 7, your life will be this project. I’m not even going to tell you what it is until then because you are so conscientious that you’d spend Thursday, Friday, Saturday, and Sunday working on it. I don’t want you to. I want you rested on Monday.”

This unconventional approach to starting an urgent major project for the CEO got the team’s attention. No one missed the symbolic importance of his breaking from his normal “no cancellation” rule, and nobody missed the symbolic importance of free days off up front. The CIO knew that the staff would be working flat out on the project for weeks on end. He also knew that he could not guarantee them a break at the end of the project. Some new project might be dropped in at that point. He could control the front end of this journey, so he carved out time for them to rest up before heading downstream. He rewarded them up front as an act of faith and trust. He did *not* need to elaborate.

In the process, however, he had expended a week of his six-week window—yet another risky move for an important project. The CIO, a former combat officer in Vietnam, was familiar with taking measured risks. His pacing paid off—even with the week to prepare. The team cleared away other projects that could have distracted them and came in ready to work on Monday. They finished the project a day early. Furthermore, they already had their

reward, and he didn't have to risk promising them vacation after the project only to have the river (or the CEO) lead him to break his word.

At first glance, as part of an organization rushing hell-bent-for-leather downstream setting a sane pace seems impossible. It amounts to saying that you should take a leisurely trip over Niagara Falls. Gravity would seem to argue otherwise. But white-water paddlers and experienced managers know ways to control their pace and progress even when the environment races on around you. Being aware of the need to pace yourself constitutes the first step. Building an awareness of when you are going dangerously fast or drowning in change is important. If you recognize the need to control your pace, what should you do about it? The following strategies can help you to pace yourself in a turbulent environment.

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## Create a “Not To Do” List

Superhuman exertions or biochemical boosters might help in the short term, but they do not offer a long-term solution to relentless change. You can't keep moving faster as the environment moves

faster. You need to recognize your own limits and look at what you can reasonably accomplish—not just what is asked of you. Pacing involves deciding not only what to do, that is, the standard focus of our “to do” lists, but also what *not* to do. You need to decide what part of this roiling mess to engage, and point the nose of your boat in that direction.

The not-to-do list is an easy concept to understand but difficult to implement. It can mean saying “no” to powerful people in the organization or making uncomfortable compromises in standards. You need to demonstrate your effectiveness to make your demand for pacing credible and show that pacing leads to better results. This will give you the ability to say “no” to projects that will push you and your people over the edge. Think of the CFO. Think of the CIO.

You also need to acquire sufficient comfort in laying out explicitly what you can and cannot do—to recognize that as a human being you have limitations, and to work to make others recognize this about both you and them. This doesn’t make you a less effective employee. In fact, it means more likely that you will prove a more effective employee over the middle to longer haul. You might disappoint some people in the short run, but you will get more work done, and better work, in the long run. How much does medical leave cost a firm? Or depression? Or divorce? While some may be disappointed today, more people will respect that you know your own limits.

You might object that this pacing isn’t possible. Your boss is not going to go away, your kids are not going to go away, and, hopefully, your spouse is not going to go away. You can and should limit debt, maximize savings (especially in retirement accounts), and negotiate severance packages. All of those practices keep you as buoyant as possible. Still, your mortgage payment comes due at the end of the month. There are some things that you cannot say “no” to. But you need to recognize the costs of lost productivity due to exhaustion. You either pay now in confronting those

making demands on your time, or you pay later in the impact on your health and performance.

If you believe this is not discussable, that is a problem. You can either hide what you are doing and surreptitiously avoid commitments, or you can make it discussable. Think about how you present it. For example, if you talk to your boss about the pain and suffering of the demands on your time, you might just come off looking like a whiner. But if you come in with information about the costs of exhaustion and overwork or with a plan to alter or reorganize work, you might find a more receptive audience.

### *If You Think You Can't Do This, You Don't Know Jack*

If you think protecting your time in this way will be the end of your career, consider the story a manager at General Electric once told to Greg. Years earlier, as a junior executive, he received a charge to run a cross-functional project for his boss, who was high up in the GE constellation. With this authority, the junior executive began calling leaders from different functions to participate. Most of the calls went well, but then he reached one manager who was not interested. This manager said he didn't have the time.

The junior executive said, "I don't think you understand. My boss said we need to do this, and we need your involvement." The boss was of rank, so it should have carried sufficient weight...or so he thought. But the stubborn manager said that if there were something of importance in it for him, he would move it up on the list. Absent that, he had a lot of important things to do, so he was not going to do this. The junior executive was shocked. That manager, according to the story, was Jack Welch. Drawing the line on what he was willing to do certainly did not stifle his career progress since he became CEO. No one questioned whether Jack Welch worked hard, but he also had the courage and wisdom to draw the line.

Pacing involves deciding not only what to do, that is, the standard focus of our “to do” lists, but also what *not* to do.

## Build Breaks in the Action

New York Yankees Hall of Fame pitcher Lefty Gomez reportedly said, “Never be in a hurry to lose.” One of Gomez’s greatest rivals was another Hall of Famer, Jimmie Foxx, who played for Yankee archrivals the Philadelphia Athletics and later the Boston Red Sox. Gomez knew that all too often, head-to-head, Foxx outdid the great Gomez. Indeed, Gomez described the powerful Foxx as “having muscles in his hair.” One day Gomez found himself facing Foxx late in a close game with several runners on base. The game was at stake, and the screams of tens of thousands of fans emphasized the point. The Yankee catcher went through his signs and Gomez shook them all off. The catcher went through the signs again. Again, Gomez shook them all off. The catcher went through the signs a third time. The stadium throbbed with noise as Gomez shook him off. Three full sets of signs; three full sets rejected.

Puzzled and frustrated, the catcher did something that he did not want to do—he asked the umpire for a time-out and approached the pitching mound. Gomez viewed the mound as his private domain, and his alone. He did not welcome visitors. Before the catcher could reach the mound, Gomez growled, “What are you doing here?” The catcher pointed out that there was a game in progress, that Gomez had only three pitches, and that he had shaken off the catcher’s sign three times. He needed to throw the ball. Just what did the great Lefty Gomez want the catcher to do?

Gomez responded gruffly and with diffidence, “Go back behind the plate. I’ll pitch when I’m ready. As long as I’m holding the ball, he can’t hit it.”

Gomez could not make his nemesis vanish. Gomez could not make the situation vanish. He would not walk away. What he could do was to build a break in the action where he could gather his thoughts and concentration. It was all he had left, and he would not relinquish it. The point in business is the same. You may not be able to change the challenges that face you at the plate or change the rules of the game overall, but you can influence how fast you go. No matter how much pressure you face, remember it is your mound. You control your own pace. Never be in a hurry to lose. Slowing down may well affect the outcome and can break the other person’s rhythm.

A brief stop for lunch on the river or a pause in an eddy behind a rock can do wonders, renewing your energies for the rapids ahead. For example, on the day that Greg’s group of dories was to take on Lava Falls, lunch went long and included time for a siesta—the river would likely prove a bit less turbulent in the afternoon, and the crews definitely more rested for the most challenging of rapids.

During the day and the throughout the week, you need to create breaks in the action—perhaps a few moments for reflection or exercise in the morning. It might be a brief meditation before you go to bed to clear the day from your head. You need to enforce and protect these moments, even when the waters are rising. You need places in your life where you can stop and get your bearings, to catch your breath before plunging back into the action. If you think you can live without these breaks, you fool only yourself, and eventually yourself will refuse the fooling. If you think breaks will naturally occur in permanent whitewater or will appear as a reward for all your hard work, you also fool yourself. You need to seek them out. It might mean that you have to take lunch instead of eating at your desk. You might need to respect

weekends instead of working straight through them. This is what negotiators call “going to the balcony.” Skilled negotiators sense when negotiations stall, and they take a break to step out of the room. This can help break a deadlock or reframe discussions. As in music, sometimes the pauses in the score are the most important part of a performance.

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you can stop and get your bearings,  
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plunging back into the action.

## Get Good Sleep

The previous discussion about sleep deprivation and its impact should make it clear that you need to get more sleep, particularly in a turbulent and stressful environment. But quality of sleep is also important. In *Sleep to Save Your Life*, Dr. Gerard Lombardo offers tips for better sleep, including<sup>9</sup>

- Get the right amount of sleep for you.
- Keep a regular schedule, based on your responsibilities.
- Relax and give yourself time to unwind. Think evening exercise or a warm bath.
- Create the right environment. Watch how children hold to rituals such as ordering precious stuffed animals or hearing a bedtime story. We suit up to go to work. Find a way to “suit down” to get ready for sleep.
- Use your bedroom for sleeping (and perhaps one other activity). Keep television and bother outside the door.

- Don't go to bed until you are feeling sleepy. Your body says "when." Listen.
- Wake at the same time.
- Do not take naps that interfere with your nighttime sleep (although napping can be useful, as noted in the following section).
- Cut down or eliminate cigarettes, as well as alcohol and caffeine, especially after 4 p.m.
- If you must eat before bedtime, eat sparingly.
- Make peace with the world. Put the hard decisions and conversations off until tomorrow. With those you can, get and give the warmth of a hug, a kiss, or a sincere handshake. Feel the love.

Falling asleep resembles catching a biological or circadian wave. In the end, "at the heart of all sleep problems, whether medical, behavioral, or psychological in origin, is respect for what your body wants to do, which is sleep at certain times of the day and night and be active at others."

## **Take a Nap**

Napping is a bit controversial. Many people associate it with laziness. Some researchers laud naps; others issue some cautions, particularly if it interferes with evening sleep. Surprisingly, some very successful people take "power naps" in the middle of the day. They actually carve out this little peaceful backwater in the middle of a rip-roaring nonstop river. Turn off the BlackBerry, shut the door, and take a 10 to 20 minute nap. We once knew a famous trial lawyer who tucked away an Oriental rug in his office, and most afternoons (when he was not grilling witnesses in court) he unrolled the rug and pulled out a pillow. He closed the door and had his secretary hold all his calls. He found himself more productive afterward just as the research would predict.

Similarly, Greg worked with an executive in his forties in London who had a heart attack as a young man that made him serious about his level of stress and pacing. Every day at his lunch break, he left the office and went to take a short nap. He rose to the top of his function.

Most companies will not actually give you formal napping time or space (although there are a few). So you might have to engage in guerilla napping. If napping in the office proves impossible—particularly if you inhabit a cubicle city—then follow the lead of people keeping a pillow and blanket in the back of the car. Just crawl into this little metal sleep chamber and tilt the seat back. Or you might leave for an appointment or lunch 15 minutes early, taking advantage of a short nap on your arrival. You will arrive at the meeting refreshed (just pack a comb so you don't arrive with bed head). A little creativity will also lead you to find other ways to grab 15 winks when 40 are not possible. A trip for a massage or acupuncture can also offer an opportunity to stretch out and unwind.

If you feel guilty about napping, remember that research shows that people perform better after a nap even if you had a good night's sleep. It also shows that they need less sleep at night. Of course, power napping is no substitute for a solid night's sleep. But when you are flying the red-eye or finishing that late-night project, a nap can provide enough break in the action to help you recharge. You may even live longer. A recent six-year study of Greek adults showed that regular nappers had 37 percent less chance of dying from a heart attack with the benefits appearing especially strong for men.<sup>10</sup>

The rising need to nap has led to a slightly greater social acceptance of napping. Some companies such as Yarde Metals in Southington, Connecticut, allow or encourage “napping on the job.” Office furniture retailers are offering napping “furniture” such as napping pods and “fatigue management” products.

If you nap, you will be in good company. Great nappers of history such as Leonardo Da Vinci, Napoleon, Thomas Edison, Albert Einstein, Winston Churchill, and John Kennedy may not have had napping pods or what Deloitte Consulting in Pittsburgh terms “napnasiums,” but they knew the benefits of napping. Edison kept a cot in his lab, and Sir Winston said:

You must sleep some time between lunch and dinner, and no half-way measures. Take off your clothes and get into bed. That's what I always do. Don't think you will be doing less work because you sleep during the day. That's a foolish notion held by people who have no imagination. You will be able to accomplish more. You get two days in one—well, at least one and a half, I'm sure. When the war started, I had to sleep during the day because that was the only way I could cope with my responsibilities.

They also knew how to nap: right length (20 to 30 minutes), right time (not too late so as to affect nighttime sleep patterns), and in a comfortable, quiet spot.

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remember that research shows  
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after a nap.

## Enforce Vacations

Kirsten Judd, CEO of the Professional Renewal Center in Lawrence, Kansas, found that most burnt-out patients who came to the center had one thing in common: They never took

vacations. Big breaks in the action, truly pulling your boat out of the water, we term vacations. Strangely, many organizations treat vacations as an unwanted cost. While Spain and France mandate that employers give 30 days of vacation per year, and the UK mandates 20, the United States has no mandatory vacation time.<sup>11</sup> The United States lags both in mandatory and in voluntary vacation days. About 50 percent of Americans will not take a real vacation this year.<sup>12</sup> In 2007, an estimated 51 million American employees will demure from using all of their vacation days. In effect, they will return almost 438 million days to their employers. Some organizations buy back vacation time as a matter of policy. Evidently, vacations are for wimps, so individuals miss out on the chance to recharge, reorient, and even rethink.

Some organizations lead the way in changing our thinking about vacations. California-based Rand Corporation awards employees who use all their vacation days a 5 percent bonus. Motek, a software firm, offers a set of luggage and \$1,000 to any employee taking off three consecutive weeks. PricewaterhouseCoopers created three extra paid holidays by shutting its offices between Christmas Eve and New Year's Day. Furthermore, the firm notifies a supervisor when employees near the forfeit date for use-it-or-lose it vacation days.<sup>13</sup>

In this tough environment, we've imported military imagery to drive people to scale the cliffs and run over the next ridge on the business battlefield. But many organizations have overlooked an important feature of military life—R & R. (And part of the agony of Iraq is the conscious violation of this principle as well.) The military traditionally has been very conscious of pacing and burnout. They push people to the limits (and beyond), but then give them time off. After a stint on the front, a soldier gets a furlough or a desk job. But in business, you are more than likely sent to another front, demanding more peak performance.

Professional athletes peak for seasons and take respites from their grueling regimens. Professional managers need to do so as well.

You need to give yourself sufficient time to get completely away from your work and immersed in something else, so you can come back to the task refreshed. Do you have any hobbies? If not, this might be a sign that you are completely immersed in your work. This is not necessarily a bad thing, but it is a small step from immersion to drowning, so beware. As the example of our CIO shows, it may appear crazy to take a vacation when you have so much work to do, but, in reality, it could be even crazier not to.

In this connected age, you also have to decide where to draw the line on technology when you are on vacation. If you keep reading e-mail, you might not actually have a vacation—you'll just have taken your office with you. You might decide to do some limited work. For example, some managers will read e-mails but not open attachments, which helps limit the amount of work you do but avoids returning to thousands of unread messages or missing responding to a real crisis.

Some of the relentless pace of e-mail is because people don't use their assistants or filtering effectively. Some managers have their assistants handle phone calls, faxes, letters, and every other form of communication but keep the e-mail completely open. Assistants should screen and filter e-mail to keep only the important things coming to you.

In this tough environment, we've imported military imagery to drive people to scale the cliffs and run over the next ridge on the business battlefield. But many organizations have overlooked an important feature of military life—R & R.

## Avoid the Perils of the Crazy Brave and Phony Tough

A crazy environment often brings out the craziness in people. During the Watergate scandal, *Newsweek* columnist Stewart Alsop once characterized the recklessness and swaggering, John Wayne-style bravado of those involved as “crazy brave and phony tough.” These two stances can make turbulent environments more dangerous for one and all.

The “crazy brave” are thrill seekers in rivers and organizations who enter turbulent environments and can do some extraordinary things at times. But they ultimately crash and burn—and do a lot of damage to people and organizations around them. Throughout his career, General George Armstrong Custer took extraordinary risks personally and with his command. His fearlessness helped him rise to become the second youngest general in the history of the U.S. Army. At Gettysburg and again near Appomattox, for example, he successfully hurled his greatly outnumbered forces at Lee’s army. But a decade later, his fearlessness became recklessness at the Little Big Horn. He raced ahead of other troops in the expedition and ignored reports and caution from his own scouts. He could have waited for a far greater force to arrive, as planned. Instead, he led his men forward into his disastrous “last stand.” Crazy brave, they went flying over the falls.

Soccer star Zinedine Zidane was kept out of the first two matches of the World Cup playoffs in 2002 by a thigh injury. He probably should have stayed out. Instead, he made the crazy brave move of coming back in the third game. He was not the same player. France lost in the first round without even scoring a goal. He didn’t do them any favor by coming back. Bravely overcoming challenges is one thing. Endangering yourself and others by being crazy brave or phony tough is another.

Similarly, in business, you have the “crazy brave” Enron executives who took their entire organization over the waterfalls as they

pushed the limits of running the business. Many organizations have high-performing managers whose personal recklessness threatens their own careers and perhaps the organization as a whole. A turbulent environment provides encouragement for this craziness for the “big play,” so you need to watch out for this tendency in yourself and in others.

In addition to the crazy brave, a perhaps less obvious and more insidious problem is the “phony tough.” These are the people who brag that they work 18 hours a day and have done it for five years without taking breaks. They push themselves to exhaustion, far beyond the point of optimal or even decent performance. The phony tough will start to make mistakes, mistakes that can seriously affect the future of the entire organization. And these phony tough, with their increasingly empty big talk, stand just one double dare away from being crazy brave.

Skilled explorers and paddlers know that their work is to manage the inevitable risks, not seek them out unnecessarily. While a whitewater environment provides inevitable excitement, it requires careful planning, sharp reflexes, and true courage, rather than a swaggering machismo or desire for thrills. As Clint Eastwood’s Mr. Dunn in *Million Dollar Baby* would say, “Tough is not enough.”

### *Losing It in the Thirteenth Round*

Boxer Billy Conn was tough enough. On June 18, 1941, he entered the ring to face Joe Louis, reigning heavyweight champion of the world. Conn knew it would be a tough fight. Louis outweighed Conn by at least 35 pounds and was legendary in his ability to hit hard and to finish off his opponents. Conn had chosen to fight “up” in weight partly because Louis had run out of heavyweights to fight (having beaten them all) and partly because Conn had a chance, however slim, to outbox Joe Louis. Conn had proven himself a tough and skillful boxer. If Conn

could avoid Louis's power, then possibly, just possibly, Conn could pull the upset of upsets and win the bout, the title, and a place in boxing history by outpointing Louis.

Through 12 rounds, Billy Conn did just that; he outboxed the great Joe Louis. He even buckled the champ's knees several times and probably came within a hair of knocking Louis down in the twelfth round. Then, in round 13, Billy Conn stopped boxing and started slugging. He went toe to toe with Joe Louis. Conn's corner vociferously entreated him to return to boxing, to the careful accumulation of points, but Conn wanted more than a victory; he wanted a knock-out. He got one. Joe Louis knocked Billy Conn into a near fetal position on the canvas. In a post-fight interview, a reporter asked Conn why he had changed tactics in the thirteenth round, to which Conn replied, "What's the sense of being Irish if you can't be thick?"

Decades later, Conn and Louis participated in a panel of heavyweight fighters. Conn jabbed at Louis saying, "I could have been champ." Louis counterpunched, "You were...for 12 rounds." Billy Conn was more than tough enough to win. Billy Conn was more than smart enough (witness his smart investment of his boxing earnings and comfortable lifestyle). Billy Conn went outside himself—outside what he was best at—just when he needed to stay within himself. By "being thick," he went crazy brave.

If not craziness or toughness, then what does it take to succeed in this environment? The factors that will lead to success are, on the surface, far more mundane: the right skills, the right equipment, and the right mindset. The ocean-liner organizations that took us across great patches of open water have already broken apart, and we have launched the lifeboats of more nimble organizational units without the grand ballrooms and corner offices.

The environment has certainly grown crazier, but this doesn't mean you need to become phony tough or crazy brave. You need to find a way to navigate through the turbulence. You need the

flexibility and responsiveness designed for true whitewater. This environment can be exhausting and unforgiving. You need to control your pace and balance courage with humility.

The “crazy brave” are thrill seekers in rivers and organizations who enter turbulent environments and can do some extraordinary things at times. But they ultimately crash and burn.

## KEEP A ROLL IN RESERVE

Your mother told you to take care of yourself, to eat right, and to get thee to a doctor when symptoms dictate. She was right...of course. A tired or ill kayaker is a danger to him- or herself as well as to others. Few of us can play at 20 percent below peak and keep up, let alone 30 to 50 percent below peak. How many times have you seen a star athlete limp onto a field only to be outdone by an average athlete? Yes, many of us can recall a star such as Mickey Mantle or Kirk Gibson limping to the plate, hitting a game-winning homer, and then limping around the bases, or Curt Schilling, blood oozing from his surgically cobbled together ankle, pitching brilliantly to help the Red Sox overcome “The Curse.” It can happen...with the right circumstances—for example, you only have to bat, so limited mobility does not matter, or a long and restorative post-season awaits, or world-class doctors have done the cobbling and literally stand by to intervene.

Imagine that you and I compete for clients around the country or around the world. You are better than I am. You are smarter and better trained. You also believe that you are the second coming of Superman. You book long trips back to back. You fly from LA to New York on the red-eye for a sales call and then to Miami for the next day.

Me? I acknowledge more of my limits. I rarely schedule key client meetings on back-to-back days in cities three or more time zones apart. I plan to do my prep on the ground so that travel time amounts to “found time.” I seldom go a week without at least four cardiovascular workouts. I make sure that I’m never away from home more than eight nights a month and never more than three in any week. I sleep with my spouse more nights than not and have no fewer than seven meals a week with my family. My dog and my toddler recognize me immediately.

I am usually at the top of my game while you are usually performing 10 to 30 percent below your peak. Yes, you are smarter and better trained than I am. You are just dumber in how you leverage what you’ve got. We meet ten times in the marketplace, and I win at least six and probably seven or eight times. I am not better than you. I do not have to be. I just have to be better at game time.

Turbulence can kill suddenly, but perhaps its greatest danger comes from its ability to wear you down over time. Day after day of fighting rapids can deplete energy and exhaust attention. Paddlers late in the day are more likely to make foolish mistakes and to lack the strength to recover from them. Paddler Jeff Bennett described kayaking the Upper Kings River in California at a very high level as “a long stretch of Class V rapids leading into the bad stuff.” Just 3 miles into their trip, they found that “our fun meters were pegged, and our energy levels were low.” When they pulled out to scout the next run, within 30 minutes, “half the crew had their sleeping bags spread out and dinner on the stove.”

Experienced paddlers try not to play themselves out. They always make sure they keep some energy in reserve for the unexpected—energy for that last roll you might need to make in a pinch. They realize that complete exhaustion greatly reduces your options. They control their momentum down the river so they can see what is coming. They recognize that using these reserves might mean flirting with death. Because you don't know what challenges you will face, you conserve some margin of error—and if you have consumed it, then get off the river.

In your work, you also need to build in a similar margin of safety. You need to have a sane enough pace so that you can deal with the inevitable turbulence you will encounter. Instead of just looking at your current work, ask yourself: What happens if my company announces a merger next week? What if my business unit is reorganized? What if I need to move to a new office? What if my job responsibilities are increased? What if my current job goes to India and I need to find a new one? What if a competitor's move requires a rapid response? This permanent whitewater environment could kick up any of these events. Consequently, think marathon, not sprint. Do you have the capacity to deal with these shocks if they happen to you? To the extent that you can, pace yourself to keep a bit of energy in reserve for such predictable "surprises." Find the eddies where you can get your bearings and recover. When you face pressure, as Billy Joel says, "you have to learn to pace yourself."

Experienced paddlers try not to play themselves out. They always make sure they keep some energy in reserve for the unexpected.



## THE TAKEOUT

Relentless, permanent whitewater often doesn't provide any natural breaks in the action. You cannot trust the environment to provide a manageable pace, so you need to pace yourself.

# Index

## A

ABoyatzis, Richard, 125  
Ackerman, Buddy, 125  
actions speak louder than words, 140-141  
active listening, 172  
Adventure Sports Center International (ASCI) park, 205  
Alsop, Stewart, 38  
Amundsen, Roald, 198  
Apollo, 181  
avoiding learned helplessness, 72-74

## B

Bennett, Jeff, 42  
Bentley, Wilson  
“Snowflake,” 82

“Brand You,” 91-92  
building portfolios of projects, 92-93  
cultivating diverse skills, 93-97  
health, 99-100  
networks, creating, 98  
breaking rules, example of CFO who broke rules for change, 13-17  
breaks in the action, 30-32

## C

caffeine, 20  
capital markets, 210  
capsizing, 49-50  
change, 6-9  
example of a consultant who paid for dinner without forks, 45-48

- example of CFO who took risk, 13-14, 16-17
- example of COO who steered his company through deregulation, 105-108
- rivers are rising, 208-214
- Chenault, Kenneth, 197
- choosing
- equipment for the right level of fun, 75-77
  - creating time and space for play, 80-81
  - patience, 77-78
  - recharging by paddling, 79
  - projects, 67-68
- Churchill, Winston, 35, 78
- Clark, Georgie White, 207
- communication
- example of a lieutenant in Vietnam, 137-139
  - signals on the river, 141
  - strategies for, 140
    - actions speak louder than words, 140-141
  - creating space to grieve, 149-151
- ensure two-way communication, 147-148
- maintain line of sight, 142-143
- make sense of what happened, 152-153
- metaphors, 156-157
- never risk a lie, 144-146
- using myths to create meaning, 153-156
- teams, 172
- Conn, Billy, 39
- crazy brave and phony tough, 38-41
- cultivating exuberance, 81-82
- Custer, George Armstrong, 38, 128

## D

- Death of a Salesman, 53
- deliberate mistakes, 58
- depersonalization, 124
- deregulation, 105
- developmental networks, 122
- Dodge, Wagner, 190

## E

- e-mail, 37
- eddies, working, 18-19
- edge of chaos, 166
- Eisner, Michael, 181
- emotional exhaustion, 124
- emotions, master emotions of failure, 56-57
- encouraging exploration, 86-87
- Enron, 181
- enthusiasm, 154
- equipment, choosing for the right level of fun, 75-77
  - creating time and space for play, 80-81
- patience, 77-78
- recharging by paddling, 79
- Eskimo roll, 51-52
- Eskimos, 2
- exhaustion, 22-24
  - emotional exhaustion, 124
- exploration, encouraging, 86-87
- extreme jobs, 19-21
  - exhaustion, 22-24
- exuberance, cultivating, 81-82

## F

- face-to-face meetings, 142
- failing, playing versus, 62-63
- failure, 48-51, 63
  - Eskimo roll, 51-52
- master emotions of failure, 56-57
- minimizing risk of, 54-56
- move on after making mistakes, 60-62
- practice failing, 57-59
- preparing to learn from, 59-60
- treating your career as a series of experiments, 52-54
- fear, failure, 56-57
- finding meaning, 157-161
- Fisch, Karl, 209
- Fisher, Steve, 103
- flat water thinking, limits of, 9-11
- Flinn, Kathleen, 85
- Foxx, Jimmie, 30
- Frankl, Viktor, 158
- free agents, 91
- Friedan, Betty, 81

## G

- G-rig, 207
- go with the flow, 77
- Gomez, Lefty, 30
- Graham, Katharine, 82
- grieving, creating space for, 149-151

## H

- Hallowell, Edward M., 61
- health, taking care of yourself, 99-100
- helplessness, avoiding, 72-74
- Hewlett, Sylvia, 19
- hiding, 215
- Hirshberg, 80
- humility, 201-203
- Huntsman, Jon, 182

## I

- identity, 89-90
- intuition, strategies for scouting and portaging, 115-119

## J

- Jamison, Kay Redfield, 81
- Janis, Irving, 181
- job searches, encouraging, 86-87
- job security, 89, 214
- jobs, extreme jobs, 19-21
  - exhaustion, 22-24
- Johnson, Spencer, xv
- Judd, Kirsten, 35

## K

- kayakers versus sailors, 7-9
- Keidel, Robert, 176
- Keller, Helen, xiv
- Kennedy, Jack, 80
- Knievel, Evil, 55
- Koch, Richard, 60
- Kram, Kathy, 122

## L

- leaders, role of trip leaders, 195-196
- leadership, stepping up to, 196-198

leading  
from behind, 201-203  
humility, 201-203  
in permanent  
whitewater, 188  
    assembling the right  
        team, 199-200  
building trust, 193-194  
enabling leaders and  
following followers,  
196-198  
managing shifting roles,  
194-195  
structuring teams,  
200-201  
understanding power  
and influence, 189-192  
learning from failure, 59-60  
Lee, Robert E., 127  
legacies, shaping, 157-161  
Lewis and Clark, 115-117,  
123-124  
Lewis, Meriwether, 123  
lies, 144-146  
life boards, 122  
life coaches, 122  
limits of flat water thinking,  
9-11

Lindgren, Scott, 104  
line of sight, maintaining,  
142-143  
listen to your heart, 130-132  
listening, active listening, 172  
listening to others, strategies  
for scouting and portaging,  
120-122  
Louis, Joe, 40  
Luce, Carolyn, 19

## M

maintaining line of sight,  
142-143  
managing shifting roles,  
194-195  
Mandela, Nelson, 201  
maneuverability, 97  
    increasing by developing  
        diverse skills, 93-97  
Manpower, 91  
MBI (Maslach Burnout  
Inventory), 124  
McEwen, Bruce, 93  
McKee, Annie, 125  
meaning  
    creating with myths,  
        153-156  
    finding, 157-161

metaphors, 9, 156-157  
minimizing risk of failure,  
54-56  
mistakes

deliberate mistakes, 58  
moving on after making,  
60-62

Moore-Ede, Martin, 23

Motek, 36

moving through turbulence,  
17-18

murmurations, 165

myths, using to create  
meaning, 153-156

## N

naps, pacing, 33-35

Nerf products, 118

networks, creating strong  
networks, 98

Nobel, Alfred, 159

“not to do” lists, 27-29

## O

optimism, 70-71

creating, avoiding learned  
helplessness, 72-74

when all else fails, paddle  
like hell, 74-75

## P

pacing, 25-27, 30

breaks in the action, 30-32

crazy brave and phony  
tough, 38-41

keeping a reserve, 41-43

“not to do” lists, 27-29

sleep, 32-33

naps, 33-35

vacations, 35-37

paddlers versus sailors, 7-9

Pareto principle, 60

patience, 77-78

Patton, George S., 121

performance deficits,  
sleep, 127

performance reviews, 125

permanent whitewater, xv, 3-5

leading in, 188

assembling the right  
team, 199-200

build trust, 193-194

enabling leaders and  
following followers,  
196-198

- managing shifting roles, 194-195
- structuring teams, 200-201
- understanding power and influence, 189-192
- personal flotation, 7
- personal flotation devices (PFDs), 89
- cultivating diverse skills, 93-97
- health, 99-100
- networks, creating, 98
- strategies for, 90
- developing “Brand You,” 91-92
- portfolios of projects, building, 92-93
- personal interactions, 143
- personal power, 189
- PFDs (personal flotation devices), 88-89
- cultivating diverse skills, 93-97
- health, 99-100
- networks, creating, 98
- strategies for, 90
- developing “Brand You,” 91-92
- portfolios of projects, building, 92-93
- phoenix, 134
- phony tough, 39-41
- Pink, Daniel, 81, 91
- playing, 66-69
- choosing equipment for the right level of fun, 75-77
- creating time and space for play, 80-81
- patience, 77-78
- recharging, 79
- failing versus, 62-63
- portaging, 109-112
- strategies for, 112
- developing intuition and listen to it, 115-119
- knowing when to portage, 123-126
- listening to others, 120-122
- listening to your heart, 130-132
- reading the water, 112-115
- recognizing when you are drowning, 126-130
- when in doubt, scout, 132-133

portfolios, building portfolios  
of projects, 92-93  
positional power, 189  
positive attitudes. See  
optimism, 71  
Powell, John Wesley, xiii  
power  
personal power, 189  
positional power, 189  
power companies,  
deregulation of, 105-108  
power of teams, 183-185  
preparedness, PFDs (personal  
flotation devices), 88  
PricewaterhouseCoopers, 36  
projects, choosing, 67-68

## R

Ragins, Belle, 122  
Rand Corporation, 36  
reading the water, 112-115,  
119-120  
reassessments, 109-112  
recharging, 79  
recognizing when you are  
drowning, 126-130  
recovery skills, 50  
reduced personal  
accomplishment, 124

relationships, 79  
rescuing yourself, 100-101  
reserves, pacing, 41-43  
Reynolds, Craig, 166  
Robinson, Brooks, 203  
roles  
managing shifting roles,  
194-195  
of trip leaders, 195-196

## S

sailors versus paddlers, 7-9  
scheduling, pacing, 41-43  
Schilling, Curt, 41  
scouting, 105-106, 108  
strategies for, 112  
developing intuition and  
listening to it, 115-119  
knowing when to  
portage, 123-126  
listening to others,  
120-122  
listening to your heart,  
130-132  
reading the water,  
112-115  
recognizing when you  
are drowning, 126-130  
when in doubt, scout,  
132-133

security, 89

Seligman, Martin, 72

setting your own course, 103-105

Shackleton, Ernest, 70, 197

sharing stories, 152-153

shifting roles, managing, 194-195

signals on the river, 141

signs you're headed for a fall, 128

skills, cultivating diverse skills to increase maneuverability, 93-97

sleep, 19-20

- exhaustion, 22-24
- pacing, 32-33

sleep performance deficits, 127

space to grieve, 149-151

specialization, 213

starlings, 165-167

stories, sharing, 152-153

strategies for communicating above the roar, 140

- actions speak louder than words, 140-141

creating space to grieve, 149-151

ensuring two-way communication, 147-148

maintaining line of sight, 142-143

making sense of what happened, 152-153

metaphors, 156-157

never risk a lie, 144-146

using myths to create meaning, 153-156

strategies for failing quickly and recovering gracefully

- making mistakes and moving on, 60-62
- mastering emotions of failure, 56-57
- minimizing risk of failure, 54-56
- practice failing, 57-59
- preparing to learn from failure, 59-60
- treating your career as a series of experiments, 52-54

strategies for personal flotation, 90

- cultivating diverse skills, 93-97

developing “Brand You,” 91-92

- health, 99-100
- networks, creating, 98
- portfolios of projects, building, 92-93
- strategies for scouting and portaging, 112
- developing intuition and listening to it, 115-119
- knowing when to portage, 123-126
- listening to others, 120-122
- listening to your heart, 130-132
- reading the water, 112-115
- recognizing when you're drowning, 126-130
- when in doubt, scout, 132-133
- strategies for teaming, 167-168
- becoming skilled at entering and leaving teams, 171-173
  - choosing the right vessel, 179-180
  - finding safety in numbers, 173-175
  - knowing what you bring to the team, 168-169
- knowing your teammates, 169-171
- understanding the working of teams, 181-182
- understanding what game you are playing, 175-178
- strategies of unsinkable optimism
- creating optimism and avoiding learned helplessness, 72, 74
  - when all else fails, paddle like hell, 74-75
- stress, 127
- Stuart, Jeb, 127
- subspecialists, 212
- subteaming, 170
- survival, 133-134
- T**
- Tapscott, Donald, 68
- teams, 165-167
- assembling the right team, 199-200
  - communication, 172
  - power of, 183-185
  - strategies for, 167-168
  - becoming skilled at entering and leaving teams, 171-173

- choosing the right vessel, 179-180
- finding safety in numbers, 173-175
- knowing what you bring to the team, 168-169
- knowing your teammates, 169, 171
- understanding the working of teams, 181-182
- understanding what game you are playing, 175-178
- structuring, 200-201
- subteaming, 170
- technology, 210
- Teeley, Peter, 111
- Thatcher, Margaret, 57
- thinking upside down, 5-6
- tight places, taking care of yourself, 100-101
- Titanic, 1-3
- training, 58
- trip leaders, role of, 195-196
- trust, building, 193-194
- Tsangpo Gorge, 103
- turbulence, moving through, 17-18
- turnover, 86
- two-way communication, 147-148

## U

Useem, Michael, 190

## V

vacations, 24  
pacing, 35-37

Vaill, Peter, xv

Vaillant, George, 81

## W

Weaver, Earl, 199, 203

Welch, Jack, 29

whitewater, 10

Whitman, Meg, 143

Wild, Frank, 197

Willie Loman syndrome, 53

Wisting, Oscar, 198

working the eddies, 18-19

## Z

Zidane, Zinedine, 38

Zimbardo, Philip, 182