

What Does it Mean to be Inside a Company, Hacking the Future by Bix Bickson

A “hack” is an effort to get inside the guts of a piece of digital gear and use it for a different purpose than it was originally designed for.

A Future Hack is to get inside your guts, the guts of your organization and develop the ability to create and fulfill the future of your choosing.

In the conversations I have had with people in organizations throughout the world, someone has their BlackBerry phone on the table in front of them. I pick up the phone and say, ‘what happened?’

Though BlackBerry has less than 1% of the smartphone market share today, it once had more than 50%. The question is how such a successful company could fall so far.

Many of us have heard the example of BlackBerry over and over again. Why is it continue to be compelling?

A few highlights: ...how the maker of something that we loved so much and that we were so addicted to — the BlackBerry – could fail so quickly?

They did ‘everything right’ for a hyper-growth, market leader.

A company that introduced the BlackBerry in 1998 became a \$20 billion company from nothing in less than a decade. disrupting the market by creating an instrument that parceled out bits of data communications so that it would not overtax the networks, whereas everyone else wanted to charge you \$4,000 for something that the networks could barely function to transmit. They had that simplicity of design [and] the conservation of the data being transmitted.

...remember very vividly President Obama at the time holding up his BlackBerry and saying, “I cannot live without my BlackBerry,” very much in line with what you were describing with respect to this iconic rise of such a great brand.

What happened?

The pivotal moment is January 2007 when Steve Jobs walks onto the stage in San Francisco and holds up that shiny glass object that we all [now] know and love so much, and says, “This is an iPhone.” It brings you computing, it brings you the Internet and it brings you email — three things. The interesting thing is that he not only brought on the prototype for the iPhone, and said “I’m going to change the world,” he also brought on

stage the head of AT&T Mobility. This is where he changed the rules of the game because really the iPhone is just an iteration of the smartphone that BlackBerry started, only they added more.

They brought the AT&T executive onstage, announced a five-year exclusive contract, and that did two things. It gave AT&T the incentive to spend billions of dollars on upgrading its network, and it made every other carrier nuts because they wanted to have the same thing, and they all went out looking for an antidote to the iPhone.

Mike Lazaridis (Blackberry) looked at this announcement, looked at what Steve Jobs was offering, and said, "This is an impossibility." Again, the conservative engineer brought up on conservation said, "The networks won't be able to carry this. It's an impossibility. It's illogical that anyone would even propose this." He was right for the first two years. Remember all the dropped calls, all the frustrations, all the lawsuits against Apple and the carriers. It didn't work....

But then it did, and RIM got it wrong. Two years is a lifetime at a technology rate, and by the time they realized what a serious threat it was, they were at that point followers.

*The thing that I take away, and we conclude with, is that the race is faster than ever. It never ends, and **the people who are the leaders today will most likely be the followers tomorrow** because it's very, very difficult to stay ahead. It is so easy today to innovate.... In the old days when you were a GE factory or an auto factory or a parts supplier, there were huge barriers to entry because you were spending hundreds of millions of dollars on plants. You were pretty well assured that there wouldn't be an excess of competitors.*

Today, that's disappeared. There are groups of kids coming out of Stanford, out of Waterloo University, all these technology companies. All they have to do if they've got a Visa card is rent server time, set up an office, get some people with code experience.... Those barriers don't exist anymore....

These days you're an algorithm away from some pretty serious competition. Look at what Apple is trying to do with payment system. I wouldn't want to be a bank right now. It's a lot of disruption, and the worst mistake you can make is think that we're better, we can out-muscle them or we can buy them or handle that competition. I don't think you can.¹

I recommend this article for a fuller understanding:

¹ Ibid

<http://knowledge.wharton.upenn.edu/article/victim-success-rise-fall-blackberry/>

It's the end of an era: BlackBerry's share of the global smartphone market is now 0.0%.

Whew!

Everyone has a plan until they get punched in the face Mike Tyson

Blackberry got punched in the face...and they did not have a plan.

Most people, most companies wait for a punch-in-the-face to tell them they have to do something different. It is called *an emergency* - having the circumstances determine what to do.

Future hacking is willing to go to the leadership of your company and say, "*you know (your company's thing) _____ It's probably going to be history in a couple of years. We're going to stop making it, and we're going to regroup and move into something we know nothing about.*"

Do you have enough energy, courage, resourcefulness, to enter the world, take on its demands, and create your commitment?

Who now, apart from the roles you play, are you? Do you have the wherewithal to shift course, deconstruct your painfully achieved identity, risking failure, marginalization and loss of collective approval?

Will you pierce the cynicism of 'we could never do that here' or the glaze of success that seduces smart people into thinking they can't lose?

Organizations, even though they act like they are, are not genetically encoded. There are not a set a rules, instructions, algorithms, forcing them to be the way they are.

They can change...you can change....they will have to change...you will have to change (adapt)... it will happen... from the outside or from the inside.

The cutting-edge design firm IDEO undertook just such an exercise a few years ago. Noting that the company's design processes and techniques were then widely understood by the market, the senior management team realized that the company was dangerously open to disruption. Thinking proactively, it invited Tom Hulme, one of its own managers, to form a team and take on the challenge of disrupting IDEO

itself. The result was OpenIDEO, a fascinating open source version of the company that created an entirely new capability that, in the end, complemented IDEO's core offering. Admittedly, this step requires a considerable amount of courage and gumption. But isn't that what leadership is all about? And if you are a big company, can you afford not to do this? Today, if you're not disrupting yourself, someone else is; your fate is to be either the disrupter or the disrupted. There is no middle ground.²

How can you pierce the cynicism of 'we could never do that here' or the glaze of success that seduces smart people into thinking they can't lose?

1.Go to bed.

What is the issue you are dealing with. What is the problem you are trying to solve? Go to bed noodling on the problem.

Adam Cheyer is the co-creator of Siri, Apple's artificial intelligence iPhone voice assistant. Building Siri was a Herculean design and programming task. The sheer number of variables—the ability to understand varying speech patterns, the ability to search based on the random ways people would request information, the ability to return answers in a useful way—were each a massive challenge. Thankfully, Cheyer had a secret weapon: ready access to his genius mode.

Although designing and building Siri was a highly structured task, Cheyer knew better than to try to logically grind out every answer. Instead, he told us, "I sleep on the issues I'm wrestling with." Cheyer, like Thomas Edison, has discovered the incredible breakthrough power of the hypnagogic and hypnopompic states, the half-asleep periods just before falling asleep and just before waking. These are times when our genius council runs on hyperdrive.

"I go to bed around 11, noodling on a problem as I fall asleep," he explained. By "noodling" on the problem, Cheyer uses his EN (executive network)to deliberately and consciously focus his genius council on a question. He relies on his genius council to

² Exponential Organizations

make new associations and deliver breakthroughs while asleep. In the morning he goes to his desk and uses his EN to process the night's harvest of ideas.

Morning after morning while first designing Siri, he would wake up with new insights from his DN(default network). He'd use his EN to integrate them into the prototype he was building. Eventually, he felt that he had something concrete enough to show the rest of the world³

2. Mess around.

We live in a world built by the masculine part of ourselves. Yet we know we embody both the masculine and the feminine in each of us.

*The dynamic side of the feminine principle is the basis of play and playfulness, the main element in the creative process....The dynamic feminine experience involves **messing around**, trying things out, moving randomly and without direction, being open to what might come up, letting events affect one, responding to the unexpected. It leads to a new combination of life's elements, each combination being valued as it arises simply for its existence, not comparatively with other combinations. The central value of the dynamic feminine principle is Eros; the connection between individuals, the relationships that encircle our lives.*

This side of the Masculine principle values initiative and action directed towards a goal. Here we have the story of the hero with his drive to conquer and to become a differentiated individual. From this place the individual seeks objective analysis, linear and rational thought, causes and effects. Progress is the central goal, and when the masculine attitude has run rampant, untempered by feminine considerations, progress's partner, technology, may be deified

Here we have the tendency towards laws and organization, the systematizing of knowledge, the codification of rules.

The masculine principle urges us to meet competitive challenges, to seek honors and recognition and to focus on concrete achievements – to go forth in the world, hoping to slay the dragon.

³ Fortune Magazine How To Have Breakthrough Ideas

[Olivia Fox Cabane & Judah Pollack](#)

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...the feminine principle values noncompetitive creation of things that are appreciated for their own essence regardless of comparative qualities. The emphasis is on caring for people and for life in all the myriad forms of its manifestation, each more interesting than all the others. One holds each form for its own sake. Rather than seeking to conquer nature or the world, the feminine approach values being in nature and the world, experiencing and savoring one's interdependent enmeshment of the great web of life that encircles the earth.

A masculine approach disregards relationships, orienting towards accomplishments and power.

The core feminine experience is one of being immersed in the living world, one link in an infinite chain. The corresponding masculine position emphasizes one's separateness from the rest of life and values behavior that acts upon the not-me world, affecting it, leaving one's mark on it, dominating it, transcending it. ⁴

3. Channel Steve Jobs

Again, you can't connect the dots looking forward; you can only connect them looking backwards. So you have to trust that the dots will somehow connect in your future. You have to trust in something — your gut, destiny, life, karma, whatever. This approach has never let me down, and it has made all the difference in my life.

Your time is limited, so don't waste it living someone else's life. Don't be trapped by dogma — which is living with the results of other people's thinking. Don't let the noise of others' opinions drown out your own inner voice. And most important, have the courage to follow your heart and intuition. They somehow already know what you truly want to become. Everything else is secondary.

⁴ Psychotherapy grounded in the feminine principle Barbara Stevens Sullivan. Wilmette, Ill. : Chiron Publications, c1989.

*Stay Hungry. Stay Foolish.*⁵

4. Build a box.

The first stage of the design process is often about discovering which constraints are important and establishing a framework for evaluating them. Constraints can best be visualized in terms of three overlapping criteria for successful ideas: feasibility (what is functionally possible within the foreseeable future); viability (what is likely to become part of a sustainable business model); and desirability (what makes sense to people and for people). A competent shifted their thinking from problem to project. The project is the vehicle that carries an idea from concept to reality.⁶

Feasibility: What is functionally possible within the foreseeable future?

Viability: What is likely to become part of a sustainable business model?

Desirability: What makes sense to people and for people?

5. Look for outliers who have succeeded against all odds.

...the unique point of entry for the positive deviance process: focus on the successful exceptions (i.e., positive deviants), not the failing norm.

As a problem-solving process, this approach requires retraining ourselves to pay attention differently—awakening minds accustomed to overlooking outliers, and cultivating skepticism about the inevitable “that’s just the way it is.” Once this concept is grasped, attention to observable exceptions draws us naturally to the “who,” the “what,” and especially the “how.” look for outliers who succeed against all odds.

Positive deviance (PD) is founded on the premise that at least one person in a community, working with the same resources as everyone else, has already licked the problem that confounds others.

This individual is an outlier in the statistical sense—an exception, someone whose outcome deviates in a positive way from the norm. In most cases this person does not

⁵ *Commencement address delivered by Steve Jobs, CEO of Apple Computer and of Pixar Animation Studios, on June 12, 2005.*

⁶ **[Change by Design: How Design Thinking Transforms Organizations and Inspires Innovation](#)** by Tim Brown Harper Collins 2009

know he or she is doing anything unusual. Yet once the unique solution is discovered and understood, it can be adopted by the wider community and transform many lives. From the PD perspective, individual difference is regarded as a community resource.

Community engagement is essential to discovering noteworthy variants in their midst and adapting their practices and strategies.

The basic premise is this: (1) Solutions to seemingly intractable problems already exist, (2) they have been discovered by members of the community itself, and (3) these innovators (individual positive deviants) have succeeded even though they share the same constraints and barriers as others.

The greatest barrier to the application of the positive deviance approach comes not from the members of the community themselves but from the “experts” who seek to help them and from the authorities who preside over them.⁷

6 Find someone to fight with.

In Oxford in the 1950s, there was a fantastic doctor, who was very unusual, named Alice Stewart. And Alice was unusual partly because, of course, she was a woman, which was pretty rare in the 1950s. And she was brilliant, she was one of the, at the time, the youngest Fellow to be elected to the Royal College of Physicians. She was unusual too because she continued to work after she got married, after she had kids, and even after she got divorced and was a single parent, she continued her medical work.

And she was unusual because she was really interested in a new science, the emerging field of epidemiology, the study of patterns in disease. But like every scientist, she appreciated that to make her mark, what she needed to do was find a hard problem and solve it. The hard problem that Alice chose was the rising incidence of childhood cancers. Most disease is correlated with poverty, but in the case of childhood cancers, the children who were dying seemed mostly to come from affluent families. So, what, she wanted to know, could explain this anomaly?

Now, Alice had trouble getting funding for her research. In the end, she got just 1,000 pounds from the Lady Tata Memorial prize. And that meant she knew she only had one shot at collecting her data. Now, she had no idea what to look for. This really was a

⁷ [**The Power of Positive Deviance: How Unlikely Innovators Solve the World's Toughest Problem**](#) by Richard Pascale, Jerry Sternin, Monique Sternin

needle in a haystack sort of search, so she asked everything she could think of. Had the children eaten boiled sweets? Had they consumed colored drinks? Did they eat fish and chips? Did they have indoor or outdoor plumbing? What time of life had they started school?

And when her carbon copied questionnaire started to come back, one thing and one thing only jumped out with the statistical clarity of a kind that most scientists can only dream of. By a rate of two to one, the children who had died had had mothers who had been X-rayed when pregnant. Now that finding flew in the face of conventional wisdom. Conventional wisdom held that everything was safe up to a point, a threshold. It flew in the face of conventional wisdom, which was huge enthusiasm for the cool new technology of that age, which was the X-ray machine. And it flew in the face of doctors' idea of themselves, which was as people who helped patients, they didn't harm them.

*Nevertheless, Alice Stewart rushed to publish her preliminary findings in *The Lancet* in 1956. People got very excited, there was talk of the Nobel Prize, and Alice really was in a big hurry to try to study all the cases of childhood cancer she could find before they disappeared. In fact, she need not have hurried. It was fully 25 years before the British and medical — British and American medical establishments abandoned the practice of X-raying pregnant women. The data was out there, it was open, it was freely available, but nobody wanted to know. A child a week was dying, but nothing changed. Openness alone can't drive change.*

So for 25 years Alice Stewart had a very big fight on her hands. So, how did she know that she was right? Well, she had a fantastic model for thinking. She worked with a statistician named George Kneale, and George was pretty much everything that Alice wasn't. So, Alice was very outgoing and sociable, and George was a recluse. Alice was very warm, very empathetic with her patients. George frankly preferred numbers to people. But he said this fantastic thing about their working relationship. He said, "My job is to prove Dr. Stewart wrong." He actively sought disconfirmation. Different ways of looking at her models, at her statistics, different ways of crunching the data in order to disprove her. He saw his job as creating conflict around her theories. Because it was only by not being able to prove that she was wrong, that George could give Alice the confidence she needed to know that she was right.

It's a fantastic model of collaboration — thinking partners who aren't echo chambers. I wonder how many of us have, or dare to have, such collaborators. Alice and George were very good at conflict. They saw it as thinking.

So what does that kind of constructive conflict require? Well, first of all, it requires that we find people who are very different from ourselves. That means we have to resist the neurobiological drive, which means that we really prefer people mostly like ourselves, and it means we have to seek out people with different backgrounds, different disciplines, different ways of thinking and different experience, and find ways to engage with them. That requires a lot of patience and a lot of energy.

And the more I've thought about this, the more I think, really, that that's a kind of love. Because you simply won't commit that kind of energy and time if you don't really care. And it also means that we have to be prepared to change our minds. Alice's daughter told me that every time Alice went head-to-head with a fellow scientist, they made her think and think and think again. "My mother," she said, "My mother didn't enjoy a fight, .but she was really good at them."

So it's one thing to do that in a one-to-one relationship. But it strikes me that the biggest problems we face, many of the biggest disasters that we've experienced, mostly haven't come from individuals, they've come from organizations, some of them bigger than countries, many of them capable of affecting hundreds, thousands, even millions of lives. So how do organizations think? Well, for the most part, they don't. And that isn't because they don't want to, it's really because they can't. And they can't because the people inside of them are too afraid of conflict.⁸

Who are your thinking partners?

7. Have several business cards.

Every time someone asks me what I do, I have have an existential moment. I now on my fourth or fifth business card. At first I thought I would simply replace the old ones with the new one. Then I thought, *what card will make sense to this person?*

Create your invitation

Men wanted for hazardous journey. Low wages, bitter cold, long hours of complete darkness. Safe return doubtful. Honour and recognition in event of success.

This was Ernest Shackleton's 1913 advertisement for the Imperial Trans-Antarctic Expedition which would constitute one of the most stupendous polar survival sagas of all time.

⁸ *Margaret Heffernan* **Dare to disagree** Posted Aug 2012

(By the way 5000 people applied for 27 crew openings)

Future hacking is willing to go to the leadership of your company and say, “*you know (your company’s thing) _____ It’s probably going to be history in a couple of years. We’re going to stop making it, and we’re going to regroup and move into something we know nothing about.*”

What way can you create an opening that people fall into?

What is the invitation for your hazardous journey? Who will you send it to? How will you send it?

8. Pull the present to you.

Most people...most companies are standing in the present try to ‘get to’ the future. When you are standing in the present trying to get to the future, what is between you and the future is effort and struggle.

Stand in the future - your created future - and pull the present to you.

Steve Jobs walks onto the stage in San Francisco and holds up that shiny glass object that we all [now] know and love so much, and says, “This is an iPhone.” It brings you computing, it brings you the Internet and it brings you email — three things. The interesting thing is that he not only brought on the prototype for the iPhone, and said “I’m going to change the world,

That is the Future Hacker’s job - to recognize they have to imagine, create, invent a future that others can see.

9. Don’t drink your own bathwater.

You either stand where you are and demand people come to you or you go to them and talk, engage them where they are.

The first one is much more efficient.

The second one is much harder, everyone has secrets, so if you create an environment they will not just do the work, they will deliver. Their secrets are the magic sauce for innovation, for leaps in performance.

People can feel when they are in the presence of themselves. People become invested in every single moment - they become invested - it is their company

The second you attack someone's spirit they will never trust you...work on not having your fear damage your work...If you bring unnecessary energy in the room it doesn't leave it just gets spread around...Space must be given so the work can happen.

You can create a phenomenal community of people who realize they can do something together that is so far beyond what any of us can imagine doing on our own - it is challenging, fun, heartbreaking, real. An exchange of energy and possibility. The opportunity is to form an intense connection with one another and accomplish something that emerges and reveals its epic proportions. Really really smart people create something less complicated than they are. Wherever you are in your life everything can get poured into it.

Business can surprise you - it can pierce our cynicism.⁹

10. Forgetting is as valuable as remembering.

There is no possibility of pursuing work without coming to terms with all the ways it is impossible to do it. Feeling far away from what we want tells us one of two things about our work: that we are at the beginning or that we have forgotten where we are going. There is no possibility of pursuing work without coming to terms with all the ways it is impossible to do it. Feeling far away from what we want tells us one of two things about our work: that we are at the beginning or that we have forgotten where we are going.

Remembering that we have forgotten is the first practical step home; the opening of a tidal gate that brings us into contact with the larger, stronger currents of existence. Exile and forgetting are natural states for most human beings, but so are remembering and recalling. All tasks are completed through cycles of visitation and absence. We should get used to this cycle and integrate it fully into the way a work or a vocation is achieved and not hold ourselves to impossible standards that are often quite tedious, giftless states, in any case.¹⁰

11. Go to bed again.

⁹ Excepted from WTF Podcast conversation with George C. Wolfe

¹⁰ The Three Marriages: Reimagining Work, Self and Relationship
Book by David Whyte 2009

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If you live inside these ideas, you've got to get out of the way so that these images and ideas can be brought to life - to bring life to the company. If everyone is vulnerable to the moment the solution is there.

A Future Hack is to get inside your guts, the guts of your organization and develop the ability to create and fulfill the future of your choosing.

Future Hacking

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