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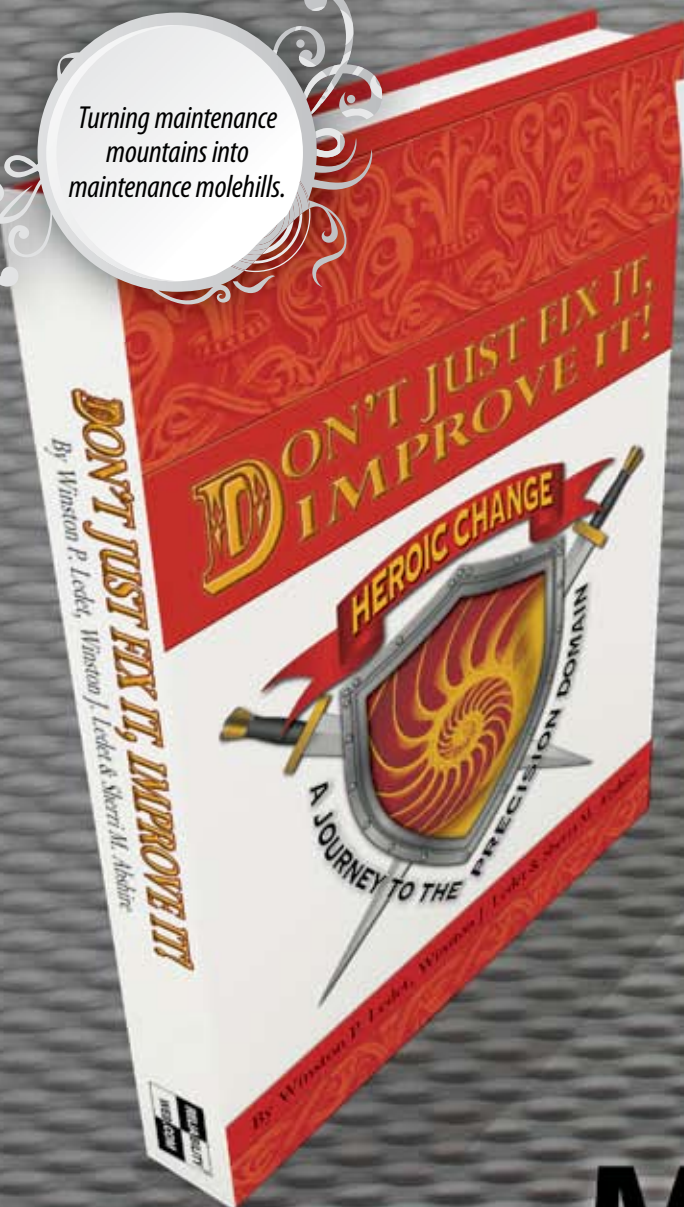
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Don't Get Even, Get M.A.D.

Making the Decision to Make A Difference

by Phillip Slater

The impact of the Global Financial Crisis is being felt far and wide. Millions have lost their jobs, production has been cut, shifts dropped, overtime cancelled and budgets slashed. In this environment it is easy to see how people get frustrated and angry. Angry that they lost their jobs through no fault of their own; angry that their colleagues have been let go; angry that they are left to do the work without the manpower that's really required; angry that their carefully thought out plans are cancelled due to a sudden lack of funding; angry that they are expected to produce results without adequate resources.

One response to this situation is to get even. That is, stay angry, blame the world, work slowly, become mediocre, give up, stop striving for benchmarks, and stop caring. And this is understandable, when it feels like your family, friends and colleagues have been attacked as the result of some Wall Street hubris. But getting even is a vicious cycle. If things are bad, getting angry and not caring can only make things worse.

A wise man once said, "It's not what happens to you that counts, it's how you respond." With the Global Financial Crisis, rather than getting even, a better response is to get M.A.D. That is, to Make A Difference. In fact, this is exactly what is required now as we work our way out of the current financial mess. While our hearts go out to those families, friends and colleagues that have lost their jobs, the rest of us must now work to ensure that they have something to return to. We are, in effect, the guardians of the future employment of our families, friends, colleagues, and especially our kids.

Like many activities in management, maintenance and engineering, Making A Difference is simple but not easy. It requires action and courage. It requires us to look forward and demonstrate leadership. It requires your involvement and commitment.

To help you get started, let's go over five key elements for Making A Difference:

1. Be Optimistic
2. Think Long Term
3. Expand Your Sphere of Influence
4. Be Active Not Passive
5. Demonstrate Leadership

Be Optimistic

OK, so we all know that things have been pretty bad. The credit crunch has led to the near collapse of many industries and governments all over the world have been injecting many hundreds of billions of dollars into economies through stimulus packages. But there is one thing of which I am certain, and that is that we will recover.

Optimism is defined¹ as 'a tendency to look on the favorable side of events and to expect the most favorable outcome' and if you want to Make A Difference then you need to be optimistic. Winston Churchill, the famous British war time Prime Minister, said, 'For myself, I am an optimist, it doesn't seem to be much use being anything else' and I agree with him. You don't need to be optimistic in a Pollyanna² way, but you do need to 'expect the most favorable outcome'. If you are going to get M.A.D, then you need to be motivated and there is nothing less motivating than the gloom and doom of the pessimist.

So, what is the basis of my optimism? Let's look at Figure 1 on the following page. This chart shows the annual change in the growth in world trade between 1970 and 2009 and has several notable attributes.

Firstly, all the pessimists will notice that the dip in 2009 is the lowest point in nearly 30 years – by a long way. But we already knew that. The interesting thing is that there are three other major dips – 1975, 1982, and 2001- and each is followed by periods of growth. The boom times that we have been enjoying for the past seven or eight years were preceded by the lowest growth for nearly 20 years. Another interesting point is that the chart continually goes up and down, there is a cycle at work here.

My conclusion: times are tough, but they will get better.

In preparation for that recovery we need to start Making A Difference right now and that starts with being optimistic, not pessimistic or complacent.

Think Long Term

Obviously the recovery won't happen tomorrow, and even if it did, we probably wouldn't recognize it for a number of months (maybe it's already started!). This means that we need to think long term. In any case with no budget or resources, it may be hard to have a short term impact. So, you may not be able to get that new CMMS or vibration unit or inventory software. But what

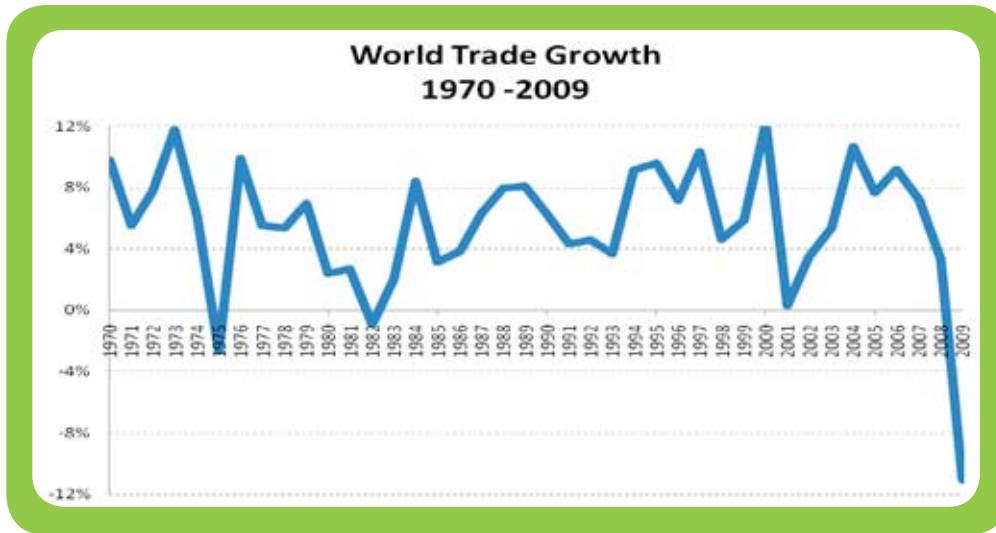


Figure 1 - World Trade Growth Chart³

can you do? What is your plan B to improve your operational results?

Thinking long term gives us a sense of purpose, it gives us something to work towards, one step at a time. During a downturn it's about working on those things that we can influence without money – culture, systems, procedures, measures, reporting and the discipline of application.

Many people have been quoted as saying 'why waste a good recession?' (I'm not sure who said it first) and it's hard to argue with that sentiment. The best time to change is when change is happening anyway, and that is right now.

To Make A Difference think long term, and look at the small things that you can change in the way you and your company go about things.

For example, in the area of engineering spares management, here are a few 'small things' that you can do to make a difference:

- Ensure that the storeroom locations are labeled so the items can be found.
- Ensure that items are labeled and segregated so that they can be identified.
- Work on ensuring that records are maintained accurately so that they can be managed with some degree of science.
- Identify your spares categories (e.g. critical spares) so that everyone knows which ones are important.
- Review your policies and procedures; are they still relevant and are they actually followed?
- Review the maintenance of your spares

– will they perform when you need them?

Sure, these actions need time and energy but they don't need much money. Better still, they can be worked on a little bit at a time. None of these actions require a major project if you are prepared to do the work gradually. What they do need is some focus.

Expand Your Sphere of Influence

Now I can hear the gloom and doom merchants saying 'I am just one person, what can I do?' What you can do is expand your sphere of influence. Henry Ford is reported to have said 'if you think you can do something or you think you can't, in either case you're probably right' so expanding your sphere of influence starts with you believing that you can do it. Let's break that down.

Influence can be defined⁴ as 'the capacity of power of a person to be a compelling force on or produce effects on the actions, behavior and opinions of others'. Your sphere of influence is how far your influence stretches beyond yourself. This is shown diagrammatically in Figure 2.

While this figure shows concentric circles you can think of your sphere of influence as a bubble all around you. Think above, below, beside, in front, behind. Who

do you influence? Your peers, your department, your company, your industry, and, of course, yourself.

As a starting point, you influence your own behavior. You decide if you want to Make A Difference and how you will go about it. Next you should be looking at how to stretch that sphere to other areas. And remember that influence can be positive or negative but if you are optimistic and thinking long term then your influence needs to be positive.

Some people have influence as a result of their position. Presidents, CEOs, VPs all have influence because of their organizational roles but that is not the sort of influence that I am talking about. I am talking about behavior and actions. You see, people love to mimic other people's actions, but most of us don't realize it. So, if you consistently do the right thing others will notice and you will influence their behavior. If you consistently put up good, positive ideas people will start coming to you for good, positive ideas. It's that simple.

There are plenty of high profile examples of people that have exerted influence way beyond their organizational roles. Think of Gandhi peacefully protesting against the British in India. Think of Erin Brockovich bringing a chemical company to account in the US. Think of Joanna Lumley influencing the British Parliament to change its immigration laws. But there are many, many more examples of people influencing your industry, your company, your department and right now, you – you just may not have recognized them.

Stop and think right now about things that have changed around you. They could be

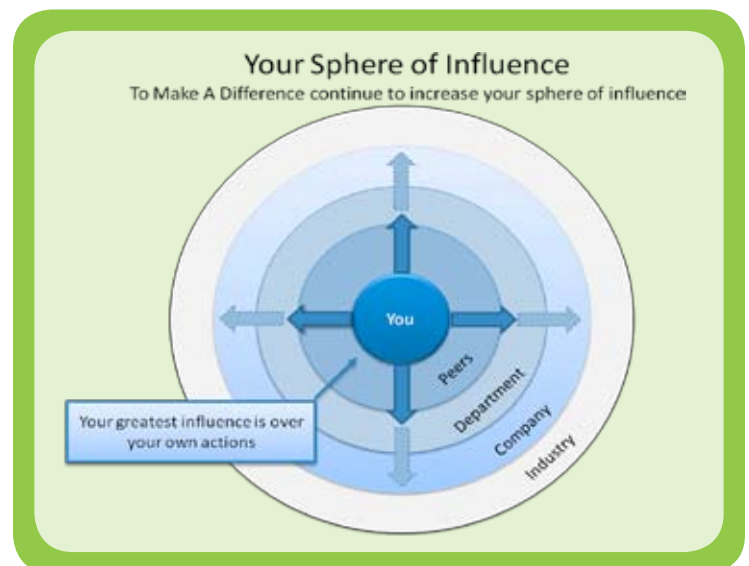


Figure 2 - Your Sphere of Influence

IT TAKES A TEAM TO WIN A RACE



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health and safety initiatives that have saved lives or minimized injuries. They could be maintenance activities that have saved downtime and improved profitability. They could be spares management initiatives that have improved spares performance and saved millions in working capital. They could be any number of things. The key is that each of them will have started with one person asking 'how can I get this done better' and then influencing others to that way of thinking.

Be Active not Passive

Too often people understand all the theory and ideas, they agree with the sentiment, they agree that something should be done and then they wait for someone else to do it. Making A Difference is all about being active, not passive.

By now, I am sure that you can see that if you are optimistic, thinking long term and expanding your sphere of influence then you need to be doing something. This means being vocal, talking with your peers, contributing in meetings, doing the research, getting the numbers together – whatever needs to be done.

It also means having the courage to be vocal with nay sayers and doom merchants. It means catching people doing the right thing and encouraging them further. It means correcting the people doing the wrong thing rather than just talking behind their backs or muttering as they walk away.

One of my favorite quotes is from George Bernhard Shaw who said 'The reasonable man shapes himself to the world around him; the unreasonable man shapes the world to suit his needs. All progress therefore relies on the unreasonable man.' So, yes, sometimes being active and Making A Difference means being unreasonable. And, yes, sometimes being unreasonable means being the odd man out. But maybe that's the whole idea of Making A Difference, if you are doing the same as everyone else then are you really changing things?

People that make a difference do so by being active, not passive. So don't just sit there, do something!

Demonstrate Leadership

All of the above actions really are the actions of a leader, so Making A Difference is all about

leadership. Not the leadership that comes from a position on an organization chart but the kind of leadership that comes from a person doing the right thing, showing the way forward, guiding and directing. Much of this is the informal leadership that comes from what you do rather than who you are. Perhaps John Quincy Adams said it best when he said, 'If your actions inspire others to dream more, learn more, do more, and become more, you are a leader'.

Conclusion

The Global Financial Crisis has given many people a reason to complain, after all, the circumstances were not of their making. But we have a choice to make about the way we respond to those circumstances. We can take revenge by being resigned to our 'fate' or we can take fate into our own hands and do something to influence our outcomes. Follow the advice of American entrepreneur, Jimmy Dean who said, 'I can't change the direction of the wind but I can adjust my sails to always reach my destination.'

Ultimately the choice is yours: how will you 'adjust your sails?' Do you want to get even or do you want to get M.A.D?

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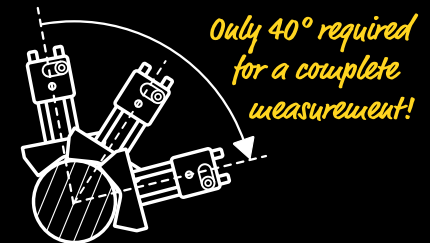
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1. Dictionary.com
2. A Pollyanna is a person regarded as being foolishly or blindly optimistic. The expression is taken from the novel Pollyanna by the American writer Eleanor Hodgeman.
3. Source: International Monetary Fund, World Economic Outlook, Crisis and Recovery, April 2009
4. Dictionary.com



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