

RECONNECTING

*"We will either find a way or
make one"*
Hannibal
Revolutionary

Paper 2
David Robinson
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The Need

We are of the generation that has wired the world. Travel and communication is quicker, cheaper and easier than ever before. These are extraordinary developments but they have come at a price. As we have embraced a far wider network of relationships we have lost the sense of belonging. We are no longer part of a community pursuing a common interest.

Professor Robert Puttnam has shown how declining rates of participation in an identifiable community has damaged the health of the individual (mental illness) the health of the neighbourhood (crime rates) and the health of the wider society (voting turnout.) On a different scale we have, through our practical work at Community Links, seen similar trends over the last 25 years and, especially amongst the young, increasingly serious disaffection.

As society has become more mobile, involvement in and dependence on the local community have become less important but have not been replaced by a commensurate sense of belonging to, or responsibility for, a wider community. Relatively few people for instance actively engage with the global environmental issues although our children know more about the wider world than any previous generation.

In the weeks after September 11th these issues were discussed more openly. At the Community Links Mansion House Reception on September 21st one of our supporters who had been in New York at the time of the attack observed that no one ever spends their final hours wishing they had spent more time at the office. Three weeks later the Prime Minister made a speech at the Labour Party Conference which would have been unimaginable on September 10th and in recent months I have been asked to “inspire” audiences as diverse as senior staff at the WRVS, the Home Office, Lovells and the New Opportunities Fund. I believe there is a new hunger for meaning in our lives, for individual purpose and for the opportunity to be a part of something bigger than ourselves.

“We must be visionaries to become realists”
Umberto Unger
Revolutionary

The Proposal

“There is no such thing as bad weather. Only the wrong clothes.”

Traditional

We need to understand the changes in the climate and we need new ways of inspiring a response. We should not be nostalgic about outmoded structures and we shouldn't try to rebuild them. We should work on new initiatives which reconnect us in search of common goals – communities of interest which exploit the mood and which may or may not relate to a specific region. We know enough to make a useful start without investigation or invention. We need to communicate, to market – to explain, to motivate and to enable.

We now have the capacity to communicate ideas instantly and extensively across the world. We don't need organisations or cumbersome structures or even significant investment. We need an idea that has the power to generate its own momentum and we need to market it with all the skills that have been successfully applied in other arenas:

Training shoes for instance were once for sport, then they became fashionable. Now they are ubiquitous and Nike has a massive international image. Joy was marketed as a feel good brand last year for an experiment which was subsequently reported in the Guardian. Market research showed that recall was extensive and consumer opinion was positive without any experience of the product – indeed there was none. He wouldn't have called it marketing but Mahatma Gandhi showed us that real ideas could be equally contagious. Peaceful opposition to tyranny, he said, would result in its eventual defeat. He had none of the advantages of modern communications but he rolled back the British Empire with well-chosen words, bold symbolic actions, the power of example and in the simple dhoti a striking and meaningful identity – brilliant marketing.

Suppose we build on these examples and create an “attribute” brand (Richard Branson) as a vehicle for change. Not an organisation or even a single product but a brand that will first change attitudes and then change behaviour. A brand that will communicate, inspire, create and coalesce. A brand that will promote awareness, inform debate, stimulate action and ultimately move us closer to a 21st Century definition of community and an application of that definition that is both relevant and timely.

Such a brand would own values which would be commercially attractive. Selling on to appropriate adopters would extend and reinforce the brand and also pay for further development. Thus a set of ideas could become a sound investment and a short-term campaign could become a sustainable movement.

*“If you are not for yourself then who will be?
If you are only for yourself then who are you?
If not now, when?”*

*Rabbi Hillel
Revolutionary*

The Vehicle

Brand Purpose

In the next section I suggest ways in which we might name, develop and test the attributes of the brand. For the purposes of this paper I want to bring it to life with a working title and some basic attributes. We are seeking a seismic shift in attitudes but we are beginning with individual actions. We want to stress the value of the tipping point i.e. one good turn will lead to another – contagious behaviour. We want an identity which asserts the importance of the individual contribution and the extraordinary power of the collective effort. We want consumers to think afresh about their place in the world and their moment in history. And we want them to change. Change for good.

Brand Vision

We are all global citizens and we are powerful. Each and every one of us. Enjoy together the resources of the world. Owning just enough is plenty. Preserve the legacy. Distinguish between the diversity that enriches our society and the inequalities that diminish us. Touch the lives of others not that we might change them but that we might grow together – learning and teaching, challenging and supporting. Start a revolution with one good turn. Your turn.

Brand Title

REVOLUTION
Change for good.

*“Live as if you were to die tomorrow.
Learn as if you were to live forever.”*
Mahatma Gandhi
Revolutionary

The Programme

Creating the Brand

I have begun an informal consultation process and now have a list of 35 people who would be interested in helping to develop these ideas and have made a range of suggestions. Their interests span media, marketing, academia, advertising, government and community and they are taking four actions:

1. A creative team are to consider brand identity, purpose and design.
2. A wider group are to be involved in a brainstorming day involving a deliberately varied mix including children.
3. Coca Cola President, Tom Long, will be holding a dinner to explore the attitudes of business leaders.
4. A small group are steering the development of these ideas.

From these beginnings it would be realistic to create the brand in six months.

Using the Brand

I envisage a primary programme of development involving five tools.

1. Little Book of Revolutions

Paul Wilson captured the Zeitgeist five years ago with his “Little Book of Calm”. It is little more than 5,000 word, albeit well chosen, but it has now sold more than 3 million copies. The Little Book of Revolutions would be based around a series of practical actions which could be similarly summarised in a couple of sentences and would be almost universally applicable. Around each action the book would include a single fact (turning off every video on standby overnight would save an amount equivalent to the daily fuel consumption of Milton Keynes) and an uplifting quote (e.g. Gandhi “we must be the change we want to see in the world.”) We could attract world-class illustrators and designers and establish the sort of exceptional production values which would match the aspirations of the project. Such a Little Book could either be sold and/or distributed free as part of wider promotion with an appropriate sponsor.

The book would be the centrepiece of the campaign. It would address the “What can I possibly do about it” question at two levels: first it would meet the need for information (this is the need, this is something simple you can do about it.) Second whilst we can all appreciate how an individual contribution can make a difference in a small community the value of the individual act seems to many insignificant in a global context. It only becomes meaningful if it is part of a wider movement (I want to change the world but I know that turning off my video won’t do much about it so I won’t bother. I would do it however, if I felt that I was one of many pursuing a common goal. The Little Book would fire that belief.)

2. Internet Development Chain

The internet enables us to connect individual actions and so demonstrate the power of collective action. Suppose for instance we all begin turning off electrical appliances on standby on January 1st and communicating that commitment to the website. We can see that we are part of something

massive. Through the internet we also have the power to gather and to share new goals and to measure the impact. Potentially the chain could also add more and new thinking on wider issues such as citizenship, education, flexible work planning and lifestyles, interfaith communication, etc.

3. State of the Nation Film

Brilliant TV coverage can not only spread knowledge but also communicate an image for the issue. Cathy Come Home, branded Shelter as the charity of its era, Comic Relief and Band Aid have benefited from similar branding. A state of the nation film would help to shape the environment.

4. Merchandise

Last Autumn Community Links was asked to produce mugs for Senior Managers at Morgan Stanley inscribed with the phrase which I had used in a presentation! This could very, very easily become tacky and demean the message but there undoubtedly is a market for owning and marketing inspiration.

5. Legion of Superheroes

We need to be inspired by the example of the big world visionaries whilst connecting their attitudes to our behaviour. Suppose a teaser campaign beginning with the Coca Cola site in Piccadilly Circus and bearing simply the Gandhi quote. In time the quote would be replaced by another, similarly uplifting. Both would be branded Revolution and eventually introduce the website address. We would rely on editorial coverage to make the connection with Coca Cola – the adopter – in the expectation that such humility marketing would not only create the right kind of interest but actually generate more intrigue and ultimately awareness.

**“We must be the change
we want to see in the world”**

Mahatma Gandhi
Revolutionary

Adopter

The foundations of the campaign could be established with these five tools. A secondary programme could then be taken up by a very small group of appropriate adopters, e.g. Coca Cola, Nike, EasyJet, Vodaphone and a fashion house.

The Process

We could pursue this programme through one of two routes.

Viral Marketing

We would begin route 1 with The Little Book of Revolutions and use it to promote the website. A film might generate interest in the publication perhaps three months after it had been launched. The association with a bigger set of principles would be dripped into public consciousness culminating in the legion of superheroes campaign, the merchandise, development of the website and ultimately the activities of the adopters.

In “The Tipping Point” Malcolm Gladwell draws on a diverse range of examples which all illustrate contagious behaviour – little causes having big effects at one dramatic moment. They are the tipping points capturing the Zeitgeist and triggering a movement. If we took the viral route the Little Book would be the tipping point re-igniting our enthusiasm for the pursuit of the common good turning the conscious acts of the few into the conventional behaviour of the many and so creating a community of interest.

Big Bang

Here we might start route 2 with the teaser poster campaign, subsequently establishing, through the editorial campaign – a huge ambition for shifting public attitudes. We would be attempting to shape attitudes and make them more receptive to the proposals for practical action which would follow. There are numerous precedents in the commercial world for this kind of process, e.g. British Airways’ work on repositioning itself as an airline for the world. The closest precedent I can get for our kind of proposal would be something like the “We love New York” campaign which successfully began shaping attitudes to New York before filling in the detail.

The Questions

I began exploring these ideas with a very clear belief that it was worth doing but with serious reservations about whether it was doable. From my conversations over the past couple of months I have become even more convinced of the need. I think the impact of 11 September is, frankly, fading for many people in the UK but the hunger for new meaning, purpose and inspiration in our lives began to take root before then and continues to grow – possibly with a little added nutrition.

The question about doability has become one about degrees rather than absolutes. Marketing friends have no doubt that it is possible to shape attitudes and are excited about the challenge. We know also that it is possible to effect behaviour around a single issue, e.g. the purchase of a product. Gradually changing attitudes over a sustained period and on a much wider front is much more ambitious. Possibly this is a question that no-one can answer at this stage and that we shouldn't try to address. Shifting 50,000 copies of the Little Book, for instance, would serve a useful practical purpose. If enthusiasm is, as I believe, knowledge on fire we might ignite a movement but even lighting a candle in the dark would be better than nothing. The poster campaign would be an interesting idea that would inspire and intrigue and perhaps be of some commercial value to the adopter. Together these actions could lead to something more. We need to start with a framework for ensuring that they can, but not necessarily for requiring that they do.

I will be pursuing the four actions outlined in "The Process" over the course of the next six months and pulling together the contents of the Little Book. I would be confident that we could, if nothing else, find a publisher for this and it could be standalone, if we were not convinced by midsummer that the wider brand had a feasible mission and was the right vehicle for pursuing it. This would be a worthwhile programme of work in its own right and could open the door to the bigger vision.

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David Robinson
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"A journey of 1000 miles begins with a single step."

Lao-Tsu
Revolutionary