

# Flight of the Phoenix

Soaring to Success in the  
21st Century



John Whiteside & Sandra Egli

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**John Whiteside  
and  
Sandra Egli**

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Also by John Whiteside

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FLIGHT OF THE PHOENIX is dedicated to working people who believe in their hearts that there is a way for us to work together in peace and harmony, and who have the commitment and courage to search until they find the way.

Especially, we mention these few:

Kevin Wilt	Gracie Williams	Pete Scharfenberg
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Ken Knipe	Ray Harness	Michael Duhart
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Mike Benhase	Dave Barger
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# Preface

FLIGHT OF THE PHOENIX: SOARING TO SUCCESS IN THE 21ST CENTURY shows how to master and thrive on destabilizing changes sweeping across the workplace. This book gives tools and a new way of solving problems, especially for individuals and companies in search of a better way to work. It shows how to heal the wounds of reengineering and downsizing and presents a positive vision for the 21st-century workplace.

This is a time of great opportunity. As a society, we have moved beyond the struggle for food. We have created material wealth for ourselves. What is possible now? Could employees and managers, working together, find a way to bring greater satisfaction to work and reclaim meaningful personal lives, and in doing so actually increase the value of their contributions?

This book shows a new perspective that puts corporate and individual needs in synergy, rather than in opposition. The only tools we need to apply this perspective are speaking and listening, for language creates reality.

The idea that language creates reality was introduced by John Whiteside in his book, *THE PHOENIX AGENDA: POWER TO TRANSFORM YOUR WORKPLACE*. In that book, John outlined twelve communication tools for creating *a great day at work, one day at a time* for you and the people around you. You do not need to read the earlier book to gain the full benefit of this book. However, if you are familiar with *The Phoenix Agenda*, you will recognize the foundation it provides here. The thesis of *THE PHOENIX AGENDA* is that language does not describe an independent reality; language creates reality.

Each of the 12 themes of *THE PHOENIX AGENDA* is a way to create new realities through generous listening and committed speaking:

- ◆ *Generate Trust: Use this conversation to offer trust freely as a gift, not as a reward for the past.*
- ◆ *Uncover Context: Use this conversation to surface underlying and unspoken assumptions.*

- ♦ *Invent the Future:* Use this conversation to engage and inspire people with a vision of the future.
- ♦ *Articulate Strategies:* Use this practical conversation to overcome obstacles and discover step-by-step approaches to fulfill a vision.
- ♦ *Source Action:* Use this conversation to initiate action that consistently leads to accomplishment and results.
- ♦ *Exploit Moments of Truth:* In every setback there is an opportunity to accelerate the achievement of goals. Use this conversation to take advantage of setbacks.
- ♦ *Maintain Awareness:* Use this conversation to place goals and plans on public display, to assure they are remembered, followed, and accomplished.
- ♦ *Realize Results:* Use this conversation to recognize the outcomes of projects and plans, both successes and failures, to pave the way for new goals.
- ♦ *Create Wisdom:* Use this conversation to crystallize learning, and to share it for the benefit of all.
- ♦ *Transcend Addictions:* Use this conversation to let go of automatic and unproductive behaviors and allow them to be replaced with effective alternatives.
- ♦ *Complete the Past:* Use this conversation to acknowledge the accomplishments and failures of the past in order to let them go.
- ♦ *Acknowledge Freely:* Use this conversation to express appreciation and honor for people.

FLIGHT OF THE PHOENIX: SOARING TO SUCCESS IN THE 21ST CENTURY presents and demonstrates the power of communication to create the work world you desire. Part I of the book, *Challenging the Culture of Work*, is an inquiry into what you take for granted about the workplace and your relationship to work today. This section raises questions and opens up a valuable examination for every reader.

Chapter 1, *Your Colleagues in Crisis*, tells the stories of successful people whose work lives are in transition. Their experiences illuminate

what is happening in the workplace today in a way that statistics cannot.

Chapter 2, *Why Work?* examines the relationship between employers and employees. What holds them together, and where do profits come from?

Chapter 3, *Could Work Be Wonderful?* tells the stories of companies and individuals who have discovered new and rewarding ways to work together.

Part II, *A Better Way To Work*, presents the perspectives and tools to make your world of work both exciting and hopeful. You will benefit greatly by taking the time to answer the questions posed for you as you read this section.

Chapter 4, *The Power of Perspectives*, shows the havoc played in human affairs as a consequence of judging human behavior according to limited individual perspectives of right and wrong.

Chapter 5, *Fulfill Your Future*, presents key aspects of 21st-century perspective and illustrates how 21st-century thinking can help you build strong, positive, and productive relationships.

Chapter 6, *The Only Two Tools You Will Ever Need*, looks at the power of speaking and listening to create reality. It extends the themes of THE PHOENIX AGENDA to include new ways to listen and thus increase your appreciation for other perspectives.

Part III, *Tools for 21st-Century Work*, shows how to use 21st-century thinking to make powerful friends, create wealth, and heal disputes.

Chapter 7, *Create Powerful Connections*, outlines nine specific and common perspectives found in business. It shows how to appreciate other perspectives and develop genuine relationships with people whose perspectives are different from your own.

Chapter 8, *Create Real Results*, shows how to achieve what you want. It examines the myth of measurement and presents a variation on themes from THE PHOENIX AGENDA designed to focus on producing meaningful results.

Chapter 9, *Dissolve Any Dispute*, addresses the fundamental question of what goes wrong in human relationships and how to set relationships right.

Our purpose in writing FLIGHT OF THE PHOENIX is to provide you an opportunity to rethink and redesign your worklife for the 21st century. Does your work call forth from you all that you have to offer in the brief span of years you are alive? For most people, the work world takes advantage of only a fraction of their full range of talents. We hope that what you take away from reading this book is a beginning and an opportunity to use your real talents fully.

We intend this book to be practical and positive; by detailing the day-to-day actions of ordinary workers at all levels, we show how these actions can be realistically altered and improved to create a better workplace.

### **About the Stories**

All the stories in this book are factual. The majority are from our own experience or the experiences of our colleagues as told to us. The few stories drawn from public sources are so indicated. Some of the stories use real names and locations; others are altered for the privacy of the participants. Only where we have used a full name, first and last, is it the actual name of the person. All other names are fictionalized. Sometimes the location has been changed, but all of the workplaces exist. Everyone mentioned in the book wants their story, their experience, to contribute to your success.

### **How to Get the Most from This Book**

Many friends and colleagues have read this book for us before publication. All of them have said, *This is not a book to skim or race through*. About half the early reviewers chose to read the book a second or third time and observed that their reactions and thinking evolved with each reading. The power of the book lies in your thoughtfulness and assimilation of the message. This power will become available to you when you take the time to think penetratingly about *your* work, *your* future, *your* goals. What is it that you want to happen for you at work and in your life? Whether you have the desire to make a major mark in your profession or simply wish to live in harmony with people, you will get more out of the book by participating in the inquiries and by answering the questions based

upon the issues you face in your life today. This book is written to make a difference for you on an everyday basis.

One reviewer read the ball-toss exercise (Chapter 4, Try a New Perspective) at the same time he was teaching his six-year-old son the rudiments of hitting a softball. He used the exercise with his son and was filled with fatherly pride when the exercise was a complete success. In his words, *Carl didn't just hit the ball, he crushed it!*

Please read this book in the order that suits you. There is no absolute reason to move from front to back. Part I makes sense of the background of current business conditions and trends as we interpret them. Part II provides the foundation and in-depth tools for 21st-century success. Part III is for those action-oriented readers who want to jump into the case studies and observe 21st-century thinking in action. There is no one right place to begin and each part of the message leads to the others.

We are glad you are here. Welcome. It has been a privilege and an honor to write this book for you.

# **Part I**

## ***Challenging the Culture of Work***

He that loveth silver shall not be satisfied with silver; nor he that loveth abundance with increase; this is also vanity.

. . . ECCLESIASTES



# I

## ***Your Colleagues in Crisis***

Seneca thinks the gods are well pleased when they see great men contending with adversity.

. . . ROBERT BURTON, *The Anatomy of Melancholy*, 1651

### **WHAT WILL BECOME OF US?**

What will become of us? How will it turn out with our careers, our companies, our mortgages, our families, and our lives?

As the second Industrial Revolution sweeps across the world and threatens to reengineer everyone out of a job, what is to become of us and what are we to do now that the rules of the game of life, work, survival, and success have changed?

The popular press, as a whole, paints a dismal picture of the future: a declining middle class with stagnant wages and increasing, permanent layoffs; uncertainty and angst among the middle managerial class; and the basic value of loyalty to the organization gone. We seem to have redefined the purpose of business as the increase of short-term shareholder value, at the expense of employee, customer, and community.

Life seemed pretty stable 20 years ago. That was a time when people worked for the system. We automatically agreed with the boss,

believed in the company, and looked forward to a lifetime of steady paychecks and suburban living. Since those quiet times, we have been riding waves of international competition, quality movements, re-engineering, restructuring, downsizing, and rightsizing, in cycles of ever-increasing intensity.

But wait! What if you could work, not at the mercy of the latest consultants' fad or top-management fashion, but for meaningful and deeply held principles, and reasons that you invent for yourself? Maybe you are not just at the mercy of trends. Maybe you have some say in the outcome, for your career, for your company, and even for the future of the working life in general. Someone has to invent trends. Why not you?

**What if work could be productive and profitable both for the shareholders *and* for you?**

This book is designed for readers who want to be proactive, not reactive, in shaping the 21st century for themselves and their companies. We start this exercise in soaring, not with statistics, but with stories of real people who are finding their way into the 21st century. As you will see, every person's story contains success. And in every case, the rules of the game have changed and the person faces uncertainty. But beyond the uncertainty, are the seeds of new beginnings.

The book shows how to nurture these beginnings, to have them grow into major opportunities for yourself and your company. But for the moment, listen to the stories. You may be interested to see how other career-oriented men and women are coping with corporate reengineering, business reinvention, and vanishing lifetime careers. Perhaps, in places, you will see yourself.

## **CAREERS AT THE CROSSROADS**

Fresh out of school in the late 1960s, Ed's first job is selling hot new minicomputers. He is excited to work for one of the first companies to

offer an alternative to IBM's mainframes. He is so proud when he participates in his first deal. Ed is always excited about his latest project, and he earns his promotion to management. It is a great challenge, but he learns and masters that job, too. In the process he acquires the accouterments of upper-middle-class life. You may think he has it made.

Many years pass. Then one day there is an unexpected twist. Ed is no longer so enthusiastic. He seems to lose his clarity and focus. Watching his son surf the Internet, Ed feels a little over his head and wonders whether the world of technology has passed him by. Then he loses his job. It may be a while before he finds another and he learns to browse the Internet for himself as part of his search for work.

Can you relate to Karen? She is a remarkable woman, a top-notch professional, and the highest-ranking engineer in the division. Her ideas and opinions are respected throughout the company. Her decisions affect products for tens of thousands of customers. She is a role model and her advice is always sought.

Then events conspire. Her company is under fire and goes through a terrible time. Markets the company has controlled for years are lost overnight. Half of the company disappears; Karen's colleagues leave or are laid off. Her job is safe but something fundamental has shifted. Karen has always valued most her community of friends and colleagues on the job. With so many of them laid off, the loyalty, the spark, and excitement are gone for her. It takes a while but one day she speaks for the first time of launching herself on an entirely new career.

Then there is Roger. He works for 18 years at a flour mill. Straight from high school, he starts as a sweeper and eventually learns the maintenance requirements of the entire plant. At every opportunity he learns new skills and acquires new levels of certification. He is a union representative for the plant, too. Then, with no warning at all, the mill closes. Roger suffers most for the people around him. They cannot understand the shutdown. Officially, of course, the reason is cost cutting. Roger has a wife and two sons and, for them, he accepts the job offered by the company in another city. But he leaves behind his parents, sisters, aunts, uncles, and a network of family and history that can never be replaced.

Pat spends years coming up through the ranks, beginning on the plant floor during his college vacations. No one works harder than he does, and he rises to head the operations of the entire company. Pat not only survives downturns—he saves the company, several times reinventing the business. When the calculator market turns unprofitable, for example, he switches his plant to manufacturing night-vision equipment for the military. Later, he anticipates the decrease in military spending and launches a line of 3-dimensional X-ray imaging devices for dentists. His crowning achievement, of which he is most proud, is forging a cooperative working relationship with the union. Today, it bothers him that no one seems to remember these past achievements. Now, the company is searching for a new president and it looks as though he will be passed over. Could this temporary setback mean he will fulfill a lifetime dream to build his own company? He is beginning to speak about that now.

**Is change a powerful source of opportunity?**

Have you known someone like Gracie? She comes, in 1965, from the South with her husband pursuing the promise of jobs to support themselves and their children. In the 1960s, a lot of companies will not even hire a woman until she is 21. She has to wait for her birthday to start work. But, the years are good for them, and today both their daughters are in college. Gracie is a union representative, and with automation facing the plant she sees a difficult and painful time ahead for many people. It occurs to her that she can help people make the transition. Perhaps no one has to be lost in the shuffle. She applies for a job as a trainer for the complex new equipment and is accepted.

Have you known someone as remarkable as Otis? He comes from a family of Texas sharecroppers. Now he runs the international sales organization for a major high-tech firm and has amassed a net worth of five million dollars. He is a great salesman and one of the most

successful managers of engineering and manufacturing. He puts his heart and soul into his job, and truly sacrifices everything for the company. In a company with the usual competitive and political struggles, he is known for sharing authority and power, for calling on people to give their best effort every day. The loyalty he inspires is a testament to his commitment to people. But Otis is tired of pursuing success just to prove something. His children will soon be grown, and he wants to stop spending 30 weeks a year traveling around the world. He is thinking about what might be next for him and whether he has the courage to walk away from this position he gave so much to attain.

## **WHAT IS GOING ON HERE?**

Take stock. Look in the mirror. Consider your colleagues. You have worked hard and so have they. We have all faced challenges, battles, and milestones and we have done well. Still, some say there is rough water ahead. A major upheaval is in progress in society and the workplace. The analysts' assessments of this upheaval are alarmist and depressing. Experts say that workplace loyalty is dead, that tension and anxiety will become the norm for everyone who depends on work for a living. Corporate managers are strategizing about self-survival in the new and future corporation.

**Survival is a game that everyone loses.**

This public conversation has an everyone-for-themselves quality. According to current wisdom, secure jobs and lifelong employment are dead so everyone must plot their own course, brace for hard times, and act like an independent business. Such advice leaves us isolated and alienated from one another and in a state of predatory watchfulness. But, we are more connected to one another than such an outlook

admits. As one survivor of corporate layoffs put it, *I did not like some of the people who were laid off. Still, it hurt to see them go. These were my workmates, some for many years. I cannot feel good except that each of them does well in the future.*

What is going on? Is the work world as we have known it gone forever? What do we face in the future? Certainly, the 20th-century working arrangements that gave a measure of stability and order are falling away. Hierarchy, definite lifelong career paths, and organizational structures dissolve beneath our feet. Often, it seems, they are replaced simply by a different hierarchy with now murky lines of advancement. We wonder how we can feel good about our jobs again. Is it wise to be loyal and dedicated to the company? What does the company owe us, or anyone? What skills make us desirable to other companies? Is there a way out of the rat race, or must we run twice as fast just to keep our jobs? And for those of us left in traditional jobs, how do we effectively manage people who face these dilemmas?

Sometimes, questions have easy answers. But these questions arise because of a fundamental shift in the social order, in how we expected life to turn out. We can answer such questions only if we look into the background of assumptions, culture, and expectations from which the questions arise in the first place.

**Asking a question in a new way is worth a dozen answers.**

This book introduces the art of asking questions in a deep, productive way. We will raise questions such as: *What is the purpose of a company? Why do you work? What is the meaning of measurement? Are you certain that A causes B?* Within the new domains, you will find yourself inventing exciting and valuable questions for your worklife.

Consider these stories of workers embracing the 21st century. Ken, a manufacturing vice president in a high-tech firm has no manufacturing facilities to oversee. After years in a large corporation, he is