

The Business of Listening: Where the Rubber Meets the Road

**Aikido
in the
World of Business**

Richard Moon
&
Doug Stone

The Business of Listening

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The Business of Listening

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The Business of Listening:

CEOs who have used the listening work describe their experiences of the Power of Extraordinary Listening.

They tell stories that explain how the listening work applies to the world of business as we enter the new millennium.

Communication is like anything else. It requires work. We're always amazed at the time and effort business people put into product development, research, engineering, marketing, advertising and all the rest without realizing that the ability to convey information from one person to another, from one department to another, from one division to another, from one company to another is central to the success of all those functions.

Buck up, Suck up and Come back When You Screw up

James Carville & Paul Begala

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The cast in order of appearance:

Doug Stone, Harvard Negotiation Project, Harvard Law School, author of Difficult Conversations. Penguin, New York

Michael Bush, CEO, Whalen & Co. an international construction consulting firm specializing in wireless communications services

Richard Moon, Founder, ExtraordinaryListening.com executive coach, consultant in creativity and leadership development,

John Combs, CEO, Shoretel, and Internet Connect, a high-speed broad band network. From 1993 to September of 1999 Area President Nextel Communications Southwestern United States

Jim Dixon, CEO, Aries International, COO Sorrento Networks, from 1991 to 1997 National Start-up President Nextel Communications. Previously VP with McCaw Cellular One and President Bay Area Cellular Telephone Company

Chris Thorsen, CEO, The Quantum Edge, an international consulting firm specializing in leadership and team development services

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Introduction to Distinguishing the Work

Doug - First tell me a little bit about the listening work you guys have done. Then let's talk a bit about how the work and your relationships evolved

Michael - Richard has done work with us in our project teams at a group dynamics level. What is unique about Richard's work compared to many of the consultants I've worked with, is that his work gets to where the real problems are, which are the issues between people and the conflicts that are present within and between the individuals.

It's very different than what most people had experienced because most organizational consultants work on a group dynamics level. They never get to the root cause. The work that can really make a difference is often individuals looking in the mirror. Getting people to do that can be very difficult and Richard is a master.

Doug - Can you think of examples where Richard has worked with you on that?

Michael - Yes, in my case after having Richard do the group work, I asked Richard to start working with me. I have worked with many people and there was something about Richard and his approach that was very different

Doug - The most recent work you have done with Richard was the listening seminar?

Michael - Right, that's the most recent.

This is how it happened. I hadn't seen Richard in a little while. I was in San Francisco negotiating to buy a company. I was in the restaurant of a large hotel when I see a couple guys I know Jim Dixon and Dan Whalen. They are having lunch with Richard in the same hotel, totally unexpected, because that's the way it happens. So I finished doing my thing, walk over to say hello. We began to talk and I say to Richard what's going on? And Richard says, "you know Mike I'm in a really tough period in my life right now. This is happening and this is happening . . . ,” and we talk about that for a little

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bit.

Then Jim says, “Mike has Richard told you about the listening work?”

True to form, he pulled out a little pamphlet and said, “Mike this is what I have put together.” He was clearly really excited about it. He shares all these really tough things that are going on that he is working his way through.

Then he shares this thing with me that I think is really powerful, that he has developed while he's in this valley. So I looked at it and in three minutes I think I asked him one question. The one thing he said that stood out so simply and clearly was, if you just listen to yourself honestly and clearly, you'll listen to others better and you'll make other people better listeners for you.

The whole circle, he had tied it all together. I understood that. Because I had been working on listening to myself, I could listen better. That part we had started working on. Then Richard filled the whole thing in. The magic comes out of helping other people listen better. So Richard in this conversation had created a reinforcing system that enhanced communication on all levels.

When he said that, I said, “Richard we've got something. You've got something. OK you've got it. I want to do something with it and I don't know what.” I said. “I've got a meeting coming up with all my team leaders. Call me and we'll do something.”

The First One

A month or so out, I had planned a meeting for all my leaders from around the world to come to San Francisco. We were going to work on some things. Richard and I were communicating primarily through voicemail. I knew only peripherally what Richard was working on. Yet I had decided that of all these important things that we had to work through his was the most important. I made it the first thing at the start of the day to signal to everyone how important it was. And I didn't know what Richard was going to do.

I never knew what the seminar consisted of. We never talked about it. He didn't even know I had placed him right there at the front of the show, which of course sets the tone for everything that follows. You know if Richard had

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done a poor job my whole day would have been a waste, about a hundred thousand dollars down the drain, plus my leadership credibility, you know all those things. Strangely I was not aware of that. I mean I hadn't even thought about it until Richard said on that day, "Michael thanks for having so much faith in me."

I said, what are you talking about? He said, "You put me on here and we never talked about what I was going to do. You didn't know if I was going to stand there silently for an hour or what." And I didn't. I hadn't even thought about it.

Richard - He never asked me what I was going to do. He only knew that I was developing a new technology. This was an alpha test as it were. Yet he never questioned me about it. Needless to say his trust made me better.

Doug - That's wild.

Michael - I didn't even think about it and it was great.

Doug - Say a little bit about what he put you guys through.

Michael - What he did was in his typical way, no handouts, no graphics, you know no overheads. Doug he just stood up in front and said, "Now, I've had situations in my life that I wonder if any of you have had?" Then he went through three or four and immediately made the connection.

He talked about listening and not listening. He started by making people aware of feeling the heat, the reactivity, and the defensiveness that can happen when somebody is talking, because our work is so high pressure. He also pointed it out in a way no one could miss, how when reactivity takes over, it is a slippery slope. Even if we see it, which we often don't, it seems like we can't stop it.

In his typical way he said, "None of you have ever experienced this, right?" But of course he connected with everyone in the room. Everybody in the room got right there with him. Then he talked about this reaction and our responses to it. He pointed out the difference between our typical reaction to our reactivity and how the listening work applies. He made the distinction between the conscious level of functioning he calls listening and

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unconsciously reacting to the reactivity, theirs and ours.

He got me to recognize clearly, that whenever you are having an important conversation with someone, something happens. What he calls somatic reactivity occurs. Our somatic reactivity makes the temperature go up. It makes the emotional mercury rise. Equally as important, the listening work teaches that the reactivity is not wrong. As a matter of fact it's wonderful. The extraordinary part of the listening work is to pay attention to it. Don't try and stop it. Figure out why it's occurring. Don't lash out with more heat. Work through your fears.

Doug - Can you give an example of a tool that was helpful?

Michael - He taught me skills in centering, how to achieve a state of calm. Doing so helps me to remember that everyone else is working with the same increase in reactivity. Don't react to their reactivity. Instead of taking it personally, include their reactivity as part of their deeper meaning. Help them listen to the meaning behind their reactivity, so they can speak more effectively and are clearer in their communication.

Understand their point of view, then communicate. Come around the table and put your arms around the other person, at least in energy. It works with litigators, it works with irrational customers, it works with everybody. But if you don't pay attention when that mercury boils, once you let some of that heat go out, once you add yours to theirs, now you're in the death spiral.

Doug - So 'Extraordinary Listening' is teaching you to do the opposite of what most of us do when the Mercury goes up. One is we lash out at the other side. When we are rational enough to know that doesn't help; we try to suppress the somatic reactions. Richard is saying, "Don't suppress the increasing energy. Be aware of it. Listen to it. Understand it. Then instead of lashing out reach around and embrace the other side. Communicate in a positive fashion that increases understanding and moves toward resolution."

Michael - That's right.

Doug - It seems obvious as we talk about it. Yet I know, it is not an easy thing to do, especially in a difficult conversation. Have you been able to actually do that in your life?

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Michael - Yes and I've been very successful with it.

Most of us don't pay attention to our reactivity. We try to ignore it. If we do notice it, we try to deny it or repress it. 'The listening work' is about noticing our reactions. It is about living with the reactivity as if the reactivity itself had something important to say. Once you have gotten that far, most importantly the work is about listening to it. There is an unexpected power in the information and energy that we first experience as reactivity.

Then we did a few exercises through which he made it possible for everyone to understand reactivity and how it affects listening and communication. He did that so simply by having people remember situations where they had the experience of reactivity. People were invited to talk about a situation they had been in. As people got to relive it others began to understand it. They began to see it in themselves. Even and especially those that find it hard to see at first were able to reproduce a situation or memory where the interference of reactivity was obvious. So everybody was there.

Then he taught about what you can do when you are aware of the Mercury going up. He had tied it all together meaning he was able to talk about how to listen to the energy that produces those feelings in you. If you can be in the moment and handle the energy of reactivity then you can listen well. You can handle the reactivity in the other person and hear their intentions and feelings. You can hear what is beneath the surface of the words.

The work is about sincerely listening and understanding. When you do the work, people feel heard because they are heard. When the other person is truly heard, they will listen. Then you've got the opportunity to speak because often what our people complain about is the fact that that customer doesn't want to hear the truth. Everybody has a really hard time at those moments.

That customer doesn't want to listen. The customer only wants to tell us about what the time frames are. They want to yell about what it costs.

Remember that from their point of view it is not your money. It is their money. They want us to listen to all of the things that mean life and death to them, which are true. You can't say, "would you just listen for a minute."

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You are adding to the reactivity so of course their fear, that you won't hear them and what they need, only increases. Especially when the customer is irate and there are hundreds of millions of dollars on the line, the answer is in listening.

It is not about making them feel heard or any particular way. You can't do common ground like you've learned in most communication classes. "Well, let me repeat what I think I've heard you say." None of those things that you learn in normal listening classes, like, "help me understand." That stuff doesn't work, not in a hot situation. It won't get you anywhere. Maybe it can work in some businesses but not in ours. What we're taught in normal listening classes, that gets you killed in our business. That gets you killed in our work. Because in a hot situation once you say, "help me understand" they are feeling processed. These people hate being processed and so they're going to bury you. "Are you an idiot? Do you think I'm an idiot?" So we don't teach our people those things because it doesn't work when the customer is boiling over.

What Richard was giving them is the only thing I have found that can make it different. With a demanding customer the only thing you can do is to listen. You can't do it by asking them to listen. You have to know how to handle the rising heat in yourself. You need a level of mastery in not letting the mercury boil over, all over the customer. They need to see and feel your mastery so they can relax and trust you to take care of them because their life, at least commercially speaking, is in our hands.

Richard – Allow me to emphasize, listening is not waiting for your turn to talk. It is not waiting for them to unload. It is listening, sincerely listening. It is as if what they had to say was the most important thing in the world even if you are sure you know exactly what they are going to say before they start.

The Hard Cases

Michael - I learned as I watched him because if you are going to pick the guys who aren't going to get anything out of it, I know who those guys are. I told Richard this later. I've got a few guys in that room who I knew would be skeptical and hard to handle. The majority of the people I know them. They have their foot in both worlds and for them it's gonna be great. So I knew

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these five to seven guys were not going to get anything out of it. But I was surprised because Richard got to those guys. I know because I watched. And I talked to them afterwards.

I talk to them now and they still refer to the work. I've got one guy I knew would never get it. I would have bet money he would never get it. He thought what you're supposed to do when you're feeling the Mercury boil is suppress it. He thought that's what you were supposed to do and he wanted Richard to say that, because that's what he tells people and that's what he does. And Richard of course would never say that. So on that day he tried to fight with Richard. During that session he would say, "now don't you find that . . ." because he couldn't understand.

Those of us who know this guy were watching him ask these questions. Of course Richard didn't know but all of us were looking at each other across the room. We would roll our eyes and smile because this is the guy. This is the guy.

Doug - Now what do you think Richard did that allowed him to get through to the six or seven guys that are not going to be gotten through to?

Michael - You know that one is tough Doug. He didn't try to suppress their reactivity. He let them have it without adding his reactivity to theirs.

The Essence

Richard - Reactivity occurs only in response to what we care about, what we value. Everyone desires to contribute value. However it came out he was trying to add value. We perceive that having our contribution acknowledged as valuable implies we have value. The need to have value as a person and therefore the desire to have your contribution valued is satisfied when someone listens sincerely. It isn't rocket science and we don't need special gifts or years of training. Acknowledging each person's value as a person is what I was able to give to these guys in Michael's group. It is incredibly soothing to be heard especially if you can't hear yourself. When someone listens it helps you hear yourself. They felt that from me and it put us in sync together.

What they were sharing with me was their reactivity. When someone is

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reactive with you, their reactivity stimulates your reactivity in an ever-increasing cycle. I could feel myself getting defensive. My defensiveness comes out of fear and I don't like it. Like most folks I prefer not to deal with it, eventually I want to lash out to protect myself from it. As I continued to listen to this process going on within me, I realized I was hearing exactly what was going on for them.

I was feeling my own reactivity. I was listening to it within myself instead of trying to make them listen to it. Because I did my work, I did not need to work on them. I was in the moment experiencing how hard it is to deal with reactivity. As a result, I was sincerely empathetic with their struggle. That empathy opened up the communication between us.

They saw me handle that reactivity Mike describes as the mercury boiling, until my defensiveness, what we call our defense condition or Def-con, started to lower within me. That reversed the cycle producing understanding and a cooling reaction.

Doug, you have to understand that these people are in a very hot industry. Hundreds of millions of dollars can be lost if Michael's company does not perform effectively. If they don't get their work done on time their customers can lose their licenses. So their customers are under tremendous pressure if there is a problem. Michael's people are usually at the receiving end of it and it was understandable for this guy to want to see me handle some.

My ability to stay with this guy and his increasing charge of energy instead of reacting to it changed the room for the guys I was 'listening' to. Instead of reacting to what was on the surface, I was hearing the underlying messages that were going on for him and for me. That let us communicate at a deeper level. I would simply say, he felt our connection at a deeper level than he even understood. We left in a good feeling about each other. When this guy came to Michael later and said in explaining a customer interaction that his Def-con level had gone to two, Michael said, "I knew you had gotten through. What is important is that you really helped him."

Michael - That is right. He used the actual language that he had learned. He began to shift in the latter part of the day after Richard had left. Even then it took a few days. But he got it. So one of the things that taught me was that if

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you are really good, you could get to anybody.

Doug - The reason I asked Richard how he had responded was because I had assumed that you Richard were responding by actually using the stuff you were teaching. Now that is really hard

Richard - Yes, that was exactly what I was doing and that is what I'm supposed to do isn't it. And yes, it is hard, but that is the art. It is simple but not easy.

Doug - Well this guy is bright obviously. And they are seeing you use the process effectively. Richard is not saying, "Stupid don't you understand that it works." He is just doing it and the guys are seeing that this is actually working here.

John - Richard did a session on the listening work for my team a few weeks ago here at Internet Connect. He taught us to be more self-aware using the analogy of the Pentagon's defense condition rating of their military status, what we call Def-con one through five: Five on the scale being a calm open dialogue, one being a full on screaming argument.

Just yesterday I was in a discussion with the founder of my company and I started to go off. I mean I got angry. Richard had talked about recognizing going to different levels of emotion. Again we all know this stuff when we have a calm conversation about it, but we often forget it in the middle of a crisis. When the emotional temperature rises enough what we call common sense starts to seem very uncommon.

So I stopped in the middle of my flare-up and said, "OK I've gone to Def-con three or two and so I'll cool back down." Everybody laughed. We could talk about it easily because we all shared the awareness and all had the same vocabulary. So it was a way to say, "OK I'm done with my flare-up. I am going back to listening now."

Doug – Like you say, everybody talks about this stuff. What's amazing, what the listening work seems to be helping you with, is enabling you to actually do it in the moment, which is tough. Self-awareness, when you are angry and to the point of losing it, is incredibly hard to do.

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How does that actually look to you when you are in the middle of feeling angry and expressing yourself angrily? How are you able to see yourself and recognize that that is what is going on in the moment?

John - I don't know. We assume it is OK when you are the boss to behave harshly so we don't pay it much mind. Sometimes we even think it is expected of us. I guess Richard planted a seed in the back of my brain that when you go off, when you lose your center you diminish your ability to be accountable for what you are doing. We forget how important that is in any relationship, but as a leader it is life and death critical for your company's success. We have to train consciously paying attention, listening.

When you are not consciously paying attention, you are a victim of your emotional and reactionary habits. Once you are conscious you can see whether or not your actions are effective, you are free to make a conscious decision about whether you want to keep going or do something different. It isn't that it is so hard to see it. It is that we aren't trained to look. We aren't trained to value that attention sufficiently.

The physical metaphor works so well for me. After thinking about the practices and skills enough, it was just there. And it's not just me. It's happened three or four other times with folks that they talked about going to different levels of def-con or emotional strain after the training class in listening that Richard shared with us. The leader is responsible for generating exceptional performance in the executive core, because exceptional performance throughout the company is generated through them. When that happens you'll have success.

Doug – That's terrific.

Listening - reactivity and interference

Jim - When he presented to it to me I was struck immediately by the power of the listening work. I believed from first hearing it that it was a prospective that would be understandable to people in a way that we had never really had the words for before.

I am oversimplifying, but what I grasped early on was the effect of what Richard points to as reactivity. Our reactivity causes interference in our

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ability to listen effectively. All of this is listening. Particularly of value in the recent work was recognizing the multitude of sources and types and shades of interference.

Doug - And by interference do you mean from our own thinking or in general?

Jim - That's where it comes from in a very broad sense.

Richard – If it's going on in our thinking, it is going on in their thinking. When the two weather systems converge, we have the makings of a perfect storm.

Jim - I'll give you the simplest version of one we encountered recently with a group of people. Chris Thorsen and I were working with a management team. Chris was laying out a schedule for that day including the issues we were going to have to cover. He mentioned that a little later in the morning, we were going to ask each individual to do a 5 minute presentation about what was important to them, where they came from and the like. Chris then proceeded to continue on with the agenda and some related topics.

As he concluded that section I said, "let's have a look at this concept of interference and how it affects our listening." I simply asked if there was anyone had who had not begun to compose their five-minute speech when Chris mentioned it. I asked if anybody knew what Chris had said next. The interference of our thinking on our listening, a very predictable human characteristic, was obvious to everyone.

So there is a one realm of interference. It couldn't be any more effective if it were a thousand-decibel foghorn. You can't hear through it. It is just with the foghorn's interference you are aware it interfered. When our thinking interferes we often don't know it. Another type of interference could be our prejudice. It is the human tendency to believe our thinking as fact rather than distinguish our thinking from the facts.

Our thinking colors what we hear. For instance not much later working with the same group of people I was listening to someone's presentation. I didn't like it. I judged it as stupid until I realized that the individual had used a

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particular word that struck me as some kind of jargon without my realizing it consciously. I translated it to mean something different than what he had intended. In this case he had mentioned a word that triggered a reaction in me. It wasn't that the word was wrong. My reaction was inappropriate for his intent. My prejudice, that was in actuality based on a misunderstanding, had interfered with my ability hear what he said. So there's another sort of interference.

Certainly a realm of interference is the attitudes or beliefs that we hold. They affect the confidence we have in someone. The assumptions we make about their competence are based on what we think of them. As soon as I thought what this man said didn't make sense, I judged him as not making sense. It certainly stopped me from hearing what he had to say. That characterizes another shade of interference.

Doug – Do you think interference affects us even in a positive sense?

Jim – Yes, it can affect us either in a positive or a negative sense. We might conversely give more weight to what someone says based on our assumptions about them. We can make more out of anything either way.

Let me offer another example that I think is tangible about different cultures. Richard and I have been working with some young leaders in Bosnia over the last year. In one of our endeavors I was working with a young woman named Danjiella. She clearly has high potential as a significant political leader. I thought I was encouraging her by challenging her about her responsibility to develop into an important leader. She absolutely rejected it. I couldn't get through to her. And I couldn't seem to understand her resistance.

As it turned out her experience of leadership had been one of strong leaders who had abused their power. So the word 'leader' had a negative connotation for her. For us leadership had the most positive reference, leaders meant people we revered. Whereas for this woman she had no desire to be a leader because in her associations with the word it meant doing the things that the leaders she was familiar with had done. The leaders she was familiar with took advantage of their power at the expense of the people they led. She had a very control oriented and abusive sense connected with the word leadership.

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Like the foghorn, to some degree we assume and allow for cultural differences internationally. However there are subcultures within cultures. Every corporation has a quality of culture and within that corporation each division and even the sub teams will develop cultures. When these differences clash it's much less obvious. We fail to see it's not a disagreement. It was a misunderstanding like when the gentleman used a term I misheard. We might not notice and therefore fail to allow for the cultural difference and so the misunderstanding can generate an antipathy.

One more example similar to Danjiella's reaction to the concept of the word leader, is my prejudice about the concept of the swastika. I understand that the symbol was used as an ancient religious symbol. In that context it had a very different meaning than it did when the Nazis used it. However, even though it may have had meaning prior to that usage, my reactivity interferes with my ability to see that. I still cannot see the swastika without feeling a certain negative association based on the Nazis and their behavior. I react based on the current meaning that I make based on my experience with the swastika. Simply speaking about it causes me to cringe.

Richard - I also notice a reaction both body and mind. Our reaction to the swastika has changed since Hitler used it to symbolize the beliefs of the Nazi movement. Now I suppose I will never see a swastika without feeling some of that revulsion.

Some words and ideas trigger a response that immediately changes the whole tone of our listening. That was a good example of a very sensory reactivity that many of us can recognize and actually feel physically. We are clearly aware of the feeling of revulsion and the reactivity that we experience around that symbol. As I suppose some neo-nazis feel a pride in it similar to what most of us feel on seeing our national flag flown at an event like the Olympics. We react positively or negatively based on our associations, beliefs and assumptions.

Jim - Even as we hear myself speak about this, I can't even hear what was just said as well as I might.

Doug— Yeah, I just had that same reaction too. At the same time, it's very self aware of you Jim to notice that reaction.

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Richard – Awareness is the central key to our experience of life. It is the eye of the camera or microscope. The listening work is about bringing awareness into focus. The first phase of the work begins by focusing on reactivity because it colors our experience of what we mean to say and how we hear everything everyone else says. The second is listening to the reactivity for a deeper understanding of it and the information behind it. I don't think we can get to the point where we don't have the reactivity. Nor can we stop the reactivity but we can notice its effects and its causes. We can listen to it and

learn from that listening about ourselves and each other. Seeing reactivity interfering in our listening allows us to intervene, to focus the lens of attention differently. By choosing to mediate our reactivity we can listen differently. Otherwise reactivity interferes producing defensiveness instead of understanding. Our work together has been about consciously, intentionally choosing peaceful communication. Peaceful means focusing on what we intend, as opposed to violent which is directing our energy against something.

Jim – I see a parallel of dealing with reactivity that is very similar to learning to return to center. We don't have the ability to stay centered. The best we have is the ability to feel where we are and to choose to center as an ongoing discipline. We do not have the ability to screen out reactivity. But we do have the ability to notice it. In noticing it we increase our ability to listen in a clearer field.

Richard - We normally listen through our reactivity and it colors everything we hear. When we consciously listen to our reactivity, instead of unconsciously listening through our reactivity; we can listen beyond our reactivity.

The ability to distinguish reactivity from intention completely changes the tone of conversation and allows clear communication. In listening to our reactivity we begin to notice the messages we hear are colored by it. Understanding how reactivity colors what we hear allows us to hear another person's message separate from our reactivity. Once we clearly isolate our reactivity, we can isolate their reactivity from their intended message. We listen with a diminished likelihood of getting the two confused. When that distinction is lost, we end up reacting to reactivity.

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Often people react to their own reactivity by boiling over and burning others. Some people have enough sense to see this is ineffective so they react by trying to suppress, avoid or deny the energy of reactivity as Michael describes earlier. We react to others being reactive by heating up which increases the problem. So we react to that by avoiding the conversation all together which does not produce resolution.

The work begins by listening to our self. It proceeds by valuing rather than repressing our reactivity. Valuing / listening to our reactivity allows us to value rather than resist or defend against the reactivity of our partners in conversation. Extraordinary Listening produces the ability to translate reactivity into the meaning that the energy actually intends to transmit.

This is what distinguishes Extraordinary Listening from other forms of communication skills. Underlying the listening work is the following principle. The energy of reactivity has value, intelligence actually. The reactivity coming from other people has value.

Have you ever said something to someone meaning it as a compliment and had them take it the wrong way? You know what you meant but they do not. In a similar way the energy we experience as reactivity hits our system and we misunderstand its intent as someone may misunderstand our intent.

There is intelligence in the energy of reactivity but if we misunderstand it as something bad, we cannot receive it as intelligence. Once the energy disturbs or frightens us, we tend to hear everything through a defensive filter. It is very hard to value what someone is saying in a defensive state of mind.

We all come out of a need to have value. We want to be seen, to count, so that we feel we have value. Everyone wants to be heard. Even the worst command and control power monger wants everyone else to listen better. Your actual value is created by your contribution to other people. When you don't value what someone says, they know it almost no matter what you do to cover it up. We can contribute to others by recognizing them as having value. You do that by listening.

We can increase everyone else's value by listening to them. When we give that to each other through listening, we change the wealth of the world. That is the power of the listening work. We are increasing the wealth of the

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world. The listening work is the way that I have come to describe Aikido for people who might think of it only as a martial art and have no interest in that. I've been trying to find a way to translate the value the power of Aikido, of being in harmony with the universe, by remembering that every one of us is part of the universe.

The whole point of the listening process is that in addition to helping you grow and develop when you listen to some one, you enhance their value by honoring what they're saying. By receiving their contribution you are making them a more valuable person. So if by listening I've helped you feel more valuable, you now have more value to contribute to the world. You now have more to give to others. In the process I have developed as a listener so I can listen to my inner guidance better instead of interrupting the same way we usually interrupt others.

Michael – Exactly! Because most of us listen to ourselves the same way we listen to everyone else. We are busy thinking about what we want to say instead of listening to what's being said. We are carried away by distractions instead of listening to our source.

Richard - Once we value ourselves, what we think and what we have to say, we can extend that valuing to other people. When people are treated as if they have value, it effects who they are. When you honor someone it helps them honor them self. When people have honor they speak with honor.

In a primitive sense being valued matters because if you have value and your society values you, you will be cared for. Your needs will be considered. Almost no matter how hard a case a person might be, virtually everyone is affected by the sense of being valued and receiving value. When that happens, each individual's power to generate value increases.

Conversely when people are treated as if they have no value, it produces a very different effect. People afraid they will not be honored or cared for, act from the fear of not being valued, of not being considered. People afraid their needs will be denied will behave with the most violent tonalities.

Learn to give yourself and your own reactivity value so you can help other people give them selves and their reactivity value. Then life becomes a process of people valuing each other. Instead of fighting to get value, each of

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us is generating and giving value. By doing so we increase our value individually and collectively. In that state of relationship we can generate wealth. Then our society becomes generous. That is what creates a wealthy society.

Doug – That's nicely put.

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How We Met

Doug – Give me a little on how you guys met.

Michael - I met Richard about four years ago through Dan Whalen, the founder of the company I presently work for. He had worked with Richard for probably eight or nine years. When I was in the final stages of being interviewed I met with Richard. I think it was very good on Dan's part. I picked up immediately the confidence that Dan had in Richard. So we started talking about doing some work together, which we have done over the past four years

John Combs – I was also actually on my initial interview with Nextel when I met Richard in the early part of June 1993 or the latter part of May.

Doug – What do you mean you met him on your interview?

John - Usually when you go on an interview you would expect to go to a business location and show up in a suit and tie. So I go out in the boondocks of Alamo in Northern California. I show up in an old rickety house that these guys had rented and where they were having a team building session. I knocked on the door and he answered it. That is where I first met Richard Moon. Richard and Chris Thorsen were leading the team building exercise with Jim Dixon. Jim was the person that hired me at Nextel. They put me upstairs in a room and the people came through and did the interviews.

Doug – John, was there a specific time when you became engaged with Richard? Were you thinking there was a specific issue you needed to work on?

John - When I interviewed with Jim it was with the idea of challenging myself. I was looking to take on something bigger than I had ever handled. I knew I would have to grow and change in order to do that. My style has been and to some extent continues to be very detail oriented. When I interviewed with Jim Dixon I mentioned to him that I was looking to develop myself. When he asked what I would like to do, I told him I would like to improve my management abilities.

The company I had been at before Nextel was L.A. Cellular and prior to that

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I was with Mitel in the P B X business, a business I knew very well. Mitel was the largest company of its type in the United States but it was a troubled company. In that company I basically knew what to do right away. I became very directive in terms of what needed to happen with the company. I made a lot of decisions very quickly and basically ran the company on a micro-managed basis. We were successful. I turned the company around made it profitable and things like that. It was by then a hundred million dollar company. I knew if I was going to run an enterprise that was larger than that I was going to have to change my management style.

I joined Nextel in June or July. Jim flew down from Northern California where he was, to Southern California where I was. He brought Richard with him and he reintroduced me to Richard. I remember it was at the end of the day. We went to a sushi place off of Bundy Avenue in West LA. Jim said, “Remember in the interview, you mentioned you wanted to become a better manager. Here is the guy who helped me to become a better manager and more importantly a much better leader. I'm going to give you him to use as you see fit at my expense.

Doug – Generous!

John - That was good but candidly it was also uncomfortable. On one hand I was pleased that Jim had followed up on my request and on the other hand I was a little bit cautious about how I was going to deal with this particular situation. I was not so sure that I wanted a very good, very tight, very trusted friend of my supervisor looking over my shoulder every day of the week while I ran the business. That was not on the top of my list.

It took Richard and I maybe one or two more meetings after that before we came to a working relationship where the communication between he and I was one of trust. Obviously if something were going on in the business that was inappropriate he should certainly have the license to tell Jim but the agreement we had was that he would speak to me first before he spoke to Jim. We get that clear and off we go.

Doug – Jim, how did you meet Richard?

Jim - I met Richard originally in his dojo, his Aikido school, in Marin County, when I was a beginning Aikido student. Chris Thorsen introduced

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us. I'm thinking this was in 1982. For me the first introduction was simply Aikido.

Chris - I had been doing employee assistance consulting for the county of Marin. During the early stages of that I was introduced to Aikido training. The guy I had been studying with left town. So for a year or two I didn't really train with anyone. Then I heard there was a class opening in West Marin, which was where I lived at the time. I went to check it out and it was Moon.

Doug – Richard was teaching it?

Chris – Yes, this was in a little judo school a guy had built on his farm in Woodacre. There were three or four of us. That was over 25 years ago. I've been training with him ever since.

Doug - Do have any memories of your first reactions to him.

Chris - I was magnetized to him in ways that I didn't understand. I still don't but what ever it is I value very highly. I guess I was drawn to the depth of his inquiry. He was not trying to prove his power in Aikido. He was inquiring into it and that was a huge draw.

Doug – OK, in the beginning Chris, you had been doing employee assistance work and Richard had been teaching Aikido. So up to that point, there hadn't been these interesting applications to business yet?

Chris – No, I had made a declaration several years before. I was at the end of a long really intense run. I had been a medic in the corporate wars. So I made a declaration that I was going to get up stream of what was going on. I was going to work with leaders.

We were given the invaluable gift of being asked to coach a willing and courageous leader. It happened to be our friend here, Jim Dixon. He was really the catalyst. The way our engagement began was I had helped him in the context of the employee assistance work. He had been a MASH pilot in Vietnam. He had flown a thousand sorties. That made him highly unusual since on average you were dead at 300.

Anyway when he got back like lot of Vietnam vets, including the 50,000

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that killed them selves afterwards, he was struggling with how to live, how to relate to the world. Part of that was, “How do I deal with the fact that, combat got me high? Who the hell do I tell that to? How do I match that in the world?” So my job counseling him was to help him work on the issues that he was facing. Finally at one point in our coaching I said to him, “Jim you need to access this energy of presence directly, not indirectly. Get on the mat.” That’s when he began training with Richard.

It was a couple of years later that he called me and said, “I just got hired as the start up President of Cellular One in San Francisco. I want to create a culture that doesn’t grind people up. Your experience in employee assistance is what I’m looking for. Help me create a company that doesn’t need an employee assistance program. We’re going to spend \$30 million in two years. I’m going to go very fast and build this system in record time and I don’t want to lose people.” In those days \$30 million was a lot of money and we ended up redefining what fast paced meant.

What was crucial in the relationship that Jim developed with us was that we were on the executive team. Not, “You are some consultant who fiddles around with my outfit once in awhile. You are on the team. You are as accountable for the business results as anyone else here and I’ll put you up against the wall just as hard and just as fast as I’ll put anyone else in here up against the wall.” That helped develop jurisdiction with the other people on the team.

Richard and I had already been talking about the possibility of taking Aikido off the mat. One of our interests was in finding hot environments to play in. In other words we were already thinking, “Let’s take it into environments where people are facing challenges beyond what they should be able to handle. If we can prove it out there then that will open the door for us to help apply its principles in other environments.” It was a bold declaration, given that we had no credentials what so ever in that world. Dixon gave us that opening.

Anyway the upshot was that Dixon called out of the blue saying, “Coach me!” My vision was realized in that moment. Suddenly, I was sitting with the leader of what turned out to be a very hot start up. So Dixon enabled us to have our first crucible to expand the same investigation we had been

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making on the mat into a high change, high pressure, business environment, with hungry players I might add.

Richard - Chris along with Jim Dixon and our friend Dan Whalen, who started the company Michael runs, were very important in the first steps of taking it out into the business realm. My teacher Robert Nadeau, a personal student of the founder of Aikido, was exploring applying Aiki principles in the realm of personal development and the human potential movement but had not gone in the direction of business. Early on a man named Terry Dobsen, who had also studied with the founder in Japan, did some important work in the process and was a mentor to us. He died a number of years back. Tom Crumb using the theme of conflict has developed quite a name for himself with it in the realm of corporate training. Tom has done some incredibly good work and also encouraged us early on. My dear friend Richard Heckler is doing some important work with the Marine corps. I could list many more.

You know the saying you are better off to be lucky than smart. The truth is we lucked into a relationship with Jim Dixon. Jim called Chris in. Jim and Chris called me in. The next thing we knew we'd spent close to two decades in corporate training, leadership and team development. We spent a lot of time on airplanes, in hotel rooms, meeting rooms and corporate retreats full of executive's, executive teams, up and coming executives, managers, etc. It was quite a run.

Jim - As it evolves Chris Thorsen had been doing executive coaching working with me as we started up Cellular One in San Francisco. Since we were both studying with Richard at the time it was very natural for us to invite Richard into that circle. As a result he started working with us and coaching my start up team in San Francisco.

Richard - In the first little while we started out with a sense that we had something really wonderful. We really liked it and we wanted to share it. Because of Jim and a few folks like him, we were able to play with it in the business realm. Chris came in with a lot of facilitation skills from his days at Interaction Associates. In that first stage we did a lot of the facilitation of meetings and business processes. That was primary and the mastery, we didn't call it listening work then, was more of an addition.

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So on the first day as it were, we started making their business processes more effective, making their meetings more effective and facilitating their strategic processes. Along the way we slipped in some little pieces or principles of the Aikido work to help them become the best teams and the most effective companies that they could be. We probably looked, to some degree at least, like normal business consultants. I can imagine some of our old clients laughing at that. OK, we were a little bit different. We were bringing what we had and we were learning about business. That is phase one. We enter the business world.

In phase two we went into blending full on to dress like they dressed, to talk like they talked. We went through a cycle where we really made an effort to learn how to speak their language. It was about learning how to put the work into a form that they understood. During that phase we made an attempt to make these principles applicable as if they were business principles and we were simply using Aikido metaphors to support these processes.

After doing that for while we had developed our skills, our confidence to the point where we felt comfortable in any office, at a level, in any setting. We played with people from the top to the bottom of big companies and small companies. In this phase the corporate world was our dojo. We had done enough business. We had blended with their world. We had learned well and had enough successes that in the next phase we began to put the Aikido forward.

At that point we finally said, "This is really what we're doing with you, this is where it comes from and this is how it helps business. We were doing Aikido and talking about how Aikido principles can help business become more efficient, effective, more powerful, more successful. We can use Aikido to empower your realm." The Aikido was forward but it was still in their context of doing better business, read: affect the bottom line.

Chris - I think it's important that we surfaced some communications to bring this unique perspective on listening into the world. Talking with Jim Dixon he said that companies we've created her together are worth billions.

An invisible part of what we do was made manifest in when a client who was a salesman at cellular one is now the guy who runs the whole western United States for Nextel. Repeatedly these guys have transcended who they

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were and what they were doing.

Richard - The companies and individuals would have grown anyway but I do believe that the work we did together was instrumental to the quantity and the quality of their growth, and their ability to bring it forward with power into the world.. .

Then a couple of years back, it began to change for me. My story goes like this. By definition we had great teams to work with. If they weren't forward thinking, risk takers and learners, they wouldn't have been working with us.

Still we helped make them successful beyond what any of us had a right to expect. We were incredibly successful and our clients were incredibly successful. Was it luck? Was it skill? Who knows? Our teams led the country in every company that we worked in. Our executives received promotion after promotion. Our clients glowed when they spoke about our work. On one level we were looking really good as performance coaches.

Doug - That's clearly a story that's the story we've been getting from these guys.

Richard - We were putting the Aikido forward. We were teaching skills and knowledge that enabled our clients to perform effectively beyond their present level. If you will forgive my flippancy I describe it this way. When no one could get it there on Friday, our clients came through, did the impossible and got it there on Friday. It may have been the doors to the crematorium; but they were very high performing teams.

Chris - And they were very high-quality doors.

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Richard – Right! We were still selling them what they think they want inside of their paradigm. After fifteen years I hit a wall at this and I started to sense what I loftily describe as a higher calling. It was in no way against the work we had been doing. I was simply adding a piece to the inquiry. It was a piece that asked, “What are we creating with our increased effectiveness? What are the long-term goals beyond a successful profit margin? What are the consequences of what we are building besides a larger market share?”

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Unless we were going to start to work with clients in a way that helps them look beyond their comfort zone, to question who they are and what they're doing, I began to question what were we doing? Unless we can get them to quiet down in the midst of the incredible rush and pressure and listen to the voice of the spirit what is our work in service of? Unless we can help them understand and look at developing businesses that create or at least move into the inquiry for a just and sustainable society are we furthering a model that leads down the path to the opposite? Unless our work leaves our children a better life and a better environment than we inherited, are we violating our sacred trust of this planet to meet wall streets expectations? Call it my age make up any reason that I wanted to move our work to serve a continually deepening inquiry.

Creating better technology that polluted our world and our spirits, enhancing the ability to create more material objects that filled people's garages, that they never use or shipping them at faster rate; ceased to be a compelling challenge. We could do that!

When I was learning how to do it and we were growing and developing our skills that in itself seemed important. But now to simply keep doing this because it paid me so well was pointless or worse. I didn't mean we had to stop until everything was perfect. I simply felt more interest in working with people where the deeper questions counted or even better were part of the request.

Needless to say I hit a place where I was much less interested in the work we had been doing. I did not find myself looking for it and naturally work dropped off. It took something to sit in the emptiness. It was out of that quiet that the listening work showed up.

The Listening Work

Doug - So of this is fairly recently?

Richard – Yes! The listening work has been building really for a long time. A lot of the things we've been doing, the Aikido inquiry, the corporate work, the international peace work, the dialogue study have all been leading us here but it took a critical mass to ignite the insight along with my continual commitment to step off into the unknown. From here it looks like a logical

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and natural outgrowth of what we've been doing the whole time. But three years back during our own version of the dark night of the soul I couldn't see anything. I just had the trust to sit quiet and let the phone sit quiet. I had to have the courage not to chase work I didn't want.

Chris – It was similar to what happened during the work I was doing in employee assistance. We were medics again only now I'm one in the corporate wars. We are patching teams up to keep them going. And I'm thinking this isn't making much sense.

Richard - So we're performance coaches in a system that's so busy making quarterly profits, where the competition is so severe that we don't have time to question what we are doing. The pressure of the market place seemed to legitimize behavior without inquiry. Our lives go faster and faster the more time saving devices we have. We were on the cutting edge of technological innovation helping speed it up. Were we supporting our own destruction? Were we helping do it better?

Our technology should improve the quality of life not just mindlessly increase productivity for its own sake. What quality of life means needs to be part of the inquiry in business, education, politics and science, in every phase of life.

Chris – Around that time I changed the name of my consulting firm from The Performance Edge to The Quantum Edge. That and starting The Listening Institute was a declaration to go beyond helping people get more efficient in their communications without thinking deeply about what they are communicating. I hold as our vision to help leaders source their decisions from spirit.

Richard - That was where Chris really started. That is not to say that we weren't doing it within the work that we were doing. But after a while of learning and growing and going to school to the point where we had the credential, we could declare for what we have come here to do. We have begun to deliver our work in terms of that commitment. At the institute we describe the seminar on extraordinary listening as a short course in listening a quantum shift in communication.

We're still talking about effective performance. We are still creating teams

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that are highly effective. Yet, the listening work develops consciousness and awareness that is driven by much more than the numbers of this quarter. It doesn't ignore the world that we're swimming in or how big the waves are but it has to do with a larger vision. It is not about surviving the waves. It is about surfing them.

We are committed to serve and work with those who want to hear this message and can listen to it. There will be people who are not interested in listening to this message. They may scoff at what one of my dear friends calls 'save the world'. I don't mean to make it so grand but I have children and that makes a difference. As my time runs out what I leave them becomes more and more important.

Some people hear the word spirit as a turn off. Some find it disturbing. Perhaps they think the message may interfere in their religious beliefs. Not so! When I use the word spirit, I simply mean the quality with which you approach life, the spirit of your engagement. Spiritual discipline means you can change a bad mood and engage in life in a positive spirit. When your spirit/intuition whispers about creating the life you would like to live, you need to be able to listen. You need to train yourself to listen to those whisperings that underlie the reactivity rather than believe the negativity based on past beliefs and prejudices.

Neither Chris nor I were ever that concerned about what most people think of as material success. The founder of Aikido who was a master of listening to the spirit said, "when the spirit rises up in victory Aikido will bear fruit in this world." This is not an anti materialist message. It is a pro spirit message.

I support creating enough wealth for everyone to share in the benefits. When you are connected to your spirit and the resources that you have are in service of that connection material wealth is a natural outcome.

We're simply clearer and clearer that our business is about creating wealth in a sustainable society. We explore creating a style of business that serves the whole. I know people in the business world commonly think personal success or the success of their company is what is important. But leadership means taking people beyond what they can see. It means helping them think and see in ways they would not perceive without that leadership. Wealth is of the spirit. Wealth is to the spirit what health is to the physical body. When

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the spirit is hungry no amount of material possessions no volume of monetary instruments will satisfy that hunger.

We are shifting into a time of harmony, a time when it becomes less important to talk and more important to listen. Not that many have seen yet how important it is that the whole system is successful. If it's not, where will you find your customers? So a tremendous shift is happening. Strategic alliances are beginning to form between people who are in competition yet are allying for mutual benefit.

We are making the shift from seeing a successful company as one that kicks ass on everybody else or in some ways succeeds at the expense of everybody else, to a whole systems company. In our earlier work we were helping the VPs of the shipping department and the sales department and their people in those departments, recognize that they were not at war. They were both part of a larger system called a company and without each other they failed, as a system. We are still working to help that happen within companies. And in the larger vision we help companies recognize that they are part of a larger system called an economy and that the economy is part of a larger system called the world

Operating in that paradigm we can create a quality of business that will produce wealth at a level that is unimaginable to the world as it exists. I am sure some percentage of the people who hold a large concentration of wealth feel that as a society we are creating wealth. But the quality of wealth I'm describing supersedes this by orders of magnitude that are exponentially greater. The level I am describing is beyond our imagination.

Let me be clear I am not talking about making the rich poorer. I am talking about creating wealth that makes everyone richer. Even if all you were interested in is money, what I am talking about will dramatically expand your customer base and their ability to buy your products and services.

A sustainable system is good business. The only way we're going to do that, because we don't know how to, is to go into an extraordinarily exquisite quality of listening. Extraordinary listening allows us to hear the guiding forces of our lives. None of us are able to do that from our limited mind set. Einstein hinted at what we are calling an extraordinary quality of listening when he said, "The problems we face will not be solved by the same

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thinking that created them."

Doug - As your saying that, I am thinking that my impression of talking to your clients, among many other impressions, has been this sense that these guys see them selves at war. At the very least it is an intense football game where the goal is to crush the other team. But there is also a larger picture.

Richard, what your saying is there is this element of, you want to win each football game; but you need the league, if you want to win the championship. Especially if you want to be the champions you need the league to thrive as well. You will never get to the Super Bowl for all the fun and excitement that it is, if the league goes down the drain and goes bankrupt. Everybody has to succeed even if each individual team has it as their goal to do well.

Focusing in on the competitive aspect may cause us to lose the larger focus. Not only is that a less effective viewpoint, it threatens the structure of the system. The costs of being shortsighted may not be measurable from here, but they will be at some point.

Richard – That is exactly the point. Aikido is a study of the unity of the universal system. When we are in harmony with the universe, we can draw on its power. When we identify as separate from the universe. We end up at odds with the natural universal harmony instead of listening to it.

Jim – When Chris suggested we invite Richard into the corporate work, Richard's significance to me as an Aikido teacher made it easy to accept the potential of what he might offer to a broader team. Though at that point I don't think any of us knew the degree to which Aikido would translate practically into business. We knew it was translating into life reasonably well but where it would fit in the business environment, particularly with our contentious, competitive, antagonistic, dualistic business attitudes, that was a bit different than the harmony and blending of Aikido.

Richard - Again blending, what I describe as harmonious relationship, using the energy of an attacker / competitor, the energy some people call fear is explained somewhat in the GTE story if Jim will tell it. It is about how he and Chris applied the principle of blending using the thrust of GTE's advertising at Cellular One several years earlier.

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Doug - Say a little bit about that. How did it come to fit in?

GTE

Jim - The essence of Aikido lies in accepting what is so and dealing with a situation by using the energy of an attack in a positive way. Through this window it became reasonably clear that we could apply Aikido principles in a competitive situation.

As we explored the process we began to see there were some fundamental Aikido techniques and principles that represented the dynamics that we faced in the business world. Almost any human dynamic in a business environment could be simulated or demonstrated through one kind of Aikido metaphor or another.

One that I recall well is the dynamic of dealing with a superior competitor. In this era we were a small start up company competing with an incumbent Goliath called GTE. There was little we could do to match them in resources, in strength, in power, in pure size. Yet, we were able to compete with them effectively by utilizing Aikido principles.

Doug – That sounds great. Would you give us an example of a time when you were aware that was going on?

Jim - Well for example we had nowhere near the financial resources to compete with GTE's advertising efforts. Any effort to try and do that was just a waste of money. They would have easily overwhelmed us if we tried to do what they were doing.

Doug - You would get thrown to the ground.

Jim - Yes, we couldn't begin to match what they were doing. Yet we saw through the Aikido perspective that we could take advantage of what they were doing. They were advertising a new technology and making people aware of the benefits of the cellular services at that time.

Rather than compete at that level, we chose rather to use their momentum, their energy if you will, to capitalize on the distribution channels. We worked on our side to capture the point of sale, while GTE worked very aggressively to stimulate the demand for the product.

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Doug – I understand the Aikido principle that you blend with an attacker's force and make use of it. I have seen Richard demonstrate it physically. I wondered how to translate it so people in business could apply it. That is a great example of the blend in a competitive business situation.

Jim – Yes, it was literally using their energy and their money and power and the effect that that money and advertising had in promoting the benefits of cellular. We were taking advantage of that strategically by reaching to the point where it mattered to us, which was a point of sale. Let them make the customer aware of the benefits of cellular. Then when that customer moves towards the purchase, let us compete at the point of sales. Let us compete for the distribution channels. So it was a very useful tactic right out of the principles of Aikido.

Doug - And when was this? Jim - This was about 83 or 84. Doug – Great! Can you think of other examples that are similar?

Jim - This is a parallel to or maybe simply expands the one I just described. It is about the attitude that can we acquire as competitors. It would be easy to adopt an attitude of being inferior or small or vulnerable because they were so much bigger. They had so much energy and they had so many resources. But in fact it became clear to us early on that their size got in their way. Their mass worked to their detriment.

Doug – Because they weren't as agile?

Jim – Right! So using their energy was one principle. But that only becomes possible when you have the right spirit or approach. We found tremendous power in the discipline of staying in a positive attitude. We could easily have been put in the position of a deer in the headlights of an oncoming car. Rather than that, we put ourselves in the position of being able to use the headlights of the oncoming car to light our way.

The confidence in our attitude, recognizing that we didn't need to be intimidated because of the mass of this behemoth competitor, made us all the more effective and successful. We also drew tremendous power from staying with what we could do and doing it well, as opposed to trying to do something we weren't equipped to do.

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Secondly, our ability to distinguish mass from effectiveness increased our ability to recognize another principle of Aikido. The power of harmony means that you needn't fear the mass or the momentum of your attacker or your competition unless you are in opposition to it. Our strength wasn't in our mass, but in our positioning. We found power in our relationship to the competition and our in our relationship with ourselves that we would likely not have found if we weren't at a size disadvantage.

Actually their mass and momentum was to our advantage so long as we stayed out of contention with it. We could blend with it and then lead it, which is what Richard teaches as the three easy lessons of Aikido. The first is presence - positive spirit or attitude. The second is adaptability – blending, harmonizing with what is happening. And the third is creativity – leading the unfolding energy in new directions. * (see Life in Three Easy Lessons, Aikido, Harmony and the Business of Living, Zanshin Press, San Rafael)

Doug - If you are blending with them than them the fact that they are bigger doesn't matter. The harder they come, the harder they fall.

Jim - Yes, exactly.

One on One Coaching

Doug - What was that the next step in the relationship? How did you move from that to a coaching relationship? Jim, in your case how did it move from the Aikido, to coaching in the business realm? Richard had you done any coaching with Jim or has it stayed more in the Aikido realm than through the business realm?

Jim - The distinction between the Aikido teaching and the business coaching was not that distinct.

Doug - The Aikido was the coaching?

Jim - I think that is very much the case.

Doug - Do you mean in terms of one on one coaching?

Jim - I consider Richard to be my primary coach in my personal life as well as in my executive and leadership development.

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Doug – Do you mean in addition to being your Sensei, your Aikido teacher, there are also an important personal and business coaching elements as well?

Jim - Absolutely, Aikido is probably the primary language that we share. It is probably the touchstone that we go back to when we're faced with a situation. But the coaching itself has gone in many directions.

Doug - That is what we want to try to put our finger on. Please say a little more about that.

Visioning – listening to the voice of spirit.

Jim - There are several that come to mind and they're quite different. One is Richard's indirect input. Around 1986 I was faced with making critical personal career choices. I had a lot of opportunities. They were all different and intriguing and somewhat intimidating. I was struggling; and struggling is the right word, with trying to make that choice. I couldn't find the comfort in making a choice that would be right. I couldn't find the right answer. At that time Richard and Chris introduced me to an associate of theirs by the name of Tom Pinkson.

Tom works in the realm of the spirit, of intuition, a world that Richard was introducing me to through Aikido. But at that point guidance from what we refer to in the listening work as 'the whisperings', what native Americans might call the 'Great Spirit' wasn't something that I would look for in the Aikido metaphor. It wasn't something I knew how to tap outside of the dojo, the practice hall. At this point I realize guidance from that realm is Aikido. So to help me with this decision process which had become very frustrating, Chris brought Tom Pinkson to my office. He took me into a deep relaxation mode of hearing or seeing what my choices were.

Richard – On several occasions, combinations of Tom, Chris and I have worked with Jim on attaining extraordinary listening states. In this case it was a visioning process, a short version of what might be called a vision quest. A vision quest is ancient tradition in many native cultures. In our culture's approach to education we don't teach it or even recognize its existence. I would also distinguish it from what we call intuition. In my use of the term, vision process implies a larger, multi-dimensional listening.

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Jim - I can remember it was a rather unusual setting because I was in my office and we would close the door. I would be sitting there with these guys taking me on a condensed vision quest like medicine men. Tom in particular draws from Native –American tradition. Doing this in my office at work seemed a very incongruous setting, which I assume is easy to imagine. In retrospect it didn't seem to matter. At the time most of this was still new to me.

What we were doing was reaching into the world from which Aikido, energy and spirit emanate. We went through probably an hour's worth of deep work and at the end of it I still did not have an answer. I felt a lot better but was still without an answer. I had not found the choice.

Aikido was teaching me to listen to languages and mediums that I had not paid attention to before. And this was very much a language and medium that I had not listened to. As I processed what had happened I eventually realized that it really may not matter what choice you make. Its what you do with that choice that matters. Now that's not a message that I would have been prepared to receive prior to my training with Richard in Aikido.

Richard – In my perspective, our ability to access a deeper wisdom is impeded by our tension, worry and inner chatter. We defend ourselves against pain. If we identify pain as the result of mistakes, we will fear making mistakes. Tensing up and constricting blocks listening to our inner wisdom and we freeze up.

Common sense occurs only when our life energy is allowed to flow. Once we relax, wisdom seems to bubble up from the depths and rise to the surface. Charting the right course comes out of an extraordinary listening. A greater wisdom is always talking. Yet we often need some help to get to an open receptive state where we can listen.

I remember several years later when Jim was on the verge of his decision about whether to take the role as start-up president for Nextel. From here, you know, what is the question. But then, Nextel didn't exist. A little company called Fleet Call that had some radio licenses for taxicab fleets wanted to take on the established giants in telecommunications. Jim and I went to spend a few days at a place on the ocean where we held personal retreats for him. Whatever it is that happens for him in that environment

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became our ally in listening. The rest as they say is history.

Doug - So Jim, Aikido opened you up to hear yourself in a different way? It sounds like it also opened to mediums that were different than what you had been able to tap into before?

Jim – Yes, and more importantly perhaps, to trust what I didn't know but what I heard. That has been a very important part of my personal growth through Aikido. It's hard to put this into words. Listening to a deeper wisdom is why we call it the listening work. It often shows up first as reactivity or an inner disturbance. It is common to avoid or try to repress the disturbance. Extraordinary Listening is about learning to trust ourselves enough to receive what we feel when we can't exactly figure it out logically. Now I sense into all my decisions through a deeper listening, through what we call in the work, listening to the whisperings.

Michael - What he does and I work with Richard as my personal coach, is he gets you to listen to yourself. He never tells you what to do as much as he asks you questions. He does it through a combination of jokes, storytelling and Aikido. Richard will be walking down the sidewalk with you. Then he'll turn and he'll put his hand on you gently and ask you to do something very simple with the pressure. He gives you an experience of a different quality of engagement, one that is powerful. He teaches you how to access it. He can do it and it only takes 30 seconds.

But you get the point and you never forget it. By doing something physical you get the point that he is trying to make very quickly. I find that after I'm with him I have a new insight to go right back and put it to work. Then I get more insight as I do that work. I am a 100 percent believer in the fact that if I want to know how to do the work I do as a leader better, what I have to change is me.

Doug - That's interesting. Something just came into my head. This may be a stretch I don't know? There is a way in which you're most powerful when you're not in opposition to yourself. If you're aligned with your own power and your own self then some of these harder choices seem to almost resolve them self.

Jim – That is my experience.

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Doug - Right, that's terrific. Let's talk a little bit about that. Can you think of an example, it might be Aikido based or in the personal coaching realm, where you were confronted with something and Richard's advice or personal coaching or your conversations brought you through in some way? So Jim you said there was a second one.

A Call to Action

Jim - The second one that comes to mind immediately is in the realm of Richards direct coaching. The last one is very much the product of Richards coaching my ability to listen, to hear and to receive in that realm. This one was the two of us alone in what may sound like a more traditional coaching set up. Later in my career in the early 1990 s, Richard is still my primary coach in that era, more so than ever.

Technically at that time I was the president of the Digital Mobile Networks division of Fleet Call in California, the company that came to be called Nextel Communications. We were about to launch the next phase of our national strategy. We are in a high-pressure start-up modality against significantly entrenched competitors. In this case I was faced with being promoted to the substantially greater responsibility of national president. The issue for me was my own insecurity and my sense of inadequacy for the job that needed to be done. I was in a very intimidated state. I was perhaps full of fear

Richard - I'd like to inject we were going in a new direction creating a new technological application. No one had experience doing exactly what we were doing. Whoever took this position would have to make it up in some way. We were creating a new business model. So Jim's fear wasn't personal in a way. He has done things that place his courage beyond anything most of us will hopefully ever face. I say this because I don't want anyone to misunderstand when he speaks so candidly about the intensity of the rush of energy he was facing. Jim is not a timid person. We just had absolutely no idea what lay beyond the visible horizon.

Jim – I was overwhelmed because as Richard describes it, I didn't know what would be asked of me, so how could I know if I could do it? Richard worked to develop me in body and mind and spirit. For several coaching sessions he repeatedly walked me up a steep mountain as a metaphor for

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what we were facing and to break down the physical resistance and strengthen my attention. He continued to coach me on my question, which was, “Am I the man for the job?”

Richard’s coaching was basically, “Jim if you’re not the person, who is? If there is someone better, get them for us.” His coaching to me was to forget about the insecurities and doubts, forget about whether or not you are adequate. He hammered home the theme that, the question in this case was only, “Can you find us someone better for the job? If not, you are it. Don’t take it personally, just do it.”

Again it was very much getting the ego out of the way. Get the mind out of chattering and resistance into its proper place of listening and action.

Richard – As Jim said earlier, “Our power came from our ability to recognize that our strength wasn’t in our mass but in our positioning.” Positioning the mind, body and spirit in alignment produces power unimaginable without the proper positioning and alignment of our forces.

Jim – The alignment Aikido teaches us, makes us more effective. It allows us to accomplish more with less energy. Setting aside the concerns of the ego, even if just for the moment, is an important ability for proper alignment and positioning. The important concept starts with lining up to the job or situation first. THEN, without attachment, do what needs to be done. Listen and respond. Use the sensory awareness of the whole person and respond totally. Don’t interfere. Don’t interfere with your own knowing, instinct or intuition. In that same vein, let the mind go where it’s supposed to go.

I cannot imagine a more appropriate metaphor for the training that I’ve received from Richard in Aikido specifically. Extraordinary listening will guide you to a right end. When I was confronted with increasing responsibility, my mind got in my way. My mind drifted toward thinking about why I couldn’t do the job. Fear of inadequacy and failing drained my attention. I have learned in the listening work that attention is our most important resource.

Richard - The term listening is drawn from my translation of a Japanese term. The word ‘Zanshin’ describes an ongoing process of developing attention. ‘Zanshin Ryu’ is the original name I gave our study. To me it

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means, ‘ongoing attentiveness, learning without end’. I translate it into English as ‘Extraordinary Listening’.

Jim – The work was extremely instrumental in focusing me beyond the point of doubt and making my doubt irrelevant. It may have been well founded but it didn't serve the purpose of going forward. Listening is a discipline to attend to just doing the work.

Again I correlate that learning to the Listening work that has grown out of the Aikido teaching, meaning I know that's where it came from. Richard maybe you can enlighten the discussion?

Richard - I once listened to Jim Socher speak. He is a football coach at UC Davis with the best record in his division. He said he drew much of the wisdom for his approach from an eastern philosophy called the Tao. I don't think it translates really but ‘the way of nature’ might be a fair attempt. Taoism is about going with the flow and as such is very resonant with the principles of Aikido.

During the speech, Socher was asked what he said to his players about winning. He responded, “We don’t talk about it.” The man who asked was obviously a football coach. His jaw dropped, the concept was so at odds with his approach. Socher continued, “We figure you can do one thing at a time really well. You can worry about winning or losing, or you can put all your attention on playing the best game you can play. So we never talk to the players about winning.”

In the world of Japanese sword training there is an ancient treatise. It says, “When you go into battle resolved to die in battle, you will return safely. When you go into battle worried about your safety you will die in battle.”

I will describe what happened in our warrior training together with the words of O Sensei the founder of Aikido. People asked him if he ever felt afraid. He said, “I experience what you call fear, but I call it a call to action.”

I virtually knew that we weren't going to get anybody better than Jim. I also knew that he would put the best person in place, whether that meant giving up the job or stepping up and doing it. He wasn't afraid to fail exactly. It was only that if someone could do it better, he would want that. Jim exemplifies

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the best in what it is to be human. By that I don't mean to make him out to be perfect or even close. As he is human, he has more than his fair share of human failings, but what he does with them is an inspiration.

I think Jim knew that there really was no one better qualified to do the job. It wasn't about qualifications. No one really had the qualifications for this job. Jim's qualifications were as good as we were likely to find. What it had to do with was his willingness. We call it a declaration, a promise with no evidence, only commitment.

All I was coaching Jim to do was what he knew how to do instinctively, what he is in a sense natural at, what I believe is his destiny. I was just helping him listen to what something in him already knew.

When all the energy goes into doing what's in front of us rather than worrying about how it's going to turn out, that's the best game you can play. My Aikido teacher said, "When you fight the best fight you can fight it really doesn't matter whether you win or lose because you did all that you can do. There's nothing more you could have done." The study, if you will, is how do you get to that state of focus.

Doug - So Jim how long did it take for you to work through the block of those doubts? Did it disappear in a day or was it a transformation over time?

Jim - Honestly I think it hasn't disappeared yet. I think what Richard helped me find within me was the ability to function in spite of that fear. I'm not suggesting that fear wasn't well founded. I was not adequate for the job. Yet what he says is true. I'm probably the best we were going to find or at least as good as we were going to find. But my inadequacy or certainly my focus on that inadequacy interfered in my ability to do that job as well as I needed to do it.

Richard – If I may, this distinction is important. Let me repeat what you said about that a minute ago Doug, because you hit it on the head. "You're most powerful when you're not in opposition to yourself. If you're aligned with your own power and your own self then some of these harder choices seem to almost resolve them self." If the alignment is proper, quoting my teacher's paraphrase of O Sensei's call to action, "fear is the harbinger of power."

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Our study of warrior's training consisted in caring for our spirit of engagement. Centering, quieting the mind, allows listening to the energy we call fear until you can discern the wisdom at the depths, of what on the surface sounds like panic.

I have to interject here again that Jim is one of the most courageous people I know. His courage surpasses what most of us will ever have experienced. That is why it has been such an honor to coach him. There are stories that I will leave to him to tell about his past. He has faced life-and-death situations with less thought for himself than for those around him.

Jim, I didn't teach you to act in spite of your fear. You had already learned that. You were already a hero. I suppose we can joke now about whether it was courage or stupidity.

In this case the challenge that he was facing and the enormity of the responsibility for the lives of other people made him care so much that the caring if misaligned could actually have gotten in the way. So I don't claim any responsibility for Jim's courage. But as a guide, a coach and a teacher he gave me the honor to serve him in reminding him to access that innate courage as wisdom.

Jim - Thank you. So 'listening to the whisperings' of wisdom as opposed to the screaming of fear and panic was a technique, a tool that became a process. I knew being distracted by my self-doubt limited my abilities. I understood how it was counter to the commitment I had made, 'to do the job' as well as I could do it.

So the coaching was a combination of the awareness of how I was inhibiting my own ability and also a confidence that though the energy we label fear would rise and it would rise again, it could be dealt with. It could be put to use. Because the alternative might have been a brash egotistical approach that caused me to not notice my weaknesses. And that would have gotten us into a different kind of trouble.

Richard - The ability to listen in the face of fear is critical, especially to those who you are leading. He was brave enough to receive coaching on how listening transforms the energy of fear into wisdom. Now yielding to overwhelm is one thing. Bravado is another. What Jim showed, that was

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courage. I believe that courage is innate in all of us.

Doug – Jim, I hear you saying this is an ongoing study.

Jim – Absolutely, frankly I think it's all on going. A critical element of being effective as a leader is you maintain the center for the organization you're leading. You become a tuning fork for centering in the rest of the organization. Centering isn't a destination it's a process. It isn't about maintaining center. It is about continually reconnecting to center.

I once imagined, as a leader I had to stay centered. Well that was a futile practice. It doesn't happen. I would simply frustrate myself at the times I observed I wasn't centered. Listening, recognizing I was off-center was the very first step in remembering the practice of moving towards center. The founder of Aikido said, "People think I don't lose my center. That is not so. I simply recognize it sooner and return more quickly."

Doug – John, after meeting them, when did you start exploring this stuff with these guys?

John - Let me give you some of the perspective from two points of view. The first one is as a participant in the Richard Moon, Chris Thorsen, team development activities as a member of Jim's team. The second is the development of my team as the leader of the southwestern region for Nextel.

To give you some sense, Jim was with Nextel from well before I got there. My experience with Jim was 93 through the end of 96 when he moved out of his role as start-up president for the national role-out. Richard and I worked together developing my team all the way through September of 1999 when I left the Nextel. In the former case when I was a member of the team with Jim there were a couple of things that stuck out. We had a number of team development sessions on a quarterly basis and Jim was pretty religious about having them.

The one thing that is universal in going off on team building exercises both as a participant in the team and as a leader of the organization, there is resistance on the part of the team to take the time. The reason is not bad. It's not because people don't want to go or don't want to learn. They want to grow and develop. They want to contribute and to be a part of the team. The

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resistance comes from everyone being so incredibly buried with all the work we have to do. The idea of taking a day or two out of an already jammed schedule, when you're not spending enough time with your family as is, seems crazy. To go off and hold hands with these jokers, you can't help but think, "What do I need to do this for?"

But there was not an occasion where either as a leader of the group or a participant I did not find the exercise to be very, very valuable. I also know the rest of the folks shared that feeling, maybe not on the way there but by the time we finished. The team left with a level of cohesion and clarity of focus on the goals and strategy that were well worth the time.

Doug - This is in the general quarterly team building meetings you were having? What was valuable to you personally about that?

'Center Blend and Lead'

John - Let me give you several examples. Chris and Richard used Aikido as a metaphor for business. That was an excellent way for me to get the points they were talking about. We took the very basics of Aikido that Richard has distilled as the Three Easy Lessons. We talked about centering first. Facing an opponent is a metaphor for any pressure or challenging situation in business. Centering is staying cool, calm, balanced and focused, keeping the mind and body working together and where you don't lose any energy to resistance. The second lesson is harmonious relationship. Blending with

pressure is getting to an alignment where you can draw on the pressure as energy like a sailor uses the wind. Then the third lesson is leading. Once you are centered and have an aligned relationship, a relationship of influence, you can lead an attacker or a company in a desired direction.

Seeing those principles as an actual physical example and process was very helpful to me. It made it very easy to comprehend the principle and then convert the ideas to applications in business. There are a lot of situations where I found myself being more confrontational than what I might like to have been. In those instances I neither listen to, nor understand another person's point of view as well as I might. Learning even the most fundamental basics of Aikido made the distinction clear when I was clashing or dominating, as opposed to leading from a state of listening.

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This is a very important distinction if you want to draw out and develop the best people have. Learning about being centered before trying to lead others in the direction I would like them to go changed my approach to management. Though if you had asked, I had thought I was doing it before. The listening work took me to a whole new level of self-awareness and made my leadership more effective. That is one example

Doug – So, when you're interacting with someone in a business context, maybe especially around conflict, the Aikido was helping you specifically do what, to listen to the other person more carefully?

John – Exactly! Of course we all know we should listen more carefully but it was giving me the ability to actually do it. When I was in a situation that was tense I learned some simple skills to change my state of tension and with it my state of attention. Simple as it sounds I learned to take a deep breath, to relax and center myself. It became my touchstone for listening with a quiet attention that was open and present.

Doug – Simple but not easy.

John - Once I had learned to center it freed me from compulsively looking to make my point. It helped me achieve a relaxed and more importantly open state where I was able to really listen and to absorb what anyone might want to share with me. Then the calmness and focus allowed me to make sure that they knew that I understood. It was all the basics you should have in communication and listening but the physical demonstration of the Aikido principles was a metaphor that was very helpful to me. Plus the listening work hits levels of subtlety that you will never get in typical communications courses.

Doug – Most of us know people often lose being centered in difficult conversation. At the least, we have seen others lose it. What I hear you emphasizing is that learning to return to a calm and open state of listening was given to you in a way that you could actually call it up when you needed it?

John - That's exactly right

Doug - Do you actually think to yourself for instance, “OK I've got to do

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that Aikido second stage of blending?" Or is it more integrated now?

John - It is more integrated now but none of this came naturally. It was work. I really had to work at it because my natural tenancy is to attack. That might be too strong a word, but I would be understating it by saying I tend to get engaged. If something is broken my propensity is to jump in and fix it. If there is an issue my tendency is to want everyone to get out of the way and let me get this thing fixed

Doug - It had obviously served you well because you had done incredibly well.

John - It did serve me well but it was raw power. It wasn't leadership. It was also getting me in trouble because in fixing things I failed to develop my people as leaders. People around me waited for me to tell them what to do or to do it myself. So you have a whole bunch of people standing at your door saying, "OK John what do we do now?" That's not effective even in a small organization. In the larger companies I was starting to run that type of organization that would not succeed. In the companies of the size I wanted to run now, that was death.

The good news at the end of the Nextel story is that I ran a division of the company that was the number one division in the company every quarter in the entire history of the company that I ran the division. I had more revenue, more customers than any other division. It was the first division that came up, the first one to a thousand employees the first to half a million customers, the first to a half a billion dollars in revenue and the first to \$300 million in cash flow. So it was a very successful story.

Looking into the Future / The Whisperings of the Future

Let's go back another example where Chris and Richard were teaching Aikido. They were talking about how the masters work. We were doing some exercises to learn to be more effective when something is coming at you. The physical metaphor was represented by someone trying to strike you. Of course it was all done in slow motion and gently so there was no actual danger of being hurt, but the learning of the principles was extremely graphic. You can't help but see it.

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Normally people learning martial arts, when you see someone starting to swing at you, you do this or that. But the masters have the ability to sense people when they began to think about making a move. They can anticipate your movements, what we call in the work ‘listening to the whisperings’. This is subtle and surprisingly powerful. If you had talked to me about it in the beginning I don’t know that I would have gotten it.

Richard and I have laughed about the fact that if prior to meeting Dixon he had come in off the street to sell me this crap, I would have tried to have him thrown out of my office. I say tried, because I’ve come to understand he has a fifth degree black belt in the art and might have been the one being thrown.

Anyway, that exercise of anticipating what was coming was very helpful to me. The analogy of knowing when the moves could come was very valuable, as was the power of catching something early on before it has become serious. Once again translating it to business this is stuff we should or do know. Yet, there are so many times I’m engaged in my business and my horizons are today’s activities, or this week’s activities or maybe this month’s activities. Through the training I have a much broader awareness. I can see something off in my peripheral vision that I know is screwed up. It is going to jump up and bite me 5 or 6 months down the road. From a larger perspective you know sometimes you know that one is gonna bite you if you don’t get on it so you might as well get on it now. If you don’t, you’re just going to have to clean up a bigger mess later on.

Again we should or would know this but the focus of our attention narrows to the immediate problems because their pressure is so great. The immediate pressures are shouting whereas the possibilities of coming problems are whispering. So it is easy to be distracted by the dramatic issues and miss the whisperings. Again we know this or should but the process of kinesthetic learning changed its priority in my attention. That simple change in priorities changed my ability. That was something that served not just me by the way but my team as well. We could use these analogies later on.

The Wall

John – OK let me give you another story. The first valuable learning was the three easy lessons, ‘Center Blend and Lead’. Then the one on looking forward was the second teaching I received in the exercises we did with

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Richard, as a member of Nextel's national executive team in which I was a participant and Jim was the leader.

The third one was probably the most significant. It is about what can be possible when we show up unimpeded by what we think we can't do, when that no longer limits us. It was probably a year into the exercise of building the company. In a growing company you have new people coming in all the time. So part of the process and challenge is getting everyone connected, getting them to know each other and work together exceptionally well. One of the things we did with Richard and Chris was to go through a 'ropes course'. You perform difficult elements sometimes at a high altitude and it is a way to call up and break through your fear. It was a way to inculcate the Aikido skills and build our vision of our capabilities. It was a lot of fun and people were getting into it and having a good time.

For people who have never done the course, there is one exercise that requires getting over a 12-foot wall using only the team as your resources. To make a long story short near the end of the exercise there are two of us left at the base of the Wall that needed to get over, myself and a small woman named Isabel Ehringer who weighs about 80 pounds. I popped her up on my shoulders and pushed her up and off she goes over the wall. Now I find myself alone at the base of the wall.

This related to our business situation. The situation we faced was that Los Angeles was to be the first market to come up. Now in hindsight it was a major case of the dumb ass because to launch a new technology in the largest market in United States should have caused someone to question their thinking. OK, but none the less we had billions of dollars sunk into this and we had to make this puppy go. To say that it was not looking good would be an understatement. The network was challenging. We were in the wireless business as I'm sure you are aware of Nextel Communications. At that point we didn't really have very good coverage and there was all kinds of reasons why it wasn't working.

It was very challenging situation. The company knew it too. There were leaders there from Chicago and New York and the next markets that would follow us in launch. They know their whole deal is toast if we don't get Los Angeles working because we are going to run out of money before we get it.

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So it was critically important to get the Los Angeles market working. This was the actual wall we had to get over and it was represented by this challenge we faced on the course.

You know the movie “white man can't jump” while that's me. I can run like the wind but getting me off the ground on a vertical plane is not a very good bet. So I jumped up and tried to reach John Shelton who was the guy who was going to launch Chicago, the next of the markets and to go up. He is leaning over from the top to reach me and I couldn't reach him. The team had lowered him down over the wall so I could get to him. I turned around and I ran at the wall and I jumped up again and I couldn't reach him again. At that point I turned around with complete frustration because I am extremely competitive.

Richard – That John, is understatement of the year.

John - And the thought that I was going to be the guy left at the bottom of the Wall was really ticking me off. I did not like it at all. I was saying to myself, “John, you cannot let this happen.” Yet after a couple of attempts it was pretty clear that I was not going to make it over this wall, not even close, really not at all. I turned around and Jim and the entire team that had gone over the wall was now behind me. Now it was absolutely surreal what happened in the next to two seconds because I turned around in disgust and there was so much emotion and energy coming out of this group that I magically turned around and jumped up and caught his ankle.

To this day I can see myself looking at the group and going through this hundred and eighty-degree transition from being defeated to just being energized. The next few seconds are from my memory and the next thing I know I'm hanging onto John. I still don't understand it but I was hanging on to his ankle and then crawling up his back. All of a sudden I was over. It was a great, great energy builder for the group.

That particular activity more than any other in the course really coalesced the team around what it would take. The team was supporting me to get Los Angeles up and running. They were depending on me to do it. Their energy, our energy together, our commitment to each other took us over that wall when it seemed impossible. As we had learned to center as individuals, we centered as a team and the power equation changed mysteriously to

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something beyond any of us. They were going to be there for me and there were all kinds of great feelings that I got out of that activity and just coincidentally it worked out that way. We had great success.

Doug - While that's incredible probably not so coincidentally. Back in the work arena it carried over in terms of people's work relationship?

John - Yes, yes, I would bet to this day, we might all point to that as being one of the real milestones. Remember right then, Nextel was not the successful company that I described to you a moment ago. Nextel was a struggling failing enterprise. The team at that point in time was what enabled Nextel to be a success and I include in no small way the contribution that Chris and Richard made to help that team coalesce. They were part of the team. Though a lot of people deserve credit for the company's success, that was the core of people that made the project go at that defining moment for the company. Their leadership fed the development of all the teams that made Nextel what it is today.

Doug - It sounds like one of the important things is that you were letting yourself be supported by other people. It also sounds like that does not come easily for you.

John – More than not easy, it is incredibly difficult for me. That is an essential piece of what the listening work helped me do was lead a team instead of running one. Letting people help is helping them be successful. That creates a reinforcing cycle.

Doug - It sounds like you went through an incredible learning experience. Were your teammates able to see the affect they could have on you by supporting you?

John - That's exactly right

Doug - That' sounds terrific! That is the kind of thing you could go through a whole lifetime and never experience especially if being supported by others doesn't come easily. How then do you learn how important it is? That's great.

John - I like to have people be supportive of me but on my terms. I don't like

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to need to be supported.

Doug - It's one thing to say I want you to support me by getting your assignment in, not by coming to help me do something that I can't quite figure out or am able to do by myself.

John - You got it right

The Transition

Doug - Let's start with one specific example where you were struggling with something or confused about something and the listening work helped you look at yourself in a way that helped you through it?

Michael - The first one that comes to mind is probably one of the most difficult situations I was in. The founder of that company hired me to come in and take over. He wanted me to and yet at the same time he couldn't let go, which is common. I very much wanted it to work and the founder did too, but it is difficult. Read the case studies about that kind of leadership transition, I don't care whether they are Harvard Business case studies or from Stanford, it is difficult and the difficulties are complex. The process does not work and again, the group dynamics change through individuals changing. I was in that situation.

One of the things that Richard did was he worked with the founder and he worked with me. I didn't know he was working with the founder and the founder didn't know he was working with me. But he was able to take the founder around the United States and talk with some other people who had unsuccessfully brought in somebody to run the business they had founded. He didn't go out and do what you would think, which was go out and find somebody who had done it successfully.

At the same time he was working with me. He was basically helping me focus. He kept asking me what did you come here to do? What did you come here to do? Michael, what did you come here to do? Then Richard said, "Michael you are in training. Now I don't know for 'what', but you're in training. The 'what' is not important." So I began to see myself that way.

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Doug - Mike, what did that mean to you, to be in training?

Michael - What it allowed me to do was work hard, commit myself fully.

Rather than seeing the difficulty of the situation I saw an opportunity to grow. Seeing each moment in a larger context enabled me to work hard on myself, which nobody likes to do especially a big shot executive.

At that time, it's important to note that our business was growing like crazy. The public thought it was doing great. That is the way it looked from the outside. As a matter of fact the founder ended up selling it for a ton of money. From the inside it was about to break. Things needed to change and the founder was going a different direction. He knew that was true when he brought me in, a year or more before he sold the company. Once he sold it the need for change accelerated to the speed of light making the transition even more difficult. It put me in the position of having to make a lot of changes on my watch.

Doug - Can you speak more about that? Can you think of another example of a tool or an application?

A story

Michael - Yes, I'll tell you a story about a guy who listened to me. Being a businessperson, I think about a situation where it made me the most money. We had a customer with whom we were negotiating a \$50 million contract, which for us is big. We had been just about to sign the contract. Our attorney went down to wrap it up and in the negotiations, he let the mercury boil over. When this happened, our customer decided they were no longer going to work with us.

I got that call and it was devastating. I remember I was in the office in jeans and a short sleeve shirt, you know we are pretty casual. So I went home and put on a suit and drove to our customer's office, which was in Los Gatos, California about 50 miles south of San Francisco. I had no idea of what I was going to do. All I knew was that I had to go. That was listening to myself. I just knew I had to go. I had no paperwork, no facts, no figures, no nothing. I just knew I had to go.

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I was in this other place. All the things you would normally want, a contract, the terms, the pricing, talking to people getting the latest information, the competitive landscape I wanted none of this. You know, I had no contract in my hands. I drove down there with no music on the radio, which I normally love to do. I got lost in it, in this other state. It is the most powerful time where I have gotten lost and the work and lost in the moment. I was just so in it. It was like being in another state, almost a trance. I was so in it. I wasn't aware of self in the usual sense.

I was on the way down and called the customer on the phone. The customer was new to us and said that he would call only talk to the president of the company, which meant the founder. At that time I was technically the acting president. The founder Dan Whalen was still the president even though he hadn't been involved for two years. He was out of the country in Bosnia working on a project that he and Richard were involved in.

This customer, the president of this company, decided he would only talk to the president of our company. He was so upset he would only talk to the president. I was on the phone driving down there. He was refusing to talk to me. When I finally got through, he said he would only talk to the president. So I told him I would get the president. And I hung up. I didn't know what I was going to do but I kept driving. When I got there 15 minutes later I called him and told him that, "the president of our company is standing at your front door."

When he walked out, there I was. He said, "I thought you said the president." Here is the internal listening again. I said, "I am the president. Dan has not been involved in this business for over two years. He is in Bosnia and has no interest in these matters. I'm it, regardless of what you read on the Internet."

He said, "OK come on in." I walked in and sat down and asked him some questions and let his Mercury boil. This is a very aggressive, finger-pointing, fist pounding, cursing type customer. And that is what he did. He was well trained from a large telecommunications conglomerate and that is their management style. I learned in it the listening work if you truly listen sometimes you can boil it away.

His heat rose and his mercury boiled over. I sat with him and let it come out.

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Now this is important. I was doing my best to listen, not just wait until he finished, but actually listen. When he finished I knew why, exactly why he was reactive. Since I was listening instead of reacting I understood what was underneath his concerns, so I could address them, which I did. Then I told

him that we had to do this work. We had to do it, that we had to have it. I told him I was committed to serving his needs and I was not going to leave until we got it. I told them I would do anything that was required within my organization and personally. I told him if he wanted his car washed I'd go out and wash it. (Laughter) If he wanted the carpet cleaned, I would clean them. I kept going just like that and I meant it.

That was what my inner voice told me to do. Half an hour later we signed a \$50 million deal. I had a check in my hand for two million dollars and I left. It was definitely the peak of my professional career. And it wasn't from anything I learned when I was in the Stanford Business school MBA program.

That's the part I wasn't aware of because I was focused on my part. Let's be clear. This is a guy that you would never see in an active listening class. (laughter) If I hadn't listened to him, he would never have listened to me. It can be so hard because when they are emotionally heating up it makes your mercury boil as well. But this guy listened to me and that's how I got the contract.

Doug - So you were really listening to yourself. You weren't following the guidebook of here's how to be a businessman. As you tell the story what comes through is, you felt a real call to this and just went for it. You were listening to an internal commitment and passion as opposed to following standardized techniques. I am guessing, if you'd done the reasonable thing you wouldn't have gotten the business?

Michael - That's right. It was listening to and trusting a deeper guidance that, based on what I had learned at Stanford didn't make any sense really. It isn't the way I was taught to negotiate a business contract. It was listening to and trusting something unknown.

Doug - You put your personal reputation on the line with this guy, so you had to come through. It had gone beyond just business

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Michael - You know we all have these special moments. Of all the things I've been involved with I will remember that one. It was like an out of body experience meaning I was operating beyond the way I knew how to operate.

Like you said it was beyond rational thought, it was beyond my training. I was listening to something deeper. Then it was the ability to draw my sword, to trust it and follow it.

Richard – When you're working from a combination of intuition, instinct and education, when all of them come together in balance, it produces a state of mastery. Many people are not aware of how different states of awareness can be. A friend of mine calls this peak state the zone.

Though it is consciously pursued through yoga, meditation and other spiritual disciplines it happens unexpectedly in intense situations. Guys who have been in war talk about it. Something of it happens in peak sports experiences. It isn't a set of actions. It is a state of energy flow that exceeds our normal functioning state. It is about tapping the source of your power, unleashing reserves that are always there, waiting to be called on. The listening practices develop the ability to achieve it on demand, like learning a phone number or memorizing how to get somewhere.

The story he just told shows his ability to trust his instincts and intuition, his education and his commitment. It exemplifies his willingness to listen and act, using the energy we might label fear as a call to action, as a source of power.

Michael – Extraordinary Listening is more than a tool. It's a technology and it's a lifelong practice. To let go to and trust something so unknown with out logical steps or check points, and then to have such a powerful result that is something that I can and I have passed on to people. And they hear it because of the power of it.

Doug – Did you process that with Richard after?

Michael - No, you who know I called after that? I called Dan. Wherever he was in Europe I had to share it with him. I called him because I had to share what had happened. He said he knew that feeling and he knew the complete serenity when you are there. Hearing me talk about my experience, he said

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tears came to his eyes because he knew that moment. He had experienced that kind of feeling. He said, “ I understand what you are talking about. Somebody else may not understand it but I know the feeling.” He knew the emotional power of what had happened and I know why. He knew that I had worked hard, that I had the help of Richard to know how to do this. I got the benefit of doing it and it wasn't about the 50 million. That is really icing on the cake. I it did not go down there driven by that.

Doug - You went down to do what you felt you had to do, regardless of what the outcome was.

Michael - Right, I had to do it, had to go home, had to put on a suit. I don't wear a suit usually when I work. When I went down there, he didn't have a suit on. Yet all these things just had to happen. I didn't even know why and I got lost in it. So it is like being in the zone. I mean I was in it for maybe six hours and stayed right there in it. It was a wonderful day.

Now I've got an MBA from Stanford. I've got an engineering degree. None of that had anything to do with anything. If I had relied on that stuff I wouldn't have gotten it. My attorney has been in this business 15 years. He's brilliant. And he got us thrown out. It happened because of a whole set of other skills. Unfortunately, people don't commonly trust or experiment with these skills. They probably aren't even aware of what we have come to call the power of extraordinary listening.

Spreading the word

Doug - Michael, when you were with this client at that moment and what happened there, did you feel that that created a break through going forward as well?

Michael - Yes that experience has defined our relationship. He has told the story within his company at some tough times in a project. He told the story with his board. And yesterday when we were haggling over a contract issue he said, “Michael I just want to say of all the firms that we have worked with, you are just as committed today as you were when we first met. And your people are just as committed which as you know is what really matters.”

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Doug - That's really an incredible story it's really powerful. Have you found yourself successful in passing it along?

Michael - Now I have shared the story with people that I think can benefit from it. My children will benefit from it. I try to pass it on to the people who are on the border who think there might be a different way of living their life.

It's something that is not for everybody. The way I describe it is some people have their foot in both worlds. They're beginning to be curious that maybe there is a different way. Those people as Richard and I describe, they're in the desert sitting on the stone with the sword in their lap. They have been sitting a long time. They are wondering why it's hot and it's dry and they're not going anywhere. And their ass hurts cause the rock is hard. (Laughter) They're wondering why that is happening. Those are the people I can tell the story to. I can tell them to stand up, hold the sword, and walk forward.

You know Doug, I only try and pass it on to the people who are struggling and are searching for a different way because those are the people who can hear it. The highly confident, you know the muscle people, the MBA's right out of school, I don't even try. They can't hear it because they think that things work a different way. They think things happen for a different reason.

They don't actually understand how you can have these moments in work that help you tremendously as a human being by using the same principles, not a different set of principles.

Doug - The connection between the business and home is no coincidence at all because it is not a different way of being a human being, which just happens to be great for work also.

At Home

Michael - I come home on Sunday after being in Europe for two weeks. My wife's been carrying the weight and my son wants to go to marine world with six of his friends. It is a theme park with roller coasters and rides. I'm taking them and my wife says, "Mike do you want me to come?" If I couldn't listen as well what I could have said is, "Well honey do you want to come?" Now what she was saying was, "Mike I need the day off." But it

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took a deeper listening to hear what she was really saying. Now I could do the thing on the surface and say, "Honey you probably want the day to rest." If I say that to my wife, she won't rest. If I say you deserve a day to rest she won't take the rest because she can't take a day to rest. It's her commitment to supporting the family and me.

So I had to listen and know. And because of the work I could say. "No honey, I want to spend the day with these guys by myself." I had to put it on me. And by putting it on me she got that day to rest.

What I know is my business is getting the benefit. My sons are getting the benefit. The last time we met my son came up. I don't remember exactly how and my wife came up. We have a good thing and as a family we have a good thing. The reason I've got the connection with my son and wife and family and the reason that this business is doing so well going so great is because I'm lucky enough at this point in my early forties to have been working on this stuff. And I'm going to continue to work on it.

The Northridge Quake

Doug – John you described your experiences as a team member. Then you have other experiences more personal expenses being coached by working with Richard directly?

John – OK, I'm going to shift into the mode as a team leader. Now I'm going to tell you a story about Nextel and me and how we developed my management team. It begins with Richard and I building a relationship and him coming down and doing a team building with my groups and building the relationships with them.

After the interviews where I first met Richard Jim took the role of national president and I was hired to run California. Later after one of the many shake-ups in the organization it was decided I was to run the southwest. That included Southern and Central California and the Arizona, New Mexico and Las Vegas markets. There are stories about building that team, but let me start with the first cycle and the team I inherited when I joined.

Now I come into this group of different individuals who had very different personalities and very different styles. Many really didn't match with me at

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all. My propensity was to go back to my directive, get it done, style. The people who were part of the business at that time prior to my joining it seemed much looser, easier going, less disciplined, focused, and organized than I thought they should be. I'm giving you my perspective of what it looked like. They probably had a different one. To them I probably seemed like this tornado showing up.

The team there had been in place for a while and they were kind of in shock about me blasting through the door. They all said things about the problems we were having and about me that we probably shouldn't print. (laughter) I also brought some folks who had worked with me before raising some cultural differences between the two different groups. For everyone it was a very challenging period. Just to start we needed to get the trust and the communication within the group linked up.

Richard has excellent skills in terms of his ability to listen to people, understand what their points of view are and to blend the group together. He came down to help me shape this dysfunctional group into something that worked well. So he met with the group. His process is to meet with the folks individually first.

Doug – Let me clarify my picture of where you are. Richard has just finished a first set of interviews with the individuals and you were about to receive the feedback?

John - Right. Richard had interviewed the team.

Richard - Let me interject a small piece here John. We actually scheduled the first team building for his group. I had flown down. I had had some interviews as I remember and was getting ready for the next day, which would be the team session. The team shared with me their concerns that

John would not be willing to listen to the feedback. They also thought that if he did listen, he would blow it off or worse retaliate. John and I had dinner that evening. I prepared him to center and listen the next day and not to default to the propensity of trying to get it fixed before they finished their first sentence. Then he dropped me off at the hotel.

I was awakened at somewhere around 4:00 in the morning. The hotel fire

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alarm had gone off. The loudspeaker was saying, “Proceed immediately to the nearest exit. Don’t dress. Leave your bags.” Contrary to the advice over the loudspeaker I took the time to put my clothes on. My bag was still packed and grabbed it as I hurried downstairs and out the nearest door that I saw. There was no fire really and we never knew why the alarm went off.

None the less, I was heading across the poolside deck when the Northridge earthquake hit. I was knocked off my feet. When I regained my balance, I moved away from the building. Small crowds of people who had responded quickly to the fire alarm were already standing across from the hotel. Immediately following the quake scores of other people flooded out into the streets. I gave away some of my clothing to those who were cold. We were not allowed back in the building and I wandered around the streets until John picked me up at about seven.

During the earthquake the alarms went off in the Nextel building. The fire suppression system turned on. By the time we could respond the next morning the water at the office was knee deep. John, myself and a great guy on John’s team named Manny, plus a couple of the technicians who were around, spent our team building day moving computers and equipment out of the office as quickly as we could, trying to save as much as possible. I just wanted to remind John that the Northridge quake was actually our first team event. I couldn’t resist joking about the lengths John would go to, to avoid the process of listening to feedback.

It was probably another month or two before we repeated the process. I did the interviews. Finally we are going to see if we could listen to each other’s views and if together we could learn from having different concerns and perspectives. We were going to see if by deepening our listening, we could pool our intelligence to make the actions of the whole team more intelligent and make the team more powerful. The session went well. We made some commitments to each other and started off on a new footing.

The boardwalk in Santa Monica.

All right, three months pass. Richard is coming back. I think I’ve been working on my list and checking it twice and I’ve been doing all my stuff. He just came down and met with the team. Then he pulled me aside said, “Let’s get out of here.” We went down to the boardwalk in Santa Monica. I

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was running and we rented a bike for Richard

Richard - Because I can't begin to keep up with him.

John - So Richard says to me, "How is it going?" And I've got big smile on my face and I say, "I think I'm making really good progress. I'm feeling good about this." Now I'm kind of uncomfortable with the changes that have been required of me but I think we are making really good progress

I will probably never forget this. Richard takes on a long pause. Then he says, "you may want to just fire me right now". (John is laughing) Because he had met with the team and they're feeling like this guy is going the wrong direction. Not only was I not making progress but I was going backwards.

This is complete disaster. They are saying, "I've got more actions than I had before. There is less flexibility. He's becoming more carnivorous. So in my mind I have really been trying and in their minds I had just been failing miserably. I'm wondering why can't you guys just tell me this stuff. So there's a big knot I am feeling. It seemed hopeless.

That was a real defining moment for Richard and I and our relationship. Because it really would have been very easy for Richard to say this guy is too hard a case. At that point in time it would have been really easy for him to say, "You know what, you've got to know when to fold 'em," and just cut his losses. He could just have gone back to Jim and said, "He is a nice guy but he's never going to get out of his ways. He's never going to be able to step up". And he didn't do that. I think he knew he had one and only one hope. He said, "I'm going to give you an opportunity to fire me."

Richard – John it also would probably been as easy or easier for you to end our relationship and go back to what had worked for you in the past. But neither of us did.

Let me add a couple of notes here. I don't give up easily but looking at this situation I had lost confidence in my abilities. You will hear this theme repeated for each of us. I was thinking this might take more than I was able to give. Before I had agreed to come down on this run I had said to Jim Dixon, John's boss and the guy who introduced us, "Jim, I appreciate your respect for me but I don't know that I have of what it takes to help this guy."

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Jim had said something similar to me about his abilities when he had been promoted to national president.

The dangerous part of this job is I work with really good people. They are quick learners and they have the uncanny ability to turn my teaching around and use it on me. They are as equally unmerciful in making me grow as I am on them. Of course it is also the best part of our time together and I will always be grateful to them for it.

Jim did to me what I did to him at one point when he was really questioning his ability to take on the national leadership role at Nextel. I used to say to him, “Jim, if you’re not the guy, will you get us the guy who is? And basically he did that to me. He challenged me and inspired me to take it on. He said, “I know John is the best person I could find to fill his role. Richard, if you can’t help him, then get us the guy who can. I need John to succeed in order for this business to succeed. Right this minute, I don’t know who else to turn to. I expect the very best of you.”

You have to understand Jim had already proven himself to me. He had shown me the commitment that helped me grow at least as much as I may have helped him. I was totally committed to him and would have died in battle before I would have let him down. That is what his leadership inspired.

All right, so I fly into Los Angeles. John picked me up at the airport. I get in the car and I said, and my exact words were, “John I just came down here to talk you into firing me.”

What I have always loved about John and I always will, is the way he shows up every time we’ve hit one of these hard moments. I thought I was going to easily explain to him that I just could not help him. What I had to ask him to do was way too hard for him to even want to work with me any more. I should have known this, and I’d like to say I did, but it was exactly like waving red in front of a bull. And John said to me, “No way are you leaving me right now. We are going to go through this, together.”

And that turned my heart around. I have never seen and I have never had that kind of commitment with anyone except with Jim, who has that same quality of responding to every challenge I give him. The harder it is, the

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more he shows up for it.

Doug – John, so Richard says you may want you to fire me.

John – Right! He starts out like this, “How is it going? And I'm telling him why I think we're making good progress and then he says to me I've come down here to convince you to fire me. He said it was his failure because not only was I not making progress, I was sinking. I was going backwards. It was becoming worse. I am running and Richard is alongside on a bicycle and by now I'm frustrated and angry. I am pissed off. By that time we had finished four or five miles and the conclusion was that we were going to team up as partners and attack this thing. We decided we were going to do what it takes to turn this thing around. And that was the beginning.

Doug – How did it change? The natural reaction is to think either my employees are just more screwed up than ever if they're telling me that I'm going backwards, or Richard is screwed up somehow. The natural thing is just not to look at yourself. How did it evolve from you being defensive and angry, which is what anyone would be? Instead you are suddenly thinking, “OK I trust this guy, let's go forward let's attack this problem!”

John - I don't know that I can answer that. All I can say now is there was a whisper in me that was saying, “John your going to have to change.” There was the frustration of the moment, almost overwhelming frustration of the moment, because being as competitive and driven as I am when you put your effort out and you don't make progress there is a flare-up that takes place.

It is like a surge of energy in the form of frustration. Doug – Like the one that preceded you getting over the wall?

John – Very much! Once I got through that, then the dialogue he and I were having opened doors of possibility. He helped me listen to the whisperings and see a tremendous opportunity. It wasn't about winning and losing it was about my development as a person and as a leader.

Richard – That was a short-lived respite. (laughter) John may be the most competitive individual I know.

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John – The dialogue and the combination of the exercise helped. Getting the endorphins going and watching him peddle along and sweat like a dog made it easier. I felt like at least, at least I inflicted some pain back on him. (all laughing)

Frankly there was something in Richard and his approach to this. I felt his sincerity and I trusted him. By the time we finished, we had decided we were going to sign up and go forward and make this thing happen. There was an indefinable kernel of energy that enabled us to walk the path. I can't explain that moment really. All I can say was in the way we responded together, our destiny together took form.

And it really didn't come easy Doug. I don't want to give you the impression that after our trip to Santa Monica pier things got clear. That just began the fight. That really was just the beginning and it was ugly, because candidly there were some real challenges in the group. A lot of things were not going well. We had to make some changes fast. The difference was at that point we were committed, both Richard to me and me to him, to turn this thing around.

An open line of communication

John - When we all got together for the team development exercise, I don't get yet that Richard is developing their ability to go into an open dialogue where creativity flourishes which is critical to develop the collective intelligence of the group. OK, so at our skill level, we're having this communication. Richard is trying to get their issues surfaced in the public domain so we can address them. I'm feeling as if I'm in the middle of the circle catching these arrows in my chest, which are the concerns that they have.

And Doug, I'm feeling way out of my comfort zone. I'm supposed to be the leader of this group. I am supposed to tell and they are supposed to listen.

I'm supposed to be telling you guys what needs to be done. I am not supposed to be in the center, having my subordinates throw spears at me. And here I am, in the eye of the storm, taking all this criticism. "You did this and you do that." So there is a part of me that is thinking this is complete B.S. We don't need this 'touchy-feely' crap. I'm thinking, let's just get on

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with it guys we've got a big business to run. So let's stop whining and get going. That's one part of me.

The other part is saying. "You know John, you are going to have to grow some day. So you better see if you can learn from this experience." There is

an incredible struggle that's going on inside me. It really goes back to the conversation I had with Jim in terms of taking my management style to the next level. It is about truly being able to work with people as a leader as opposed to me just driving this thing on my own. I really want to develop. I know I need it. And this is painful. So I'm struggling with this thing, big time.

This did not come naturally to me Doug, what so ever. So I'm working to try to learn. Now I'm the kind of person who does need the metaphors. I need to write things down. I have built up a continuous set of 'learnings'. I've still got my notes that I still carry with me in a binder, that I used when I would go into a meeting. When I found myself getting off center I could go back to these notes.

Doug – If you would, read a few of them.

Richard – I want to add how important Chris was at this point in bringing these into the condensed form in which they exist.

John – Ok, I have listed them as coachings for John Combs, coaching for the team and suggestions to improve the decision making process. These actually come from several different sessions.

As a manager I was task oriented. I also knew including people was helpful in getting 'buy in'. So for example my approach was to say, "What do you think about doing this." I meant it as an approach to leadership, developing people's sense of inclusion. It was well intentioned, but shortsighted.

Once we had an open line of communication, they said, "Please don't ask me what my opinion is and then tell me to go and do what you were going to tell me anyway. John, if you have already made up your mind, don't ask me for input. It is actually more demeaning than if, when you know you want me to just go and do 'A', just tell me to go do 'A'."

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Richard – It was a big step for them to say that. But it was only a start. What we wanted was input to design a culture that worked read learned together.

We wanted everyone to design a system of communication that we could rely on, one that made things better.

John - The boss really never knows what is said in his absence. Without help increasing my listening, without some kind of open dialogue process, this issue might have lingered unspoken for who knows how long.

Most teams have issues that go unspoken. Everyone needs to develop and as the leader your developmental needs stand out like a neon sign. Most people in the position of follower see the boss make mistakes. Are they supposed to live with them? Or are they supposed to correct a superior?

Some people are naturals and can listen openly. Most can't. And we all know it. There are things you don't want to say to people because they are likely to react and reactivity blocks communication. If that person is 'the boss' and if they have reacted poorly once or twice in the past, why would you take the risk of being the one to speak up?

Also as leaders we can let our ideas of leadership cause hearing loss. I thought I was supposed to tell. They were supposed to listen. The Listening work was like a hearing aid. True, though some bosses would get mad, a good leader would relish the feedback. For anyone who is big enough to take it, knowing how people feel isn't demeaning. It simply increases your options. Knowledge is power.

Once this was on the table, we designed a request together. It was simply to designate the degree of closure that I had come to prior to asking them for input. Was it 20% 50% 80%? That way they could calibrate, depending on how strongly they felt, whether it was worth talking with me about it. It seems so simple. But it not only changed our efficiency working together, it changed their sense of being respected. It changed their sense of ownership and responsibility for the whole enterprise.

Something this simple can completely change the power of a team. It is intangible. That isn't quite right. As a member of the team you can feel the difference. It is just you can never measure exactly how it affects the bottom

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line. But it does and anyone who has been there knows it does.

Here are a couple of similar requests from the group:

Allow the managers to make decisions and make mistakes.

Use decisions to resolve conflicts and as a coaching and development opportunities. Don't just resolve the issue.

People grow into what is expected of them, up or down. A leader communicates the degree of maturity and responsibility they expect through the expectations they set and the quality of respect that they might show an individual. When a manager steps on that, it can deflate an individual or team's ability to initiate action big time. It may be fine if you want to be the boss. But you can't begin to measure the cost when you want to be a leader.

Doug - Back to the mistakes, what was and is your feeling about that?

John - Right now, I do allow my team to make mistakes. I can do it. Before, I couldn't do it. If I could see, through my high degree of clarity the outcome was going to be bad, I would not let them go do it. Jim used the phrase of 'above or below the water line' meaning it would or would not likely sink the enterprise. Now what I do with my people, especially when it is what I believe to be an 'above the waterline' issue, is I say, "I think the outcome is going to be bad. This is what I think I might do but this is your call. Go ahead and do what you want to do."

I have found when people take their idea, even when I think it is a lousy idea and maybe let's say it is lousy idea but they're committed to it, they get it done. As opposed to taking my great idea and let's assume for a minute it is a great idea but they don't have the commitment to get it done, they don't get it done very well.

Doug - So you are giving them some leeway there? What if they come back and say, "John you said it was going to be a mistake and it was a mistake."

John – In the larger picture, it is not that big of a deal. I had that happen the other day with one of my people hiring a person. I said. "I don't think that's going to be a good person." He came back and said, "You know what, you've told me that on seven different occasions and all seven people have

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left the company.” He said, “I don't know what it is about you but you've got that talent. So now I'm going to listen to you. Can you teach me what you know? Can you help me be better?” Imagine the difference in this person's willingness to listen, which of course affects their ability to learn and grow if I had said, “Let me tell you how to do it.”

Doug - So now they're not just doing it because you say to do it. It would seem your ability to trust them increases their ability to trust you.

John – No question! I've given them some freedom to make a mistake. I can still feel my reaction that it seems wrong; but it strengthens the team.

Here's one on action items. I am carnivorous when it comes to getting things done. So another point here is to be aware of my automatic action item requests. I keep an action item list for my team. I want them to get these things done quickly. What I want us to do is everything, very well, right now. What I have a tendency to do and this is one I am still working on, is I keep piling on more actions than they can get done.

At some point in time they said, “You've just given me action after action after action and request after request after request. And you're tracking every one of these damn things and can't get them all done. Now you just gave me five more. Every one of them seems very important. Yet I go back and look at my action list and I think I can never get all these things done.”

When I get going I can talk faster than they can comprehend. What is the point? I might as well not say it. It ends up being de-motivational. Unless you are listening to the larger conversation when you talk to someone, you cannot sense if they are with you or not. With a little sensitivity I can pace them. It may seem a little slower, which is hard for me, but the listening work has taught me to see how much more effective, read faster here, it actually is.

Richard – Two things here, first John has a capacity for work that buries most people. He is a marathoner and leaves most of us dying in the first mile and he is still running twenty-five miles later. Two, John is in his way a Mozart of business and most people cannot begin to comprehend what he comprehends. Almost no one can do what he can do and it sets up a real dynamic when you are that kind of a leader.

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I don't mean to belittle anyone's ability, but compared to the average person I am very disciplined. Compared to John I am a slug. When you are as capable and driven as John is, it's hard to manage people who can't begin to keep pace with what you are capable of. Throughout John's career that has driven him and his people crazy.

Doug – He is not working with a hundred John Combs. He is working with-Richard - . . ordinary people. He had to work with ordinary gifted people like the rest of us. It can be frustrating for someone who has the skills and drive that he does.

Doug – which is part of what a leader needs to be able to do.

Richard - So the old John Combs, the manager, would just do it or drive it. He was beyond good at that. But leadership is something else. It means delegating and developing. Leadership skills are very sophisticated compared to the technical skills of managing tasks and people.

Earlier in his career he could just do it through his tremendous horsepower.

His position at Nextel was the breakpoint, because it was too big. He could not do it all himself. Now John was becoming a leader of leaders. He had to learn to develop a leadership team. That meant developing leaders that could develop their people. It is a different skill set. You don't just manage people at the level we needed. If you do you get twenty-five percent of what is possible. A leader would get one thousand percent of what is possible because what I mean by leadership makes the impossible possible.

John - Doug, so we have this first meeting where we bring the team together.

I am rewinding a little bit. We have this discussion and I come out of it very uncomfortable. I have VERY strong very mixed feelings. On one side of course I am thinking, "this is all BS." On the other side I am saying to myself, "Well, if you are going to have to change somehow, you're going to have to listen to something different. At least a you have someone who's here, working at your side, working with you, who is going to help you."

So we've finished the meeting and Richard and I have a conversation. I dove into it. I said, "OK Combs, let's settle down and let get serious about this.

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Let's work to make some improvements."

After Santa Monica

So after Santa Monica we worked with the team as a group and we began to sort out individual issues. Two things I wanted to share. One is that we went through many – and we were pretty religious about doing this on a quarterly basis – we went through many discussions that were very difficult. At this point in '93, you have got a company where the wheels are coming off. I don't know how I could describe it to you. But the phones don't work; there are not enough cell sites; we're out of money; people are losing their AAA towing licenses because they're using our equipment and couldn't get their calls; customers are losing their businesses because the stuff we sold them didn't work. It went from being as ugly as I've ever seen it, to the point where at the end where it was a huge success. The stock, which dropped to nine at that point, recently peaked at about one hundred and sixty.

In the beginning early on Richard counseled me regarding improving my communication with the team. Then there was a transition, let's call it the middle tier back where he was counseling them to communicate more with me. I have a pretty strong personality and though I have never felt this from Richard, people often have difficulty sharing how they feel with me, and communicating candidly. What Richard was doing was helping them learn to share their feelings and ideas openly and honestly. He was also giving them the skills to communicate with the appropriate diplomacy.

He was saying, "Take the risk and say what you think and feel to John. Give him the chance to share his ability to listen. Unless you take that risk your relationship with him and the effectiveness of the team stay on the plateau. You have to climb the mountain to achieve exceptional success. I've been with you guys now for years. You express concerns to me and you don't talk to John. It is time now. I'm calling you guys on this. You have got to start communicating with John. He's not going to take your head off. He has been responding positively for years now so, no more excuses. Talk to him!"

Both steps were important, the coaching me to listen and coaching them to give me the opportunity to practice listening by speaking up. That work created two-way communication that was built over time that really helped us out. That process was critical to our success.

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Richard - The thing about John is he is one of the most intense guys, although most of the guys I coach have an edge where they can get pretty frightening when they get intense. But John also has a kind of charisma where the people around him really want him to love them. So a combination of both puts people in our position where it can be hard for people to speak to him candidly.

This is where I said to them, "John is one of the most willing listeners in the world. You might like to pretend that you can't talk to him but it is only because you won't talk to him. He is totally willing to hear from you guys and totally committed to your success."

Now we built this level of candor up gradually and I feel a sincere respect for these people. They are under tremendous pressure. But I remember one time I where I raised my voice with them saying some things we can't reprint. They had worked with me over several years so we had a fair degree of trust. I said, "You talk to me and I carry the messages to John. Every time he has responded professionally with every issue that has come up.

People are used to thinking that what their boss wants is them to behave well. It is a projection of the meaning we make based on interpretations from experiences from the past. It is replaying old tapes as opposed to listening to what is happening now. What we were trying to develop was a group of leaders and to align their ability to work together. To develop every one of them into leaders, we knew we needed to develop this kind of courage in them

Doug - It was developed and it was rewarded presumably?

John - Every quarter we had a strategy meeting. One day we would talk about business. We would go to have a dinner at night and Richard would facilitate an open dialogue session. Some times the dialogue session would go on into the next day and then we'd go out and do something fun as a team.

This dialogue session we had in Santa Maria was the one where we really had the breakthrough for the team. From my perspective this was where Richard took the bull by the horns. This where he said, "OK guys, it's time for you now to step out and began to act as leaders in the organization.

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Communicate your feelings to both John and the rest of the team. As leaders, it's time to stop hiding."

Richard – I got pretty intense at that session. I wasn't sure myself if I had lost it but I finally said in a fairly loud voice, "You have no right to call yourself leaders until you are willing to step up to making the communications that need to be made. If you guys still won't talk to him _____ . (You can fill in the expletive) And I don't talk that way to my clients a lot.

John - Not the ones you want to keep. (all laughing)

That one stands out. It really was a key transition point for the team. Those quarterly shots of communication and dialogue built the trust of the team to the point where we could make those kinds of breakthroughs. Also the team building exercises themselves independent of the dialogue sessions were an important part of the process. Cruising down the Colorado River on a raft sitting next to somebody for a few hours and you get them talking about their family and who they are. Then if you have up problem with them a few weeks later the way you approach them is just different than the way you would have before.

Doug – You see them in a whole different light.

John – Exactly.

The dark night of the soul

Doug – I have more questions but I also want to hear about some of the stories that you guys have named. Like what is 'the dark night of the soul'?

John - There are three key defining moments I would say in terms of where our work together really impacted me. The first was the one I described about getting over the Wall. The second was the trip to Santa Monica. The third is 'the dark of night of the soul'.

The time is November 1994 and Wall Street thinks were the hottest thing since sliced bread our stock has gone from around \$24 to \$52 a share. We are on fire everybody on Wall Street is talking about Nextel.

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So on Wall Street they are loving us. They think we're the next wireless company. We've got everything going for us. That's on the externals,

Internally Doug you have never seen such a cluster ____ (expletive deleted). It was unbelievable. I mean it was unbelievably bad. The network probably had ten to twenty thousand customers loaded on the system. The fidelity was terrible and it went down all the time. The entire network would go down two or three times a week, the entire network, for hours.

The phone was big and expensive. In the marketplace they are giving phones away for free. If you sign up for service you get a free phone. We are trying to charge \$800 for ours. The telephone we have weighs three times as much as anything out there. You almost have to have a belt to go with this thing is so heavy. And it doesn't work. It a piece of junk

The voice quality on it sounds like Daffy Duck. We are in great shape right. When we would get a customer they became negative advertising. And it kept churning in on itself and it was getting worse and worse.

Every quarter Motorola is coming out with a software load that is going to solve these problems. They used to call them colors. There was the blue load and the green load and they finally came up with the brown load. (Everybody is laughing) Doug this is the truth 'the brown load is going to save the day' and I am thinking you guys have a sick sense of humor.

We had this real dichotomy. Of course the demand from the leadership of the organization was that we've got to go. If we don't sell Los Angeles we don't get more funding. Probably billions of dollars in investment goes down the drain and the company folds. We don't really have any choice. We've got to meet Wall Street's expectations.

Now my management team, and everybody in the field really, is saying, "This dog won't hunt!" I made a couple of attempts to communicate this to Jim Dixon. As I look back I can't help but smile because I would go up and tell him this is really ugly. Basically I would leave his office after an hour and half later thinking, "John you've got to become a better leader." I went through this cycle about three times and I thought, you know, maybe I'm just not that good.

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Richard – Is this theme beginning to sound familiar?

John - I had general managers in my office crying. These are not wimps. These are studs. These are tough smart people and they are in my office balling their eyes out, saying, “John, I can't keep doing this anymore.” To me this was an incredible moment because I was at a point where I was ready to let go of the reins. I was ready to quit. I'm saying to myself, “You know maybe I'm not a good enough leader to get us through this.” It was another one of those times when I'm saying, “Hey I need some help here guys.”

So we all get together in a room for a team building exercise. We bring the extended team, my direct reports and their direct reports. Everybody understands what the problem is. Nobody knows how to solve it. Richard was leading this session.

Richard – Each of us knows that minute when you feel like you should quit but you can't. This was what I called the dark night of the soul. I knew this was that time when we were facing the test that would make or break the game. This was what we had been training for.

I knew if we could listen to the deepest, most authentic, most powerful aspect of ourselves we would come through this. If we were true to something indefinable, if we listened to the whisperings, we would attain heaven or enlightenment, which of course in the business world we call profits and in the investment world we call an accelerating stock price.

John – I could see Richard's coaching came through, because we had the courage to speak up to each other and to move this strategy forward. In the end the solution to the problem was incredibly simple but incredibly difficult to implement. Most of the time we only hear the screaming of the marketplace, the board of directors and the stock price. This message came from the whisperings of wisdom.

The solution and the answer that came from the team, not from me, was we stop acquiring customers as fast as we have been acquiring them. There is a segment of customers we can satisfy and make happy. Let's focus on them. Let's get as many of them as we can. In spite of all the pressures, we have to go forward in that way, until we're able to get the technology settled and the

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smaller phone and all that kind of stuff. Then we will build the business back up.

Now that was not a message that the leadership of the company wanted to hear. I'd already given the message verbally a few times. So what I did was I wrote a letter to Jim and to the management of the company stating this is what we need to do.

I recognized the impact on the company was going to be huge and it was. And the stock went from \$50 to \$9 and people lost billions of dollars. But in doing that Doug, we saved Nextel, because on the path that we had been following, we were going to be accelerating off the cliff.

When I left that meeting the team was now fully coalesced around what we were going to do. The power we had built together through ‘the way of listening’ gave us the strength to face all the pressure of Wall Street and all the pressure of the leadership of the company and all the pressure from the marketplace. We left that room as a totally aligned team. When we left that meeting we knew what we had to do. And as Richard says, “We were going to go do it, or die in battle.”

Now I had a big knot in my stomach because this was something like going home and telling your wife you just don't love her anymore. This is one of those communications you don't want to have to go do. I knew that the letter I was going to write, the communication I was going to have to make, would 50-50 maybe get me booted out of this position.

At the end of the day fortunately we had a leader who had an appreciation from that customer's perspective. Jim had gone on to a new role and Waylon Hicks was the president of the company at this time and he got it. He understood the strategy. He had an appreciation for what we were trying to do and he supported us in that transition.

We worked our way through the challenges in the marketplace. The stock did go down materially but we did it in a manner that I think was very professional in terms of how we restructured the company. Because as I say to this day, that was the moment in which Nextel was saved. I think Nextel would have been out of business if we had continued down the road we were taking.

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Richard - This was the time when we put our integrity on line. We took the risks we needed to take. We supported each other in the process and we faced hell. All the work we had done together to develop our warrior's spirit bore fruit. It took a warrior's spirit to make the call in the first place and to hold it in the face of the pressure that came back to challenge it.

We all made the call together. Now in a way it was easy for me to say because I it was not facing the wrath of the leadership the same way they were. On the other hand Jim was moving out. Waylon Hicks was taking over. John was now my main client in the company and I knew the whole ride could go away in an instant.

It was also the place where anyone with less confidence would have taken the reins away from me. They would never have let me lead a meeting that was so important in that way at such an incredibly critical moment. Meaning I was in effect encouraging a revolution, challenging 'the powers that be' in the company. That is the power of the partnership that John and I developed.

When you asked him earlier about how he did it in Santa Monica, how he chose to trust me rather than get defensive and he said I don't know. He said. "I heard a whispering."

I would say that was where my and our combined leadership came from, a whispering. But the power came from the trust that John and I had for each other. By showing that trust of each other, we had built it in the team. The unwavering respect and confidence in the way we held each other took the team to the state of power that allowed us to walk through that Valley of the Shadow of Death, that I so poetically call 'the dark night of the soul'.

John - When we walked into that conference room in Orange County, the tension in the room with huge. It was not tension where people were at each other. Tension may be the wrong word. Pressure is the right word. The pressure was tremendous. It was extreme and in the meeting Richard told the story of 'the dark night of the soul'.

Basically when everything is wrapping around you, you come into this dark place from which you don't see any way out. You have to find a way out of here. Yet, you think you are completely locked in. Now is the time when you want to let go of fixating on the pressure and tension. Center blend and lead,

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and let's get out of this thing. Let's figure a way out. And yes logically there is no way out, but you can't let the logic or habitual thinking get in your way.

It is a matter of holding to a positive spirit. When everything in you says you want to get out, you want to run, you want to break down, at that moment, if you can open your mind to the spirit of possibility, the whisperings can be heard.

That story and the conversation that followed in a context that looked like guaranteed failure with no way out, led to the, OK what should we do. It created what we all glibly call thinking outside of the box. When you look back from here, now, the answer seems so incredibly simple. Just take care of the customers that you can take care of. It couldn't be simpler than that. Yet it looked the opposite to everyone at headquarters whose only input seemed like a flood of pressure to add customers. Still, if we had not taken that risk to listen to our gut, no question in my mind, we would have been finished.

But we didn't have the answer walking into the room. By facing into, instead of fearing 'the dark night of the soul', we had the answer walking out of the room and it was incredibly powerful for the group.

The Power of Relationship

Doug - Now to comeback to the work, imagine that moment or that dialogue without Richard? I want I ask you John, sticking with Richard for a moment, how do you see Richard as a person? It seems like he taps into the courage that is already there. He taps into the clarity that is already there. Just for you, how you see him other than as a guy who seems to be around when these amazing things happened?

John - I think that dark night of the soul is an example and probably the most vivid and crystallizing example of Richard's contribution. But I guess I have probably seen him in situations like that, literally Doug, 20 times. There is a point in the meeting or the discussion or the dialogue where things seemed to be rambling aimlessly. We have all been in meetings where there is a real sense that we are wasting our time together. Somehow in that confusion Richard seems to be able to reach out and coalesce the essence of the issue we are working on. In a manner that we can't see maybe because we are so

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close to it, he is able to bring the team together around it.

The thing that makes him seem so gifted is he doesn't know anything really about our business. It's not like he can say what you have to do to get the new software load working or a less expensive phone or anything like that. He doesn't have a clue about that and that might be the extent of his technical business knowledge. I mean he's talking on the phone and he says back, "This is a really lousy service."

He could give me that kind of coaching, which I really appreciated. You know along with another person, my best friend, who says, "Hey it sounds like you've got at can and a string tied together there. (wild laughter throughout)

Doug - But it's a really good can and string.

John – Right! But he has the ability to see and draw the energy out of the people in the room and bring them together so at the end of this session, the dark night of the soul being the most memorable one, the team is now coalesced. Things are clear. They are much more centered as individuals and as a team. A lot of the garbage they had, the baggage they brought coming into the meeting, has been left the floor. They leave refreshed and excited with a much clearer sense of purpose. They go back out and continue to work together on the things that are most important.

Now if I fast forward from there to the end state at Nextel a lot of people changed out over time but the end state was the highest performing team at Nextel nationwide and the highest performing team I've ever worked with.

Doug – Incredible!

John - These are people who learned to trust one another at an exceptional level. We went through a process of evolution where first we learned how to establish trust with one another. Then we had the problem actually of a kind of love-in going, where nobody would talk about the delicate and difficult problems. I am sure you know how often suggestions are heard, at least subconsciously, as blame or criticism.

Through this study Richard has come to call extraordinary listening,

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eventually we took the team's operational and communications effectiveness to the point where people had the ability to bring up virtually anything. People could hear each other's intention for solution.

They could say to one another, "This is not working well in the business; it's in your area of responsibility; I need your help to get it fixed." And not have the person who you're making the request of, feel defensive. They learned to listen in a new and open way. As the trust grew they came to know about each other, "Hey, this is a good guy. He's bringing this up not to throw me under the bus but to highlight something that could make us all more successful. And I know he's there to help me." That was a very, very, very, effective team, absolutely no politics. So the result was very strong. Now getting from where we were at the end of '93 on the Santa Monica boardwalk to where we were in '99 was a six year project and we made a lot of steps along the way.

Off the Line - Translating the Principle

Doug - So what other thoughts, stories, images or anecdotes stand out for you guys?

Jim – John is an example of how it has spread to people in the various management organizations I have led. I am thinking about some of the people around us. We have found examples where people would help us understand what it meant to them. In many instances we would take fundamental techniques and translate them to help with a specific question. In some cases people would ask us to create the physical Aikido metaphor that might correlate to a situation or problem that they were facing. So sometimes we would demonstrate an Aikido principle in a management retreat or training session in response to a specific challenge. Sometimes just for the fun of it we would demonstrate some principle we were interested in.

For example in Aikido, a fundamental principle is to move 'off the line', to move out of the way of the focus of an attack. As opposed to standing in the way of the attack trying to defend yourself or absorb the blow, getting off the line allows you a safe, harmonious position to lead from. If you are not where they aim their force, it doesn't matter how hard they can hit.

It's amazing how that correlates to interpersonal dealings. I remember one

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executive talking about dealing with an irate employee and recognizing that their tenancy had been to deflect, absorb and confront, all the above. Once they simply got out of the way and focused their attention on listening and understanding rather than placing or avoiding blame, the employee had more space to express their needs. Even if they expressed it through anger, if the manager could get ‘off the line’, they would not have to absorb it. If they do not absorb the anger, they are not hurt by it. They are much less likely to return it. Both people then would be better able to make use of the information exchanged.

Doug – How do you get out of the way in that context?

Jim – It is as much a concept as it is an action. If you are taking it personally or reacting defensively, you are probably on the line. In the verbal and emotional realm, it's easier to see what it looks like when somebody doesn't move out of the way. It is a very painful experience. You can feel the hurt and defensiveness when someone tends to protect them self. Equally you can feel the power of possibility increase when they listen.

Looking at the physical action demonstrated in Aikido, it is very easy to see when you move your body out of the way of the attack. You start by moving your feet.

When the energy is verbal, ask yourself, “Am I standing in front of the attack, absorbing the anger or frustration? Am I blocking their communication with excuses? Am I power tripping them with my position and authority? Am I making them feel guilty in order to control the situation? Or, have I positioned myself in a way to listen and understand what they are saying and why it is important to them? Am I allowing this person to express what they need to say to dissipate the energy that they need to dissipate? Am I interested in learning or being right?”

If we don't think about moving into a harmonious relationship we will tend to protect. Defensiveness necessarily blocks listening. The listening process involves transforming fear and defensiveness into a call to action. It describes consciously moving into a spirit of willingness to listen, to learn and grow. When we are there with them in that spirit, they know it. They feel it. And they are affected by it, as is the field of communication.

A State of Relationship

Doug -So in the interpersonal realm it is as much a state of mind, a state of awareness as any kind of verbal move? Being ‘off the line’ implies shifting to a state where you are interested in what is going on for them without hearing it as blame or in terms of your value as a person?

Jim – Yes, I would describe it as a state of relationship. The difference between opposing someone’s anger or trying to help someone vent their anger by absorbing it, as opposed to giving them space to express it without taking it on, is huge. The concept seems simple when you see it demonstrated physically. Even visualizing the physical process makes the principle much easier to comprehend in its interpersonal application. When we are trying to create a high performing team, getting off the line and listening is clearly more functional than flinching in response to criticism or intimidating others to protect yourself from the possibility of attack. The technique is centering, continually returning yourself to a centered relationship so you can listen. If you are in alignment you want to learn how to improve. You do not feel the need to defend. Defensiveness comes from perceiving someone’s input as being about your value rather than your effectiveness. In a centered state the same information could produce growth and development.

There are probably a lot of verbal cues and techniques you could isolate that verbally neutralize an attack but it's very much like Richard's teaching in Aikido. The awareness of a proper relationship will take you halfway to wherever you need to go, even if you don't know where that is. Even if you don't know what to say, maybe especially then, the principle of getting off the line means you do know the first step in generating a harmonious relationship. You don't figure out a technique. Relate to the incoming energy in a present, non resistant way. The technique will naturally begin to appear. When you listen openly you naturally know how to respond creatively. That's when the listening work shows up as Aikido in the world

A lot of our interpersonal training is predicated on being taught set techniques. Techniques are manipulations. When our intention is to manipulate someone we usually do not listen for learning, we try to find leverage. A preset agenda blocks listening. If you have a technique in mind,

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if you already know what you are going to say or do, you really don't listen very well.

Richard - In a good conversation you don't prepare your responses in advance. They come out of your experience of the moment. It is only when you are under pressure and tension impedes your thinking that you don't speak freely and easily. When we defend ourselves against what someone is saying we usually tense up which limits our ability to hear the whisperings of our own wisdom. Once you start to notice it that may be more often than you would have thought. In an argument or debate, critical meeting or sales call, you may feel the need to plan your response. But when you have a meaningful conversation with a good friend, i.e. when you are open and flowing, the words form as if of themselves. Wisdom flows in the system.

Doug - What does Richard mean to you in your life?

Jim - He's my closest personal friend. I consider him my brother. Being an only child that has a lot of meaning to me. We are co-conspirators in learning. When I really want to flatter Richard I remind him that my initial attraction to him and continuing commitment to him as a teacher is that he really doesn't teach. He learns out loud. He is always exploring. He is not claiming expertise. He is pursuing it. And he pursues it in a way that those of us who choose to study with him really don't study under him. I mean that as a very high compliment. He facilitates our ability to learn with him as he learns out loud.

Doug - I imagine that's powerful for Richard to hear, not that he hasn't heard it before.

Jim - Over the years one of the other real strengths I have gotten from the work and one of the benefits I have got from him as a teacher is that he has participated in my learning out loud. On the Aikido mat the distinction between teacher and student is of great value. Out side of that setting we interact as collaborators, co-conspirators. We are learning together.

Richard - This is a conversation Jim and I have had in the last while, remarking on how fortunate we are to have each other in our lives. We reinforce each other's learning. I think about how incredibly different our

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lives would be without each other at this point. Of course it's wonderful to hear and at another level I am very cognizant of how important I am to him. And I trust he knows how important he is to me.

Doug - So John anything left important that has been left unsaid from your point of view?

John - I guess the piece that has been and left unsaid is the personal bond that has been created between Richard and I having traveled all these rocky roads. I can tell you without reservation that I love Richard. I mean I love him for what he has helped me with but more than that as a friend, as a trusted confidant.

I mean he will call me on my stuff faster than anyone else. And I trust him completely to be coming from a point of view that is looking to serve my best interest rather than his own for example. Hopefully likewise, he feels the same.

Richard- No question! No question!

John - We have come through some times together that are to me, the reason why I'm where I'm at now, because things got too civilized where I was before. Now here I am again probably in a company that is running out of dough. We should probably go belly up next week. But you know what, we're not going to let that happen. Having been through the experiences with

Richard gives me the strength to live my life fully extended, as opposed to some corporate guy with a whole lot of stock options worth a lot of money that is a golfing twice a week. That is not me. I'd be going crazy. But having a partnership like ours lets me take greater risks than I might have without it. He pushes me that way and then backs me up.

There are two distinct differences from the before and after of Richard and John. One is that I have a very clear understanding that I don't have to do it all myself. And number two is that if I properly execute and communicate the art of leadership for myself to my team, they will do things much better than I ever did, could ever have believed or even imagined.

What I mean by that is I can't tell you how many times both at Internet

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Connect and at Nextel, I have asked people to do something that from my perspective was completely impossible to do and they have gotten it done.

There is a place in an individual when they know you're asking them to do something impossible and they know you are counting on them. They know you are there to support them but they know they've got to do it, they get it done. And the best news out of that is that they feel wonderful about themselves when they finish it. If you provide the recognition and say, "I don't know how you got that done but thank-you, God bless you. That was a great job!" It helps to reinforce them to live their life on the edge as opposed to looking for a comfortable place to reside.

Doug- Thank you for sharing these stories. I can see why you guys are great friends it's totally obvious to me.

I also do consulting work, which only makes me appreciate these stories more. They are just gold in terms of what makes a difference in terms of people's lives and in their business. It is incredibly interesting to me. I just want to chime in with I have an incredible fondness and admiration for Richard as well which is probably pretty obvious. So it is great to hear these stories about the way he has impacted other people's lives.

John, I'm incredibly admiring of your trust in Richard. I work with so many people that when they confront adversity they internalize it as depression or time to give up or whatever. I don't know how much it is you as individuals and how much it is your partnership but the outcome is amazing. It sounds like the pattern for you working with Richard is just each time someone throws something at you, you see it as this huge challenge, just take it on and bust right through it. That is pretty rare

John - Thank-you

Richard - I don't take credit for that. John is an exceptional champion. What I would say draws us all together is we all share that kind of nature. What has been really great has been the opportunity that has enabled us to support each other.

No question I am a better person for working with these gentlemen because of the modeling each has done for me. John has been just a fantastic person

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to have in my life, a fantastic friend, as well as a special client. He came with that spirit of, ‘we’re not going to give up, we’re not going to quit’. Reinforcing that in each other is what got us to where we are. And we have had a great time doing it together. What is great for me about the work is I could say that about each of the individuals here.

Michael has been a special blessing for me. Jim and Chris have been part of my life for so long now it is hard to imagine who I would be without them. Also because Jim brought us in at the beginning of forming his teams we have been able to have incredible impact on creating the kind of culture throughout the organization that John described in his team.

Jim – I like start-ups because we can begin creating this quality of culture. I try to bring this into the reservoir of resources and tools early on. But even consulting with established executive teams this practice increases their collective intelligence.

Doug – I assume both by talking about it and probably modeling it by example?

Jim - Yes definitely modeling and also I use the technique that I've come to admire in Richard and that is to learn out loud. I've moved from a teaching attitude, to a sharing attitude. For example I'll describe ways which I have misunderstood, like when this guy used a word I did not like and I immediately found 87 reasons to react that didn't have anything to do with what he meant.

Doug – Jim, one of the things that's striking about this conversation from my point of view is here you are someone who is obviously extremely successful in the business world, yet a lot of the conversation is about insecurities, sense of weakness, mistakes. And I don't think that's a coincidence. I think it takes a very powerful stance to be able to talk about that stuff comfortably because so many of us are busy trying to cover that stuff up. My view is that that's very counterproductive. So at a personal level I really appreciate your willingness to do that and I imagine that it has to do with Richards influence as well.

Jim - Oh yes, very much so. Richards modeling has given me the courage to model in the same way. I would say there are also times and places and

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certain groups of people where this conversation would be very different. I've been fortunate to be able to attract and select people who are players in my sense of the word. There are two questions I ask people who I want to work with. One is whether they think they're done yet, meaning are you finished learning? Because if you are, I don't think I have anything to offer you and you don't offer me much. The other question I like to ask is, "Is there anything you can't do?" And the answer I hope for, at least the answer in spirit that I hope to hear is, "There isn't anything I can't do, there are a lot things I haven't learned how to do yet." But I can't do it that doesn't seem to make much sense for me.

The people I like to engage with and surround myself with are the people who are consciously and continuously in a state of personal development. I want them to be confident, not cocky, in their abilities. Now although that plays well with a strong leadership management team, it doesn't sit well in the boardroom. We don't talk about my insecurities as were doing a business review because that would interfere with their ability to hear what I have to say.

Michael - There is only a small group of people I can even really tell. Our shareholders, we have got a few million of them, they have no idea why they're getting the return they're getting. They think it's our strategy, our global positioning and all that stuff. I know it isn't. But if I told them why they were really getting it, they would vote me out. They'd say OK this guy's been great but we've got to get somebody else.

Every quarter you have to do much better than you did last quarter these days or your stock gets slammed. Meeting your plan will make your stock lose value. You've got to blow it out. Everybody wonders, certainly every business leader wonders, when it is it going to stop. I don't know. All I know is it isn't stopping now.

The last time I saw Richard I said, "Richard I would like to see you every other week for Tuesday morning." If anyone looked at my calendar and what our business and I has to produce you would say, "How can you possibly have four hours every other Tuesday to spend with this guy?" That's what most people would say except for those that are practicing like we are. The reason I said it is because I know that it is going to be the most important for

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hours of that week and I know it for a fact. At one point I'll get to the point where I do it every week because I'm still developing. When I put that time in I know my business does tremendous things. It does tremendous things. And I can't explain it.

What makes Richard distinct from other people who do leadership development, his work is so efficient. If I tell him I have 30 minutes I get what I need. If I tell him I've got four hours he'll go a little deeper. But at the end I won't feel like I wish I had more time or can we get together tomorrow. He makes it happen.

There are a couple of things that I attribute to us all being successful. Number one the founder had worked for years with Richard on this hard work, the inside job - they had a history. Then I was also willing to do that.

I met someone in Richard who was able to connect with me to do this hard work of listening to yourself. Listening to the very depths, the very essence of the message is what the work is all about. Now Richard can't work with everybody, because everybody doesn't want to do it.

Doug - And you probably can't work with everybody. So what is it about Richard that enabled you to do the hard work of looking at yourself. I mean why did you trust him enough to be able to do that?

Michael - His sense of humor, as I think about other people and I think about Richard, he always brought positive energy even when he was down. He would tell you exactly what was going on with him. He would tell you, "Honestly' I am having a really hard time in my life." Yet with all that being true he was positive, meaning it was about moving forward. It was about not being stuck. He has a sense of humor that I really like, because his sense of humor reveals the truth.

So if that's what you're trying to do, cut to the essence of what is true for you, then you can connect with him. But if you can't deal with the truth, you're not going to want Richard around. Because he is going to keep bringing it up. He's not going to let you get off the hook.

He also works very precisely. It isn't let's get together three times a week. That wouldn't work for me. I can't do that with anybody. I travel all over the

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world and I need to be able to make a connection and do some work that makes a big difference now or I'm not doing it anymore. He can always give you a tool to work with and begin to practice on right now.

Richard's work helps people can hear the sincerity and the value and the desire to help that he just talked about. When people are working hard, sincerely and wholeheartedly then they will find the metaphor that works.

Richard has worked hard and gotten good at it. I'm working and practicing and have gotten confirmation that it's worth me continuing to work and to practice. So I am continuing to work with Richard.

The image of the sword

Richard - Part of what was going on was that it was a very difficult transition from the founder of any company to a new leader. It is difficult for the person releasing the reins as well as the person taking them. All of which only makes it harder for the members of the organization. At that time there seemed to be in no way to resolve the external problems that were out of our control.

When the situation gets so complex, it can be very hard to stay fully engaged and want to work on it. The problem seemed so big and overwhelming, it gets hard to even care about today's problems anymore. Personal development gives us a focus that we can stay fully engaged in. It is something we do care about, even in the midst of everything else being screwed up.

We have reinforced each other in our ongoing growth and development. Since Aikido comes from the art of sword, we talked about developing ourselves as samurai, sword masters. That became our analogy for mastery in business. Samurai means to be in service to a higher purpose.

Together we have been through times when what was going on around us has been beyond our control. The ability to stay engaged in the practice of awareness, open attention and full commitment at that time, has been a big piece of our work. When it was hard to stay engaged, Michael came up with an image of a sword master sitting on the rock with the sword on his lap as distinct from when you stand up and draw the sword. To engage in a sword

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fight, the most effective stance is standing, your sword is in your hands, ready, alert and open to what ever is coming up.

In Aikido we use the term ‘centered’ to describe someone who is in balance and ready to be effective, instead of getting caught in the two extremes of feeling deflated or ranting and raving. Michael has the training and he definitely has the spirit. He is an incredibly disciplined leader and his success shows his ability to stay engaged when the chips are down.

So we can use the image of the sword master to cut through apathy. We have used Mike’s image to stimulate the attitude of engaging effectively, regardless of the odds, hopelessness or hopefulness of the situation. He has excelled and shown tremendous ability mostly in his willingness to look at himself at those moments, to do what he calls, the hard work. He has obviously always had the power to do it. We have been able to develop his natural ability that he could access sometimes, to a skill that is virtually at his fingertips to use when he chooses. Before Nextel John had acquired the nickname of ‘Combs the barbarian’ because he moved so powerfully it blew everyone away. With John I talked about the primitive power of a club implying using his brute strength to manage versus developing the mastery of a samurai and wielding a sword that was incredibly more refined and increased his power to lead huge organizations.

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Aikido

Doug -- What does Aikido mean to you?

Chris – Aikido is an inquiry into the source of our being and the energy, I might use the word spirit, that that source generates. Aikido is an inquiry into who we really are. It happens to be a somatic, by that I mean whole system inquiry, which appeals to me. Secondly out of that inquiry into the energy or spirit, comes a set of universal principles that guide us in how to conduct one's self in the world with grace and power. I'm interested in both and Aikido has served me in both.

Doug - When I think of Aikido I think of the physical martial art. Say what the relationship is between the inquiry into who we are and the spiritual way of being in the world.

Chris - As distinct from an art of defense, which is the way Aikido is often understood, the founder held it as the art of love. He referred to it as the 'art of peace'. Aikido informs everything you do if you choose to look through that lens into the world. The special power of Aikido is that it provides as high of a feedback environment as I've ever experienced. It is an incredible laboratory for self inquiry and inquiry into the self beyond oneself.

I define Aikido as the ability to sit in the center of the cyclone while everybody else is losing it. It is the ability to source one's decisions from spirit or from a deep intuition. To me being connected with the center of the universe means being able to tap intuitive awareness in the middle of the

During the employee assistance work I was doing a lot of crisis counseling. I was counseling police from all over the county, prison guards from San Quentin, firefighters, doctors and nurses in hospitals and county employees of all kinds.

Aikido enabled me both to ground myself such that I could be of value to the folks that I was dealing with who were in crisis. It also enabled me to provide them with some coaching in deepening their own presence. So those were two practical applications that happened immediately and that grew steadily over the years that I did the work. I had trained Zen and yoga and

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meditation but couldn't translate that off my meditation cushion.

I was in situations that required a deeply grounded experience, more than I could bring to them. When I saw Aikido I thought, "That's meditation in action. That's what I need." I sought out Aikido because I knew I needed a deep training to enable me to do the work that was throwing me for a loop. It not only provided me with that training, it helped me ground the emotional charge. In addition it helped me handle my own reactions in relationship to what Carl Jung described as the shadow, the deep emotional work that was required to help me in counseling others. It also helped me provide tools to people that needed something concrete, quickly.

Doug - Can you bring that down to the everyday level in terms of examples of actual interactions or general ways of being in the world?

Chris - There are a lot of examples. The first one that jumps to mind comes from the business environments we have worked in. Perhaps even stronger is that Aikido prepared me to handle the dynamics around my wife's stroke and hold my ground when she couldn't find hers.

Inquiry without Form

Doug - The way you guys do Aikido and teach Aikido, meaning the spirituality and the practicality of your approach, is that something you guys have brought to it? If I walked into an Aikido school in Kansas would they be the same way?

Chris – Not really, though they would be similar in some ways. Of course you would find some difference between dojos (schools) everywhere. The training, the approach and the exploration in our school are quite unique. I dropped out of school because of the rote nature of the 'learnings'. When I walked into Richard's dojo that was not occurring in the way it occurs in probably the vast majority of the dojos around the world.

In most schools you see a common approach. Aikido is typically taught as a set of self-defense techniques or physical movements that are prescribed. They are taught in a particular manner though different schools may disagree about the correct way to perform them. Traditionally the practice is physical and only the teacher talks. Sometimes there will be more or less emphasis on

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the philosophy of harmony, sometimes on physical technique, or strength and speed or effectiveness in a street self-defense situation.

In some schools there is an intention to transfer what is being taught to the rest of your life, but it occurs afterwards or haphazardly. The inquiry may be there but it's implicit. In Richards's work the inquiry is explicit. That's another reason I trained with him. In our dojo there is a constant movement back and forth between the somatic-kinesthetic and the deepest verbal inquiry.

His approach is more about the inquiry than learning the specific technical movements most people associate with Aikido and many identify as the art.

Though all are aspects of the art, I would make the distinction between doing Aikido to learn techniques, for exercise or for self-defense, to improve who you are; and doing it for personal transformation, to change who you are and how you know yourself.

One of the most unique aspects of Richard's approach is he works in very free-form study, very free-flowing inquiry. Some portion of the class might be teaching the forms as a way to get present, aligned and to open the inquiry. The majority of the class will often be almost completely without form.

Doug - This is interesting to me because I've done a little of the Aikido work with you guys and it never occurred to me that there was this dichotomy. I just assumed everyone did it this way.

Chris - The training of the art in a given school creates or generates a synergistic field out of the players that is way bigger than the individuals wandering around on the mat. Anyone who trains, swims around in that field and gets imbued by it and transformed by it. It has always had an immediate effect on me when I walked on the mat. Yet it is the training over the years that has developed my character. It has enhanced my ability to walk through the world and disturb people less inadvertently and less when it's inappropriate.

Doug - Richard, what about you created that?

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Richard – I sensed there was untapped power in the practice of coming into harmony with the universe before I ever saw Aikido. The focus on that aspect was always quintessential in my study. The rest of it was incidental. It was a full on spiritual practice and an extension of the yoga and meditation training I did for years. I did them all the same way I approach music.

As a musician I play all kinds of music. I seek connection with the source, the muse, so I play everything from classical to folk music, from improvised jazz to rock-and-roll. I do the same thing with Aikido. I study everything from classical music to primitive chants and drums, to rock, punk, and folk.

Chris – Yeah, but you really do improvised jazz!

Richard – That is true. I am interested in improvisation and creativity. My major interest is not in self-defense. It is almost the opposite. The traditional approach to the study is through the forms and techniques. I'm only minimally interested in practicing forms, physical or mental, that enhance our ability to defend ourselves. Rather than defending how we know ourselves I am interested in going beyond the limits of the known. I am interested getting beyond the defensiveness that seems so pervasive in the human condition. Connection to the source of creation is the essence of what I seek.

Aikido is a way of being, of relating. That exploration is distinct for me from memorizing forms and developing the capability of applying them to self-defense. I am interested in connecting and harmonizing with the power that creates forms.

Primarily I'm interested in creating new ways of living together based on what the founder of Aikido called the spirit of harmony. There is an intelligence that creates and flows through the universe. We are all part of it. Every now and then accidentally or magically it seems to flow through us, to appear in our lives. Every now and then we might experience what the mystics call a state of grace.

The majority of our time, energy and attention seem to go into defensive behavior rather than creativity. I had an insight about this not that long ago. I began to notice how often I caught myself practicing Aikido to defend myself instead of confronting my fear so I could transform it. Even though

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my intended commitment was to enter into the inquiry, I needed to pay very conscious attention to make sure that my practice developed the spirit of harmony with the mystery, instead of simply seeking safety and defending what I think and how I know myself.

All of us are driven by so many fears that cause us to panic and expend our energy in destructive ways. Fear of pain is a stronger motivator in human behavior than the desire for creativity. So we spend most of our lives avoiding our fear or defending ourselves against it. I think we've proven that sufficiently. Look at where our resources go, where we expend our wealth. Compare what we spend on the arts with the huge quantities of our intelligence and our resources that went to developing nuclear weapons that hopefully we will never use.

Keep in mind that what ever we spent, we will spend hundreds of times that amount to clean up the toxic waste we have created in the process. The worst part is we will never be able to do it. In twenty-five thousand years it will only be half as dangerous to us as it is now. That is an example of the cost of defaulting to defensiveness instead of choosing harmony. We pollute our relationships in a similar way.

We expend so much time defending ourselves against our fear, not just the big fears about survival but also all the small fears that drain our reserves in a low-grade state of worry. As I shared this insight with a friend who also teaches Aikido, he said to me, "My fear is so prevalent, I am afraid when I see someone I have met before that I won't remember their name."

The samurai warriors would rather die than lose. They would kill themselves before they would lose face. Not remembering someone's name is a miniature loss of face. Nuclear winter might be the extreme example of what fear can produce at a social level.

Most religions teach some form of the expression that God is love. Yet since time immemorial, religions have been claimed as the basis for war. Something wasn't working for me in that and it drove my inquiry intensely.

Chris - There were edges that we all had to figure out as we went. That part of the inquiry was clear.

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Richard - My inquiry into Aikido and the Listening work has been focused on transcending our limitations. It has always been about transforming fear rather than about, not being afraid. We are always going to have reactions, from the deeply embedded primal biological fear of being eaten by a larger animal, to the social fear of not remembering someone's name down to the personal fear of not having enough time.

How do we stay in a creative state?

Let's not be afraid we are going to play the wrong note. Let's not worry about that. Certainly let's not let the fear of losing face or making a mistake stop us from playing music. Let's see if we can find someway of engaging creatively beyond what we can imagine let alone design. Let's see if we can develop a 'way of being' designed by a larger system of intelligence than our fear reactions. That is what the way of harmony with the spirit means. I developed the Listening work and my approach to Aikido training to help in that exploration. It's been the only thing that has interested me with the exception of that short period of time when I did want to be Bruce Lee. But that didn't last very long.

Doug – It seems most people study Aikido to get good at the martial techniques. They are studying and teaching classical guitar. What is it about you that you thought I'm going to approach this a little differently? Was it that way for you from the very beginning?

Richard - You ask a deep question. Why are any of us who we are? I am going to take the easy way out at least to start. Kids learn much faster than aDULLts in part because kids have fun when they learn. In a spirit of play our minds are open as opposed to where we are worried about doing it right. They learn through play. Our educational system mistakenly breeds that out pretty quickly.

I knew that if I didn't have fun doing in my study I would quit. I had to do it the old way when I was learning because that was all that was taught. I had an image of myself as a spy sneaking in and stealing secrets so I could take them back and innovate with them. It was sort of espionage. Actually my teacher was sort of on the cusp with a foot in both worlds which made it possible for me to take off from there.

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To answer the second part of your question, yes, from the very beginning I created my own laboratory to pursue this avenue of exploration. Very early on in my training, long before I was prepared to teach in the formal sense, I opened a school where we could have fun and explore. So, instead of having to learn to do it right we could inquire into the source of divine creation that inspired the art.

When O Sensei founded the art he listened to what he called the ‘Aiki kami’ ‘the divine spirit of Aikido, what I have come to call the whisperings. I designed my school so that my students could study directly with the ‘Aiki kami’, instead of having to listen to me. All of us come there with the agreement that what we’re doing together is listening to better understand the creative source of the universe. We reinforce each other in that study. What is it about me that sets it up that way? I don’t know. Using O Sensei’s words I would say that it is my bestowed mission.

Chris - It's useful to understand the importance of this, because it is this very ability that counts now. Creativity, the ability to handle change successfully is important for everybody, but certainly for every leader in this increasingly complex, highly changing environment.

Richard - One of the questions that always come up is, “Does it work on the street? Does it work in the real world outside the school?” How do we live in harmony with each other and do business together as an expression of this truth of universal harmony?

I know some reader will be saying, “It is a dog eat dog world.” I agree, but the heights of civilization are based on transforming that energy into cooperation. I come back to this because it is essential to the work.

If we see business as a game, you want to win a game but not at the expense of everyone else. Striving to produce superlative performance creates wealth much more than focusing with unbending intensity and commitment to win by devastating others. If you think of business as war, look at what war has produced. We have to remember the metaphor that ‘business is war’ is a metaphor. Business is business.

At the end of World War I there was a mindset of taking advantage of your enemy. It sowed the seeds of World War II. Now clearly it was considerably

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more civilized than the mentality of killing everyone when you took a city, however it saw winning as beating the other person or country.

At the end of World War II American thought dominated and brought something new to the old European values established through centuries of fighting. We built our enemies up. We helped them. That value is part of what is truly great about the American spirit. It is one of the greatest contributions that comes out of our melting pot of unifying many cultures. We could have devastated our enemies and drained their wealth as I believe their ruling regimes would have done to us. We didn't. We sent money. We gradually built them into strong independent partners. Not only have they become some of our best trading partners they have also contributed much to improve the quality of our lives. Certainly in the cases of Germany and Japan they have brought products and processes that we would never have had without them. Our generosity toward them made this surge of globalization and global wealth possible.

This concept of a civil society is something that we humans generated over centuries. It doesn't just happen. And it doesn't come easy. It is still a challenge and presently our greatest. But I think through this example, recognizing ourselves as part of a larger system can be shown to be of at least a simple intelligence. Forgiveness and generosity are strengths and in our best interests as well as the interests of all. Look at the economies of those who have held to ancient hatreds over cooperation. They have paid dearly for it.

I'm not saying that war doesn't exist, or there is never a time to fight. What I am saying is, we have reached the point in our technological development

where Mutually Assured Destruction does not serve our best interests. It does not solve the idea of self-preservation, which was ostensibly why we built the weapons in the first place. Our behavior had become incoherent. Nuclear winter, and maybe it takes that for us to listen, said to us, "you must think in a different way. You must act in a different way. You must listen to a different voice in yourself. You must live together if you are to live at all!" Now we are beginning to see this mentality grow in the business world.

A new world is dawning. Dee Hock the founder of Visa got competitors to cooperate. Their cooperation created the network of the credit card. That

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network made everyone who used it more competitive by being cooperative.

Chris – There is a tremendous ground swell for this understanding. Now people and especially competitive corporations are becoming involved in strategic alliances with competitors that five years ago, no one would have considered.

Richard - There were those people at the turn of the 20th century whose reaction to our progress could be summed up by their reaction to the airplane. "If man had been meant to fly, he would have been born with wings." Women were not even considered in the equation. Neither were the non-Caucasian races seen to be important in the unfolding of Anglo-European history.

Diversity, acceptance and inclusion will be the watchwords of the new millennium. As we enter the 21st century the quality quantity and speed of change will only increase. Success will be determined not by what you know but by how fast you learn. Resistance will not help. Aikido will. To negotiate the New World will require an extraordinary listening.

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We are a network of consultants specializing in executive coaching, leadership and team development, mastery training and mediation. Our training and process work are drawn from and explore the disciplines of Aikido and Dialogue. Our coaching and training has been delivered primarily in high-change environments. We have worked with fast-paced start-ups within the telecommunications industry, large utility firms, the banking industry, and a number of high-tech corporations. We also contribute in the arena of international peace building, having worked with the Institute for Multi-track Diplomacy, Harvard Negotiation Project, Conflict Management Group and the Fulbright Commission.

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