

ON PURPOSE

CONFESSIONS OF A TECHNOPHOBE

by Richard J. Leider

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I still cannot set my VCR. After a power outage, I panic when I walk around my house and see my VCR, stereo and microwave blinking.

I am a technophobe, part of the great unwired.

THE GREAT UNWIRED

Nature provided for the *unwired* by creating the *wired*. My children used to set my clocks. They also set the VCR to record the timed functions on the TV. But now that they have left the nest, they have left me feeling trapped, unwired.

Most people I know work and play in the digital world. Being digital, they inhabit virtual offices where they socialize and share information. They endlessly discuss the latest computer bells and whistles and use buzz words I don't understand, like WWW, CBT, URL and HTML. They debate the virtues of America OnLine, Prodigy and Compuserv and regularly visit Web sites like Hot Wired's Netizen and Pathfinder.

There's no escaping that I live and work in a world transformed by cyberspace. And the cyberhip world is far more threatening than any wilderness I ever faced.

GETTING CAUGHT IN THE WEB

I haven't managed to learn Excel, Lotus or Microsoft Word. And I haven't been caught in the Web.

This is the second year of the "great Web migration." Like the great wildebeest migration in Africa, tens of thousands of people are scrambling to produce Web pages in a great stampede. Many appear rushing to have a Web page before they have any clue what to put on one.

Internet growth is expanding by 25 percent per month! Projections show that by the year 2000, more than one million companies will be doing business in cyberspace. And ours will be one of them.

So what's a technophobe to do? Here I sit, at my home overlooking the St. Croix River, writing this article with my beloved Mont Blanc pen, and pondering my plight.

INVENTURING IN CYBERSPACE

In the beginning, training was simple. I only needed a classroom, a flip chart and participants. As the years have passed, the flip chart was embellished with overhead projector, slides and video.

Today, computer based training and distance learning are transforming the training industry. Just last week, with the support of my computer-literate colleague, Barb Hoese, I delivered my first training using Microsoft Powerpoint overheads. Barb ran the computer and I talked.

It's no longer enough for me to master the profession I've been studying for 25 years. I now need to master e-mail, learn to transfer files, participate in news groups and browse the World Wide Web for information on my field. And I need to learn how to telecommute from my home on the river miles from the office.

Increasingly, I must learn to go on-line with my clients. And with The Inventure Group's philosophy of creating "covenant" relationships with our clients, I will need to broaden my skills in designing and delivering our training around the world on the knowledge superhighway.

THE RITUAL OF WRITING

As a writer I have had one ambition: to be able to wake up in a nature setting, and spend the morning writing.

Joseph Campbell captured the spirit of my ambition: "You must have a room, or a certain hour or so a day, where you don't know what was in the newspaper that morning, you don't know what you owe anybody, you don't know what anybody owes you. This is a place where you can simply experience and bring forth what you are and what you might be."

I'm in that exact place at the present moment while penning this piece. As a writer, I work with a pen and a legal pad.

Why would you buy a pen today? Only for the pleasing ritual of moving your hand while using it. I love pens! My snow-capped Mont Blanc fountain pen, with the fat, warm barrel, is a pleasure to hold.

One reason it's hard for me to quit writing and join the cyberhip is the satisfying ritual of writing, the relaxing pace of reflection.

There is a pleasing ritual of writing with real ink. It's satisfying to dip the nib deep into liquid blue ink and slowly draw it into my pen. I write at least one unsolicited note to a friend, colleague or client *every* day. I often receive notes back commenting on their appreciation for the high-touch in a world of high-tech. Faxes and e-mail are effective, but the more common they become, the more meaning is attached to handwritten notes.

Many, many people, by now, have suggested that I could greatly improve my writing by using a computer. I have steadfastly resisted! Why? I have one reason.

I don't believe the premise that I or anybody else could write *better* with a computer than a pen. I flat-out don't believe it.

TECHNOLOGY HAS BECOME HIP

Everyday I read about computer networks on the front pages of newspapers and magazines. My colleagues give me their e-mail addresses; friends are on-line three or four hours a night. Lots of action but less reflection.

As the pace of technology accelerates, we rush more and more to keep up with it. A thought, however, is no more compelling than the reflection that goes into it.

Take television as an example. After close to 50 years, has television made our lives better? Although I rarely watch it, the evidence seems strong that television, far from enlightening us, is a tool that numbs us. After five decades of TV, we have become a people who cannot sustain a dialogue about anything important beyond today's sound bite.

In an essay entitled "Feminism, the Body, and the Machine," Wendell Berry explained why, despite the exhortations of friends and colleagues, he was not going to buy a computer to write faster, easier and more.

Do I then want to write faster, easier and more? No. My standards are not speed, ease and quantity. I have already left behind too much evidence that, writing with a pencil, I have written too fast, too easily, and

too much. I would like to be a better writer, and for that I need help from other humans, not a machine.

Most of us, especially in the context of the global business world, are apt to see Berry, like some see me, as an incurable technophobe, hopelessly out of step with the present. In today's cyberworld, where the standards for quality are faster, easier and too much, speed, ease-of-use and output rule the day.

But what do we really get by setting these as our highest standards? Does speed really improve the quality of our output?

It would be unwise and untrue for me to propose that being wired diminishes the quality of all our output. My co-author, David Shapiro, (*Repacking Your Bags*, Berrett-Koehler, 1995) is totally wired! My business partner, Steve Buchholz, is semi-wired. My colleagues and talented computer jocks, Barb Hoese, Cara Connelly and Lisa Capistrant, are wired at work *and* home. Our chief financial officer telecommutes from Durango, Colorado and Makaha, Hawaii. Our newest colleague, John Busacker, bought a special bag to carry his computer to business meetings and my fiancée, Sally LeClaire, puts her computer to multiple uses in the teaching profession. They'd all take umbrage at the suggestion that they're missing out on something important — reflection.

But in spite of my wired colleagues, Berry echoes my unwired point of view:

If you are already solving your problem with the equipment you have — a pencil, say — why solve it

with something more expensive and more damaging? If you don't have a problem, why pay for a solution? If you love the freedom and elegance of simple tools, why encumber yourself with something complicated?

I do love the freedom and elegance of simple tools. Being at the river to write, I have my pen and pad and I feel as well equipped to write as my colleagues. I am also free, for a period of time, of everything that clutters my thinking. My mind and hand are free to flow with the river.

Few aspects of my daily life require computers. They're irrelevant to driving, counseling, eating, hiking and roller-blading. I don't need a keyboard to birdwatch, recite a poem, meditate or say a prayer.

"HIGH-TECH, HIGH-TOUCH"

And yet, over the past few years I've experienced a change of heart. I am moving toward the "high-tech — high-touch" world John Naisbitt and others predicted. In the next few years, my work world will become dramatically different with a telecommuting office that uses electronic technology to link me with people and functions at scattered sites.

The high-tech — high-touch phenomenon was brought quickly home to me this year in Africa. Visiting the remote and primitive Endulen School that we help support near Ngorongoro Crater in Tanzania, the School Director, Father Ned Marchessault, gave our Inventure Expedition group

a briefing on his Maasai students. I had written Ned requesting that he help us understand the big picture.

Over a Safari Lager after dinner, Father Ned leaned over to me and asked if it was alright to use his new solar-powered computer to tell the Maasai story. A surrealistic scene took place. With our group staring into a computer screen in front of a roaring Acacia wood fire, while 25 Maasai children serenaded us with traditional songs, Father Ned told his mesmerizing story via the computer complete with photos, graphics and charts.

Even Father Ned is wired! So, I guess it's time for me, too, to join my wired friends and colleagues in cyberspace.

I still yearn for the good old days when writing was an art form. I will still continue my practice of filling and preparing and writing with my pen — a welcome break from the high-tech world we live in. I'll still relish the familiar feel of my pen while I write my daily personal notes. I don't want to lose the ritual, the sense of touch, the feeling of being a part of the process.

Ranked by Forbes as one of the "Top 5" most respected coaches, Richard Leider is a best-selling author with thirty years experience in coaching people to live and work on purpose. He is founder and chairman of The Inventure Group, a Minneapolis-based firm specializing in leadership development. Richard is the author of seven books, including three best-sellers and his work has been translated into 17 languages.

Why Do You Do This Work?

by Doug Donovan

Darkness came quickly upon our camp in the Soitorgoss corridor of the Serengeti in Tanzania. The bats left the caves in black rippling waves towards the setting sun. The darkness gathered us around the welcoming campfire for dinner. As we settled around the fire our baboon neighbors settled on the cliffs above us to watch our nocturnal gathering.

The night noises, flickering flames and a full stomach brought out the oldest of human traditions — sharing the day, sharing feelings and storytelling. Doug Baker stimulated the discussion by telling of meeting with a master in India and asking the wise man, "What's the purpose of life?" The answer he received was puzzling. He was told, "prepare for a good death." This led to a lively discussion regarding death, life and purpose.

This brought to mind Art Marshal's story that I shared with our bunch of trekkers and some onlooking baboons in the fullness of the African night with the firelight dancing in our eyes. Come. Join us by the fire. Get comfortable. Listen to the journey of one soul discovering the answer to the question, "What's the purpose of life?"

First, you must come with me to Hong Kong for this is a story within a story. The first story is my story and it prepares the way for Art Marshal's story.

I had been given an assignment as General Manager of ARC International operations in Japan and Hong Kong. ARC International operated five centers in Japan and one in Hong Kong, changing lives with their Life Dynamics personal growth training. Because the Japanese operations only taught the course in Japanese, I went to Hong Kong to attend the Basic and Advanced training taught in English. It is in my Advanced Training course that my story begins.

One of the things that happens in Advanced Training is that the Advanced Trainer assigns a *stretch* exercise. Our class was assigned to go out on the streets of Hong Kong and individually approach someone we had never met before, engage them in a meaningful conversation, have lunch with them, and return within a specified period of time, without telling this person it is part of a class or an assignment.

Our class was all Chinese except for a British businessman based in Hong Kong, another based in Taiwan, and me from the United States via Tokyo. We left together and went to a local shopping and restaurant area where we split up to attempt our assignment. Before departing we agreed to meet back at the entrance at a specified time.

With a certain amount of clumsiness and tentativeness I selected my first target, an old Chinese man who couldn't move too quickly. I went up and introduced myself and began babbling, trying to strike up a conversation. He turned and walked away from me, saying in perfect English, "I don't speak English." I could see that this was not going to be easy. I then spotted a Chinese

businessman walking through the area. He paused and listened to me for a while but then told me he had an appointment and dashed away. I then tried conversing with several women and they thought I was trying to hit on them so they quickly rejected my approach. I was getting rejection after rejection and was beginning to feel defeated. The only thing that kept me going was the fear of facing my Advanced Trainer and the class and telling them that I had failed to accomplish the assignment.

I decided to try one more time. I positioned myself strategically on a walkway in front of the restaurant area. I said to myself, I will approach the next person coming down the walkway. I will try one more time. I walked two young women and a young man. I approached the first woman and introduced myself — "Hello, my name is Doug Donovan. I am new to Hong Kong and I would like to get to know some people and learn more about Hong Kong." We got into a conversation and she introduced herself and the other woman, her sister, and the young man, who was a friend. We talked for a while and finally I asked if they would join me for lunch. She said yes, but that they were waiting for some friends to join them. We continued to talk and I learned that she was a Phillipino working in Hong Kong as an Ama, and that it was her birthday and she was waiting for her friends to join her in a birthday celebration.

Soon her friends began to arrive. As each entered, she introduced them to me by telling them, "This is Doug Donovan. He is my birthday present from the United States."

After they all arrived, we went inside and had lunch. They bought my lunch. We had birthday cake, sang songs and had a wonderful time. When my friends from Singapore and Taiwan came looking for me they found me in the middle of this wonderful celebration. They took pictures of us for the celebrant which she later sent to me. Every year I send her a card on her birthday.

The lesson for me was how important it is to reach out. Sure, I experienced a lot of rejection. But in the end I got invited to a birthday party and I now have some wonderful friends on the other side of the world.

Well, what does this have to do with Art Marshal? That's the real story.

For Art's story, we must go across the China Sea to Tokyo. The Japanese economy was going through a very difficult period. The bubble economy had burst. ARC was struggling to keep its Life Dynamics Centers alive. I had a temporary assignment (10 months) as General Manager. I decided to take my key staff on a tour of the Centers and meet with the Center personnel to encourage them to improve results.

Our first stop was Yokohama. We gathered at the Center in a large meeting room. One of the things I had learned earlier is that people in this business are authentically dedicated and committed. They put their hearts and souls into the business. We began our cheer leading, work harder pitch. About 15 minutes into the meeting I looked around the table at the faces and the dark, loving eyes and stopped the meeting. I suggested that we switch gears and

each of us answer the question, "*Why do you do this work?*" We went around the table and everyone told their story. Sometimes it was personal, but mostly it was about other lives touched. All were wonderful and inspiring stories. We laughed and we cried. Then we came to Art Marshal.

Art's story began back in time and across the Pacific Ocean in San Francisco. There he was attending an Advanced Training much like my training in Hong Kong. He too was given a *stretch* exercise to go out and meet a stranger, engage them in conversation and have lunch together. Art went down to Union Street and approached person after person and experienced rejection after rejection. He was about to give up and was bracing himself to face his Advanced Trainer, when he spotted someone laying in the gutter in front of the 7-Eleven store. He began to think about the rules — *meet a stranger and engage them in conversation*. He walked over and pulled the guy out of the gutter and braced him up against the wall of the 7-Eleven. He started talking to him and then he remembered, they were supposed to *have lunch together*. So he ran into the store, got some sandwiches and sodas, came out and had lunch with the guy. When it came time to leave, Art took out his business card, wrote his home phone number on it, put it into the guy's pocket and said, "If you ever decide you want to straighten out, give me a call."

Art went back to his class and reported that he met this guy down on Union Street and they had lunch together. He had successfully completed his mission.

Now the clock moves forward about six months. Art gets this call. "Hello, Art," an unfamiliar voice says. "Yes," Art responded. "This is Jim. We met down on Union Street." After more discussion he figured out who he was talking to. Jim had decided to straighten out his life. He had Art's card — and he called. They agreed that Art would pick him up at the 7-Eleven store where they had first met. Art brought Jim home. He struggled through withdrawal with him. As they talked, he learned that Jim was an architect, that he was married, and had a young daughter. They had left him and he had not seen them for some time.

Art knew only one architectural firm in town where he had a friend that got an interview for Jim. Art is a tall man with an Ichabod Crane physique. Art loaned Jim one of his suits, which he wore to the interview with the sleeves rolled up. As it turned out, Jim was not only an architect, but he went to one of the best schools. He was a *great* architect! He was hired immediately. As he began his new life, he drifted away from Art.

Now we move the clock forward one year. Art was having trouble in his own life. In ARC seminars you may re-take the Basic Seminar at any time, and Art decided to do that. Since he was in the business and was a little embarrassed about his situation, he didn't tell anyone that he was going.

He attended the seminar and worked through some of his current issues. Near the end of the training, he knew what was going to happen. The trainer had the lights turned off, participants had their eyes closed, the music was turned up and the trainer was speaking. This was all done to cover up the fact

that friends and sponsors were entering the room and lining up in front of the graduates to congratulate them. Art knew what was happening and he was sad. He knew that there would be people there for all the other graduates, but no one would be there for him. In a few minutes, when the music came down and the lights came up, everyone would have *someone* there. Everyone, except for him. He felt very lonely.

Soon the music faded and the lights came up. When Art opened his eyes, there, standing before him, was a little girl holding a big bouquet of flowers! The little girl stepped forward, handed the flowers to Art and said, "Thank you for saving my daddy." Behind the girl stood her mom and her dad — Jim the architect.

When you ask Art, "Why do you do this work?" he responds that it isn't about making a lot of money or it isn't because the work is easy. What it's about for him is seeing the face of a little girl, looking up at him, reaching out with a big bouquet of flowers, saying, "Thank you for saving my daddy."

Doug Donovan spends part of his time as the Chief Financial Officer of Pecos River Learning and part of his time in his consulting practice, Soaring Eagle Enterprises, Ltd. He is an executive coach and an aspiring writer.

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