

C O N F E S S I O N S
of an intrapreneur

September 2015



Confessions of an intrapreneur

Yann A. Gourvennec

CEO & founder

Visionary Marketing, Digital Marketing Agency

<http://visionarymarketing.com>

LAST UPDATE DATE; 05/04/2015

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Session synopsis

No slides

I have to apologise for having no slides for this presentation. I tried to figure out a reason why I should add some but couldn't go beyond the need to show some nice pictures, I don't believe that what I have to say – mostly derived from my day to day experience in these few years that I have worked – is worth being plonked into PowerPoint slides, it doesn't add any value and besides, by refusing to show slides and pictures, I'm certain that I'll get all your attention.

The problem with the French?

"The problem with the French is that they don't have a word for entrepreneur¹." George W. Bush is reported to have said to Prime Minister Tony Blair during a discussion about the French economy. Although this is mostly hearsay and not proven that George W Bush actually said that (there is this assumption that he was really stupid but who knows actually?), this 'Bushism' was indeed recycled a great deal of times on the Internet and beyond. But I am here to guarantee that this isn't true, the word exists; and we even have another word, intrapreneur, derived from the first, which describes those people who attempt to do new things in large organisations, implement change, move things forward; relentlessly ...

An intrapreneur

I am – or rather used to be, because since early 2014 I have become a fully-fledged entrepreneur – such an intrapreneur and I liked it. Maybe this is because I dreamed of being an entrepreneur and hadn't had the opportunity at the time. Regardless, change is part of my business life, I love to change things, have always done, will always do. I believe it must be like a second nature. I can't help it even though sometimes I think it would be a lot safer and more straightforward for me if I chose to let things be.

- Intrapreneurs love to bridge the gap between thinkers, researchers, developers and those who run everyday business operations,
- Intrapreneurs are doers, they like getting things done, they like it when the rubber meets the road,
- I am like that too.
- 2 years ago, Like Minds invited me to Exeter in Britain, and they asked me to pitch about my "confessions" (their choice of words) about this need to launch new projects, push new boundaries, and implement new things for the large companies which I have worked for or with.
 - Yet, the word "confessions" – if I believe the Cambridge dictionary – means that one has done certain things wrong, committed a crime or a sin, and I'm not quite sure about that choice of words,
 - OK, many a time being an intrapreneur means that one fights against established rules, battle against resistance, overcome obstacles,
 - But intrapreneurs aren't troublemakers, because true intrapreneurs always act for the common good.

¹ <http://politicalhumor.about.com/library/blbushisms2002.htm>

The Like Minds Summit in 2010

I believe that the reason why I'm talking to you about this today is coming from an initial discussion at the Like Minds Summit at Bovey Castle in March 2010 with a few alumni, including our much regretted friend Trey Pennington, to whom I would like to dedicate this presentation.

Our subject was "how to implement social media in enterprises" and I soon realised that my experience was shedding a different light on that topic because I am an insider, I did this for years on end, and whether it may concern social media or any other thing doesn't make a difference at all.

It's more difficult to change things if you are in a big organisation.

Setting up a blog for a (very) small organisation is a no brainer. You just go to wordpress.com and set up your space in a matter of minutes ... you cannot do it exactly like that if you are the legal representative of a large company, mostly when it has gone public! It's more complex; there are rules to comply with and obstacles to overcome. It's easier to stay from the outside and just issue recommendations. I know, because I too worked as a consultant for many years ... and yet it is also very frustrating because a consultant who issues recommendations is seldom the one who is commissioned to implement that change!

Lessons learned

So here is my confession, that is to say a few lessons that I learned while implementing change and are my guiding rules for intrapreneurship. For each of these lessons I will give you an example, if time allows.

Lesson no.1: change begins with a prayer

... 'The serenity prayer' to be precise, which I first noticed in Kurt Vonnegut's *Slaughterhouse 5*, when Billy Pilgrim has this sign posted above his desk in his office stating:

*"God grant me the serenity
to accept the things I cannot change;
courage to change the things I can;
and wisdom to know the difference"*

Apparently, Alcoholics Anonymous has adopted it too² ...

Anecdote: implementing the 'Profit' Sales Force Automation System³ at Unisys at the beginning of 1992 with Graham M. who told me "ok for you to get the job, but don't change anything about your predecessor's method". So I didn't, let the project fail, then proposed a new method, and succeeded in less than 4 months in implementing a new system throughout Europe. I didn't choose to change what I couldn't change, I just proposed the right solution at the right time, i.e. when Graham realised that the old method wasn't the right one. Besides, I didn't have to criticise it, all I had to do was to put things right. It only took 30 minutes to convince him by drafting the plan on the flipchart of our London office.

Lesson no 2: think big and start small

One of the commonest mistakes is to try and change the whole world in one go... too fast, too big, too early...

Most people hate change, despite all the talk about innovation, letting sleeping dogs lie is reassuring, and change creates – in most people – anxiety, the fear that things may longer be as they were, the risk for them to become out of touch, to be left on the side, to be taken out of their own comfort zone and into the red zone (the one in which people think that they are no longer in control, that they are losing touch, becoming incompetent and eventually ... will be made redundant, even with no real reason).

Hence change has to be implemented step by step, starting little and getting bigger, in order for people to reassure themselves that they can be part of that change and not be threatened by it!

² source: Wikipedia

³ one of the first eight such systems in the World, before the term CRM was coined and above a decade before Salesforce

Anecdote: while in the process of overhauling the orange.com website in 2011, our ambition was way beyond that. What we aimed at was the establishment of a group-wide governance which will give more leeway to all our entities/countries while ensuring better consistency and maximising our Web IT spend. Although it's a no-brainer, it would be stupid to start with the biggest websites, so we slowly but surely added small websites to our platform, therefore showing that our new Website factory was not a threat but a tool for all to benefit from.

Lesson no. 3: choose the path of least resistance

Resistance to change is a staple of change management, so rather than confronting your detractors, it's best to ignore them and circumvent the issue by working exclusively with the positive change agents which you can find. Therefore, there will be more than one person to advocate the change, and eventually, your detractors will follow in your footsteps when they realise you have succeeded and they can't do otherwise.

If fights arise, I have found time and time again that refusing to confront people was the best way of getting rid of such issues. When the fight gets nasty and personal I go off on a tangent and do something else until the person tires and usually, they do. The most aggressive ones usually make so many enemies for themselves that they either fall victim to their own aggressiveness or, eventually, they go somewhere else and make other people suffer, in search for other fights.

It's best to concentrate on one's work, one's results, to be a professional, not to confront people and move ahead.²

I also insist that one must remain courteous and friendly and positive, even with one's worst enemies. Always shake hands, never attack them: "(Matthew 5:39) But I tell you, Do not resist an evil person. If someone strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also".

Anecdote: when I worked for a large British Bank in the mid-1990s on the Internet strategy for the Bank and was interviewing people, I met some people who were initiating their own project. I proposed that they become part of the team and that we promote their project and use their idea as a driving force for our strategic change. They instead became aggressive and secretive, refused to share their ideas and findings, refused to share their project, eventually died with it, the Internet project went on without them, they didn't benefit from their advance, didn't make any friends and didn't help their company either. We didn't have to confront them, they just shot themselves in the foot.

Lesson no. 4: set up an example

If you tell people to do things, they might well believe you if your power of persuasion is good, but if you actually do these things yourself, it's even better. Now if you ask your boss to show the way, it will be even more powerful and will have 2 positive consequences:

- He/She will end up being convinced and will support you even more in your endeavours.
- He/She will in his/her turn become an advocate of the change you wish to implement and will help you spread the word around

Anecdote: when I started the Orange Business Services blogs in 2008, not everyone was convinced. I started with a couple of change agents who helped me move forward, but it's only when I asked my boss to help us with the blogging activity that I reached a higher level of success. Indeed, from the moment I asked him to blog on his favourite topic, my boss stopped asking about the return on investment of expert blogging because he actually understood this for himself, and besides he became a lot more positive about what we were doing and encouraged other people to do so. Six years later, here was still one of the strongest advocates of expert blogging and Orange Business Services.

Lesson no. 5: don't think top-down

To those who don't understand change management very well, it would seem a good idea to ask the top man to issue a top-down statement and to assume that this is sufficient for everyone to change their ways. Although this method sometimes works, most of the time it is not efficient and there are better ways of using top executives to implement change.

The best way for you to use top executive management to implement change, is to first obtain results at field level, highlight these results, and then seek a mandate from the top manager who will use these initial results to reinforce the need for change and send his instructions, reinstating the support that he's giving you.

Anecdote: when I was in charge of implementing a new Salesforce automation system throughout Europe at the beginning of the 1990s the Unisys, I realised that my predecessor had started her process by asking the executive director of the Europe Africa division to send a letter/mail to all country managers in Europe. The result was appalling. Nobody ever paid attention to the letter because there were more important issues at hand. The proper method, was to initiate change at field level, establish a few results, then come and negotiate face-to-face with each country manager, proving the case, and demonstrating that change was needed, resources needed to be appointed, and once a few countries had been convinced (avoiding carefully the most antagonistic ones) then we went to the executive director of the Europe Africa division who confirmed our decisions and course of action. The system was deployed throughout Europe with a proper organisation and resources it less than 4 months, when the previous process had led to almost a year of procrastination.

Very recently, at the end of 2014, we came across another instance of that fact that top-down management doesn't (always) work, this time for a digital transformation endeavour: advising a large international company I cannot name, we recommended starting small with a given department (one for which digital transformation was a no-brainer). The Lady in charge readily agreed and we were ready to get something started. Then she was appointed CDO for the whole group and we congratulated her on that. We repeated our recommendation however, by starting from the bottom-up, establishing credibility, avoiding politics and moving forward. Even though she agreed, she got caught in the middle of a high level management battle and she is still struggling with it. I am not worried because she has understood the problem and she has realised that we were speaking the truth. Trying to trigger the project from the top initiated political feuds which are almost impossible to stop and endless discussions about rather impractical things as well as theoretical debates about what is best for whom. I have seen this happen so often, I could almost write down the story even though I wasn't there to hear it. Once time is ripe, we'll be able to start from scratch, beginning with the beginning. We will have lost 6 or 12 months in the process.

Lesson no. 6: always respect people

E-mail should always be used as a last resort. The right method is to favour human discussions over everything else. If people are in disagreements, then they should talk and express themselves openly over these disagreements rather than bicker and send each other useless e-mails which waste everybody's time!

Anecdote: I had to work on a very important subject related to the governance of our domain names at Orange worldwide (2011-2013). This particular issue was a thorny one because people had debated about the subject for the past 2 years. We were in a situation whereby people were negotiating on positions, not on facts, and regardless of the common good. I spent a couple of weeks talking to all these people individually, making them realise that we had to converge towards a solution, and whenever we were disagreeing, exposing the case of our disagreements clearly and debating them in a human and positive fashion, face-to-face or on the telephone. Eventually, after a couple of months, we were in a position to call on a new meeting in which a decision could be reached. Detractors exposed their views in front of the entire group, decisions were put to vote, and eventually, those same detractors came to me at the end of the meeting, saying: "this decision was exactly what we wanted". It has to be stated that the decision which was reached, was the very opposite of what they were proposing in the beginning.

Lesson no. 7: Murphy's Law should be your guiding principle

This point is a thorny one because it is often misinterpreted.

Good project managers and change managers are able to foresee not the future, but at least the various alternatives in store. This is what is described often as managing a project by Murphy's Law: "if anything can go wrong it will!".

Good project managers therefore, can predict the ways in which projects might actually screw up; in order to take all the precautions which will help them avoid these issues.

Bad project managers, on the contrary, are 100% positive that the project will work beautifully, pay no attention to the things that could go wrong and therefore are ill prepared for issues when they arise.

It is therefore often misinterpreted that good project managers working with Murphy's Law are negative or pessimistic, whereas in fact they are merely cautious and professional.

Anecdote: it is difficult for me to quote any particular example, because I do this all the time. I have a sixth sense for predicting issues arising on the path of a project, and knowing the issues which could cause a project to fail, enable me to take precautionary measures whenever needed. This is also why I always tend to put a lot of pressure on a new project in the beginning of its launch rather than towards the end of the delivery period when it's too late. And then I press my project managers with questions about the things that could go wrong and how they have protected themselves against them, which enables me to deliver projects either in advance or at least in a very cool manner. I have never seen one of my projects generate tension towards the end of the delivery period.

Lesson no. 8: act swiftly

Most organisations tend to reinvent themselves every 6 months. I have seen very few people actually like the idea, but this is nothing you can resist, and you'd rather have to put up with this and make the most of the opportunities it offers. This means that if you want to implement change, you had better do it within this six-month period. 3 months is even a better period, as it allows you to show positive and effective changes to management, complete with results and proof of concepts, for them to prepare the forthcoming reshuffle described above.

Preparing your projects and teams to move forward like this, will ensure that you are part of the new organisation; rather than having to submit to the change decided by others; it is better for you to drive that change instead.

Anecdote: when I implemented the new IT security blogs at Orange Business Services in 2008, my first instructions were that I was not supposed to be touching blogs. Yet, I managed to find some change agents in the course of three or four weeks who made it possible for me to implement my new vision very quickly. I sold the idea of expert blogging a couple of weeks later (elevator pitch) and then went on to implement them very quickly, laying the stress on the deliverables and the content, rather than spending years on end on IT delivery. In order to speed up the process, I went on straight to a software as a service solution (Typepad), even though that was not the optimum technical solution (I migrated it a little later), but it was a good enough solution to land a result very quickly, prove my point, show some positive and immediate results, issue a press announcement, establish the change within the organisation, and establish my content marketing strategy for the long-term.

Lesson no. 9: in times of trouble, speed up the process!

Most people stop implementing change when chaos arises. This is a very common mistake because chaos is the mother of creation. The use of the noun 'chaos' in the derived sense of "complete disorder or confusion" first appears in Elizabethan Early Modern English but the original sense, taken from the Greek mythology and later religious writings, depicts the original state of the World before it took shape.

Chaos is therefore not synonymous to havoc, but rather describes the state of things before change is being implemented, before things start to make sense. Visionaries therefore always try to implement change in periods of chaos, because these are the times when everything is possible and creativity is often given free rein. Almost all my change management endeavours, have been carried out at the worst possible moments; moments of which I had trouble finding my place within the hierarchy, and this is exactly when I decided to launch my new initiatives.

Launching new initiatives at times when organisations are being re invented is in fact the right way forward, because this is the period at which top executives are searching for solutions to solve their problems, and are therefore more open to innovators, and intrapreneurs, who are going to bring solutions to their problems.

Anecdote: one of the most stressful periods of my working life took place when I came back from England to Unisys France to join the consulting practice in the middle of the 1990s. That period was a period of turmoil; a period of crisis to0, and the consulting outfit I had just joined didn't last for long. But right at that moment, the World Wide Web had just started to become popular, and I seized this opportunity to apply my marketing skills to the Web and to become one of the pioneers of Web marketing. At a moment when I had trouble to find who I was reporting to, I multiplied visits to various clients, departments and sites in order to promote these Internet skills and I ended up bumping into Steve. I had built a little website as a proof of concept (visionarymarketing.com, which still exists and became my personal website and even my agency Website at a later date) and when Steve spotted visionarymarketing.com he immediately asked me to come back to London to implement something similar for him (I ended up creating <http://internet-banking.com> for his new Internet banking practice. The next thing I knew, the French part of Unisys didn't want to let me go any more, and I had ceased to be a consultant without a hierarchy, I had found myself a new job, a new purpose and that eventually led me to even leave Unisys a couple of years later and join Cap Gemini and then Orange. Had I decided not to do anything because of the chaos which was surrounding me, I would have been laid off like so many others at Unisys, which unfortunately went from a 120,000 employee company in the 1980s to a 30,000 company in 1997!

Lesson no. 10: To become a seasoned negotiator, a thick skin is necessary

Most people think that changing things is easy but, as Scott Berkun rightfully points out in his *Myths of Innovation* opus, it is on the contrary very hard because most of them *hate* change. Change is a threat to most in terms of how they do things, how they could tackle the future and transform their ways and habits. There is this tendency to believe that "I've done things like this all my life and therefore it must be good and there's no reason for me to change". Like it or not, revolutions – good and bad ones – are never the result of the work of a majority of the people concerned.

This creates tensions and often, change agents must grow a thick skin in order to make their projects succeed, and even sometimes to outlive them. Above all, they need to show stamina while remaining kind and open to discussion and they must endeavour never to vex others in order to preserve a margin for negotiations. They must also learn to spot difficult persons. Often, such difficult persons leave the company or the project after a while by dint of unpleasantness and after a while, everybody else shuns them (there are exceptions). Our intrapreneur will have to learn how to deal with such zealots and appraise whether they will continue to annoy everyone else or rather take to their heels one day. A great deal of the work related to innovation is down to people and has not much or even nothing to do with technology. Innovators and entrepreneurs must deal with this situation on a permanent basis.

Even when no zealots are involved, intrapreneurs must learn how to negotiate and in that respect, they should follow in the footsteps of Ury and Fisher, who are the co-authors of the best-selling book *Getting To Yes (negotiating an agreement without giving in)*. Incidentally they are also both professors at Harvard and at least one of them has been involved in some high ranking peace process negotiations in the Middle East.

According to Ury and Fisher, there are 4 major points one should bear in mind in order to carry out successful negotiations:

1. **Separating People and Issues** : "People tend to become personally involved with the issues and with their side's positions. And so they will tend to take responses to those issues and positions as personal attacks. Separating the people from the issues allows the parties to address the issues without damaging their relationship. It also helps them to get a clearer view of the substantive problem⁴",
2. **Focus on interests (not on positions)**: "Good agreements focus on the parties' interests, rather than their positions [...]. Defining a problem in terms of positions means that at least one party will "lose" the dispute. When a problem is defined in terms of the parties' underlying interests it is often possible to find a solution which satisfies both parties' interests",
3. **Generate options**: "Participants can avoid falling into a win-lose mentality by focusing on shared interests. When the parties' interests differ, they should seek options in which those differences can be made compatible or even complementary. [...] Each side should try to make proposals that are appealing to the other side, and that the other side would find easy to agree to. To do this it is important to identify the decision makers and target proposals directly toward them",
4. **Use objective criteria**: "Allowing [...] differences to spark a battle of wills will destroy relationships is inefficient, and is not likely to produce wise agreements. Decisions based on reasonable standards make it easier for the parties to agree and preserve their good relationship".

Anecdote: working for the IT department of a large health insurance company in Paris in early 2015, we realised that there was a huge issue regarding marketing and its ability to engage

⁴ In order to provide accurate information about the book, I used the university of Colorado's book summary at <http://www.colorado.edu/conflict/peace/example/fish7513.htm>

with the internal IT department. They were bargaining on positions, not on facts, and their digital transformation was at bay. Marketing was moving ahead in their own direction, and so was IT but the real question was how to harness the team's creativity in order to move forward together for the benefit of the entire company (and even possibly convince a few people from other departments they should be part of the project). We suggested a one-day workshop to set things off and start from scratch – after a few days of preparation and investigation. We therefore initiated an ideation session and got the team to work on something concrete and positive to pave the way for future innovations for the company. Our first encounter with Marketing wasn't a good one. We then decided to ward off the war between Marketing from the very kick-off of that workshop. Our strategy was to shock people with examples which would prove them that a war on positions would be wanton and that we needed to pull ourselves together as a team. This was a gamble and we frankly had no more than a mere 50% chance to win that battle. So we started off with that thought-provoking presentation on the war between marketing and IT and how silly it is, basing it on our experience on both sides of the fence and other famous real life examples. It didn't fare well to begin with, but after an hour we realised that we'd won. We had given them an opportunity to deny the facts and prove us wrong ("there is no such war you know!") so that when we started the brainstorm sessions, everybody – barring one or two non-proactive people – was on board. The most aggressive of our counterparts ended up being the most enthusiastic of all and even though some of them had warned us they had to leave before the wrap-up, they ended up staying with us until the very end of that workshop. We are now working on the sequel of those meetings. Our ideation session was successful, yet the ideas generated were mostly a pretext for us to work together, and a lot more needs to be done on those matrices (and beyond). What we'd done was to give them the ability to bargain not on positions but on facts. Our discussions were entirely rational and prevented the participants from taking sides and our ideation matrices provided ideal solutions for them to generate options for the group. They ended up understanding the company's interest (not their individual interest) and that made the job a lot easier. Last but not least we started ranking the ideas collectively hence diluting the position factor through more objective criteria validated by the team. We are now working on the next steps and namely how to bring in other departments and skills into the game.