

THE PARADOXICAL COMMANDMENTS



**The
Silent**

Revolution

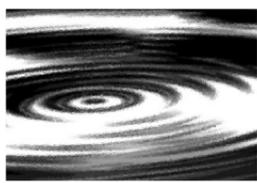
**DYNAMIC LEADERSHIP IN THE
STUDENT COUNCIL**

KENT M. KEITH

THE PARADOXICAL COMMANDMENTS

This is a new edition of the original classic, *The Silent Revolution: Dynamic Leadership in the Student Council*, that was first published in 1968. Kent M. Keith was 19, a sophomore at Harvard, when he wrote the book as a leadership manual for high school student leaders.

In *The Silent Revolution*, Keith encourages student leaders to work together, through the system, to achieve positive, lasting change. He believes that student councils can, and should, make a difference. He explains the need to love people, and do what is meaningful and satisfying, whether you get the credit or not. He uses hypothetical stories to describe practical leadership skills and dilemmas, argues that the “good guys” can win, and urges students to take action now. “Don’t veg-
etate,” he says. “Initiate.”



This is the book for which Kent Keith wrote “The Paradoxical Commandments,” 149 words that have spread all over the world, and have been used by millions of people of all ages and backgrounds.

When Kent Keith learned that Mother Teresa had the Paradoxical Commandments up on the wall of her children’s home in Calcutta, he began writing and speaking about the Paradoxical Commandments again after 30 years. His recent books are *Anyway: The Paradoxical Commandments* (G. P. Putnam’s Sons) and *Do It Anyway: The Handbook for Finding Personal Meaning and Deep Happiness in a Crazy World* (Inner Ocean Publishing).

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THE SILENT REVOLUTION

Other books by Kent M. Keith

Anyway:

The Paradoxical Commandments

Do It Anyway:

The Handbook for Finding Personal Meaning
and Deep Happiness in a Crazy World

The Silent Majority:

The Problem of Apathy and the Student Council

For more information visit:

www.paradoxicalcommandments.com

THE SILENT REVOLUTION

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KENT M. KEITH

The Silent Revolution: Dynamic Leadership in the Student Council by Kent M. Keith was first published by Harvard Student Agencies, Inc. in 1968. A revised edition, *The Silent Revolution in the Seventies: Dynamic Leadership in the Student Council* was written by Kent M. Keith and published by the National Association of Secondary School Principals (NASSP) in 1972. NASSP also published two other books by Kent M. Keith: *The Silent Majority: The Problem of Apathy and the Student Council* (1971), and *Now You're in the Middle: A Handbook for the Student Council Adviser* (1972).

This book is a new edition of *The Silent Revolution: Dynamic Leadership in the Student Council*, and is published by Terrace Press, Inc., P. O. Box 61909, Honolulu, HI 96839.



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TO MY FATHER

Bruce E. Keith

*a man of strength, courage,
and leadership skill.*

“Patience and gentleness is power”

THE SILENT REVOLUTION

Dynamic Leadership in the Student Council

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AUTHOR'S PREFACE
TO THE NEW EDITION

This is the book that launched “The Paradoxical Commandments.” I wrote the Paradoxical Commandments for the second chapter of *The Silent Revolution: Dynamic Leadership in the Student Council*, published by Harvard Student Agencies in 1968, and reprinted several times in 1968 and 1969. A revised edition of the book, *The Silent Revolution in the Seventies: Dynamic Leadership in the Student Council* was published by the National Association of Secondary School Principals (NASSP) in 1972. Somewhere between 20,000 and 30,000 copies of the two editions of the book were sold and distributed throughout the country. The book has been out of print since 1977.

I was 19, a college sophomore, when I wrote *The Silent Revolution* in 1968. After the book was published, I went on with my education and my career, unaware of what was happening to the Paradoxical Commandments. What I know now is that after the book was published, people began putting the Paradoxical Commandments up on their walls and refrigerator doors. They put them into speeches and articles. During the past 35 years they have been used by millions of people all over the world. They have been used by government officials, religious leaders, military commanders, business leaders, University Presidents, teachers, coaches, social workers, and students. Information about sightings of the Paradoxical Commandments can be found at www.paradoxicalcommandments.com.

In 1997, I learned that Mother Teresa or one of her co-workers had put the Paradoxical Commandments up on the wall of their children’s home in Calcutta. That discovery had a big impact on me. As a result, I decided to write and speak about the Paradoxical Commandments again after thirty-five years. *Anyway: The Paradoxical Commandments* was published by G. P. Putnam’s Sons in 2002, and *Do It Anyway: The Handbook for*

Finding Personal Meaning and Deep Happiness in a Crazy World was published by Inner Ocean Publishing in 2003.

As I travel the country speaking about the Paradoxical Commandments, people often ask me why and when I wrote them. I have received more and more inquiries about the little book that started it all—*The Silent Revolution*. As a result of those inquiries, I decided to republish the book.

The text in this new edition is almost identical to the first edition that was published by Harvard Student Agencies. I have done some light editing and updating. I have also pulled phrases out of the text to highlight on individual pages. Otherwise, it is presented here as it first appeared in 1968. I hope that the book will again be useful to student leaders and the dedicated adults who work with them.

Kent M. Keith
Honolulu, Hawaii
2003

AUTHOR'S PREFACE
(1968)

In an age of sit-ins and protest demonstrations, many students are under pressure from their peers to be “noisemakers.” Making noise is self-gratifying, and student leaders are encouraged by their fellows to join in. Unfortunately, noisemaking is rarely the best way to get things done—and high school leaders know it. It's just that making noise is easy, and the alternatives are not. Other leadership methods are harder to discover, and take more time to develop. I have found that most student leaders are willing to work through the system to bring about the changes they desire. But more often than not, they don't know *how*.

The Silent Revolution was written to answer that *how*. It is an attempt to describe to high school student council leaders the personal requirements and techniques for bringing about the constructive changes they seek for their schools and student councils. The word “revolution” rests a little uncomfortably for some, and indeed, the contents of this volume might just as well be titled “The Accelerated Evolution” or some such less radical- sounding name. However, it seems to me that ver revolutionary things can happen through the persistent use of reasonable and officially recognized processes. The basic thesis is that working through the system is ultimately more effective than beating one's head against it. And infinitely easier on one's head, also.

As a technique, “The Silent Revolution” does not exist in a vacuum: it is vitally affected by the individual leader's reasons for leading, and, in turn, it affects his or her outlook on the solving of leadership problems and the development of leadership potential. For this reason, this volume is not only an attempt to describe a technique, but to put it in a total leadership perspective as well: why one leads, how one leads, and the effects of that leadership. I consider these three phases of leadership to be irrevocably intertwined.

I have spent the last five years assimilating as much knowledge and experience in the field of student council and secondary education as possible—as a student council leader, student council Advisor, state Workshop Director, and part-time teacher and curriculum researcher. My experiences will inevitably differ from other writers in the field, but information was gathered first-hand from as wide a range of sources as possible: high schools in Hawaii, Massachusetts, and Rhode Island; workshops in Hawaii, Oregon, and Indiana; state student council conventions in Rhode Island and Hawaii; and the NASC National Convention.

Much of the inspiration I have received for my belief in the potential of student councils has come from my good fortune in working with Dr. Donald I. Wood, Chairman of the Department of Education at Rice University. The following people have also been helpful at some point in the last few years: Mr. William T. S. Wong, Principal, and Mr. George Arashiro, Advisor, Roosevelt High School, Honolulu; Mr. William Sweeney, Principal, Rindge Technical School, Cambridge, Massachusetts; Mr. Gerald M. Van Pool, NASSP Director of Student Activities; Mr. Albert J. Michaud, former Executive Secretary of the Rhode Island Association of Student Councils; Mr. Albert G. Lovelady, former Executive Secretary of the Hawaii Association of Student Councils; Mr. John M. Livingston, Newton High School, Newtonville, Massachusetts; and Mr. Walt Dulaney, youth worker and columnist, Honolulu, Hawaii.

Many friends and colleagues were kind enough to read the manuscript in its first two editions. Their comments were most helpful. I am indebted to the following: Steve Nagy, Suzanne Sato, Dave Frick, Janet Rich, Dave Powlison, Brad Ware, Ken Stanley, April Sasaki, Larry Takumi, Worldman Kimm, Dean Thaddeus Seymour of Dartmouth College and Professor Harvey Mansfield of Harvard. Of course, the contents of this volume are my sole responsibility.

At Harvard Student Agencies, I am indebted to the General Manager, Dustin M. Burke; his Assistant, Charles W. Filson; and my fellow workers in the Publishing Division for their help and advice. Harvard Student Agencies takes pride in being the largest student-run publishing house in the world, publishing books written *by* students, *for* students.

K. M. K.
Harvard University
August 1968

THE SILENT REVOLUTION

INTRODUCTION

The more I see of student councils across the country, the more depressed I become. One meeting I sat in on recently seemed to be the perfect example of student council pettiness and senselessness. As I entered the room, the “Advisor” was running the meeting from the podium—telling the kids how bad they were, and how much they owed to him, their Student Council Advisor. After a while, enough appreciation had presumably sunk in, and the Advisor allowed the business of the meeting to begin.

And you can imagine how *that* went. It’s an old story: some council members are power-mad; some love to hear the sound of their own voice no matter what absurdities issue forth; some are jockeying for the next election already; some are blockers (It’ll never work – let’s go home); some go to sleep at each meeting without exception; some laugh through each meeting without exception; some are exceptions entirely in themselves; some are virtual heroes; some are virtual villains; some are just glad to get out of Miss Barnes’s English class. The Beautiful People criticize the Unbeautiful People; the gaudily-dressed compete for the attention of the opposite sex; Johnny spends the whole forty five minutes trying to slip a note to Billy telling him what Sue told Jane about Jimmy; and the Student Council Advisor clears his throat every once in a while in a subtle fog-horn fashion as if to say: “Careful, students, I’m still here, ahem!” The Friday night dance that was supposed to have occurred last week is again postponed, and at this peak of accomplishment, the meeting finally adjourns.

You either want to laugh or cry. Nothing is happening. *Nothing.*

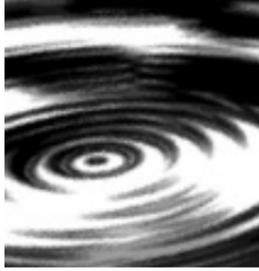
The effects of these hoaxes that call themselves student councils are bad, sometimes truly tragic. One thing is sure: they are always disturbing to people who know what tremendous potential a student council has for doing really meaningful things. I consider myself one of those people. I believe that student councils have great potential, and that students themselves have much control over how that potential is to be used. I believe that students who want to do something about a hoax can do it, given the proper combination of ideals and technical know-how.

This volume is a plea to end the student council hoax. It is a plea to you, the student council member, to accept the challenge of building a meaningful and dynamic student council. A plea to you, the young leader, to learn the techniques for putting your ideals into practice. A plea to you, the reformer, to bring about change through effective and reasonable means.

This volume is written specifically for high school student council leaders who want to do something meaningful with their student councils— and are willing to go unnoticed, if necessary, in order to do so. It is written for young leaders who are sensitive to the needs of their fellow students and want to respond to those needs.

I hope you are one of these people, because we need you. Your fellow students need you. You have advantages they lack, and will never have, if you keep them all to yourself. If you really want to help other students, you'll find you can do a lot with your time and energy.

I hope to explain *how*.



PART ONE:
The Pieces

THE SILENT REVOLUTION

CHAPTER ONE: That Thing You Call a Student Council

Just what is this thing we call a student council? Is it worth bothering about? A lot of students say no. Why is this the case? There are a few generalities that can account for a large number of those who choose to condemn the student council. Quite often, those who say student councils are useless are those who never tried to put any meaning *into* one, or those who seem to go through the school day asking themselves, “What has my student council done for me in the last twenty minutes? Nothing!” But even students who sincerely try to put something into a student council can be led astray by a misconception of the council’s function. These are the students who walk into the Principal’s office each afternoon and demand longer lunch hours, less homework, and a coke machine at every desk—plus paid vacations, twice yearly. When their demands are not met, they conclude that student councils are nothingness epitomized. They really try, but end up being trying.

There are quite a few students, then, who just haven’t seen the light. But don’t worry. If you are at a loss to explain this phenomenon, just remember: five hundred years ago people still thought the world was flat. (In every century, lots of people just don’t get the word.)

Other students are reluctantly negative in their appraisal of the student council. These are the ones with reasonable conceptions of the functions of the council, who really work to achieve meaningful things—but are blocked by Advisors,

Principals, apathetic or shortsighted fellow students, and even the unpredictable forces of circumstance. It is this category of young leader—the reluctant negative voice—that I hope to help by the discussions in this volume. It must be realized, of course, that a failure to solve some problems is as much a mark of the size of the problem as it is of the relative effectiveness of the student council and its leaders. On the other hand, as we shall see later, there are important techniques for maximizing the degree of success that can be achieved.

Well, then. How about the positive side? What are some of the reasons for having student councils and trying to make sure they are *good* ones?

There are many important functions for any student council. Perhaps the following three are among the most critical: (1) The student council can dedicate itself to providing an atmosphere for learning in which as many students as possible can learn as much as possible; (2) the student council can contribute significantly to the development of good citizenship—the ultimate aim of much of the process of education; and (3) the student council can serve as the crucial link between the student body and the administration in the conduct of school affairs.

First, I believe the primary task of the student council is to enhance the atmosphere for learning in the school, and help make school as meaningful as possible for as many students as possible. This means two things: eliminating those things that are distractions to the learning process, and providing those things that encourage it. This is tough, because what contributes to the “atmosphere” is often hard to determine. Certainly activities like school mixers, sports, and special interest clubs play an important part here, by promoting students’ school interests and increasing morale.

A vital starting point for action might be the fact that a student must *want* to be in school, or he or she won’t learn anything. This desire depends in a large part on the reactions he or she gets from other students. If a student feels that he “counts,”

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he is apt to take much more interest in what goes on than if he is constantly being trod upon by his snobbish peers. (“Did you hear about Joey Mocklesmith? He studied hard and only got a 56% on the last test. I didn’t even study, and I got a 96%. Boy, Joey must really be dumb!”)

When you set out to improve the atmosphere for learning, ask yourself: is your student council set up to serve the *whole* student body, or just the top 10%, which you represent? Does your student council provide a meaningful curriculum of activities for those students who may excel in things besides calculus and physics and honors English? There is a lot of real and serious work to be done in regard to making school a pleasant and exciting place to work. Many students who drop out of school do so because there’s nothing *in* school that they value. It’s your job in the student council to help them find something.

What you help them find may be the student council itself. This is the second point: the student council is a very valuable learning experience—perhaps the most valuable in the whole school. Personally, I don’t think there is anything so desperately needed in our country and the world as people who know how to get along with others and work together to accomplish common goals. Student council is one of the best ways to begin learning these skills. Working on a project with other people, relying upon them and they upon you, putting your heads together to solve problems, coordinating actions—all of these things must be learned through experience, and cannot be too highly valued. The world is getting more and more specialized, and needs people of talent and versatility who know how to pull it together to do things that will benefit everyone—more sensibly and in greater depth than if each tried to do it by himself.

Although student councils don’t actually govern, they are the focal point for the activities program, and the things they do are very similar to good governments. The involvement of students in this process means the development of citizenship

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in a real sense—the participatory, action sense. Be careful not to exclude the “potential dropouts” who are interested in student council work. Oliver Wendell Holmes reminds us that our greatest scholars have not been our greatest leaders, and vice-versa. Make sure the student council provides a significant learning experience in itself while it strives to enhance additional learning experiences for the student body at large.

Finally, the student council can serve a valuable role as a link between the students and administration. The student council can be a clearinghouse of ideas, complaints, desires, dislikes, and plans for action. In most schools, the student council is the only body that can represent the wishes of the students as well as being the only body to which the administration can go with a suggestion or grievance regarding problems in the school as a whole. The student council can mediate for both the students and the administration: it can be a place for peacefully and reasonably ironing out difficulties and coordinating teamwork plans. Without losing its own integrity as an independent student activity, the student council can bridge the gap between the student body and the school administration—to the benefit of both. This doesn’t mean that the student council becomes the Principal’s Little Helpers, nor does it mean becoming Advisory Council for Popular Uprisings. It means playing a very important functional role in the management of school life: assistance in decision making and decision execution, assistance in idea creation and idea follow-through.

Of course, there are many more reasons for having a student council—it has many more potential functions, many more advantages. But these three are apt to be among the most important. You will notice that all of them are centered on *people*: helping people learn, getting people involved in decision-making processes, mediating between people. This idea is important. Every good student council is indeed people-centered. Make sure *yours* is.

**Every good
student council is
people-centered.**

CHAPTER TWO: Brotherly What?

This book makes a pretty big assumption. It assumes that you care. I mean, really. Not just because it's fashionable to appear concerned for those who are "less fortunate." Not because you know that pretending to care is going to earn you the title of Miss Nice. Not because the redhead in the next row loves charitable people. Not because it's a good way to get attention in the public spotlight. No. Something deep, something sincere and real. Being interested in what others think, how they feel, what's important to them, what they need. Being sensitive to the people around you; and when they need something, wanting to help.

You might call it brotherly love, a concern for all people, people-consciousness.

A lot of sentimental hocus-pocus? Maybe. Personally, I am convinced that unless you really care for the people you are going to lead, you'll never do anything meaningful—except by accident. People-consciousness is a definite prerequisite for good leadership. If you aren't sensitive to the needs of the people you lead, how will you ever be able to meet their needs? Caring is a practical necessity. If you are going to do right by people, you have to be concerned with their welfare.

I would like to enter a plea, here. People-centered student councils need people-conscious leaders. If you find that you are quite indifferent about what the student council does and whether or not it helps or hurts people, please get out. Resign.

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to the needs of the
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their needs?**

Your leadership is apt to do more harm than good. It will exist in a vacuum, or be irrelevant, or even be antagonistic to the needs of your peers. If you don't care, you're not going to help anyone. So, unless you have a deep feeling for the welfare of the people you are supposed to lead, please, *stop leading*.

It is not easy to be people-conscious all the time; it is not easy to keep student council affairs from being self-centered instead of people-centered. After all, our own interests are naturally in the fore, and it is a real effort to keep them subordinated. For example: how willing are you to support a project that you feel has great value but is considered ridiculous by the student council? So often, sensitive members of the council do not speak up because they are afraid of "making fools of themselves" by standing alone on an issue. Which do *you* place first, your own popularity and prestige, or the meaningfulness attached to helping people? People-consciousness is not easy to come by, and often hard to put into effect. You have to really care, to make it work.

The idea of really caring for others has an important effect on the other side of the coin: the leader herself. In the Silent Revolution, caring is necessary not only because you must care in order to do relevant and meaningful things; it is also necessary to make your leadership durable. A deep concern for others is one of the few motivations, I'm convinced, that is powerful enough to compensate for the sacrifice—as well as provide the inspiration—for strong and purposeful leadership. Without it, you may be very unhappy and short-lived as a leader.

Essentially, the price tag on the Silent Revolution is that you must give up a lot of ego-satisfaction. As you will see later, you must reconcile yourself to being less noisy, less dramatic, less heroic, and more of a behind-the-scenes mover of events. In the Silent Revolution you must give of your time and effort because you care and want to give, not because you are expecting glory and prominence in return. It is very conceivable, of course, that if you really do something for your student body, they will respect you for it and be glad they elected you. You

can be selfless *and* popular, but popularity must not be your goal. Do things because you believe in them, and the simple satisfaction of having achieved them will be enough. (Applause is great, but it's only the frosting, and we've got to bake cakes.) If you're in it for other people, then helping them will give you satisfaction that having your name in lights could never compete with!

Lack of praise or recognition is often a result of using the Silent Revolution. It is comparatively easy to bear; it is a simple kind of self-denial that allows the achievement of greater meaning and satisfaction. Other situations are less easy. Being attacked and mistreated by the people you are trying to help, for example, is a possibility much harder to stomach than a mere lack of recognition. It hurts in particular when you really care for the people who are attacking you: if you didn't care, you could shrug it off with indifference. And yet, a deep concern for people makes it possible to understand that attack with compassion, and to keep helping. This kind of paradoxical situation can occur often. Indeed, we might list some Paradoxical Commandments of Leadership:

- 1. People are illogical, unreasonable, and self-centered.**
Love them anyway.
- 2. If you do good, people will accuse you of selfish ulterior motives.**
Do good anyway.
- 3. If you are successful, you win false friends and true enemies.**
Succeed anyway.
- 4. The good you do today will be forgotten tomorrow.**
Do good anyway.

5. **Honesty and frankness make you vulnerable.**
Be honest and frank anyway.
6. **The biggest men and women with the biggest ideas can be shot down by the smallest men and women with the smallest minds.**
Think big anyway.
7. **People favor underdogs but follow only top dogs.**
Fight for a few underdogs anyway.
8. **What you spend years building may be destroyed overnight.**
Build anyway.
9. **People really need help but may attack you if you do help them.**
Help people anyway.
10. **Give the world the best you have and you'll get kicked in the teeth.**
Give the world the best you have anyway.

You'll find that there is no such thing as going through a Silent Revolution just for fun. It's seldom fun. It's tiring, ridiculously nerve-wracking, demoralizing, and seemingly impossible. You've got to be deeply committed to people—*all* of them, not just the ones who are nice to you—in order to go through with it. If you're in it for other people, you may not always succeed, but you can be happy in the knowledge that you are doing things that are as meaningful as possible for both you and the people you're helping. You're working at full potential, so there can be no regrets. You're doing the most you can, as best you can.

One thing can't be overemphasized here. This approach does not require saints, nor does it make martyrs. It requires

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conscientious leaders, and provides a meaningful leadership style; it requires sensitive leaders, and provides an effective outlet for that sensitivity. Why a saint? Silent Revolutions simply need people who are very *human*. And why a martyr? Silent Revolutions demand a lot, but they give a lot in return. Personally, I'm convinced that if you are helping people for *your* sake and not theirs, you'll never be satisfied: either the "return" in personal glorification won't come, or if it does, it won't for long appease a constantly growing ego. If you're out for glory you'll never have enough, and you'll never be happy.

On the other hand, if you really care and want to help, then a lack of recognition is no great tragedy. To the contrary, it can be a very satisfying approach—you do things because they are valid in themselves, not because they are calculated to bring so many votes and so much glory. If meaning and significance have anything to do with happiness—and I think they do!—then the Silent Revolutionary is one of the happiest leaders around. Who's a martyr? Silent Revolutions can give deep-feeling leaders a deeply satisfying leadership experience. You can buy glory and recognition; you can't buy meaning. Satisfaction has to come from inside. Newspaper headlines can't give it to you.

The price of leading a Silent Revolution is high, but well worth paying. To pay it back with interest, try some real brotherly love. It can be the happiest thing that ever happens to you.

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CHAPTER THREE: Getting Properly Angry

If you really care for people, you will get upset when they are mistreated or in need. Hopefully, you will get angry. For anger is the catalyst, the call to action, the stimulus that says: “This is something we’ve got to correct,” and says it in bright letters and flashing neon signs.

If you aren’t moved, you’ll never get moving. So *please* get angry.

When you get angry, do it properly, by all means. First of all, get *really* angry. A deep anger, a slow-burning, smoldering kind of anger. None of this flash-in-the pan stuff— you know, angry one minute and laughing the next. It’s got to last. It’s got to strike a chord stronger than the “nobody-loves-me-and-lunch-was-bad” kind of thing that comes and goes each day. It’s got to be deep, so that the catalyst will be there for a long, long time. Most problems worthy of real anger aren’t going to be solved overnight—so be deep.

When you get angry, do it quietly. Not an out-of-control, bitter, flying wrath that leaves a trail of broken furniture and regrets. Show your anger by actions designed to solve the situation, not by loud and noisy expositions of your emotions. Somehow, being noisy about your anger feels like you’ve *done* something about the situation—which is deceiving. Restrict most of your expression to actions. Say little, do a lot. Action speaks louder than words. Another reason for keeping silent about your anger is that constant expositions of it will easily

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become a matter of self-righteousness. Avoid self-righteousness like the plague. Nothing gets progress bogged down faster than people who are more interested in their own purity than in doing anything important. It easily escalates into a contest of who can be more righteous than someone else, and in the end, nothing gets done—which isn't righteous at all. Please ignore the “holier than thou” stuff. It's irrelevant, and obstructive.

Most important, get angry *about issues* and not *at people*. People are proponents of various sides of issues, or participants in various problems—but as such, it is the issue and the problem that deserve your attention, not those “horrible people” who disagree with you. You may quite naturally dislike or distrust individuals who take a certain stand, but attacking the individual is beside the point—you've got to attack the stand. This is one case where it is definitely bad to get “personal.” It develops unnecessary animosity and friction, and it proves nothing. If the issue is a big one, it will still be there when the opposing parties are gone. If the issue is a small and simple one, the hard feelings will remain long after the problem is solved. Either way, attacking individuals is a waste of energy and it doesn't affect the outcome—except to get in the way and make it harder to be fair and reasonable in your dealings. Getting personal merely distorts the issue.

Fight the issue itself, and allow people who might have been enemies to change their minds and become friends. If you're right, they'll know it, and will appreciate being able to change their stands gracefully. Remember: your opponents on this issue may be your only allies on the next one. Treat them like friends. They probably are.

In short, go out and get angry—proper-like.

CHAPTER FOUR: On Being Eminently Practical

Goal-Orientation

With a real concern for people as motivation and move us to action, the next question is: what action? The first guideline I would like to suggest is simple. I call it *goal-orientation*.

One thing is painfully obvious, and that is that motivation is not enough. You can't just *want* to do right, and always end up doing it. It is no help at all to escort an old lady across the street when she doesn't want to go. And what is the sense of jumping into the water to save a drowning victim when you can't swim yourself? Clearly, there must be more to it than just desire.

Goal-orientation means employing only those actions that are really relevant to the achievement of the specific end you have in mind. This is very simple on the surface, but it is one of the points that is so easy to confuse in the midst of a campaign. Unless your actions are consistent with the goal, and are channeled *toward* that goal, you may dictate your own defeat. You may get so far away from your aims and objectives that you lose sight of them, or you may do things that destroy the *possibility* of achieving them in the future.

For example, ask yourself: will you achieve your goal faster by calling your opponent monstrous things? And do you facilitate your goals by picketing the opposition, causing them to resist and harden their stand all the more? If you don't like a

teacher, does it make sense to spite your own education by refusing to cooperate with her? If you don't like the food in the cafeteria, do you boycott it so the school will have less money to buy better food? If you don't think there's enough free speech in the school, should you make so much noise that you get suspended and then can't talk to anybody about anything? Large and small, significant or trivial, these kinds of questions must constantly be asked.

How can I best serve my goals? It is a question that is often hard to answer, but one that you can't afford to ignore. A loving and willing heart must be guided by reason and know-how, or the real helpfulness will be only mediocre at best, and tragic at worst. No matter how much you want to help, you may only hurt people unless you know what you're doing. First, you must *mean* well; then, you must *do* well—for the sake of the people you're trying to help. Doing well means doing relevant and effective things. If you can't translate your concern and desire to help into concrete benefits to the people you're concerned about, then the meaning of your motivation is sadly lost. Don't let it be! Make sure your actions are goal-oriented; make sure you deliver what the customers need. They'll appreciate it.

The Insecure Life of Intellectual Honesty

Another guideline I'd like to suggest in deciding what action to take is something we might call "intellectual honesty." This means an attempt to call the shots as they are, and to be as honest and practical as possible when interpreting those shots. The key to intellectual honesty, as I see it, is recognition of the fact that the world is not all black-and-white. That means that taking absolute stands on many issues is merely a matter of running away from them. Extreme, absolute, black-and-white answers are an easy way out because you don't have to think, you just plug in a formula. Granted, it takes more nerve, but most issues today are complex, and must be faced in their full complexity.

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Nowhere, perhaps, are formulas more interesting in their effects than in the realm of ethics. For example, if the statement were made, “What this country needs is absolute morality,” most people wouldn’t question it. But intellectual honesty demands closer scrutiny. In all sincerity, what is absolute morality? We really don’t know. Every part of the country has a slightly different set of conventions for moral and immoral behavior. Each person’s conception of absolute morality may be a little different from the next person’s even when they’re from the same part of the country.

Let’s assume that absolute morality means such things as “don’t tell lies,” a statement that is pretty clearly understood by most people. As a general rule, “don’t tell lies,” is extremely important and ought to be followed. But as an *absolute*? What happens if a killer is loose and he wants to shoot your brother? Obviously, it would be quite reasonable for you to lie about his whereabouts. Lying isn’t good, but saving your brother’s life is far more important. Absolute morality wouldn’t allow us to tell a falsehood to save a life: lies are lies, and that is that. It is better to let your brother die than tell a lie. Is this the kind of thing we want? No, of course not. This example is a bit extreme, but it makes the point clear—to be practical, we need more flexibility than an *absolute* gives us. This fact is recognized often in our daily lives, when we talk about “fibbing” or telling “white lies” to keep from hurting people’s feelings or giving away a secret of some sort.

Intellectual honesty is insecure because there are no easy formulas to rest on. You often don’t have the answers, and have to admit it—quite unlike the absolutist who is secure thinking he has all the answers wrapped around his little finger, and goes around wondering how anybody could be so dumb as to not agree with him. But the absolutist doesn’t do much thinking, and if you don’t think and try to grasp the real complexity of a problem, you’ll never be able to *solve* that problem. Problems that exist in the gray must be understood in the gray if they are to be solved.

In short, the minute you think you have all the answers, don't. You'll stop thinking and learning and adapting—prerequisites for progress! There's no reason to worry if you don't have all the answers. Just don't sit there complacently as if you *did!*

Necessary Assumptions

There are some necessary assumptions that you must have if you are going to deal with people both happily and successfully. Let me list a few of them:

- 1. People are more important than things.**
- 2. The people I work with are neither angels nor monsters, but human beings basically like myself, differing mostly in degrees of talent and experience.**
- 3. Most people want very much to do what they feel is right.**
- 4. I should always try to understand people, rather than pass judgment on them.**
- 5. In general, it costs me nothing to give the other person the benefit of the doubt.**
- 6. The decisions I make are based on my opinions, which may be wrong, and my knowledge, which may be insufficient.**

The idea that people are more important than things is easy to forget, particularly in a society where the Almighty Dollar and materialistic possessions are so central. We keep forgetting that theoretically, governments, schools, labor-saving machinery, student councils, dollars, and so on—are all there to serve people. The more who are served, the better. Oddly enough, the

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one thing that so many people need most is not to be equated with red tape or dollar signs or new inventions: most people need other people.

In your own student council, don't let those dollar signs and red tape and what-have-you get in the way of helping your peers. It may be a tradition to have a special Hinkleberry Octavius April Fool's Day Gala Dance, but if you charge \$75 per student and only twelve people come, it would behoove you to either change it so it can be a morale-builder for the entire student body, or get rid of it. It is only a "thing," and people are more important than traditional "things." At the same time, a program of students tutoring fellow students in academic subjects may seem like a lot of charitable nonsense. It certainly lacks prestige—no great expenditures, no ancient and hallowed standing committee to run it, no smashing publicity, just a couple of students sitting around talking about biology. But it is this kind of thing that student councils should be all about: people helping people.

The idea that the people you work with are neither angels nor monsters is crucial, particularly in working with teachers and the Principal. Rumors have been circulating recently that teachers and Principals are human. Indeed, though it is still only a matter of hearsay, this rumor seems to be true. After all, what is an adult but a grownup teenager? And heaven knows, teenagers are human. More than that, it seems that Principals and teachers just don't have time to be either angels or monsters. Being human is a full-time job for everybody: teachers, students, athletes, financial czars, and poolroom attendants.

What's worse, rumors indicate that even the Nastiest Principal in the Annals of School History is, deep down inside, doing what he thinks is right. Of course, you may not think he is very smart, or courteous, or enlightened as to the virtues of his students, and so on. But he is probably sincere. Don't get angry with him, but help him become educated—not by telling him how things ought to be, but by showing him that you are sincere and on the ball yourself.

If a teacher or Principal persists in being “unenlightened,” don’t run around muttering under your breath and cursing Virtually the World. Try to understand *why* that person behaves the way he or she does. Don’t judge him or her as being dumb or mean or evil or monstrous. Remember: some people have had different experiences with certain things, others have illnesses, others know more than you do, others have a passionate dislike for marmalade, and so on. There are a multitude of factors that go into making people behave the way they do. Condemning people doesn’t help.

Don’t judge, understand. And if you can’t possibly understand a certain kind of behavior—well, what does it cost to give the other guy the benefit of the doubt? There may be something going on in his or her life or profession that you don’t have the least inkling about, and it won’t hurt you to assume that there is a valid reason for the behavior you are witnessing. This goes for your fellow students as well. Whether you agree with their thoughts and actions or not, you can understand and perhaps even help. At any rate, you’ll only cause people more problems by trampling all over them for no good reason. Quite often, insensitivity causes more damage than intentional harm. Be sensitive and compassionate, for your sake and everybody else’s.

In all this, please remember our last assumption: you and I, just as everyone else, possess opinions, biases, facts, and general knowledge that may be partially or totally false. A realization of this factor is not meant to cause one to give up and say, “Well, I guess we shouldn’t do anything at all, because it will never be completely correct.” Not at all. We *have* to marshal as many facts and opinions as we can and make decisions based on them. We *have* to come up with the best answers we can and try to put them into effect. But not with the idea that they are Final Truth, Generally and Specifically Impregnable. We move forward with a set of “tentative conclusions.” When new knowledge comes to light we have to be flexible. So add a dash of humility to the next decision. In the long run, it will taste

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better that way. It will also help you to respect other people's opinions right now, in the short run. If we might be wrong, others might be right—no matter how disconcerting that thought may be!

Sinking in the Same Boat?

As long as we're being eminently practical, there is one point that must be made clear. As hard as it may be to believe at times, the fact is that you, the student council, the teachers, and the Principal are all there at school for the same purpose: to educate young men and women; to make school an interesting and purposeful period in each of their lives; to prepare them for new challenges and tasks after they leave high school.

You're all in it together. No matter how much you think that a teacher or Principal is your forsworn and eternal enemy, the fact is that they are there to help you. Let me assure you, they're not there for their own fun and games. Teaching is not easy, and it usually doesn't pay well. If they were in it for their own selfish reasons they'd be miles away in some other job. But they aren't. They're trying to help you learn. And that's what you should be trying to do—learn. And that's what the student council can help by improving the morale and lessening the distractions in school—the process of learning. And that's what the student council is in itself—a certain kind of learning.

So who can afford to be enemies of whom? You've all got the same goals. Furthermore, if one of you fails, the others can't be totally successful. If students don't want to learn, if school disinterests them, then the teachers can't really help them learn. (You can lead a horse to water, but you can't make him drink if he's not thirsty.) On the other hand, if students want to learn and the teachers are no good, the process is still a failure. (You can lead a horse to water, but if the well is dry, he'll just stand around getting thirsty.) The student council can help by promoting school harmony. It can provide new kinds of learning experiences in its activities and projects, as well as encouraging

study along academic lines. Minimizing friction and maximizing the atmosphere for learning is crucial. (You can lead a horse to water, but if there are 1200 other horses fighting over it, he may not get a drink—he may get hoofed to death.)

Students, teachers, principals, student councils—the goals, interests, and concerns of all are intermixed. You can't harm one without harming the others. The next time you think Miss Barnes or Principal Doe is really terrible, just remember: you're all in the same boat, and if that boat is sinking, you're all sinking with it. So get your bucket out and start bailing. Bail for all you're worth. If you don't, you and your student council may not be worth *anything*. Keep that boat from sinking—and, if you can, make it watertight.

It is logical enough that people with the same goals ought to work together as a team. Try to set up that kind of teamwork in your own school. Establish a working relationship with teachers, principals, and students alike.

Be sure to have frequent contacts with the Principal and Student Council Advisor. Give them a chance to express their views. Don't make every meeting a meeting of crises for either of you. Go to see them often enough that you're not always bringing a problem or a demand with you. If it gets to the point that the Principal can say, "Oh, here she is again. Another sticky problem, another unbelievable crisis."—well, you've lost your effectiveness as well as your welcome! Let the Principal or Advisor be happy to see you. After all, you're part of the same team, and morale is important.

But the student council must not only communicate with the Principal and Advisor, it must communicate with the student body as well. That always *sounds* easy, but think about it. Do you really know the "average" student in your school? My guess is that you don't. It is so easy to go around with ten or twenty kids who are just like yourself, and ignore the other 95% of the student body.

When was the last time you spoke up for the so-called "little person" on campus? When was the last time you even knew

what the “little person” was interested in? You may not feel comfortable around your school’s nerds, geeks, hot-rodders, motorcycle kings, near-dropouts, or professional delinquents—but the fact is, you’re all members of the same crew on the same boat, together. Of course, there ought to be a good leader at the helm—but unless the helmsman has someone to row, no one will get anywhere. I’ll bet that the “little person” in your school isn’t so “little.” The odds are, he or she has as much muscle for rowing as you do.

If you want to keep your boat afloat, you’re going to have to walk the deck in a lot of other people’s shoes for a while, no matter how sore your feet get. You won’t get far bailing if your leadership bucket has holes in the bottom. You’ve got to find those holes and patch them up, eliminate them. Keep in touch with all the members of the crew: teachers, principals, students, advisors, geeks, athletes, honor students—all of them. It’s really the only way. Otherwise, you’ll capsize in the first storm... and believe me, the water is cold. *Really* cold.

Strength at the Right Times

There are some interesting theories of leadership that seem to say: A strong leader is always strong; he never lets anyone forget he is in command; he keeps the reins tight. In short, he bulldozes his way through life like a rhinoceros in a porcelain closet. Contrary to this theory, I would like to suggest that the true test of a “strong” leader is his or her ability to be strong *at the right times*.

First of all, you’ll wear yourself out trying to be “strong” or dominant all the time—and furthermore, not everything needs or is worth your full strength. If there are a few big issues you want to get resolved, devote your strength to *them*. For the rest, don’t step in as the dominant figure unless you have to. You can sit through an entire committee meeting and never say a word, if things are going the way you would like them to go anyhow.

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Popular conceptions of strength are pretty confusing. One that has always intrigued me is the childhood game (found in adult circles as well) of daring people to do certain things. The feeling is that if you decline a dare, you're yellow, you're weak. But where does real strength lie? A dare is a way of manipulating people. Johnny knows all he has to do to control Billy is to dare him to do something. Billy will do it, because the last thing Billy is, by golly, is yellow. On close scrutiny, we find that Billy is the weak one because he allows himself to be manipulated. Georgie, on the other hand, may refuse the dare—which is supposed to make him yellow, or green, or whatever color is in vogue. But this proves his real strength, since he is not susceptible to this kind of manipulation. He was strong because he made up his own mind and stuck to his decision, all colors and catcalls notwithstanding.

Another example, is the situation in which a leader is slandered in an attack by a “non-follower.” Immediately, we think of the leader making a strong comeback, demolishing the attacker's arguments, and again reigning victorious. But, if you want to be quite practical, this strong “comeback” only puts the leader on the same level as the slanderer—which, by the way, is not a very good level to be on! Brushing it off, or ignoring it, can often be the sign of real strength. If you have to squelch each opponent, you're showing your weakness—no matter how good a squelcher you are.

And so it goes. Sometimes strength is forbearance; sometimes it is best to roar. But always remember to maximize your strength by concentrating it. Ancient wisdom tells us it is better to say, “This one thing I have done,” rather than “These ten things I have tried, sort of.” Be careful about what “strength” means in each particular context. Beware in particular of being so “strong” that you are unduly hard on people. They are apt to mutiny against your leadership and leave you charging the enemy by yourself. That's not strong at all—I guarantee. Perhaps Charles V had the right idea: An iron hand in a velvet glove. And that's not kid stuff.

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Words, Words, Words

In general, words are a pain. You have to use the right ones with the right meanings. You have to spell them correctly. You have to use them in correct combinations. You have to take special connotations into account: words won't even stand still for you. The phobia for them that began back in kindergarten with Miss Murphy's Primer is always with us. And yet, they are the most valuable tool the leader has to work with. If you can make words serve you, you can conquer mountains with a valet.

As you are increasing your ability to communicate—by both written and spoken words—try to keep in mind one particular category of vocabulary. Every leader ought to have several non-committal words and phrases, to be employed constantly as substitutes for negative words. For example, instead of saying, "That's a lousy idea," and killing the discussion, you can say, "Well, that's a suggestion that would bear some investigation," or, "That's a point we shouldn't overlook," or some such. You can refrain from hurting people's feelings, and still be honest. (After all, bad ideas will bear investigation even if they don't bear up under investigation—and bad ideas shouldn't be overlooked, they ought to be pinpointed and recognized for what is bad in them, so that those things are not a part of a so-called "good idea.")

Hocus-pocus? Trickery? Don't be silly. You're just making as pleasant a comment as you can, without disavowing your own opinion and without hurting other people's feelings. If someone asks you what you think about an idea, there are scads of words you can use in this fashion: "interesting," "unique," "different," "new," "impressive," "forceful," "thoughtful," and so on. "What do you think about such-and-such?" "Well, it's certainly an interesting idea . . . I'm glad it was brought up . . . it's well worth considering." Don't be phony or unnatural—pick your own words, your own phrases. On the other hand, don't be offensive when you don't have to be! You can maxi-

mize your own pleasantness or that of a meeting by using words carefully—in either a neutral, “open” way, or in a strictly positive way.

Another thing to remember: words can help you leave the back door open for yourself and for your opponent. Phrases such as, “To the best of my knowledge,” or “Based on these assumptions,” or “I don’t know, but I got the impression that,” or “I know that some people feel” – phrases such as these are invaluable. They recognize, first of all, one of our basic assumptions: that our opinions or ideas may be wrong. If they turn out to be, having recognized this possibility makes it easier on us. Also, if you are asserting a “truth,” these phrases and others like them can make that assertion less blatant and harsh sounding to others, without reducing the content of the statement.

This kind of thing cannot be overrated. It’s one of those little ways to help you get along with other people and live with yourself at the same time: to tell the truth, but not make it a slap in the face to the people who are listening. If an idea is bad, it will be obvious sooner or later. Let your words soften your stand now, and thus soften the defeat of opposing stands, later. Nothing is lost regarding the issue itself and much can be gained in terms of human relations. Words, words, words. Who needs them? Leaders do!

Mini-Maxims

There are many mini-maxims, which when totaled become maxi-maxims. A few are listed below:

1. *The value of a “can do” attitude and a pleasing personality cannot be over-emphasized.*
2. *There is nothing that will build success like success.*
Start with little successes and work your way up. Meanwhile, don’t go for success for its own sake: make sure each success is relevant to real needs and problems.

3. *When you're working with people, find areas of agreement and try to expand them.*
4. *There is tremendous value in just listening.*
5. *Promise something less, deliver something more.*
Promise less than you have reason to believe you can deliver. If the bottom falls out, you'll be glad you didn't promise The World. If things go all right, you'll be able to happily deliver more than you guaranteed.
6. *Ask crucial questions at the right time.* If the principal is tired and harried, he won't want to hear too many new, wild-sounding student council proposals. If possible, try to see people when they're fresh and most open to new ideas (maybe sometime in the morning?). Also, pick the right time of year, not only the right time of day, for certain more long-range plans.
7. *Get the key people involved.* You will encounter less opposition if key people don't feel left out; you will receive more support if key people are a part of the program and interested in it. Don't get so many people involved that you lose focus, and don't force people to become involved when they don't want to. But by and large, the involvement of key people will make the program go smoother, and be more fun and instructive all the way around. Get them involved as early as possible, and as much as possible.
8. *Sell a program, not yourself.* You can throw yourself into a program, but advocating oneself is a bit unseemly! The program is more important and anyway, if the program succeeds, the odds are that you will too.
9. *Give credit where credit is due.* Be generous in your distribution of praise. You're not doing it all by yourself, and don't

make it look that way! At the same time, success will reflect on the leader no matter where the laurels go.

10. *Get your facts straight.* Hearsay, confounded by the prejudices of each person who reports it, compound to undermine the truth. Don't make any decisions without going to the source of the rumor, and pinpointing what really happened. Otherwise, you won't even be asking the right questions about the issue—much less coming up with the right answers.
11. *Talk with people individually.* People often behave differently when they're in a group; behavior changes, opinions change, and so on. Talk with people individually and take away the group pressure: listen to each person much more as he or she really is.
12. *Talk with your opposition eyeball to eyeball.* You're . . . much more apt to get real insight that way, and it prevents the unreliability of second-hand information while facilitating the agreement process. If someone has been portrayed to you as a monster, go and talk with her and find out she isn't—and then solve the problem that made her seem like one.
13. *Most people have a pet project.* Keep it in mind.
14. Above all, always remember: *The janitor runs the school.*

A Practical Situation

Now that we have brotherly love for motivation, anger for a catalyst, and are eminently practical (with goal-orientation, intellectual honesty, the right assumptions, a sense of teamwork, the good word, and mini-maxims), let's try a concrete situation.

Let's say that the Principal of Elderock Higgins High School has decided that Senior Class Day is for the birds and will not be held this year, under any circumstances. Let's hypothesize two approaches and their likely results:

President X: This Student Council President was furious about the decision. He called an immediate student council meeting, and a resolution was passed that a special delegation should be formed to go to the Principal's Office after school and demand that Senior Class Day be restored. This resolution was bitterly debated by a few members, but passed by all overwhelming majority of the student council—thanks to the rhetoric of the President. The delegation was appointed and presented its demands to the Principal. The Principal resented being “stormed” in his office and told what to do by “renegade students.” The students wanted all or nothing. Since the Principal had other people and factors to deal with also, the students got nothing.

The popularity of President X skyrocketed. He was a hero. “Boy, he really told off the Principal, didn't he!” “Really has guts!” “What a guy!” Sure was great to have someone who wasn't a puppet for the Principal, someone who was so bold in demanding things that his fellow students wanted. Unfortunately, the whole thing made the Principal so angry that he didn't say “Yes” to even the smallest requests the council had during the rest of the year. (The students, of course, blamed it all on the Principal: “He's such an old grouch.” “Nothing like having a mean Principal.” “Talk about being uncooperative!” “He's denying our basic human rights; how tyrannical can you get?” “He's so bad I can't believe it.”)

President Y: President Y was disturbed about the decision, so she dropped in to see the Principal after school to talk about it. The Principal told her that each year seniors damage the school grounds during Class Day activities. Last year, they ripped out 26 shrub plants, destroyed three flower beds, and ruined the cafeteria walls with egg fights. “There is going to be no more of that. Finished. Through. There's no sense in putting time,

money, and effort into providing attractive school surroundings just so seniors can convivially tear it all to shreds each spring—and that’s final. Seniors need a Class Day like a hole in the head.”

President Y invited discussion on the issue at the next council meeting. Most of the students were pretty upset. They felt that just a few had been responsible for the property damage. Anyway, it would be possible to plan activities that would not occur in the shrubbery areas, so no damage would be likely. Most of the activities could take place in the auditorium and football field; student committees could pick up litter; students could be made more aware of the problem of damaging school property; and so on.

President Y, of course, was happy to hear the constructive remarks. She and the Class Day Committee Chairman made an appointment with the Principal and presented some of these alternatives. The Principal was impressed with the proposals, and agreed that theoretically, the alternative plans should work. But he said that each year it seems as though nothing can possibly happen, and it always does. He said that seniors swear up and down that nothing will happen, and then suddenly 26 shrubs and three flowerbeds are torn to shreds. In short, his answer was “no.”

The President and the student council were pretty discouraged about this. Voices in the council became more militant: “He’ll never listen to reason. Let’s go on strike.” “Let’s boycott school on Senior Class Day.” “Let’s tear up all the shrubbery *now*. Why wait?” But the President was convinced that if they could only prove to the Principal that they were indeed concerned about damaging school property, he might change his mind. The President suggested that the seniors have a Campus Cleanup on a Saturday in the near future. Under the direction of grounds and maintenance people, the students could pull weeds and pick up litter. The Senior Class could even buy some new shrubbery and plants as a gift to the school.

Needless to say, this jazz about a Campus Cleanup didn’t go

over too well with most of the students. (After all, pulling weeds isn't anything but hard work, and they grow back anyway.) There was a lot of grumbling. But it seemed a good way to prove their sincerity. And it might be pretty constructive. Okay, okay—they'd try it. The Principal approved, and proper custodial supervision was provided. The student council publicized and promoted it, with service clubs responding favorably. That Saturday, about 30 students showed up. Although only about half of them were working at any one time (how can you pass up such a good chance to catch all the latest gossip?) quite a bit was actually accomplished. Teachers and students alike were pleasantly surprised when they returned to school on Monday. Even the Principal was pleased. He stopped the President in the hall and told her what a good job they had done. Unfortunately, he didn't seem to have changed his mind about a Class Day.

President Y was disappointed, but she went back to the council to see if they couldn't come up with some more proposals. Perhaps they could hold the Class Day off campus, and so on. She went back to see the Principal. The Principal had done some serious thinking about the matter, and when the President stopped in again, he decided that the students were sincere after all. Maybe they did need a Class Day like a hole in the head, but if they were willing to work for it ... why not? He said yes. The only condition was that the students pay for any damage incurred to school property. (As it turned out, almost no damage was incurred, due to the vigilance of those students who had spent their Saturday pulling weeds and planting shrubs!)

Throughout the issue, President Y appeared as a rather undramatic, almost shy leader. She was a mediator, not a demander of student rights. She worked mostly in the background, out of the public eye. Her popularity went nowhere. And yet, she delivered the goods. She did what President X, the protester, *couldn't* do. She got a Class Day, where President X failed completely. Furthermore, school appearance was improved and pride in its maintenance had increased. Of

course, it took some work, and a lot of patience. It took a willingness to be reasonable, to meet the Principal halfway, to give as well as take. But it got the students what they wanted.

More important, the approach used by President Y enhanced the prestige of the student council. Besides the fact that there was no bitterness created between the council and the school administration, there was the fact that the council had *solved* a problem, to the mutual satisfaction of the students and the administration. The council was willing to work, not just complain. Other projects that the student council wanted to try later in the year were received warmly. Not all of them were approved, but the students had the feeling that the administration was “on their side.”

Compared with the approach of President X, it was terribly dull. And terribly effective. Quiet, demanding, slow—and *effective*.

What do you think? Which method would you pick: dramatic, popular, and ineffective, or silent, selfless, and successful?

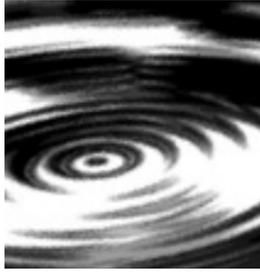
If you recall our discussions in this chapter, you know that the very first prerequisite was not met by President X: goal-orientation. In particular, if the prime task of the student council is to improve the atmosphere for learning and make school as meaningful as possible for as many students as possible, then everything the student council does should fit into this framework. Not only did President X fail to get a Class Day, but he failed to meet this first goal. An all-out, bitter war between students and administration is a severe distraction to the learning process. President X also failed to take into account the importance of the student council as a mediator. Instead of increased understanding and communications, he caused long-lasting distrust and animosity between students and school officials. Even if the “battle” over the Class Day had been won, the “war” would have been lost. All progress would have stopped. Each side would have dug into its trenches, with no white flags honored. Is this the kind of learning experience

that student councils are supposed to promote? I should say *not!*

What we need, of course, is the approach that President Y used—an approach that is consistent with our standards of goal-orientation, intellectual honesty, necessary assumptions, and school-wide team work. President Y attacked the issue, not the Principal. She kept all the channels open. She demonstrated her sense of teamwork by her willingness to help the situation in terms of concrete and relevant projects. She didn't cause any animosity between students and administrators. She worked *persistently* rather than self-righteously. She worked *in* the system, not against it. No distractions to the learning process. No lasting bitterness, but a growing respect.

You can do revolutionary things with this approach. I call it the Silent Revolution. Not much uproar, not much noise. But huge changes.

Let's take a closer look



**PART TWO:
PUTTING THE
PIECES TOGETHER**

CHAPTER FIVE: The Silent Revolution

The Silent Revolution is a leadership technique, characterized most specifically by persistence and compromise. It is designed to bring about change as quickly, quietly, and reasonably as possible.

Persistence is easier said than done. You can probably recite countless times when you worked weeks and months to get seemingly simple things accomplished. It's easy to stop trying—especially when there is no guarantee that you'll get what you want even if you stick it out. But without persistence, most of what you try to do will fail. Most student council work is not an open-and-shut case; it requires real vigilance to see it through. So be persistent.

Always remember: PEOPLE RESIST CHANGE. Any kind of change. Even if something is good, if it's *new*, people will need time to get used to it. It makes sense. People know how things are now. The future, on the other hand, is unpredictable. Why should people trade a sure thing for something that is unproven (as all really new things are)? People resist change because the status quo is usually “safe.” They are accustomed to it. Why change? Things might get worse, for all they know.

Persistence is the simplest weapon for bringing about change: you just keep a proposal in front of people long enough that they become accustomed to the ideas and begin to identify them with the status quo. Actually executing the proposal may be revolutionary, but if the idea has been mulling around in the

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atmosphere for a while, it will seem like an expected and natural result of “normalcy.” Acceptance can be a result of good exposure.

With long-range plans, persistence allied with the “drop of water” approach can get the job done. Perhaps you have some big changes in mind. Take them slowly, step by step. Let time work to your advantage. The odds are, if you try to fill the bucket with a blasting faucet, someone will turn the faucet off. Let it fill your bucket slowly, a few drops at a time, and in a while it will be full.

Quite often, each little step will have to be fought for, and compromise enters the picture. The art of compromise is perhaps best seen in concrete situations. So let’s take an example. Let’s put the Silent Revolution into action.

Welcome to Archibald J. Gramlich High School. Gramlich High has 544 students (or 543, depending on whether or not Johnny Crassenbad finally gets suspended). The Principal is Mr. Horatio Mandelbaum, who has been at Gramlich for 34 years. He has often been heard telling students that he was the Principal when their parents went to Gramlich, and he will still be Principal when their children go to Gramlich—and no one challenges the statement. He is a venerated part of the school and community.

The community of Gramlich itself is rather small. The town has a bowling alley, three grocery stores, a movie theater, four churches, two restaurants, and a hamburger joint. For additional excitement, citizens of Gramlich journey to nearby Anderson ville, a city of 20,000. Andersonville has ice cream parlors.

The student council at Gramlich High is a phlegmatic, do-nothing body of refugees from Miss Wetzell’s seventh period history class. Last year, a new President tried to dissolve the council, as a service to the school. Based on tradition and a mortal fear of Miss Wetzell, the council withstood the onslaught and it still lives.

The students complain a lot about the council. It's a hoax, but it's not their fault, they say. It's Mr. Mandelbaum. He's a tyrant. And the Student Council Advisor, Miss Smithies. She's an old hag. It's all a conspiracy. Students aren't allowed to do anything. They try, but it's not *their* fault.

Okay. You are the new Student Council President, and you want to see some major changes. How? You draw up a plan for action, a Silent Revolution. Since you are armed with some basic assumptions about people, you begin by realizing that Mr. Mandelbaum is not a tyrant and Miss Smithies is not a hag. Furthermore, your student council is not a hoax primarily because of them. It is a hoax because some students want it that way, and others don't know how to make it any better.

You realize that the limit to what your student council can do is set mostly by the strength and responsibility of the council itself. Admittedly, Mr. Mandelbaum and Miss Smithies may have a misconception as to the purpose and potential of the student council. But to blame them is only a lame way of defending your own inaction and irresponsibility. Obviously, Principals do set restrictions and departments of education do make rulings on many kinds of student activities. Student councils—even the very best of them—are told “no,” to be sure. But for the most part, that “no” is merely a reflection of the opinion which the Principal has of student councils in general and yours in particular. If the Principal thinks your council is a bunch of no-good bums who aren't willing to work and are grossly irresponsible—well, then, why should he ever say “yes”? You've got to prove to him that the council is responsible and constructive, that it can play a helpful and important role in school life.

Hmmm. Prove the council's worth. But how? It's a vicious circle. You have to do something good to prove you can do things, but you aren't allowed to do things because you've never done anything that was good. How do you break into the circle and get started? The only thing to do is to start with

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something small, and build from there. Make each little task a success, and keep going—bigger and better all the time. Do well everything that you do, and sooner or later Mr. Mandelbaum can't help but have confidence in you.

Where do you start? Remember we said that you, the student council, the teachers, the students, and the Principal are all in it together. You want more responsibility, more “rights” in the school community— this would be a benefit to you. Why not start by doing a few things that might be beneficial to the other members of the team?

Go talk with Mr. Mandelbaum. Talk with Miss Smithies. What can the student council do to help alleviate some of their problems? What are they concerned about? Mr. Mandelbaum wants people to keep order in the lunch lines, needs money to buy a new movie projector, wants someone to administer the parking regulations, and is concerned about school spirit. Now, it isn't the student council's job to run the school. Maybe it would be best to stay out of the projector buying and parking supervision. (Your student council can be useful without being used. Usually, it is not your function to administer regulations you had no part in formulating.) But school spirit—there's a clear issue for your council. And even unruly lunch lines could be given some attention. Take the problems that are closest to the purposes of the student council, and go ahead. In any school, there is a lot to be done. You can afford to do something that *both* the council and the Principal or Advisor are interested in!

Okay, you've got an issue—school spirit. Your poor football team hasn't heard a spirited cheer in twelve years, and Mr. Mandelbaum is understandably upset. If you're going to lose to Andersonville every year, the least you can do is to go down fighting. “There's no dishonor in losing, if you do it with spirit, proudly,” Mr. Mandelbaum is often heard to say. At Gramlich, however, most of the students leave the game before the end of the third quarter—and the cheering section leaves before that. Only Joe Skinner stays for the finish of the game. He tells

Bobbie Ferguson about it, and then the whole school knows.

Your first problem, given the nature of the situation, is the membership of the student council itself. Needless to say, it is important to get your most enthusiastic people involved in the project—and they may not be on the council at all. If no one on the council is excited about the proposition, go get someone in the student body at large and make him or her the committee chairman. Even if you do have a couple of “movers” on your student council, get as many non-council students involved as possible. The project won’t succeed without broad support anyway.

Remember: it’s a project *by* the student council, but *for* the student body and the school as a whole. In this respect it is important to remember that what the student body needs, and what the student council *thinks* the student body needs, may be quite different things. Get a lot of opinions, and not just from the students you know best.

Let’s say you develop a Pep Club, and a special cheering section: card tricks, special yells, badges, banners, and the whole works. For the first time in twelve years a mighty cheer rises up from the stands, and the football team nearly goes crazy. They are so inspired, they lose by the smallest gap in Gramlich history. Mr. Mandelbaum grins from ear to ear for days. Gramlich really gave it to them, boy. A lot more students are bound to turn out for the team next fall—and then we’ll show them!

Well, it’s a long road from Pep Clubs to “The Student Council as a Dynamic Force in School Affairs.” But probably not as long a road as you think. You’ve accomplished one thing at least: Mr. Mandelbaum and Miss Smithies respect you now.

But your student council never has any money. You spend your whole year raising money or doing nothing because you have none. Student councils weren’t meant to be fund-raising organizations. In Andersonville, they charge a small amount at the beginning of the year as “dues” for the student council. Then, during the year, this money is returned in the form of “free” activities and projects. Such a system would be the coun-

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cil's Emancipation Proclamation in regard to financial limitations.

You go and talk with Miss Smithies. She is opposed to the plan, because many students in the school aren't well off financially, and it would be hard for them to pay a lot of extra fees during registration. She suggests you talk with Mr. Mandelbaum. He is opposed to the plan because it would slow down registration and add more bookkeeping work to the tasks of the already overloaded school secretary.

You discuss the matter with the council, and find that several members would be willing to do the bookkeeping during registration, to take the load off the secretary. Other members suggest that the dues be kept very low, just enough to cover operating costs like paper, mimeograph stencils, posters, paint, and so on. Beyond that, each activity would be expected to pay for itself through charging for participation. Miss Smithies agreed, and then Mr. Mandelbaum. Next fall, the incoming student council will have a little operating capital, and be freed from some of the usual financial agonies. Okay—you have won the confidence of the school administration through your work with school spirit, and now you've gained a little more organizational freedom.

But what you really want to do is to break the "static school atmosphere." You want to have some good assemblies, sponsor some popular discussion groups; broaden the representation of the student council; increase student control over elections; have some good informal dances; set up orientation activities for the new underclassmen each fall; establish a system of intramural sports; and, in general, provide meaningful outlets for the interests of as many students as possible. World politics, cars, singing, woodworking, drama, calculus, literature, photography, music, French, sports—all can be encouraged and fostered by a student council. But not if it doesn't try to find out what others are interested in.

The thing that presses down upon you the hardest is that the way your council is now organized, it is especially hard to

find out what the majority of the student body *is* interested in. Seniors dominate the membership numerically as well as psychologically, and students need nearly an “A” average to be eligible for office at all. The council thus represents about 10% of the Senior Class—a sad state of affairs when there is a whole school to consider.

As President, you can’t help but think that the council is really out of touch, and you want to do something about it—reapportion the council’s membership. You want to change the student council constitution so that each grade level will have representation on the council based on the size of each class. This measure will give a more democratic representation to each grade level, and hopefully, it will result in a less distorted student council. Larger classes will now be getting the representation they deserve.

This change is radical for the Gramlich High student council, which has existed as a feudal society lorded over by the Seniors in collusion with the king—or Principal. It will be hard to bring about a change of this magnitude. In particular, though the lower grades are larger, the upper grades dominate the council, and the council must pass the constitutional amendment.

The council membership is: Seniors, 16; Juniors, 12; Sophomores, 8; Freshmen, 4. Obviously, the Seniors aren’t going to want to give up their “seniority,” as it were. You can already hear them saying: “Who cares about all this democracy jazz? Freshmen are dumb. Do you want them to have as many votes as the *Seniors*? You’re asking for a dumb student council.” You also discover that it was Mr. Mandelbaum—yes, when he started, 34 years ago—who set up the student council this way. Finally, Miss Smithies is not anxious to disagree with Mr. Mandelbaum, because he has hinted lately about making her a new Department Chair.

Well, it doesn’t look so good. Okay—time for strategy. Think. You’ve got to convince the council, and then the Advisor and Principal, and finally, the entire student body. The

council is dominated by Seniors, the student body is dominated by persuasive upperclassmen, and the Principal and Advisor just dominate in general.

A key point to remember here is that the adage, “We’ll cross that bridge when we come to it” can often be disastrous. All the people in this situation *interact*: most problems are thus not linear chain reactions (like dominoes toppling each other in a straight line), but slow buildups of common consenses. This means crossing a lot of bridges at the same time—slowly, taking account of all the different interactions as you go.

Saying that you ought to start crossing all of your bridges at once is a little vague. In this case, it means there are four factors to watch: the Principal, the Advisor, the student council, and the student body, all of which must give their approval to your plan, and all of which interact with each other in the decision-making process. The Principal is influenced by what the Advisor thinks because the Advisor is on the scene; the Advisor is influenced by what the Principal thinks because he is in the highest position of authority. The student council is influenced by what the Advisor thinks, and influences what the student body thinks. The Principal tries to take into account the feelings of the student body; the student body is influenced by the Principal’s ideas; the Advisor is influenced by a competent student council’s ideas about what the student body wants—and so on, in a potentially complex series of attitudes and opinions.

The important thing to remember is that none of these people or groups is operating in a vacuum: they all look to each other, to some extent, to get their bearings on issues and situations. Try to bring all of them along with you, so that when they look to each other, there will be some agreement instead of conflict and doubt.

You have to start somewhere, so ask yourself: who has final authority in this case? The Principal, naturally. If you are mobilizing to revise the constitution, he is the person of whom you will ultimately have to be sure. You may be able to get around anyone or anything else, but not him. He doesn’t have to

answer to anyone on campus for his “arbitrary” decisions; he answers to the superintendent, the school board, and the people at large.

So even though you’ve got to get the council’s approval of the revision before the Principal can affix his judgment to the issue, start working with the Principal. Drop in to see him before the matter comes up in the council. Ask his advice. If the Principal is for your plan, great. If he is against your plan, the trip to his office can be crucially important. It gives you a chance to form a proposition that minimizes his objections. This is important: make sure that the motion that is presented in the council the first time is the closest to being agreeable to all parties concerned as you can make it (without destroying its basic effects).

The plot thickens as interaction begins. The best time for seeing the Advisor is a multiple-choice kind of thing. The point is this: it would be nice to get a “yes” from one person before you go to see the other. Thus, if you think Miss Smithies would be in favor of the idea why not go see her first? This is normal protocol, and it would be nice to be able to mention to Mr. Mandelbaum that his appointed Advisor, Miss Smithies, thinks your plan is a good idea.

On the other hand, if you think that Mr. Mandelbaum himself would be a champion of the cause (unlikely in this case), you might drop by to see him first. If he agrees, this “plus” from the Principal can greatly influence the views of his Advisor. (The Advisor usually represents the views of the Principal and the school administration, so, if the Principal agrees with you, the Advisor is apt to defer to his wishes. “Well, I don’t agree, but that’s what Mr. Mandelbaum wants.”) At the same time, if Mr. Mandelbaum says no and Miss Smithies says yes, she might be willing to “lobby” for you at the Principal’s office. (At least up to a point: she naturally doesn’t want to endanger her Department Chair prospects.) If you get a “no” from both the Principal and the Advisor, then back to the drawing board—to

draw up a plan, if possible, that minimizes the objections of *both* people.

No matter what, don't *avoid* talking with the Principal and Advisor. Don't make them feel you're trying to do something behind their backs. They'll appreciate just knowing that you sought them out for pre-meeting advice. A thoughtful move like this on your part may be the only "plus" you can be sure of: even if you lose, the foundation of frankness and trust you have laid will continue to work for you.

Now that we have started crossing two of the bridges, let's turn our attention to another one—the student council itself. It is common for an amendment to require a two-thirds majority vote in the council, and then in the student body at large. Chronologically, your first task is to get it through the council. When during the year is the best time, if any, to start crossing this bridge?

If you think that opposition in the council will be strong (due to the "Freshmen-are-dumb" thought pattern, etc.) then you may spend a few months very profitably trying to build up the Freshman image on campus. Increased respect for the Freshmen may be a way of subtly influencing the outcome in your favor when the issue goes to the council.

If you think the opposition will be strong just because the Seniors won't want to give up their power, then pick the time of least resistance: spring, when the Seniors are on their way out anyhow and can afford to be generous and vote for an abstraction called "representative democracy!" Give them the opportunity of leaving their alma mater with a legacy of justice in the form of your proposed revision.

Well, let's assume that things look bad enough to require both the image-building and the spring strategy. You begin by finding a few capable Freshmen and giving them important things to do in the council itself (committee work, special reports, etc.). If they do a good job with their assignments, you are on the road to making them look respectable. At the same

time, work with the Freshman class council and give whatever assistance you can toward making it an effective group. When they have activities that go over well, make sure that the school paper lets everyone know about it. Anything you can do to show that they aren't "dumb," but rather, competent and hard-working, will facilitate matters immensely.

Okay. You've been building the Freshman image, and finally it's spring. Time to move into high gear; time to think about presenting the proposition to the council.

First, have the matter "originate" from a source other than yourself (this will help you maintain the impartiality of a presiding officer). Have it proposed by the Constitution Revision Committee, or some other group with an official sanction (this is more impressive than its being introduced by a member of the council on an individual basis). Obviously, you can work with this committee beforehand, and help them develop a proposition that maximizes the benefits and minimizes the objections you have learned from the Principal and Advisor. This has the advantage also of getting many different viewpoints and reactions before the council meeting itself—so you have an idea of how to present the proposition in its most favorable light, and have a ready defense for any major criticism of the plan.

Remember that the committee exists only by extension of Presidential power: feel free to bring out your own views. On the other hand, you appointed its members because you wanted their help and advice. Don't squash their ideas—they may have some that are better than your own.

Now you're ready to do some field work. You've worked out some tightly argued reasons for the change, as a result of the committee discussions. Now you've got to find some people who agree with these arguments and will present them in the council meeting itself. You probably know a few people who would like the proposition. Seek them out. Talk the issue over with them. Suggest a few of your ideas as to why the change would be good; listen to some of their ideas in turn. Let them

know the matter will be discussed at an upcoming meeting; tell them you'll look forward to hearing their views at that time.

This is important. Find people who can speak up for your viewpoint because if you are President, you can debate only by turning the chair over to your Vice President—and you lose the appearance of impartiality when you do so. If you are an officer other than the President, it might still be a good idea to say little until there appears to be a real need for you to step in. The best system is to add your approval to the idea more as a footnote than an onslaught: use it to tip the balance after other council members have spoken in favor of the proposition. At any rate, don't make it look like the officers and the Committee are trying to force the matter through the council. Sooner or later, it has to be a matter of popular will. Influence, but don't railroad.

While you're seeking people out to talk with them, don't forget to seek out those who are apt to oppose the issue. Even if you can't persuade them to hold your own view, it is valuable to get an idea of their strengths, weaknesses, and the areas in which they are willing to compromise.

Try to gain support from as many different students as possible—Freshmen and Seniors, committee members and spectators, officers and homeroom representatives, and so on. The appearance of unanimity is important.

The most crucial, subtle, and difficult-to-obtain support will be from the group that appears to have the most to lose by supporting the issue. Whatever group (if any) has the most to lose, get some member of it to support the proposal. This is really impressive. Presumably, if they believe in the matter so strongly that they are willing to give up personal advantage, the proposal must be good. (Also, a selfless attitude is sometimes contagious. And once you get the council members thinking about others more than themselves, things might really begin to happen!) In this case, the Juniors are really the first to be affected by the change; when it takes effect next fall, they will be running in a tighter election due to fewer Senior

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positions on the council. See if you can get some idealistic Juniors to back the move.

Unfortunately, very few student council decisions are based on the power of pure reason. You can have the best intellectual arguments in the world, but what Johnny is really dying to know is whether or not Mr. Football Hero will vote for it. Likewise, Susie is watching Beverly, the Campus Queen for All Matters of Fashionability. No one—except an utter fool—would ruin her social career by voting differently from *Beverly!* And so, the inevitable contest between intellect and emotion, reason and acceptability, “facts” and prejudices. All too often the intellectual argument is reduced to being just “window dressing” for the quite unintellectual motives for voting. We may be voting with Mr. Football Hero and Miss Fashion Leader, but we may not want to explain our vote to other people that way! Well, that’s life. Include a few popular students in your group of supporters if you can. Make sure they understand the issues, and are willing to speak up when the time comes.

Well, now, let’s do some calculating. You need a total of 27 votes out of 40 for your two-thirds majority. Where will they come from? Theoretically, the Seniors have the least to lose—they will be gone when the change takes effect. If you appeal to their idealistic nature, you might walk off with 12 of their 16 votes.

Oddly enough, the Freshmen might give you only 2 of their 4 votes: a show of modesty since they have the most to gain, and also a tribute to the fact that they have undoubtedly been subjected to intimidation by aggressive upperclassmen. The Sophomores are well enough established in the school to be little affected by intimidation, and are yet far enough away from the full effects of the change that they may come up with 6 of their 8 votes.

The Juniors are much more on the firing line, and their 12 votes are apt to be the pivotal ones. They’ve spent a lot of time looking forward to being Beautiful People in their Senior year, and this proposal lessens their chances. So far, we have totaled

up an estimated 20 votes from the other classes. If those estimates prove good, you'll still need 7 votes from the Juniors to make it through. And—needless to say—this all depends on everybody getting to the meeting!

When you feel you're ready, put the matter on the agenda for the next meeting.

Let's assume that the meeting has arrived, and during the discussion things don't look so good. Students are balking over the idea of representation based on the population of each class. There is general agreement developing to the effect that each class should have the same number of representatives (10 apiece). Those who argue for this position note that, since the Freshman class is the largest in the school, it would end up with more votes than the Seniors if the change were made on the basis of population. This is an uncomfortable prospect to a lot of upperclassmen.

As an idealist, you want representation based on population. But it doesn't look like you can get it that way. You have worked for months, trying to create an atmosphere in which the proposition would be received as auspiciously as possible—but you came into the meeting with an estimated close margin, and you don't want to lose the whole thing after months of preparation.

Where do you stand? There's really no good way to find out. Just mentally counting heads and guessing may be your best bet. Of course, if you want to use a parliamentary angle, you can move that the motion be laid on the table. Theoretically, those opposed to the proposal would vote to lay it on the table, and those in favor of it would vote against laying it on the table. This would give you an indication of the strength of both the support and the opposition.

If the motion to lay it on the table is defeated, it may be because the majority of the students like the proposition and want to keep it under consideration so that it can be passed. If that is indeed the case, you may feel you have enough support to pass the proposal—and so you go ahead. If the proposal is

indeed laid on the table, you have temporarily lost—until the next meeting. You'll have to make sure it is then taken off the table, and that when it is, you have more favorable votes than the last time. That means more work!

If you think you have enough strength to pass it but, in fact, you don't—and it is defeated—then that particular proposal is pretty much dead. At the next meeting (or even later in the same one) propose a different setup. Compromise. Have a motion presented to the effect that each grade level be given *equal* representation on the council. This is more amenable to your opposition. It's not precisely what you want, but it's more apt to carry, and it is definitely better than nothing.

Compromise may be inevitable anyway—there is still the Principal and Advisor, and then the entire student body. You have talked with them, asked their advice, and tried to take it all into account. The Principal and Advisor have probably given the matter some thought; they may be generally favorable to increased participation by underclassmen. If they are against the population-base idea, they may favor the idea of equal-representation-by-class. Thus, even if the council goes all the way for you, a compromise may be necessary before you're finished. Let's assume that the equal-representation-by-class solution is the one you end up with, and put into effect.

It was a long journey, wasn't it? Many months ago you started by talking with the Principal and Advisor; drafting a proposal in the committee; organizing support in the council itself; calculating the strength of support and opposition; compromising when it became necessary; and so on. Finally, you presented it to the entire student body, where the population strength of the underclassmen insured an easy passage once the issue was presented clearly and often. Next year, each class will have 10 representatives. Some of the underclassmen who helped with this revision are already talking about trying again next year to get the representation based on class population. With an equal number of votes per class it may be easier to marshal the support that didn't come through this year. At any

rate, it appears that your compromise proposal is the best solution for the time being.

It was a long journey, but then, there were other journeys being undertaken at the same time. The student body wanted an improved baseball field, so you finally got approval to hold a carnival to raise money for one. The carnival was the biggest event in Gramlich High School history. Though it didn't make enough money for the kind of field the student body wanted, Mr. Mandelbaum got a little money from a school building-and grounds fund to take it over the top. Mr. Mandelbaum refused to have any speakers "waste school time" in assemblies, but didn't prevent the forming of a popular discussion group that met after school. He thought the student council was planning too many dances, and put a halt to the planning of one of them. On the other hand, the interest the council took in the school's automotive and electronics vocational program brought about some significant improvements in the comprehensiveness of the curriculum; also, the intramural sports proved quite successful.

Throughout the year, you kept in touch, and many proposals were hashed out between you, the student council, Miss Smithies, Mr. Mandelbaum, and the student body. By and large, you were successful. One thing was sure: you got a lot more done than you ever would have thought at the beginning of the year. Last September, Mr. Mandelbaum wouldn't even have *considered* letting you do half of the things you *accomplished*. It was tiring and frustrating at times, but you did a good job.

Of course, we could have set it up under optimal conditions. You know how it is in some student council literature: you make a proposal, the Advisor congratulates you on your eminent brilliance, the Principal loves it, the council can't pass it fast enough, the student body goes wild over you, the Mayor gives you an award for citizenship, the city fathers proclaim a Student Council Day, and the President of the United States sends his best wishes. Uh-huh. Sure. We know!

Actually, it could go very smoothly, especially if you do the preparation work. The real situation will probably hit middle-ground between the fabled Sheer Triumph and the unplanned Total Failure. The approach I have used here is not meant to be pessimistic, but realistic. Indeed, there is such a thing as realistic optimism: “It will come out right, because we understand the situation and will work hard enough to *make it* come out right!”

The beginning of this chapter was about persistence, and now, after examining a hypothetical situation, we see the role of compromise. One thing you should always remember: IF YOU HAVE A CHOICE BETWEEN A 50% COMPROMISE AND GETTING NOTHING, CHOOSE THE COMPROMISE. YOU CAN USUALLY GET THE OTHER 50% LATER IF YOU KEEP AT IT.

Persistence and compromise must occur in alternating roles. Accept compromise; it is usually necessary. But make it *as temporary as possible*. Be persistent. Keep going. Next time you make a 50% compromise, you will actually be bringing your total score up to 75% (by adding half of the remaining 50%), and so on, right down to total victory. If your cause has merit and you keep at it, slowly but surely, you can end up scoring the 100% that you wanted but was impossible to get the first time around.

This, then, is the Silent Revolution: persistence and compromise. Its roots are real brotherly love as the motivation, anger as the catalyst, and practical knowledge as the guide. The Silent Revolution: quiet, selfless, demanding—and *effective*.

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and getting
nothing, choose
the compromise.
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if you keep at it.**

CHAPTER SIX: The Idealist's Dilemma

Youth is a time for idealism. It is also a time when young adults are becoming members of society in a full sense, and find a lot to criticize about the society of which they are becoming a part. It is this combination of dissatisfaction and idealism that keeps things moving—that inspires constructive change, and keeps us from becoming stagnant.

But although young people criticize those things that don't fit their ideals, they often know nothing about “technique”—how to achieve their ideals. Some who do know the method—establishing goals, organizing to meet them, compromising when necessary—would rather withdraw instead of “degrade themselves” by participating in the system for which they have so much disapproval. They have a real phobia against working in the system and compromising, and so they never put their ideals into action. They keep their ideals, but nothing comes of them. (Not a very ideal situation!)

There is another group of people who virtually have “systemitis”—they're so good at getting things done that somehow their sense of direction gets lost: they have no ideals to speak of. They've lost them completely, or put them up on a shelf somewhere out of the way.

This, then, is the dilemma: idealism is good, but if you keep your idealism, does that mean you must be ineffective? Likewise, does being effective mean that you must give up your ideals? We need idealists always. But must an idealist sit on the

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sidelines and merely criticize, must he or she vegetate in a practical sense? Likewise, we must have people who know how to make things happen—get the votes, pass the resolutions, start the projects, and so on. Must a person have absolutely no scruples at all to be successful in The System? Isn't that a constant compromising of oneself?

Nonsense. Complete nonsense. It's not a choice between being an unprincipled wheeler-dealer and a sideline intellectual. Obviously, ideals and system know-how can be combined. The crucial question to ask is this: *Is my technique serving my ideals, or just perpetuating itself?* Is my know-how going any place significant, or just maintaining itself for some vague reason—or a lack of one? If the know-how is serving the ideals, you're in good shape.

Does compromise mean losing one's ideals? Does it mean self-compromise? Heavens no. If it did, no one would have any ideals at all. No one can have his or her way all of the time; no one achieves his or her ideals all the time. You keep the same ideals, merely accepting a temporary delay. Meanwhile, you keep working to make the ideals come true. Compromising means accepting less than you want. It doesn't mean changing your ideas about *what* you want. You can change your mind, but compromising doesn't change it for you. From start to finish, it's up to you.

The real question is simply, *to what extent can you make your actions reflect those ideals you hold dear?* How well can you make reality correspond to your dreams even if it necessarily falls short of the mark? Hopefully, a few Silent Revolutions will help answer the question in a positive manner.

About compromise being yellow: what is so brave about sitting back with idealistic visions, but not having the courage to try to put them into effect?

Compromise is one of the greatest tools that the leader has to work with. Since all people are different, a student council of 40 members is apt to have 40 different views on the same issue. The task of the leader is to establish enough of a synthesis that

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something can be accomplished which suits the majority of the people affected. If no one compromised, if everyone kept insistently to his or her own view—why, you'd never pass anything in ten years! The leader has got to find the group's common denominator, and that may mean compromise from all sides.

There's another reason why finding the common denominator is important: it means the best backing possible for the final decision. True, there is always the danger of pleasing everyone a little and no one very much. But absolutism is not the answer, either. Forcing one opinion on people who have many different ones is not the way to find a lasting solution to a problem.

As a leader, you have your own convictions—and they should be represented. But be careful not to dictate—lead instead. Most issues are complex enough to have several rational solutions. You can lead the group to find the compromise solution with the greatest possible force and effectiveness. A good compromise can unite all the different factions under one banner, and thus further insure the success of the proposal.

Of course, *don't compromise unless you have to*. You may have the best idea to start with—so why spoil getting 100% if you can? But if it's a choice between compromise and getting nothing, don't fret about the compromise. (Civilization couldn't exist without it!) Just maintain your ideals foremost before you, and keep at it. Remember that in general, success comes from working in the system, not fighting it. Don't beat your head against a wall. Become one of the masons, and build the wall the way you think it *should* be.

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CHAPTER SEVEN: Can the Good Guys Win?

The movies are great. Take the average “Western.” Before it begins, you know how it will all turn out. The good guy always wins. He wears white, is kind to animals, and has 10,000 bullets in his six-shooter. The bad guy always loses. He wears black, is mean to his horse, and has only five bullets in his six-shooter. The good guy rides off into the horizon, a fair damsel at his side. The bad guy rides off to jail.

Now, it is not surprising that we so rarely tire of a plot like that. Why should we? Everything is taken care of for us: the 10,000 bullets, the well-timed arrival of the cavalry, the handsome men and beautiful women, everything. Better yet, the superheroes whose powers are limited only by the imaginations of the scriptwriters. We adore the “men” who fly, see through walls, eat poison, drive super cars, leap buildings at a single bound, and, in general, are totally unbeatable under any circumstances. We just sit back and watch Good triumph. A pushbutton control on the best things in life.

The only surprising thing about these fantasies is that people forget they are just that—fantasies. We all know that life isn’t like the movies. Intellectually, we are aware that all too often in real life the hero rides off into the horizon and gets shot, while the villain rides off to jail and gets probation. We *know* this, but we don’t *behave* as if we knew it. In real life, too, we sit back and watch, thinking that the good guys always win.

In the movies, being good is enough. In real life, it isn’t. The good guys have to be effective, as well as properly motivated.

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And to be effective, the good leader has to *compete* for leadership resources. This cannot be overemphasized: the techniques and resources for leadership are neutral. They will work for both good and evil people. The 10,000 bullets, the cavalry—they're all there, ready to help whoever knows best how to get a hold of them. If good is to triumph in real life, a good leader must compete successfully for the resources he or she needs to lead effectively. In the movies, the script provides those resources. In real life, the script is indifferent and he has to get them for himself.

The good leader has got to know how to plan, to organize, to set a course and work with people and institutions who can help him or her make sure that a certain course is going to be followed. If a good leader can't do this, two things may happen: (1) someone who is *not* good may take over, or (2) there will be no leadership, just confusion and lack of direction.

First of all, it is obvious that *someone* is going to lead. *Someone* is going to use the techniques and resources of leadership. The crucial question is: what kind of person will he or she be? And the answer that we face all too often is: someone not properly motivated, someone who is in it for himself or herself, someone who is not the best person available.

Why is this the case? Perhaps it is because people either default their goodness by not using it, or try to use it and don't know how. Often, bad leaders are supported by good people who do nothing, who sit back and watch. Or, bad leaders win because good people don't know how to compete for leadership resources. Only if good leaders know how to plan, organize, and marshall the forces of good, can bad leaders be defeated.

Confusion and lack of direction are the second possible result of ineffectiveness on the part of a "good" leader. This can be as bad as having a "bad" leader, for the simple reason that nothing good is apt to be accomplished. A good person with a leadership position who cannot put people and things together for unified and purposeful programs—well, that person is no leader, only the holder of a leadership position. If he believes he

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should just go to meetings and let things happen; if he is opposed to doing fieldwork and taking a stand on what he thinks ought to be done; if he has been elected to help people help others but is too timid to try it—then he is a leader who either favors anarchy or labors under the illusion that problems solve themselves spontaneously by the unanimous consent of all the people at every meeting.

This is a point about which so many people are self-contradictory. Who is going to maintain that a leader should, in effect, close her eyes and hope for the best? She has been *elected* to give direction to group tasks, to discover wants and needs and see what can be done about fulfilling them. She can't do this by relinquishing her leadership. She can't do this by sitting back like everyone else. And yet, many people interpret planning and organizing as "scheming," or "being sneaky" or even "immoral." It is really incredible that people should elect someone to lead them and then deny her all the tools of leadership that she needs to be successful!

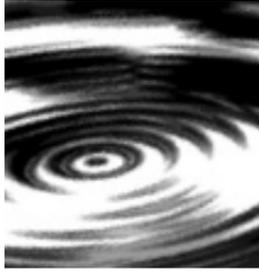
One thing must be made clear. The Silent Revolution, as a technique, is simply a way of planning and organizing for success. No one is forced to agree to something about which he or she has doubts. Nothing is being railroaded. Nothing is being done behind the backs of students, teachers, or administrators. The leader in the Silent Revolution simply works to consolidate the people and institutions who agree on a policy, planning and organizing so that they can become effective and successful "forces of good." The leader seeks to find what people need; formulates a solution and finds and organizes those who agree with that solution; and works openly in the system to accomplish that solution. In short, the leader works to present a solution in its optimal form; he or she works to give the "good" its best possible chance for success.

No matter how deeply we feel that a good leader ought to succeed hands down, the fact of the matter is that he or she must go out and get that success. If he doesn't, someone else will—and that person may not be so good—or confusion and

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anarchy will reign, preventing the achievement of common goals. People who have this crazy notion that (1) goodness is enough and (2) anyone who has to compete for leadership tools or plan and organize in order to insure success is therefore *bad*— these people have at best a very tenuous hold on the realities of life. Planning and organizing is the leader's job—crucial to the success of any group venture!

Can the good guys win? Of course. If they *work*.



**PART THREE:
THE IMPOSSIBLE
DREAM**

CHAPTER EIGHT: On Being Less than Eighteen

A lot of things are reserved for 18-year-olds in this country. Voting, joining the army, paying when you go to the zoo—a lot of things start at 18. What's so magic about 18? Authoritative sources assure us that it is a mythical number, arrived at by dividing the height of the average pine tree by its number of needles, and subtracting this from the square root of the length of a small river in Peru. That, of course, may not be true at all.

At any rate, 18 does get to be a magic number. Some people claim that this is due to the reinforcement it gets from the National 18-and-Over Mystic Cult Association, whose members include Virtually Everyone of Importance—or so the Association claims. Rumor has it that members of this Cult wear white-hair wigs and beards, and sit around talking about the good old days—the early 17th century.

Another explanation for the magic of “18” may be that we students find it a convenient excuse for not doing things. How many times have you said to yourself, “I’m too young to do that ... I had better wait until I’m older, until I’m an adult”? Somehow, we underestimate our ability to do real things now. Being less than 18 is often a good way to convince ourselves we *don't* have the ability yet. After all, the rest of society doesn't consider us mature until we're 18, does it?

And so we sit back, waiting, telling ourselves that we're not supposed to do real things in high school. And that's where the harm begins. Because high school years are very formative

ones. The way you begin to think, the way you begin to look at things now, will have a very definite effect on the way you will *always* think, the way you will *always* look at things.

It is not good at all to get into a habit of waiting for some mysterious signal (like becoming 18) before you begin the action. Because the odds are, those habits will get the better of you: you will never get involved, you'll never hear a signal. When the gun sounds, you may not even be near the racetrack. Get started now; new tasks, challenging experiences, difficult problems. Get into good leadership-shape. Time is precious—don't wait. If you always plan to do it tomorrow, your life will only be a lot of empty yesterdays.

Join the National You're Alive Now Association. This Association realizes that the formula, 18=adulthood, is generally meaningless. The question is more one of experience and maturity than age. Obviously, there are people who are 60 and have never grown up, and others who are 16 and quite mature. Ask yourself: Why is it that older people are generally looked up to? Isn't it because they have simply been around longer, and have more experience? Right. It's not because they are intrinsically smarter, or more talented, or what-have-you. They've just seen and done more. *Adults don't have a monopoly on talent or ability, only a head start on experience. And experience is something you can collect for yourself right now. Why not get started?*

Throughout your experience-gathering, keep one word in mind: *awareness*. There is a big difference between merely remembering what happened, and understanding what happened. Try to always be aware of what is going on around you, and why. If a dance fails, don't accept it as fate: find out why. If an assembly goes well, don't just chalk it up to good fortune: find out what made it a success. If the Principal says no, don't consider it a matter of whim: ask him if he would explain more fully the reasons for his decision. You must always seek to understand what you have done and what you are doing, or you will learn little from your experiences. Don't just remember what happened: remember *why*. It is difficult to know what

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remember
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remember *why*.

to do in the future if you don't understand what happened in the past.

As you start doing real things, start being a real person as well. Before you're 18. If you're waiting to be "your own person," waiting won't help. Because there just isn't any time set aside for you by society to be your own person. There will always be a Cult that wants your hide, regardless of who you are and what you do. For example, there's the College-Students-Should-Keep-Their-Mouths-Closed Association of America; then there's the Businessmen-Must-Fit-The-Corporate-Image National Disciplinary Board; and then the Retired-People-Should-Stay-At-Home-And-Pull-Weeds Official Club of the United States. The country is crawling with Cults.

Obviously, society must have a large degree of stability, or anarchy will be a threat. But right now, this threat seems to be somewhat overbalanced by the Cult philosophy of Total Conformity and Subsequent Stagnation. I think it can be said that this country depends on the work of people who are, by and large, nonconformists: people with new ideas, different approaches, unique skills, special backgrounds. America depends for its well-being upon people who don't join, and are little influenced by, the Cults. If you want to be a real person and do real things, then stay away from the Cults. All of them.

Begin ignoring the Cults right now. This is as good a time as any to "swing out." Oh, come on. Why not? Go ahead and be individualistic, creative, Silent Revolutionary, dynamic, or just plain different. If you do so responsibly, there shouldn't be any problems. Study Greek mythology, become an expert on an order of insects, overhaul a car, learn to sing, build a radio, try sculpturing, read *The Complete Sherlock Holmes*, study modern drama, play the harpsichord, learn to paint, invest in stock; develop your own theories about historical events, offer your own analysis of current social problems; go out into the "adult world" and work on a few projects of community-wide scope; contribute significantly to the "student world" in your own school. There is so much to do and be: don't be afraid to devel-

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op your own interests and tastes. *There should be more to distinguish you as a person than just your name.*

There's not much sense in fighting the Cults, now or later. Simply ignore them. They're bogus. Start doing real things now; start being a real person now. Don't get into the habit of waiting for meaning—search it out. If you're waiting for magic to happen, you'll be waiting forever. Don't wait. Because the world won't wait for *you*.

You're alive now.

Don't vegetate. *Initiate.*

**Don't get into
the habit of
waiting
for meaning—
search it out.**

CHAPTER NINE: Dragons versus Windmills

It is popular amongst students in most schools to maintain that the student council is a hoax, a real farce. And usually, these students are right. Personally, I would not credit more than 30% of the student councils I have seen with being either effective or vaguely meaningful—much less, both.

But the crucial question is not whether or not student councils are hoaxes. The question is, *can they become meaningful organizations?* And to that I answer an unqualified YES. There is tremendous potential for student councils to do real things, to provide real challenges for student leaders and significant activities for the student body at large. Saying a student council is a hoax is one thing; saying you can't do anything about it is something else entirely.

Unfortunately, a student council is no better than its members. As said earlier, *most student councils are hoaxes because the students want it that way.* A lot of students are in this student council fling because it's terribly fashionable. They're not in it to *do* anything, unless it be to bask in their own glory. They want the applause, they want to be part of the chosen elite, to be the Beautiful People, to be worshiped—but not to roll up their shirt sleeves and get their hands dirty trying to do anything real and significant. It's much easier to sit back and complain that the council is a hoax, and it's all the Principal's fault. Why should they strain themselves? They've made it into the school's most cliquish little club, self-sustaining and self-satisfying, isolated from the rest of the student body (all those *other*

students). They have arrived. Congratulations. And thanks for nothing.

In an atmosphere of fashionable complaining, in a school where the student council is just a nice little club, a student who takes it seriously is bound to be laughed at. “Take it easy, Joe. The whole thing’s just a farce. Don’t ruin it by being serious. It’s funny the way it is now.” It is possible that the laughter may die down later. But the inevitable fact seems to be that trying to inject meaning into a student council will make a student look like a “Don Quixote,” jousting with windmills he mistakes for dragons. “Sit down, George, and stop making a fool of yourself. You can’t do anything with a student council!” “Did you hear what John said? Boy, how sick. Someone better cue him in that student council is only for college application forms—you’re not supposed to *do* anything, everybody knows that.”

One, two, three—everybody laugh.

Well, it is easy to slip into the category of Official Windmill Fighter. It is easy to lose one’s sense of direction, it is easy to get stuck on small issues and petty arguments, it is easy to win only Pyrrhic victories. And even when things are going well, it must be remembered that Rome wasn’t built in a nine-month school year. The really big things you want to see happen may not happen in the year or two you spend in the student council. You have to accept the fact that your goals are limited by the situation: you won’t have enough time to do it all. It may take many student councils after you have graduated, to finish what you start.

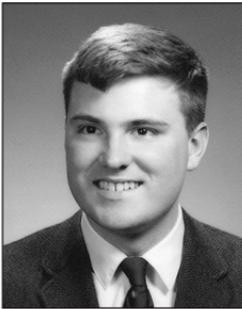
But that’s just the point: starting. The journey might be miles, but no matter how long, the first step must always be taken. A person who tries may not be successful; a person who never tries is sure to fail. And there is no little amount of satisfaction derived from knowing you’re giving it all you’ve got—you’re working at full potential, using everything you know and all that you feel, to make people happier. For that, it is worth being laughed at by *anybody*.

Being a Don Quixote, idealistic and laughed at, charging windmills, is essentially a tragic role. But perhaps if we set forth better armed than Don Quixote ever was, we can slay real dragons, not just windmills. Perhaps if we have real concern for motivation, anger for a catalyst, practical knowledge for guidance, and are willing to undertake Silent Revolutions, *now*—then, perhaps, we shall succeed as Don Quixote never did. Perhaps we shall not be tragic figures at all, but happy and successful leaders.

A statement that has always appealed to me is one attributed to Andrew Jackson: “One man with courage makes a majority.” It has seemed to me for a long time that a person of conviction, with practical knowledge and skill, can’t help but go a long way. I still think so.

**Give it all
you've got.
Work at full
potential, using
everything you
know and all
that you feel,
to make
people happier.**

THE AUTHOR (First Edition 1968)



Kent M. Keith is a student at Harvard University (Class of '70), and is majoring in government. His student council work began in junior high school and carried through his high school years with positions on the homeroom, class, student body, and state-wide levels.

..As a Senior at Roosevelt High School in Honolulu, Kent founded the Hawaii Student Leadership Institute, the official student council workshop for the state of Hawaii. Since its inception, the Institute has been run entirely by students. Kent served as Director for two years, and is presently Advisor and Session Director for the workshop. Kent also served as a Council Advisor at both the Indiana and Oregon Student Council Workshops, and was the keynote speaker at the Rhode Island state convention in the fall of 1966.

As a college freshman, Kent served as Student Council Advisor at Rindge Technical School in Cambridge, Massachusetts. As a sophomore, he served as a part-time teacher and curriculum researcher at Newton High School in Newtonville, Massachusetts.

In addition to his student council work, Kent is the winner of numerous awards in speech and music activities. He has also been active in student business: as the founder of his high school's bookstore, a leader in the Bank of Hawaii junior stockholders program, and now as Manager of the Harvard Student Agencies Publishing Division— a \$150,000 student-run publishing house.

Kent has lived in six states, visited 47 of them extensively, and traveled 80,000 miles by car and bus on the American mainland. He enjoys photography and writing poetry as pastimes. Kent plans to attend law school and go into politics.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR (New Edition 2003)



Kent M. Keith has been an attorney, a state government official, a high-tech park developer, president of a private university, a graduate school lecturer, and a community organizer. He is currently senior vice president of the YMCA of Honolulu. He earned his B.A. from Harvard University, his M.A. from Oxford University, his certificate in Japanese from

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Dr. Keith is known nationally and internationally as the author of the Paradoxical Commandments, which he wrote as part of *The Silent Revolution: Dynamic Leadership in the Student Council*, published by Harvard Student Agencies in 1968. His book *Anyway: The Paradoxical Commandments*, was published by G. P. Putnam's Sons in 2002, and has become a national best-seller. His newest book, *Do It Anyway: The Handbook for Finding Personal Meaning and Deep Happiness in a Crazy World*, was published by Inner Ocean Publishing in 2003.

Dr. Keith has appeared on the front page of *The New York Times* and has been featured in *People* magazine, *The Washington Post*, *The San Francisco Chronicle*, and *Family Circle*. He was interviewed by Katie Couric on NBC's "Today Show," and has appeared on a dozen TV shows and more than seventy radio programs in the United States, the United Kingdom, and Australia.

Dr. Keith lives in Honolulu with his wife, Elizabeth, and their three children, Kristina, Spencer, and Angela. He can be contacted through: www.paradoxicalcommandments.com.