
Developing a 21st Century Mind

by Lou Tice

It is difficult to imagine a more demanding or more exciting time in human history than the 20th Century. Particularly during the last two decades of the 20th Century, we faced unprecedented rates of change that required massive adaptation. In every field of endeavor — business and industry, government and education, science, human services, athletics and art — the challenge of dramatic and rapid change confronted us. The 21st Century promises to continue and even step up that trend.

Some of the challenges we face as we progress further into the new millennium include an increasingly high rate of technological innovation, the need to balance economic and environmental concerns, the information explosion, quickly shifting employment and career trends, a highly competitive global marketplace, a widening gap between society's "haves" and "have-nots," and the ever-present task of inventing a future that will foster the health and well-being of us all.

To my mind, one of the most critical concepts of our time is "interdependence." Unless we, as a species and as individuals, can develop and demonstrate concern for more than just ourselves and our own families, companies, communities and nations, we will be falling far short of achieving our potential for prosperity, peace and happiness.

We can't just shrug off the massive problems of our times, thinking that "technology" will take care of them. Technology alone can't get us through the 21st Century in a way that benefits the delicate, interdependent web of life our planet supports. It is people working together who must create a desirable future for ourselves and for future generations.

But what sort of people? What kind of mind will it take to create a peaceful, prosperous and environmentally healthy 21st Century? Well, to begin with, a mind that is receptive to change and able to figure out how to do more with less. The model for this mind already exists, and it can be

found, to the surprise of some environmentalists, in the corporate world.

Many of the companies we work with have had to initiate massive cultural and organizational changes in order to stay in business. To do this, they have had to develop new ways of thinking. With our help, they have moved from Newtonian to Whiteheadian leadership. They have moved from being staffed by people who simply do what they're told to people who actively participate in decisions that affect them and their organization. They have moved from seeing employees as problems to seeing them as problem solvers. And they have moved from closed-door strategic planning to open vision-building sessions and free-flowing information. As a result, their productivity has increased, even when significant downsizing has been necessary.

It is my strong belief that we can and must transfer these essential thinking skills to all segments of our culture, all aspects of human society. We have already begun to do so. In the 1950s, about 70 percent of all workers made their living through some form of manual labor. After basic skills had been mastered, these jobs required little or no creative thinking. Only the remaining 30 percent of the work force had to exercise thinking skills in order to earn their daily bread; therefore, only this 30 percent minority had to be educated to be able to think for themselves. Is it any wonder that we became complacent, under-utilized and vulnerable to all sorts of troubles?

These days, it's a different story. The numbers are now reversed, and about 70 percent of today's jobs require the continued use of the mind on a regular basis. Only about 30 percent use primarily physical skills, and that number is dropping every day, right along with the wages these jobs pay.

But 70 percent is not nearly enough. And, like our corporate clients, many of those counted in that

figure need to learn new ways to use their thinking skills. The dramatically changing conditions of the 21st Century and the serious nature of many of our environmental problems demand that all of us every last one become creative, innovative, expansive thinkers. At the same time, we need to realize that we are, indeed, interdependent, and we need to celebrate the tremendous power we have when we band together to work toward a worthwhile common goal. Like those corporations, we must now get nothing less than full value from every member of human society and encourage each member to participate to the fullest.

The Pacific Institute's education is an ideal vehicle for assisting this global transformation to a 21st Century mind. It helps people to become what noted psychologist Abraham Maslow termed "self-actualizing." To be self-actualizing means that we accept ourselves and others, we have a strong focus on solving problems outside the self, and we have deep feelings of sympathy and affection for humankind. It also means that we have strong ethics, definite moral standards, and independent stability in the face of hard knocks.

People who self-actualize are the kinds of people who will be at home in the 21st Century. In Maslow's words, "Self-actualizing people are, without a single exception, involved in a cause outside of themselves. They are devoted, working at something precious to them — a calling, a vocation.... They are working at something fate has called them to somehow, and which they love, so that the joy/work dichotomy in them disappears."

When we are self-actualizing, we are most likely to experience the level of happiness that Father Spitzer of Seattle University calls "H-4."

At level H-1 we see happiness as a "feel-good" thing. All we want is to feel good, avoid feeling bad, and that's it. We don't give a hoot how anyone else is feeling.

At level H-2, we do a lot of work on ourselves, because we want to be better than the next guy. We have plenty of self-discipline, but it's all ego-driven, and we're not really happy, except when someone's telling us how great we are.

At level H-3, we're starting to make the best kind of happiness happen. That's because what we want most is to help other people, and it feels great when we do. We forget about ourselves. More than anything else, we care about others — our team, our community, the whole darn planet, and we want to be a contributing part of all of it.

At level H-4, we can see beyond the good of the team or the group to the ultimate good. We start to understand what unconditional love is all about, and we're always thinking about what we can learn and how we can give. At level H-4, we can see the highest good in everything, and we just naturally respond to it with the best, most loving part of ourselves.

That's the goal we need to move toward as we approach the 21st Century. And that's also why I'm more convinced than ever that our education is a vital part of the process. Our graduates report that they feel a much greater sense of personal accountability, not only for the quality of their own lives, but also for the quality of life around them. They are actively concerned about what's happening in their company, their family, their community, their nation and their planet, and they want to take effective action to improve things.

They have what Maslow called an "older sibling" attitude toward those who may be less fortunate: They gladly take time to share their knowledge, and they enjoy mentoring others to success. They want to operate at levels H-3 or H-4. And they are possibility thinkers — exactly what the 21st Century needs. This is no time to think in small, limited terms about our own lives and the roles that we can play in the future. This is a time for an entirely new vision of "human nature" — one that is more complete, more caring, more creative and more effective than ever before.