

The Future IS Now

Today's Realities

Shifts and Trends That Are Redefining Organizations, Careers, and Life

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⌘ Key Sources ⌘

The ideas in this document represent a thematic synthesis of the major information and insights drawn from a thorough reading of these and many other books. These sources give us the following highly-condensed picture of the world we all face as learners and performers.

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Welcome to the most recent version of The Future IS Now . . . or “the FIN” as it has come to be known. Feel free to copy and share it. Give credit when it fits. Thanks to those colleagues who continue to contribute to the update. Know that we appreciate all suggestions as to what might be added to continuously updated versions of the FIN.

PURPOSE OF “the FIN”

We all realize that we live in a time of rapid change. With that reality comes the need for leaders, planners, educators, and virtually everyone, to be future-focused in order to be successful. The paradox is that most of us are so busy working and doing things that we don’t have time to read the fifty+ future oriented books on which this relatively short report is based. So, the FIN is here to offer “CliffsNotes” on the shifts and trends that help us to identify the “future conditions” in which we will live and work tomorrow. In short, read, study, and reflect on the FIN and you will exit with a future focus that will help you ready yourself for what the world holds for you today and tomorrow.

THE CREATION PROCESS

We started by reading about one hundred futuristic books . . . forty+ of which made our list of “Key Sources.” From our study and notes, we selected the “shift and trend” topics that we think are the most relevant to how we will live our lives. We then wrote a short paragraph explaining each of the topics. We try to be catchy and thought provoking with our “from-to” labels so that they might be “Sticky.” It is important to note that we identified the major categories of the FIN after we selected the “from-to” topics . . . we DID NOT identify the eight major categories and then identify the individual topics. So, the individual topics are the drivers of the FIN document.

HOW OUR UNDERSTANDING OF CHANGE . . . HAS CHANGED

We have come to the realization that “change” is no longer a “trend.” Rather, change is a powerful force that drives all of today’s trends. Our listing of fifty-plus trends/future conditions is significantly influenced by our rapidly changing world. Therefore, don’t expect a paragraph or a category labeled “change.” All of the FIN topics swim in today’s “change” water.

1 - Lifestyle

From Fast Pace to Warp Speed
From Megatrends to Microtrends
From Work-Life Balance to Work-Life Blend
From Linear to Multi-dimensional
From Him/Her the Expert to Me the Chooser
From Broadcasting to Interaction
From Network News to My Yahoo Homepage
From Privacy to Profiling
From Boomers to Seniors

2 - Culture

From Functionality to Design
From Religion to Spirituality
From The Commandments to Anything Goes
From Trust to Skepticism
From Civility to Rude
From Right or Wrong to Relative
From Logic to Emotion
From Repair to Replace

3 - Learning and Education

From Assembly Line to Mass Customized Learning
From Books to Digits
From Answers to Questions
From Engaging Students to Students Engaged

4 - Transformational Technologies

From Change to Disruptive Innovations
From Place to Wireless
From Shelves to Tags
From Filing Cabinets to Trusting Digits
From "Send" to Risk
From Microsoft Programs to Apps
From Program Designers to Here Comes Everybody
From Service Specialists to Do-It-Yourself
From Record Labels to iTunes
From CDs to Playlists
From New York Times to Blogs
From Simon and Schuster to Self-Publishing

5 - Work

From Job Security to "The Ride"
From Career Ladder to Career Lattice
From IQ to EQ
From Employment to Free Agent
From Supervision to Empowerment
From Office to Anywhere
From Unions to The Creative Class

6 - Businesses and Organizations

From Bureaucracies to Customer-Focus
From Administrative Convenience to Mass Customization
From Organizational Charts to Networks
From Headquarters to Leaderless Organizations
From Men to Women
From Secrecy and Strategy to Transparency
From Professional Development to Personal Development
From Advertising to Customer Evaluations
From Carbon to Green

7 - Government and Politics

From Differing Perspectives to Permanent Biases
From Party of Choice to Independent
From Representation to Arrogance
From Problem Solving to Blame
From Middle Class to Entitlement Class
From Illegal to Undocumented

8 - Global

From Industrial Age to Information Age and Beyond
From World to Global
From Rich and Poor to Super Rich and Destitute
From Universal Values to (Void)
From Power to Terror
From Hunger to Obesity
From United States to China

Fast Pace>>>>>>>>>Warp Speed

We are living in an age of speed and continuous discovery. Change is constant and the speed of change is relentlessly on the increase. Rapid and fundamental change is simultaneously impacting our personal world, our work world, our culture, and our society. Put them all together, and we find that most of us are living a life that is stressful, sometimes out of control and, for many, very exciting. Some wish the world would slow down. Well, get over it! It's just not going to happen.

Megatrends>>>>>>>>>Microtrends

We are more affluent than ever before, have more lifestyle choices, and the unique choices we make are segregating us into smaller and smaller niches. One size no longer fits all. When one percent of our population makes a similar choice (e.g., to homeschool or to be “old new dads”), a microtrend is born and that group becomes a “niche” that marketers and politicians listen to.

Work-Life Balance>>>>>>>>>Work-Life Blend

For the knowledge worker, today's anywhere, anytime technology has blurred the lines between being at work and being at home with the family. Your Netbook is all you need to transfer your work from the office to your den. So beware, you can easily be putting in 70+ hours per week at the expense of your family time if you are not able to blend your responsibilities. Healthy blenders have identified work that is highly satisfying to them personally and then take the time, at their discretion, to be the parent and partner that they want to be. Timelines may be blurred, but responsibilities are not.

Linear>>>>>>>>>Multi-dimensional

We have long valued and honored those left brainers who are able to focus, keep their eye on the goal, do one thing at a time, and finish their task before taking up the next. Not near so much today. We now boast about our ability to multitask, to simultaneously keep four balls in the air, and are rewarded for our creativity more than our convention.

Him/Her the Expert>>>>>>>>>Me the Chooser

There once were recognized and rewarded experts; those who knew more about one thing than anyone. We listened to them. We bought the stocks they suggested, raised our children as they advised, bought the car that they endorsed. Today we are more likely to trust the “Wisdom of the Crowd.” We buy cameras based on the rankings of average Joes who are real users, buy the car that makes us look good behind the wheel, and purchase the book that others who bought this book also purchased.

Broadcasting>>>>>>>>>Interaction

Just yesterday (Oct. 2010) it was announced that ABC, NBC, and CBS news programs had lost nearly one million viewers over the past year. About the same as last year . . . and the year before that. Think anything will change over the next year? Doubt it! All the while, Madden football continues to grow more popular and profitable, and people get their news from their Yahoo Homepage where they are able to “comment” on the story. People today (and especially NetGeners) tend not to sit quietly and listen. They go where they can be part of the action.

Network News>>>>>>>>>My Yahoo Homepage

Would you like 22 minutes of news chosen by Brian Williams along with 8 minutes of commercials about medications and their side effects in the 30 minutes you set aside to catch up on the events of the day . . . or would you like to create a My Yahoo Homepage that allows you to identify the news sources you trust/enjoy, read the news that is of interest to you, avoid commercials except those of interest, and consume all the news you want/need in 15 minutes? Gee, . . . let me think!

Privacy>>>>>>>>>Profiling

Today's Internet-driven social networks allow people and organizations to know more about you than you might like. Very large piles of raw data can be "mined" to make predictions about your lifestyle, buying habits, vulnerabilities, or whatever. Barcodes, credit cards, e-mails, Internet habits, and just plain snooping, when combined, can create a detailed profile on nearly anyone. A technology known as Radio Frequency Identification makes it possible for Walmart to track a single lipstick tube or a toaster – how it got there, who bought it, and where it is now. The good news is that profiling has the potential to serve you better. Amazon.com can make better recommendations when it has your profile . . . as can doctors, teachers, or anyone who is bent on doing you good. You may one day want to have your very own barcode to ensure that everyone can serve you better. Bottom line, however . . . if someone wants to know something about you, has dollars and is persistent, they will probably find it. "Big brother" might be watching and, just because you're paranoid, doesn't mean that they're not out to get you!

Boomers>>>>>>>>>Seniors

Demographics are real numbers, factual, hard to argue with. The famous Boomer generation is becoming "seniors" . . . but not the kind of seniors your grandma was. They are healthy, expect to live longer and, for most, believe that anything is still possible. And there are lots of them . . . who will create new markets, require services, and depend on a shrinking number of wage earners to keep Social Security and Medicare solvent.

Functionality>>>>>>>>>Design

Competing in today’s marketplace isn’t for sissies. You must produce with quality, speed, and uniqueness... or quickly become a commodity, selling your product or service only because it’s cheapest. But today, add another layer to customer expectations. We want it quick, we want it to work, we want to be the first on our block to have it... AND, we want it to be “designed” with class and elegance. Think Apple Inc. and the iPad, iPhone, and MacBook Air. Design adds “looks good” and “feels good” to the “value added” equation. Design???? You know it when you see it or feel it!

Religion>>>>>>>>>Spirituality

While the world struggles with religious indifference on one hand and religious fanaticism on the other, the impulse of human beings to connect with the spiritual is in evidence everywhere. Spiritual supplements have become big business . . . from books to prayer beads to meditation benches. Many are searching for something higher, deeper, greater and more profound than themselves, and something which transcends the boundaries of traditional religions. An oversimplification for sure, but it would appear that the blue states are about spirituality while the red states are about religion.

The Commandments>>>>>>>>>Anything Goes

The pop culture of the U.S., led by the entertainment industry and the media and supported by willing consumers, is rapidly becoming an “anything goes” culture. It is a mark of honor for the entertainment industry to “push the envelope” of sex, violence, and language. Red states and blue states and recent national elections reflect this conflict. One has only to watch a rerun of Archie, Andy, or Mary Tyler Moore and then watch a promo for *Desperate Housewives* to see and understand the conflict. The first amendment rights of adults consistently and arbitrarily put children and parenting in jeopardy. The influence of America’s “slippery slope” culture is multiplied by the fact that the U.S. is by far the world’s largest distributor of contemporary culture. A continued conflict between the “anything goes” culture of the U.S. and the more conservative religions and cultures of much of the world appears to be inevitable and troublesome.

Trust>>>>>>>>>Skepticism

When there were few news sources, few businesses, and some would say in “the good old days,” we tended to believe most anything that was in print and appeared professional. And with reason; there were hucksters then for sure, but honesty has taken a big hit in our recent past. “Buyer beware” is now engrained in our psyche . . . we don’t have to be told or even think about it. Skepticism is our default setting. “Trust everyone but cut the cards” is the new rule.

Civility>>>>>>>>>Rudeness

Talk show hosts and guests MUST talk over others on the show or they will never get the mic . . . or another opportunity to be a “guest.” We have come to accept this type of rudeness as natural from angry drivers, irate customers, mean bosses, exchanges between parents and children, etc., etc. In fairness, rude people are very outnumbered by the civil, but what tends to be rewarded, what we notice and seem to imitate, are those in-your-face trash talkers that dominate professional sports. Role models for our youth???

Right or Wrong>>>>>>>>>Relative

Today’s society has few “rights” and “wrongs.” Individuals can and do present a rationale for their way of thinking, their way of acting, and then go about their business with little pushback from public norms. Decisions and behaviors are considered situational and relative. Although norms continue to exist, acting outside of these norms is commonplace and accepted. End result: freedom to “do your thing,” and few rules to guide thinking, decisions, and actions.

Logic>>>>>>>>>Emotion

After you read an article or listen to a speaker who takes a strong stand on an issue, it is healthy to take the time to analyze the argument. The question, the focus of the reflection: "Is the argument and the ultimate position taken by the author based on a logical, rationale argument, one that is based on data, research, accepted theory, and/or history?" Or was the position taken by the author accepted or rejected based upon his/her charisma, speaking ability, feelings, and emotions? Our culture today allows many to commit "Crimes Against Logic" when selling products or political positions.

Repair>>>>>>>>>Replace

The quality paradigm of the 90s made everything last longer . . . well, almost everything. Production techniques have made them cheaper. Technological complexities have made them hard to repair. Repair shops are mostly out of business. When my digital camera, that does everything short of sorting socks, develops a small flaw, I am told by the retailer that it is "cheaper to buy a new one." The new model, by the way, has more features that I probably will never use . . . and will make the new model even more unlikely to ever be repaired.

Assembly Line>>>>>>>>>Mass Customized Learning

The Industrial Age brought us mass production. The Information Age brought us mass customization. Everyone is mass customizing. We have come to expect that the products we buy and the services we subscribe to are personalized to US. Starbucks does it. iTunes does it. Google does it. Your gym does it. Your grocery store does it. Everybody does it. Except for K-12 education! Education continues to offer learning opportunities in an assembly line fashion. The “belt” moves kids from grade 1 through grade 12, where time is the constant and learning is the variable. Given what we know about learners and learning, it is INEVITABLE that education will adopt some form of mass customization.

Books>>>>>>>>>Digits

What is a book anyway? Does a series of ten related and sequenced essays require a “cover” to be a book? Does it have to be able to sit on a shelf to be a “book?” We can’t think of another industry that has been so quickly turned on its head. Computers, Google, Wikipedia, Amazon.com, e-readers, and thumb drives are quickly, and not so quietly, replacing textbooks and libraries. The question asked five years ago was “can we afford to buy computers for every student?” Today we are hearing “why do we continue to buy all of those expensive books when one iPad brings access to the entire world of information?”

Answers>>>>>>>>>Questions

Answers are good, helpful, and important when we are dealing with problems of the past. These answers had their day, but if the problem that created the answer can be “Googled” and an agreed-upon answer is returned, their day is quite finished. But thoughtful “what if” questions are what take us to the future, to solutions for present and future opportunities. “What if” questions tend to contain the “vision” of the asker . . . and it is that vision that moves the discussion, the innovation, and the potential breakthrough forward.

Engaging Students>>>>>>>>>Students Engaged

Engaged learners are achievers, much as engaged workers are producers. On that we can agree. But what *causes* learners and workers to be engaged is not so easily agreed upon. Is it extrinsic rewards and punishments such as grades, class rank, and the car on Saturday night? Or is engagement better fostered through the intrinsic rewards of relevance, meaning, challenge, achievement, and success? Extrinsic motivators may help the system to “engage students in their learning,” but intrinsic motivators help students to “be engaged in their learning.” The difference in the phrases is subtle, but the difference in the degree of engagement is striking. Recent research and accepted theory is coming down heavily on the side of intrinsic motivation.

Change>>>>>>>>>Disruptive Innovations

Change used to be something that we could see coming, something we could watch. Montgomery Ward, the once retail giant, took a couple of decades to be done in by the retailing innovations of Sam Walton. Travel agents fought the tide of the personal computer, the Internet, and the do-it-yourself movement for years. Today it doesn't take that long to "do in" a business or a complete industry. Disruptive technological innovations, society's changing norms and expectations, and the "mass customization" movement have taken down Blockbuster and crippled Barnes & Noble in a matter of months. Today's technological breakthrough innovations have placed in jeopardy any business or industry that sits between the creator of products or services and the end user of those products or services. Does anyone see self-publishing about to "disrupt" the publishing industry?

Place >>>>>>>>>Wireless

"Place" used to be an important determiner of what we were doing. Certain things were done in certain places. Offices and factories were for work, theaters were for being entertained, our homes were for family activities, etc. Computers and the Internet significantly changed all of that. The technology of ten years ago gave us the flexibility to do things in "different/alternative places." But when "wireless" was added to that technology, "place" ceased to be a factor. Anyone can do anything from any place at any time. It is interesting to see how third-world countries have leapfrogged the old communications infrastructure costs by going from almost no communication with the rest of the world to cell phones and being connected . . . globally.

Shelves>>>>>>>>>Tags

Grocery stores have things in their places . . . as do closets and silverware drawers. The Dewey Decimal System went one level better with the card catalog . . . you could find a book from a title, author, or subject card in the card catalog. But today, Google and Bing are organizing the world's information . . . and putting *you* in charge of how it will be organized for your own particular use. Flickr is doing the same thing for photos, and Apple is doing it with iTunes and playlists. It used to be that authorities would tell us how things should be organized – top down. Today, information is "tagged" and bar-coded, and computers allow us to tell the authors and experts *how we want it organized* – bottom up. Read *Everything is Miscellaneous* by Weinberger for an understanding of how "level three organizing" works and how it is changing who is in control.

Filing Cabinets>>>>>>>>>Trusting Digits

Digital immigrants took some time to trust digits. For years we continued to make hard copies of anything we "might really need some time." Paperless offices, though visualized, were not happening. But today we have come to trust digits, hard drives, and especially our "backup" systems. Copy machines have moved from downtown to our offices and are seldom used except for printing boarding passes. Photo albums are accessed from "My Pictures" or iPhoto, music is accessed through iTunes, books are accessed through Kindle, office correspondence and reports are accessed through "Word," students bring their homework to school on thumb drives, and Google provides the world's information via your Netbook or iPad. What are we going to do with all of that shelf space??

"Send">>>>>>>>>Risk

We have gone from "let's make a copy of that in case we might need it someday," to "once you have hit the "send" button, it will be there forever." Before you hit that "send" button, you are encouraged to ask yourself . . . "Would I want Mom to see this? Could I handle this being on the front page of the NYT? What could O'Reilly do with this? Could this possibly be ammo for a prosecuting attorney?" Not to mention my wife! (Or husband, of course.)

New York Times>>>>>>>>>Blogs

Newspapers and news magazines are in trouble. Readership continues to go down about 10% per year and the accompanying lack of revenue has caused major layoffs and potential bankruptcies. They face two simultaneous enemies and are losing their readers and their shirts. One, more than half of the public believes that major news organization like the NYT and Newsweek do not cover events objectively, that they are biased to the left, and have stopped reading them. Two, bloggers have proven to be strong competitors. They too, of course, are biased, but the reader gets to select the bias that is synced with his/her personal bias. And it doesn't seem as though the main media "gets it!"

Simon and Schuster>>>>>>>>>Self-Publishing

A power shift is also occurring in the book publishing industry. Rejection letters from publishers rank high on the list of esteem crushers. We have experienced it! Publishers (many of them, anyway) come across as arrogant judges with EQs barely at the "trainable" level. Look to the horizon and Lulu, CreateSpace and a dozen other self-publishers who actually treat would-be authors as customers are coming. Furthermore, publishers believe themselves generous when they share 12% of the selling price of the book. Self-publishing can create a business model that rewards authors with 50% or more of the price of the book.

Office>>>>>>>>>>Anywhere

Work has moved from heavy lifting to forklifts . . . from running machines to talking to machines . . . from people to robots . . . from 8 to 5 to anytime and anywhere . . . from the office to ATT Wireless at a corner table at Starbucks. Through the power of communication technologies, more and more people are working outside of the conventional forty hours per week job schedule and structure. Flexible schedules, job sharing, teaming arrangements, and offsite locations place a premium on worker autonomy, responsibility, and the ability to “get the job done well” with minimum structure and supervision. And the research on this indicates that most of these “anywhere, anytime” employees tend to be more productive than those at the office. *The 4-Hour Workweek*, a NY Times bestseller, written by 30-year old Timothy Ferris, is a creative and fun read if you are ready to explore a new lifestyle.

Unions>>>>>>>>>>The Creative Class

In this day of frequent career change, power has shifted from unions to the talented, creative, and responsible employees who love challenge. They are in demand. Treat them with respect, provide the flexibility they want, give them control, ensure that they find meaning in their work . . . or lose them. Lose them to another company or to the “free agent” entrepreneur pool that continues to grow in this age of talent and creativity. Meanwhile, unions once so important to workers and our society in the Industrial Age, today find their power and their demands choking businesses and industries that must compete globally.

Bureaucracies>>>>>>>>>Customer Focus

We have moved from a business world in which companies controlled consumers to one in which consumers control companies. Worldwide comparative shopping requires only a few clicks. If you expect to sell it, it needs to have value for your customers, and they know it! Today's self-directed consumers have countless options, unashamedly vote with their feet and pocketbooks, openly demand choices in products and services that are customized to their needs and tastes, want things now, not tomorrow or next week, expect quality and value – and the price to go down, and willingly return things that don't suit them. Moreover, whether satisfied or not, they tell their friends – over the Internet. Even the rich expect and take pride in getting a “good deal.” Guess the old saying that the “customer is always right,” is more true today than ever.

Administrative Convenience>>>>>>>>>Mass Customization

Technology (think computers, tablets, smartphones, and the Internet) has changed nearly every aspect of our world and our life. “Mass Customization,” a term that slipped into the futures literature a few years ago, has silently changed our expectations for products and services. We, the consumers, no longer want one “off of the shelf,” but rather one tailored to our needs and wants. Back when, when Dell allowed us to design our own computer and deliver it in two days, we recognized how they changed the computer market. Now, new forms of customization have become the norm, they happen daily, and we hardly notice them. One of the most recent to affect your humble authors is self-publishing. We get to do it our way! Who needs rejection letters??

Organizational Charts>>>>>>>>>Networks

Communications technologies have made it possible for a single supervisor to double or triple the number of employees that he/she can effectively monitor and supervise. Consequently, fewer levels of management are required and organizational charts have been flattened. At the same time, the nature of work changed as we moved from the assembly line to the age of the “knowledge worker.” Solutions for today's more complex “knowledge work” require teams of experts. These two new realities, in combination, have moved organizational structures from a rigid chain of command to a more flexible system of teams and networks. Organizational charts have moved from pyramids to pancakes.

Headquarters>>>>>>>>>Leaderless Organizations

The world . . . and especially governments and industries . . . are learning of the unstoppable power of decentralized leaderless organizations. The Internet has made it possible for like-minded individuals from anywhere in the world to meet in cyberspace and form powerful movements . . . for good or for bad, without ever creating a centralized organization that can be confronted. These movements are usually created by a charismatic leader who then moves to the background, leaving a leaderless movement maintained by loose networks and driven by a strong and rigid ideology. Al Qaeda, PETA, the group(s) against globalization, and those illegally sharing copyrighted music files are examples. When attacked, these decentralized organizations tend to become even more open and decentralized . . . and very difficult to confront or defeat. *The Starfish and the Spider* by Brafman and Beckstrom effectively describes this leadership/organizational phenomenon . . . an important read for all of us.

Men>>>>>>>>>>Women

Despite the enormous pressures women in the labor market face in handling child-rearing and other household management responsibilities, a large proportion of new businesses are owned and operated by women. Women not only serve as a big source of employment, they represent a new, congenial, relationship-oriented approach to leadership that balances the command/control approach so widely accepted in traditional male-dominated firms. According to Tom Peters, “Women get it!” They get relationships, teaming, cooperation, networking, etc. when organizations need, well . . . relationships, teaming, cooperation, networking, etc. For more on women in leadership, look for Peters’ *Re-Imagine!*, where Tom probably gets to the point of being “sexist” . . . against men!

Secrecy and Strategy>>>>>>>>>>Transparency

The society-wide demand for greater organizational openness and accountability is reinforcing a major trend in effective organizational change and adaptability. Namely, honest and open communication is a key to effective leadership performance, organizational credibility, employee trust and motivation, and organizational innovation and productivity. The great demand by both consumers and employees for “want to know” information is supported by the technological capacity to make it available at the touch of a keypad. Information technology has made it nearly impossible to hide anything from anyone. There seems to be a visual, auditory, and/or written record of everything . . . from old nude pictures of today’s stars to the kindergarten records of presidential candidates.

Professional Development>>>>>>>>>>Personal Development

Who you are is how you relate, how you work, and how you lead. Your core shows itself in everything you think, say, and do. In today’s world where EQ (emotional quotient) is more important than IQ, professional development is ultimately personal development. In short, if you wish to improve any aspect of your life, look to your core for improving your health, speeding your development, and improving your opportunities for success.

Advertising>>>>>>>>>>Customer Evaluations

Who would you trust to advise you . . . the marketing department of HP or the reviews of 150 people who have purchased the printer you are considering, the publisher’s review of *Inevitable: Mass Customized Learning* or the evaluations of 60 people who have purchased and read the book. We now not only have access to the reviews of real users, but reviews of the reviewers . . . like in “56 out of 58 people found this review helpful.”

Carbon>>>>>>>>>>Green

The ~~global warming debate~~ climate change debate may not be over, but you wouldn’t know it from the number of businesses and organizations that are boasting of their commitment to “going green.” Expect things to happen. Customers are influenced by companies and communities that are environmentally friendly. Add another “inconvenient truth” . . . values don’t typically change behaviors . . . behaviors actually change when there is a financial incentive to do what we say we value.

Differing Perspectives >>>>>>>>Permanent Biases

Political biases seem to be more extreme and permanently rigid than ever before. From the liberal . . . George Bush IS dumb, he lied about WMDs, and his eight years nearly ruined our country. From the conservative . . . Obama is a socialist, taking us in the wrong direction, and can't speak without his teleprompter. It is rare to hear anyone saying good things, even one good thing, about the values and strengths of the opposing candidate or party. Enter the independent who is tired of this hateful, biased, and loud rhetoric.

Party of Choice>>>>>>>>Independent

Irony of ironies . . . it is the independent unbiased thinker, not the true believer who is electing our political leaders today. The rigid 40% on each side of the middle slug it out with negative ads, personal attacks, and one-dimensional voting records while it takes only the 5 to 10% of independent thinkers and decision makers moving in one direction to elect a candidate.

Representation>>>>>>>>Arrogance

There was a time when we could expect those we elected to represent the constituency from whence they came. But the day after being elected now appears to be the first day of raising \$\$\$ for the next election. Career politicians hold the powerful positions, and their incumbency perks make them hard to defeat. Our country is angry, and much of the anger can be placed on the arrogance of those in power. Can you believe the arrogance of our elected officials passing major laws that they themselves do not have to follow? Think health care, social security, retirement benefits, etc.

Problem Solving>>>>>>>>Blame

There may have been a time when our representatives focused on solving problems . . . but our memories are too short to be sure about that. Today political parties rule, and woe to those who break with party line. The blame game is everywhere. Talk show hosts, TV commentators, political consultants, and even our friends and neighbors have a position . . . not so much on the issues at hand, but on who is to blame for the mess that we are in. Remember the problem-solving process when we 1) clearly stated the problem, 2) gathered data regarding causes and possible solutions, 3) took part in civil discourse to gain a consensus regarding the best solution, and then 4) we, as a group, supported the decision. Today the mics are outside the meeting room so that the party that loses can begin placing blame for the bad things that are now going to happen.

Middle Class>>>>>>>>Entitlement Class

Early in 2010 it was widely reported in the media that, for the first time in U.S. history, we were very near the point where 50% of the population didn't pay any income taxes or were actually receiving tax credits. Fifty percent is the middle . . . so where has the "middle class" gone. Social programs/entitlements are increasing rapidly and most of our programs do not appear to be sustainable. It should come as no surprise that these conditions have created a huge political divide between the "haves" and the "have nots." Today's political debates all seem to stem from that divide.

Illegal>>>>>>>>Undocumented

The U.S. border with Mexico is far from secure. Neither political party seems to have the desire, courage, or an acceptable plan for securing our border. In the process, the U.S., long known as a "nation of laws," has lost that distinction . . . and our vocabulary shows our lack of resolve. We have moved from "illegal" to "undocumented" and our federal government is suing Arizona because of its proposed law that closely mirrors that of our Justice Department. There surely are two sides to this issue, but the U.S.'s reputation as a nation of laws has taken a hit.

Industrial Age>>>>>>>>>Information Age and Beyond

Deja vu, The World IS Flat. In 2005, Tom Friedman explained how and why *The World Is Flat* . . . and it's gotten even flatter since. His underlying message is that because of ten forces that flattened the world, global competition has taken a sharp turn, and that it is no longer better to be a "B" student in Boise than to be a genius in Bangkok. Technology has moved us from *countries* being competitors, through *companies* being competitors, to *individuals* being competitors. Much of our knowledge work is going to India and much of Japan's knowledge work is going to China . . . even the "white collar" stuff. Young people throughout the world are competing favorably with our most talented graduates. We all know that they work cheaper, but the distasteful little secret is that they also tend toward increased motivation, higher productivity and better quality. The Information Age is old hat . . . we now live in an Age of Continuous Discovery and the Age of Empowerment. All made possible by explosive technological advances.

World>>>>>>>>>Global

The world is a much smaller place today. Miles have become meaningless and distance is dead. Globalization has made everyone our "close neighbors." We used to think of the "global economy" in isolation, but today it is not just the economy but cultures, politics, ecology, and national security that have gone global. These aspects of globalization get mixed together and each affects all others. Our world is small, complicated, and sometimes a volatile place. Cultures are clashing, terrorism has become an accepted means of gaining power, and the belief that there is such a thing as "universal values" is losing its innocence.

Universal Values >>>>>>>>>(Void)

Before 9/11 the West, and especially Americans, believed that there were universal values upon which the whole world would readily agree. But since 9/11, and the analysis thereof, it has become evident that a significant percentage of the world population does not value: Progress, Productivity, Liberty, Freedom, and even Life itself. This lack of a set of Universal Values makes it even more difficult to reach lasting, peaceful agreements between nations and cultures.

Rich and Poor>>>>>>>>>Super Rich and Destitute

The "have" and the "have not" gap has become the Grand Canyon. The rich countries and their better educated citizens are getting richer, while across the globe the poor continue to bear children in disproportionate numbers, thereby lessening their per capita incomes even further. Wide economic disparities across a country's social and ethnic groups are the leading predictor of political unrest and revolution. These disparities will continue to shape internal as well as international politics as long as the poor have access to media that continually reminds them of options and material goods that they do not enjoy. The plight of the poor is being exacerbated in African countries by the AIDS epidemic that is leaving countless children without parents, without hope for an education, and without the skills to sustain employment. Earthquakes, tsunamis, hurricanes, and droughts of the past few years have significantly increased an already tragic predicament.

Power>>>>>>>>>Terror

Terrorists are using fright to fight the powerful's might. Bodies as bombs are being used to counter the smart bombs of superior military forces. Americans are becoming aware of the depth and breadth of the hatred of our values, lifestyle, and economy, all of which are not understood or tolerated by a significant portion of the population of many countries and cultures. The most powerful are no longer assured of victory. Wars are no longer fought fairly. (There must be an oxymoron hiding in there somewhere.)

Hunger>>>>>>>>>Obesity

Sometime in the middle of 2010 it was announced that for the first time in history there were more people in the world who were obese than were going to bed hungry. Yes we can feed the world . . . there just seems to be a distribution problem. Obesity has become an epidemic influencing health of course, but also our economy. Obesity increases hospital costs and decreases productivity. No doubt there are psychological and emotional costs as well. There are those who would blame McDonalds, those that would blame the individual, and those that would blame one's genes.

United States>>>>>>>>>China

Over the past 15 years, our FIN papers have gone from "China Is Coming," to "China and India Have Arrived," to "China the Dominator." Any way we look at it, China has become a power that is the rival of the U.S. China's GDP is increasing at a rate more than double that of the U.S., they are graduating significantly more scientists and engineers than we are, their space program is competitive, their military is strong, their middle class (think consumers) is growing rapidly, and they are loaning \$\$\$ to the U.S. government so that we may continue to create huge deficits. 'Tis hard for many Americans to accept that a Communist government is financing US debt.