

the Observer

Digital Edition

Building the Bigger Box

- Gary Klaben

Life is never static. You either grow or wilt. There's no simpler way to put it.

Intuitively, down to our bones, we know this. But still, we allow ourselves to coast. After all, haven't we made it this far? It's done. Complete. *Finito!*

Why this acquiescence to settle back with no tension, no agenda, no worries, no toil, no sweat? Don't we want a bigger future rather than succumb to the rolling tides of fate? First, a story:

In 1996, a young baseball player was faring poorly as the starting shortstop for the Seattle Mariners. In fact, his batting average was one of the league's lowest. On April 18, 1996, he met with Jim Fannin, a professional coach to athletes in baseball, tennis and other sports. Jim asked him, "What do you want, and why am I here?" He looked at Jim and, without hesitating, said, "Hall of Fame."

They talked a bit. This player said he had three goals for the 1996 season. First, winning the batting title by the end of the year. Second, to be selected to the 1996 All-Star Team. Finally, to be introduced on a late-night talk show as the new baseball superstar. Remember, this is mid-April. That year, all three goals were achieved by Alex Rodriguez, A-Rod as he is known, in his first year of big league professional baseball.

A-Rod went on to sign a record-breaking \$252 million contract with the Texas Rangers in 2001, and followed that up with another record-breaking \$275 million contract with the New York Yankees in 2007: An exceptional athlete with a big plan.

Then there is the story of a young girl who aspired to have her name up in lights on New York's Madison Square Garden marquee. She lived just 20 blocks from that famed landmark that has seen the likes of crooners Frank Sinatra and Perry Como, rockers The Rolling Stones and Led Zeppelin, and everything in between.

She aspired at NYU's Tisch School of the Arts to act like Marisa Tomei and sing like Liza Minnelli, both of whom attended this school. I watched a recent concert of hers on Home Box Office (HBO). Lady Gaga at the young age of 25 is the hottest ticket currently in the music industry. Her irreverent style, booming voice, glitz-glam and outré sense of fashion has everyone wondering what she will come up with next. She mentioned during her recent Madison Square Garden concert, with Marisa and Liza in the audience, her childhood desire to be on that stage. Stefani Joanne Angelina Germanotta started early.

What's the common denominator for A-Rod and Lady Gaga that lead to their phenomenal successes? My bet: Two essential elements. First, a Bigger Box. Second, a Lifetime Learning School.

In 1931, a young 25-year-old Austrian, Kurt Gödel, set forth two mathematical theorems. Rather than walk you through these "incompleteness" theorems, I will take creative license by explaining them in a different manner. Gödel basically said you can't understand any system you are in unless you go outside the system. You can't see the forest for the trees. Or, to quote Ralph Waldo Emerson: "You cannot see the mountain near."



As we progress through life, we instinctively seek to make our future bigger than our past. The challenge is: We don't have a crystal ball. When I meet with business owners, they many times are struggling to take their businesses to the next level. They gaze uphill, out of breath, with 100 pounds on their back, and no end in sight. It can be downright depressing!

In the past few years, we have met with various clients' recently minted college graduates. Some are struggling to find jobs in this economy. They want to pursue their professional future, they have good skills, but as I write this, a few are still looking.

My view: Today's graduates need a Bigger Box and Lifetime Learning School. They need to "step outside themselves" and expand their

"So, What are we aiming for, Timmy—the Nobel Prize or 'Inspected by No. 7'?"

field of gaze.

Finally (and I will cut quickly to the chase), there is *attitude*. When one changes one's thoughts, one changes attitude. When shifting attitude, one shifts actions. When altering actions, one alters results. When enhancing results, one enhances destiny. *Attitude* puts the whole process into play.

"Perpetual optimism is a force multiplier." - Colin Powell, former Chairman of U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff, Secretary of State

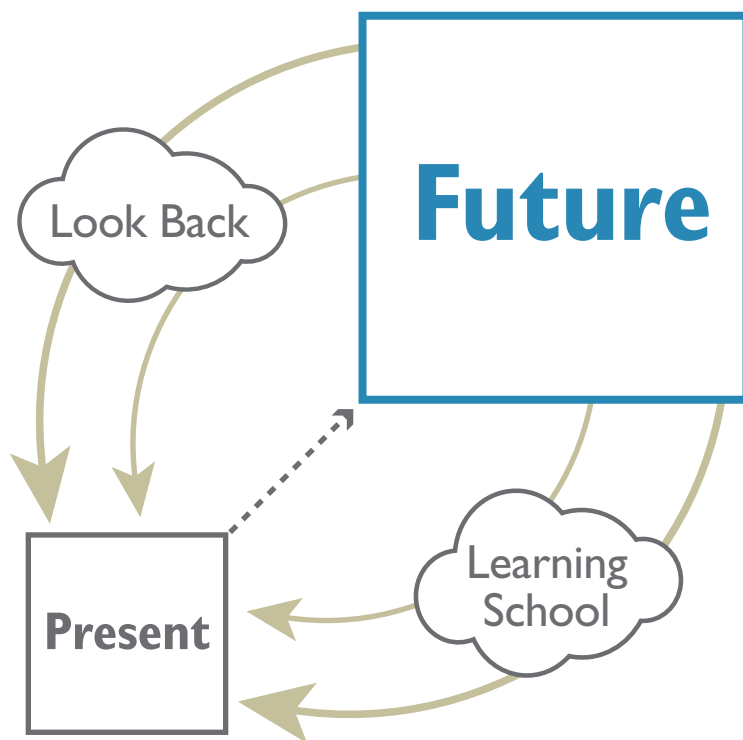
The important elements of *your* Lifetime Learning School include your Bigger Box (future), stepping outside yourself (Gödel), and changing your thoughts (attitude). To be sure, we also need to make the Bigger Box "normal." By that I mean, we need to talk about it and visualize it as being real. The more we live, breath, think and discuss it, the more real and achievable it becomes!

Surely you can think back to times when your Lifetime Learning School helped you achieve a bigger future?

With a Bigger Box and Lifetime Learning School, a bigger future beckons. Suddenly, it's so much easier to place yourself in your future and look back at where you are in the present. I've been told that "imagine" and "vision" are two of the most powerful words in the English language. Without our ancestors' imagination and vision, we'd undoubtedly still reside in the Stone Age.

Innovate Like Edison (2007) by Michael J. Gelb and Sarah Miller Caldicott offers another example of lifetime learning. Edison and his team invented the incandescent light bulb, phonograph and moving pictures. Prior to the invention of the light bulb, candles, whale-oil lamps and later kerosene lamps were the norm. The simple light bulb immediately accelerated learning throughout the world.

The "Bigger Box"



Several things interest me about Edison: his notebooks and his Menlo Park, N.J., laboratory. Edison wrote down all his ideas in four distinctly different notebook categories. Some 2,500 notebooks were compiled over Edison's lifetime. Edison's Menlo Park lab expanded to occupy two city blocks. The inventor wanted his lab to have "a stock of almost every conceivable material." An 1887 newspaper article stated the lab contained "eight thousand kinds of chemicals, every kind of screw made, every size of needle, every kind of cord or wire, hair of humans, horses, hogs, cows, rabbits, goats, minx, camels ... silk in every texture, cocoons, various kinds of hoofs, shark's teeth, deer horns, tortoise shell ... cork, resin, varnish and oil, ostrich feathers, a peacock's tail, jet, amber, rubber, all ores" and the list goes on.

With his notebooks Edison created the first industrial laboratory dedicated to creating knowledge and harnessing its application. A Lifetime Learning School creating ever Bigger and Better Boxes.

"Imagination is the beginning of creation. You imagine what you desire, you will what you imagine, and at last you create what you will." - George Bernard Shaw

"Vision is the art of seeing what is invisible to others." - Jonathan Swift

So, what kind of a box are you building? Your box may be about anything either positive or negative. It may be emotional, beneficial, dysfunctional, addictive, philanthropic, or anything else. A box is about "intentionality." The deliberative setting forth of a better or worse future.

This reminds me of a joke I recently heard. A mother is sitting in the VIP

stands behind her daughter who is about to be sworn in as the first female President of the United States. The official next to her leans over and says, "You must be extremely proud of your daughter." She sighs, "But her brother is a dentist!"

As the diagram indicates, a Bigger Box for a bigger future requires our personal Lifetime Learning school. A purposeful envisioning and imagining of our desired future. We achieve this Bigger Box by talking about it, reading about it, concentrating on it, and bending our attitude and imagination to what it can be. For Edison, an unstinting aim to light homes, schools and factories. For Henry Ford, a quest to mass-produce affordable automobiles. For Bill Gates, to build personal computers. For Fred Soderberg, to connect people through social networks.

What sparks this process? Maybe it starts something like this:

Your third-grade daughter is watching the popular TV program "House" and proclaims "I want to be a doctor when I grow up." Maybe you chuckle to yourself about this ambitious goal. Over the next several years your daughter continues to talk about being a doctor. She does well in grade school, excels in high school -- all the time, thinking about her future self. She is accepted to a good college, obtains exceptional grades, and is accepted into a top medical school. During medical school, she decides to pursue a career as a brain surgeon.

*Desire is the starting point of all achievement,
not a hope, not a wish, but a keen pulsating
desire which transcends everything.*

- NAPOLEON HILL, THINK AND GROW RICH

Because of her outstanding residency performance, she becomes a fellow in a neurology internship. She goes on to study the effects of autism. She starts a medical lab and authors several peer-reviewed books. She funds a private foundation whose mission is to help autism research. Throughout her life, she continues to envision a Bigger Box.

Recently, the grandson of our firm's founder, Ed Coyle III, asked for our help in creating his future. He is graduating from college this year. We met with him late last summer and again at the beginning of this year. He put a plan together of what he wanted to be and how he could get there. He has been meeting with business leaders and professionals to build his professional network. He's talking about his vision. He's becoming clearer day by day about what he loves. He is drawing the outline of what his Bigger Box looks like. He has created the first stage of his Lifetime Learning School. I am positive he is well on his way to achieving his goals.

I love this Bigger Box concept. It employs the most important elements of life: imagination, vision, lifetime learning, attitude, desire, continued growth.

I've written before about people like financial investor Roy Neuberger. He



Kevin T. Coyle

was orphaned at age 12 and started on Wall Street in 1929, seven months before the Great Crash. He started Neuberger Berman in 1939 and grew it into a very prestigious money management company still in operation today. He could be seen eating his lunch in Central Park quite often into his mid-90s. He was a patron of the arts and died last year at the age of 107. He envisioned and achieved many Bigger Boxes over his lifetime. He remained sharp, motivated, inquisitive, and left us with his “learning boots” still on.

“We are what we imagine ourselves to be.” - Kurt Vonnegut, Jr.



Edward J. Kelly, Jr

In 1979, a 24-year-old entrepreneur paid a visit to a Silicon Valley research center called Xerox PARC. The company let him sneak a peek at PARC’s personal computer, which included a “mouse” cursor on a screen. Xerox, then focused on printers, ultimately withdrew from the PC business. But this young guy raced back to his firm and demanded that his own PC team drop everything. He wanted screen menus, windows, a mouse! The result was the Macintosh. The company: Apple. The young man: Steve Jobs.



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