

# Practically Radical

- ✦ Not-So-Crazy Ways to Transform Your Company, Shake Up Your Industry, and Challenge Yourself.
- ✦ by William C. Taylor
- ✦ ©2011, William Morrow: New York, New York
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# The Author and the Book

- ✦ William C. Taylor is the cofounder of *Fast Company* and coauthor of the bestseller *Mavericks at Work: Why the Most Original Minds in Business Win*. He has written for the *Harvard Business Review*, *The New York Times*, and *The Guardian*. *Practically Radical* is a manifesto for change and a manual for making it happen. If you want to break new ground and fight the status quo, this book will give you radical ideas and practical advice. Leaders in all walks of life can use this guide to rethink the logic of leadership. To research this book, Taylor went inside 25 organizations who achieved dramatic results in trying times. The case studies (not summarized) are all interesting, inspirational, and instructive.

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# Back to the Future

- ✦ Taylor starts with the concept of Vuja Dé. This is the opposite of déjà vu where you feel like something has already happened before. Vuja Dé is a situation where something that should look familiar looks very different. He goes on to tell captivating stories of Omega Swiss Watches, The Girl Scouts, and the Providence, Rhode Island Police Department who had all fallen on hard times. To turn things around, they all looked to their past to re-imagine their future. It is easy to change if you are looking into an abyss. Seeing the future with fresh eyes doesn't mean turning a blind eye to history.

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# Good Ideas From Unfamiliar Places

- ✦ Any company and its leaders can learn to look for new ideas in unfamiliar places. Taylor tells stories of companies whose CEO's spent time looking at successful operations in unrelated industries. Henry Ford got the idea of assembly lines from a slaughterhouse. Commerce Bank looked at high-volume retailers like Walmart. Surgeons studied pit crews. A medical center in Virginia adapted Toyota's concepts of just-in-time production, continuous improvement, and fixing problems in realtime. Searching in unrelated fields isn't just about copying what works. It's about changing mind-sets, standards, and expectations

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# Truths of Transformation

- ✿ Most organizations suffer from tunnel vision. You need to see your organization as you have never seen it before. Long held expertise can get in the way. Embrace the imagination of a child. If someone asks why, make sure you answer. The change agent needs to summon a sense of urgency that can be turned into action. The opposite of urgency is complacency. Complacent people usually don't realize it. The change agent must also never stop learning. Ask what is best for a hypothetical customer.

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# Try to be the most of whatever you do.

- ✿ Creativity is one of the first things to go when you don't get enough sleep. More effective people do not necessarily work the most hours. The biggest obstacle is the pull of old mental models. You don't have to be a blank-sheet-of-paper start-up to embrace a blank-sheet-of-paper mind-set. Try to imagine what ideal performance is and work backward from there. Assemble a small group of smart people and encourage them to think freely.

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# You have to care more.

- ✦ Personal engagement and emotional attachment go beyond the dollars-and-cents logic of business. Be a community first and a company second. The goal is for people to be part of something they are proud of. This means giving them a voice, a vote, and the skills to be better people. Bring the same rigor to checking on how people treat each other as you do checking on other key metrics. Leaders need to experience the highs and lows on the front lines. This creates a reservoir of empathy. Are you a “we” company or a “they” company. “We” companies have a sense of shared ownership. Inspire with a vision you are passionate about.

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# Rules for Starting Something New

- ✦ Try to be the most of something. This doesn't mean you can't do lots of different things. Being unique is not about being narrow. You need to think more and care more than the competition. Engage customers emotionally. (Doug: As a principal my customers were the students, their parents, and my staff.) If they can live without you, they eventually will. You don't need to start something new to have a blank-sheet-of-paper mind-set.

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# You don't have to be the smartest.

- ✦ Executive leadership is hard to resist and impossible to do. Leaders should strive for a blend of humility and ambition. Do not belittle others as you pursue ambition. The lone genius is a myth. Group genius generates breakthrough innovation. When we collaborate, creativity unfolds across people. Groups think of far fewer ideas than people thinking alone. Brainstorming doesn't work. The group is dumber than the individual members. IBM took advantage of this. Great story in this chapter. Invite bright people throughout the organization to share insights. CEO's shouldn't think they are the smartest.

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# The outside is the new inside.

- ✦ Look for a diverse group of people with the right expertise. It isn't just collective intelligence, it's collective capability. Most organizations are surrounded by customers, suppliers, fans, and advocates bursting with ideas and eager to help. Invite them to share their best ideas. You need to know how to move forward when you don't have all the answers. Your customers know more about their context, their desired outcomes, their needs, and their constraints than you can ever hope to learn. Try to blur the distinction between who does the work and who makes the decisions, who's an employee and who's a customer.

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# Highly Humbitious Leaders

- ✦ If you are humbitious, you have the right mix of humbleness and ambition. You don't pretend to know everything. (See the story about the Netflix Prize.) Attract new ideas and use collective energy to evaluate the ideas. (See Threadless story.) If you get lots of ideas you need to get good at rejecting the bad ones without demoralizing contributors. You should also look to share your ideas with outsiders.

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# Cool Quotes

- ✿ “If all you ever do is all you’ve ever done, then all you’ll ever get is all you ever got.”
- ✿ “In a business environment that never stops changing, leaders can never stop learning.”
- ✿ “There’s nothing in the middle of the road but yellow stripes and dead armadillos.” Jim Hightower (Texas)
- ✿ “Love is more powerful than hate. Loyalty is the greatest of loves.” Vince Lombardi
- ✿ “Nothing splendid was ever created in cold blood. Every great accomplishment is the story of a flaming heart.” Arnold Glasgow
- ✿ Rock is Dead, and Paper Killed it. To Err Is Human, to Arr is Pirate.” Threadless Tee Shirts

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# Other Books at DrDougGreen.com

- ✦ Taylor mentions other books that have been summarized at DrDougGreen.Com. Here are the books and the links.
- ✦ *Drive: The Surprising Truth About What Motivates Us* by Daniel Pink <http://bit.ly/do78ZR>
- ✦ *Innovation Killer: Are You a Zero Gravity Thinker?* by Cynthia Rabe <http://bit.ly/Evan>

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