



How to Invent the Impossible

"Handle them carefully, for words have more power than atom bombs."

Pearl Strachan Hurd (British Politician, 1930s)

Maybe it was my overactive imagination as a kid in the 1960s, but when I was in the sixth grade, there seemed to be a huge amount of fear about the Cold War. As I recall, adults didn't actually talk about the Cold War, they talked about America getting nuked by the Russians, and they taught us to deal with this frightening notion of annihilation by practicing "duck and cover" exercises in our classrooms.

Looking back, it seems like an absurd experience—laughable even. Did adults really think that if we were attacked with an atomic bomb, hiding under our little desks would provide a lick of protection? Or were they just protecting us from the knowledge that if attacked, we would all simultaneously evaporate into thin air?

On May 1, 1960, the news came that the Russians had shot down an American U-2 spy plane. The pilot, Gary Powers, plummeted from 70,000 feet, bailing out at 30,000 feet right into the hands of the enemy. His U-2 was the most advanced reconnaissance jet we had in our arsenal at the time, but by the time Powers was going through his ordeal, Lockheed Corporation's advanced development group, 'Skunk Works', was already working on a new even more advanced U-2 type aircraft. The U.S. government wanted a jet that would fly higher, faster, and more stealthily than anything in existence— an impossible airplane that nobody had ever imagined because they couldn't imagine it—and the country needed it right away.

The job of creating it had fallen to a group of Lockheed's aircraft designers led by Clarence Leonard "Kelly" Johnson, who had a reputation for producing seemingly impossible technology. But this new plane needed to go beyond the impossible. Lockheed quotes Johnson as reporting later, "Everything had to be invented, everything," He took up the gauntlet and declared that he and his team would design and build an aircraft capable of exceeding a speed of 2,000 miles per hour—and do it all in twenty months! Kelly Johnson literally stood up and declared the future of aviation.

Everyone else said it couldn't be done, but he stated exactly what his team would accomplish and exactly how their aircraft would perform as if it were already a reality. The plane that Johnson and his team developed—the Blackbird SR-71—was so advanced that the paradigms of flight and aircraft navigation had to be rewritten to accommodate it.

Visual references used in conventional flying were worthless to its pilots. At 83,000 feet, you couldn't see a highway, bridge, or river, so you needed to use oceans, mountains, and large lakes as reference points. The Blackbird could fly from coast to coast in under seventy minutes, and it served for more than three decades, until 1998, when it was retired due to excessive operating costs.

The technology that emerged from its development has made its way into other systems that are still being used to safeguard the United States. The Blackbird now hangs in the Smithsonian National Air and Space Museum. Though the aerospace industry was proud of its accomplishments, the people working in that industry knew that the technologies of the past were useless in building anything close to what was now needed.

Given what we know about Johnson and his team, it's a safe bet that the seeming impossibility of constructing this aircraft fueled their urgent desire to create it. The Blackbird was built entirely from scratch, so it was a game-changer in every sense. That's why its story is so important to your business.

Have a Conversation With Yourself to Build the Impossible in Your Life

The Blackbird SR-71 began with a conversation **FOR**—not **ABOUT**—the possibility of something impossible, and it was fulfilled through a conversation for taking bold action.

Amazing things happen when you are willing to declare the impossible to be possible—without any idea how you're going to make it so.

Everything is a function of the types of conversations you engage in. And the conversations that create every dimension of your life are the conversations that cause you and your business (or career) to succeed or fail. You may not think much about this day-to-day—after all, conversations are just words. Yet, they form your entire world. So, imagine if

all it took to build an unstoppable company was to change the conversations in your own life and your business. And guess what—that's really all it takes! Become Aware of and Transform Your Network of Conversations That Are Your Business.

Before your business (or, again, your career) came into existence, there was a founding conversation, and today you continue to manage your business with conversations. And while conversations appear to happen one at a time, in fact, they rarely exist as singular entities. Our day-to-day interactions are made up of interconnecting conversations. I'll say it again: **Business is a network of interrelated conversations**; that's all business is. Everything you do in your business is the result of a conversation. Each business idea you come up with starts with a conversation, and each action you take as a result, is another conversation.

There are conversations you are aware of and others you are unaware of and, as a result, pay little or no attention to. Yet those unacknowledged conversations undermine and sabotage your business; they act like a virus that infects your vision, your mission, and the strategy you're trying to execute right now.

I first learned about these conversations more than forty years ago from a wonderful teacher—my father. I spent my early years learning about business from him. But while I knew these conversations existed, I remained unaware of their content, and just knowing about them did little or nothing for me, because I didn't have the tools to understand them.

It doesn't have to be that way for you. Over the years, I've seen how some conversations can destroy a person's career and the quality of their life. I've studied the conversations in poorly run, toxic, mismanaged organizations, and I've also uncovered the conversations that help build 'Best Place to Work' companies. I've worked with other entrepreneurs to help them see the damage they were triggering in their own organizations through their unconsciously destructive conversations—destroying trust and causing great people to leave. I've seen the transformations that happen when people uncover the damaging conversations and finally begin to build what they've always wanted: a connection-driven business that achieves their most impossible dreams.

Conversations have within them the ultimate power to make things BE the way you say they're going to be. Creating an awareness of conversations is one of the biggest challenges in your life and your business. At the end of the day, everything comes down to a conversation.