

THE UNEXPECTED

The day of "testimonials" yesterday was the reporting of last quarter's work and symbolized the beginning of our next period of time, however long that is. I know that the quarter prepared me for yesterday for I had experienced everything we talked about and found myself saying "yes" to what we heard. This morning I want to share with you three of the ways I experienced this last quarter. The first one is that it was a time of the UNEXPECTED breaking in. The second thing is that the task before us is mutating into a new practical reality, and the third thing is that the mood of our being was experienced as exhaustion and exhilaration.

I think that the first part of the quarter I was struck first by the expected things that didn't happen rather than the unexpected things that did happen. I was struck by the fact that when I went out to solicit sponsors they didn't always decide to become one. I'm sure that you also experienced going to a Kiwanis club, talking to them, giving them a rousing presentation, and then sitting there with the room filled with awe hearing them decide not to do a Town Meeting. This kind of experience seemed to be common through the quarter.

And yet those were not the ones that bothered me, strangely enough. Rather it was the UNexpected events that happened that began to get to me, or impress me, or in some cases, bother me, although not necessarily in a negative way. For example, when we had an RS-I with 46 people, or 130 people showed up for a guardian event, I went around saying how surprised I was, but I really wasn't. Then there was an ITI grad in San Francisco who was one of the failures of the ITI by his own admission, by our admission, and by everyone else's. Every time things got the least bit practical, he discovered a meeting in Los Angeles that he had to go to. I had just written him off. Well, he called on the phone one day and said, "Bob, how are you? I would like for you to go to lunch with me and one of my friends." I thought if there was anything that I didn't need to do, it was go to lunch with him: I was busy and I had important things to do. Yet, for some reason, I guess I'm naturally a nice guy, I agreed to go to lunch with him and somebody from some place that I'd not really been cognisant of before, SRI. Well, "SRI" stands for "Stanford Research Institute," which is the granddaddy of the big research institutes around the country. Stanford has, over the last twenty-five years, become the conservative of those enterprises. It has received a tremendous amount of government money and has done over of the decade a lot of the very down-to-earth practical work for the CIA and other such organizations. As a consequence of that lunch, we spent a full day with six or seven of the staff from the Stanford Research Institute, doing a presentation on Fifth City, Lens, Town Meeting, and Social Demonstration. By the end of that day, they were saying, "This is exactly what we have to do or we will go out of existence." They really responded to the term "social demonstration." The key guy we were working with there had just spent three years in Omaha spending five million dollars and getting nothing for his money. "Let's work together here," he said. "Here you

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are, an established, respectable, accomplished institute." (You know, that took me back a little bit.) He started telling me that most of the people he had worked with in the community organizations in Omaha were street guys that meet together on the corner at night, and that he had had to go into corporations and ask them for funding for these three guys. "Here you are, an established, respectable, accomplished organization. Well, just look at your track record, look at what you have done, what you have accomplished, the kind of image you have. You are exactly the kind of people we need to work with." He suggested we work together, "SRI will help write the proposals and will get the money. We have entrees into U.S. Steel, and into this corporation and that one, and so forth, and you, then, would provide the delivery system." Well, you have all run into those kinds of appointments, but we came out of there sensing that perhaps there was something new here, that SRI is definitely concerned, from the point of view of their self-image, to find a way to relate to someone like us. Now, I think that will take time, but it has possibilities.

Now, as if that wasn't enough in itself, while we were sitting there at lunch, this pastor asked, "Now, have any of your people gone to see this elder in my church?" Well, as it turned out this elder is the editor of the Sunset Magazine and is an entree into the Bank of America and we had been working for eight months trying to find a way to see this man. The whole luncheon was just a completely unexpected event. You make all these grandiose plans about how you are going to do this and that and then the totally unexpected breaks in.

Another example is a story about a colleague many of you know who has been in the movement some 10 or 12 years. He is one of those strange kind of guys who, it appears, has not moved one inch from the time of his PLC. Yet, he still hangs in there. Well, something incredible happened in the last six months to that man. He asked one day, "What would happen in my church if we had a Town Meeting?" We suggested that this was going to be where we needed to move with the whole parish experiment. Then one day he decided that he would start moving in that direction himself, and his whole being exploded. He had been working and guarding his galaxy group and he wouldn't let anybody get into it, for fear that somebody would find out he was working with the Ecumenical Institute, and on and on. Then all of a sudden, everytime you turned around he was bringing five or six new people to movement events. The night Goodger showed his slides on the social demonstration consult, our colleague showed up with about fifteen people. Now, we had sat down at the beginning of the quarter and made a list. Our friend was at the bottom, down off the list, for everybody knew he would never do it. It seems that all quarter those kinds of unexpected events were happening which you simply had no way to anticipate. The things that you were sure couldn't produce anything of value began to do just that. That is just the first way I experienced the newness of this last quarter.

Secondly, the task before us is mutating us into a new practical reality. This has been a fascinating kind of struggle for me, to think

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through what I want to share with you. It involves the coming into being of an authentic tension between centrum and the areas. Now I will be talking to the Areas. Centrum may listen in if they wish. I want to talk about the kind of mutation that has occurred in me in trying to figure out what was going on in an area. I experience unbelievable frustration in relationship to Centrum. But not the kind of frustration that you and I have talked about in the past, not the frustration over whether or not they got your materials on time. Two things occurred that really struck me this quarter. One was getting a prior's packet containing some authorization letters, and with all due respect, one of the letters was from Boston. My immediate response was, "I don't need some letter from Boston, from some little group on the South End", (although I was personally interested in it, having lived there). The second was when I picked up the global order report and saw the note about the Exchange Club. I called Centrum and asked what this breakthrough was and none of the ones I talked to knew anything about it. Somebody suggested, "Why don't you call somebody and find out." So I proceeded to call New Orleans and called all over the country trying to find out what had happened there. What finally began to break through was that the kind of thing that I was looking for, Centrum was no longer in the position to provide, primarily because of the shift that had taken place in our task. In a brand new way, the research edge had shifted to the Areas.

We can reflect back into the history of how this has developed. Four or five years ago the edge of what we were doing was present in Centrum, and the areas were on the receiving end of the communication. Then, I think over the last couple of years everything was up for grabs and nobody really knew what was where. I think that we now have discovered that the actual edge is in the areas. I mean, it was out there making those calls that gave us the practical sociological data and experience that allowed us to have the conversation that we had yesterday. Centrum was not in a position to do the calling research, or to talk about that letter. It finally dawned on me that centrum was invisible, that it was only getting the letters that I was sending in (which was zero at that point). There are no networks here at centrum; they are all out in the areas and we are the ones that are running into the networks. To sit somewhere and say, "Why don't you do something about this network or that network?" is ridiculous because Centrum is no longer in a position to know what is going on, except through us.

We've talked about data exchange for years and years, and I have not been too excited about it. I am now excited. I am now clear that we have a massive amount of valuable data that we have got to get interchanged. In the past it seemed as though it would have been helpful but not a necessity. It is now a necessity. When you compare us to corporations, the speed at which we get things communicated, even with the bumbling way we sometimes do it, is overwhelming. We make major policy decisions and shifts in a period of a month. Corporations and other kinds of organizations will go on a year before they can make major shifts.

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Now, I am not really sure what this means, but it makes sense in relation to what I found myself doing, particularly in the area house. We saw we needed some slides. When we checked with centrum, there wasn't anybody making slides for everybody, and the area went ahead and created a set of slides. We called Plainsville and Albany, and we got some from a couple of other places and put a set together. Maybe centrum could have done that, but in one sense they weren't in a position to, either with access to the materials, or in being able to add another hand to the pot in terms of getting that work done. We found ourselves creating brochures. We discovered that we knew someone in the AAUW, and by talking with her we discerned what ought to be in that AAUW brochure. It became clear that it was upon our shoulders to get it created and to make it available. We created a California newsletter. It was obvious that we had to create a California Newsletter and Centrum was not in a position to create a California Newsletter. It's not to replace the national one, but rather is complementary to what is going on there. I'm not at all clear what the demand is or how we will work, but I see things like the primal community consult. From the way we began to move last quarter, I see that has to be more and more in the mainstream of everything we do. We are irresponsible if we get out of here without thinking through at least the directions it needs to go, because it is related to where we are in the areas. It is not a theoretical happening. It is an event that has to depend upon the data of the areas. It's very clear something is happening. We are mutating and the question is holding the tension and thinking through the new forms.

The third observation is this: the mood of our being is one of exhaustion and exhilaration. One of our guardians went to Kawangware, and before he left he talked about how his own internal experience of getting ready to go shifted from excitement, to anxiety, to terror. You could see, as he was getting ready, that he was both exhausted and exhilarated. When he came back it was even more apparent that he was exhausted and exhilarated. He was just utterly worn out, utterly spent, more tired than I have ever seen him in his whole life. And he was just sparkling. I think the exhaustion part of it had become clear to me earlier. I experience being worn out in a way that I have never experienced before, and it has nothing to do with being sleepy. I was not sleepy. I was worn out. And it did not seem to change as the quarter progressed. You used to go along and then all of a sudden collapse at the end of the day. But this quarter you were just exhausted constantly. We began to look for what was going on, for it was not exhaustion simply because you are working hard. Think back on PLC calls or RS-I calls we used to make. We would go out on those calls and even though we tried to guard against it, we would go into an appointment and do it by radar. You would scan the room a little bit, decide on one of your seven pitches, push the button and sit back and listen. Then, after you had finished, you would turn off the sender, turn on the receiver, wait thirty seconds and it would pick up automatically which of the six excuses you were hearing. Then you would switch to automatic and think about the call. Maybe we thought during the call, but never before and never after.

Now these Town Meeting calls are something else. As you are walking out the door to go to the appointment, you are already strategically planning at a hundred miles an hour because you are going into an unknown situation. You get in there and you know only at the last moment which of the pitches you are actually going to do. You do it, and then all of a sudden it's time for a response. Sometimes it looks like it is rolling down on your head. Other times you get excited and then you get out of the appointment and half way to the next appointment you are still evaluating and trying to make sense out of what the heck happened in that appointment. It's like no other appointment you've ever had in your life. All day long there is that confrontation with the unexpected situation. Exhaustion.

Now for awhile I thought the rage was separate. Everywhere I went, as well as in myself, I ran into rage. At first I thought it was in regards to not winning, but then I noticed that wasn't the case, that even though Town Meetings were coming slowly in San Francisco, we were not upset about them, if that makes sense. I mean, we were not resentful at losing, but we were resentful at winning and at the exhaustion. You found yourself resenting the anticipated burden. I know that you all know this becoming exhausted over against the overwhelming possibility that is there, for I've been aware of that dynamic for years, but it really struck me this quarter. And, the burden that always stayed lurking in the background was INDIA. Not the 5000 here, but India and Kawangware.

When Goodger made his first report to the house, we sat there just stunned and the exhaustion filled our beings. Now the thing that struck me was becoming aware of how exhilarated I was in the midst of that exhaustion. I had always thought that there were bad things like exhaustion and rage and then there were good things, like relaxation and leisure. And here was exhilaration, that didn't fit under either one. The exhilaration did not come after I finished all the work and got off somewhere else to relax, but the exhilaration came right in the middle of the exhaustion and quite unexpectedly. I had heard all these people say how much fun Town Meeting calls were, and I tell you that they were not fun, they were horrible. Yet, after several calls I began to discover that I was having fun. Not relaxed pleasure. Prior to the guardian event we were worn out getting ready for it. The night before I couldn't go to sleep and my wife turns and mutters, "You are so darn excited about this thing tomorrow night!" I said, "No, I am not excited. I don't get excited about that kind of thing. Maybe I used to, but I have put off that kind of thing. Well, I have just been so excited about the last two days that I can hardly contain myself." But it certainly is not relaxed pleasure. The exhilaration comes right in the midst of the expenditure. Now, I am very clear that it is the Dark Night and this is only rehearsing the way it seems to come to me this quarter.

I found myself reading a couple of books about flying saucers this quarter. Everybody, especially my wife would poo-poo it and so forth, but I would get into some conversations with people on the side, and they were fantastic conversations. I regret to report that I do not have

any first hand empirical experience, but it lead me off into a whole universe of reflection on what it meant to be open to the unexpected, to the radical unexpected events of everyday, like an RSI lunch or witnessing to a colleague's transformation. We were kidding last night about the impact of the reports made by some of our colleagues. My first repsonse was that it just could never happen in San Francisco. If they only knew how difficult it is out in San Francisco. But then, I found myself saying, "But you never know where the phantom will strike next." Well, you talk to Booher and he is very clear that it came up from behind and exploded right there beside him and it might happen to you next.

This is the season of Advent. There is no question but that this is the Advent time for us, particularly in relationship to Town Meeting. It is sort of like Commencement or when you graduate from high school. This is the time of the unexpected. That for me is a brand new category particularly in relationship to the 5000. For the first time I have an intuitive grasp after the possibility of the utterly and totally unexpected. It is almost as if I anticipated happenings that I could not know how to plan for. Yet there is no question, the unexpected is there.

--Bob Vance