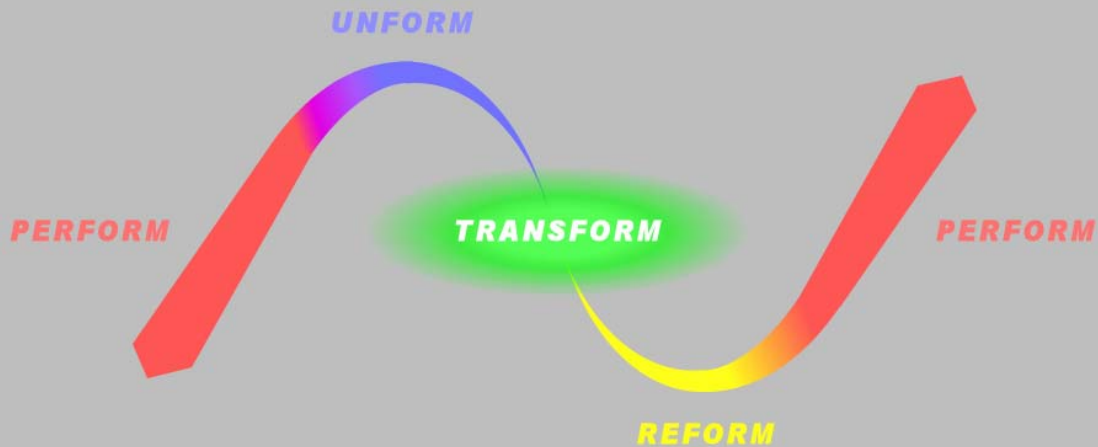


# WAVE PHASES OF LIVING SYSTEM GROWTH

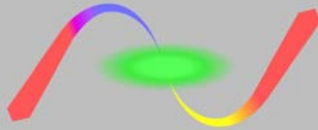


**Unforming** forces us to release patterns that have been familiar and successful. Denial, anger and fear overwhelm us as the Wave plunges into apparent chaos. Here **Tribal Elders** help us face and cope with new **Realities**.

**Transforming** must change our fear of danger into the excitement of opportunity. As we go into the emptiness of the void, **Symbolic Leaders** help us see new **Purpose** so we can release old identities and open to the new.

**Reforming** creates the new patterns that will allow us to survive and prosper in the changed environment. This phase is exciting and turbulent as **System Builders** establish the **Processes** to make us successful in the new reality.

**Performing** is where we enjoy the benefits of our new patterns. **Empowered Individuals** bring the commitment, consistency and innovation that continuously improves our processes and creates **Excellence** in all areas of life.



## The Wave Has Four Phases

All living systems go through the four phases of the Growth Wave over and over. Their successes – and survival – directly depend on the ability to recognize and align with each phase...

### 1: Unforming Accepts Realities

Unforming happens when the lobster molts its shell, when the caterpillar dissolves in the chrysalis and when the child realizes mom cannot protect it from every threat. Unforming is the phase of growth in which we are forced to let go of previously useful, but now obsolete, behaviors and beliefs. It is going through Unformings that enables us to transform ourselves, our organizations and our world. But this is a good deal easier said than done.

#### The Unforming of Sputnik

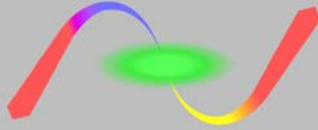
From 1945 until 1957 we Americans thought of ourselves as the biggest, toughest, highest-tech country around. And why shouldn't we? We'd won World War II and achieved the highest standard of living in history. And then we woke up one morning in 1957, and Sputnik was orbiting the earth. How was this possible? We were #1, weren't we? No one, especially the Russians, could beat us into space, could they? But Sputnik kept right on circling the globe.

No matter how much we blamed or denied, that little satellite wouldn't go away. Like it or not (and we didn't like it one bit) in the eyes of the world, we were #2. And nothing we knew how to do could fix it. Putting bigger fins on cars didn't help. Having Elvis and John Wayne on our side didn't help. Not even color television, baseball and Marilyn Monroe helped. Sputnik just kept going around, Krushchev kept laughing and our stress kept increasing.

This new reality — Sputnik — put us through an Unforming. We had to accept that we were not who we thought we were, that America was not the "biggest, toughest, highest-tech country around..."

#### Unforming Is Frightening

Unforming is the most difficult of the four growth phases because it involves a frightening loss of



identity. Suddenly our tried and true methods no longer work. When we apply them to our problems, things get worse instead of better — our results actually decrease and our stress increases. In our confusion and fear we do more of what used to work, and our results decrease further while our stress escalates dramatically. This is when we feel crazy (both individually and organizationally) because the world has changed and we don't know how to cope.

## **The 60's Were an Unforming**

The sixties were such a time of Unforming for many. Imagine being parents who planned and worked to send your children to university only to have them return rejecting your values and way of life. Imagine being a soldier who went through hell for your country only to be ignored or even despised by those who stayed at home. Imagine being an adolescent who trusted and believed in your leaders only to have that trust undeniably shattered over and over. Who am I when these things happen to me? The answer is, "I don't know anymore..." This is the terrifying, crazy-making side of Unforming.

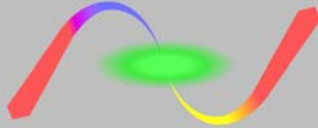
## **Unforming Frees Us from Old Limitations**

But there is a freeing side, too. When we lose our old identities, we lose their limitations as well. No longer am I just a parent, just a soldier, just a trusting child. There is more that is possible for me now, even though I might wish desperately to return to the security of the familiar, and broken, cocoon. It is in this "more" that I find opportunity, possibilities that never before existed for me as a caterpillar, but are mine for the claiming as a butterfly. The costs of Unforming are enormous, but so can be the benefits if I will experience and accept the new realities that are mine to work with...

## **But Unforming Takes Us into the Void — and This Is Painful**

Most will not do this because accepting realities is painful. We do not want to know we are failing, that our view of ourselves and the world is only partial and obviously flawed. To let go of what we have spent so much time and energy building and defending — well, that is very difficult.

But to do this without new beliefs ready to replace the old — that is terrifying because it means going into the void. And this is what Unforming means: Letting go of the old without knowing what the new will be, or even that there is a new. When the caterpillar participates in its literal Unforming, it cannot know a butterfly will emerge from the undefined mass of protoplasmic goo it is becoming. Nor can we (as individuals or organizations) know either, but if we are to survive



## 2: Transforming Inspires Purpose

and grow, we must proceed into and through the Unforming...

In this phase of growth we literally transform the frightening realities of Unforming into exciting new opportunities. Remember, the realities do not change: What changes is the way we choose to look at them.

Some see things as they are and ask, "Why?" Others see things as they could be and say, "Why not?" Most people think events in the world (realities) make them feel good or bad. They spend their lives waiting for the world to change. The transformative leader accepts that events happen and knows that his or her response to those events is what matters. These leaders transform pain and anxiety into excitement; they open their eyes to "things as they are" and to "things as they could be," and the tension between the two inspires new purpose.

### From Sputnik to the Moon

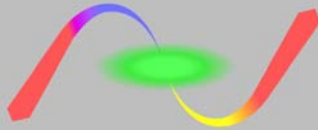
As with most clear defeats, the realities of Sputnik were accepted quickly. The world saw us second to Russia, and, at least in space, so did we. Kennedy understood the need of the American people for a transformation. He used the pain of national humiliation as the basis for a new sense of purpose: "We shall send a man to the moon and return him safely to earth..."

### Purpose Requires Symbol

Note Kennedy did not ask the American people for \$40 billion so "we could be #1 again"; that vision is too vague to generate purpose. Purpose requires symbol to have power, and he understood this. The entire astronaut program was investment in a symbol the American people could unite behind. And the power of that symbol still commands allegiance years later — just recall the sense of national tragedy we shared over the loss of the Challenger crew.

### Transforming Shifts Attitudes

So Transforming is about attitudes. It transforms people's attitudes from depression and despair into aspiration and commitment. Nothing has yet changed in the tangible world, but an enormously significant shift has occurred internally. Now, with a renewed sense of vision and purpose, we are ready to do the work of Reforming and so we can begin Performing again.



## 3: Reforming Develops Capability

When the realities of Unforming have been accepted and transformed into new purpose, then capability becomes the issue. Since we know what we've got and what we want, our question becomes "How can we get it?"

### Reforming Is Familiar Ground

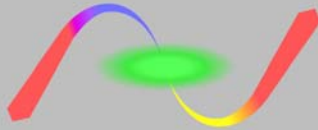
At this point we are on familiar ground. We know how to develop systems and processes. We know how to recruit and train. We know how to plan and manage projects. Once Kennedy created a unified sense of purpose and symbolized it in the astronauts, NASA was almost inevitable. Yes, it took eight years before Neil Armstrong actually took that "great step for mankind." Yes, amazing feats of organization and technological break-through were performed during those eight years. Yes, there were tragic setbacks that had to be overcome. But the successful outcome was virtually certain once the Unforming and Transforming phases had been successfully completed.

### Leading Precedes Managing

This is what we as leaders must come to understand. We know how to organize technically, and these are skills critical to the success of any venture. But they will only be used effectively if we know how to organize emotionally as well. When we truly lead ourselves and our people through Unforming and Transforming, then our Reforming will enable the Performing we want.

## 4: Performing Creates Excellence

In Performing we produce the results that fulfill our purpose — but it is a mistake to attribute the causes of our success to this phase of growth. By doing our work well in the first three phases, these results follow naturally. In every field those with experience know that preparation — in-



tellectual, spiritual, emotional and physical — is what makes the difference. Why would we expect it to be any different in leadership?

## **Flexible Persistence**

But there is a special skill to great performance, and that is, as Kenny Rogers sings, "to know when to hold 'em, when to fold 'em and when to run." The outstanding performer knows when to hold to course, when to change course and when to quit the race.

In his study of peak performers in business, Charles Garfield found one of their traits to be the ability to change course when appropriate. More importantly, he found that peak performers know things never stay perfectly on course; they expect changes (course deviations) and can enjoy making the corrections and using them for gain.

## **"Off Course 90% of the Time..."**

"Off course 90% of the time and right on schedule..." This describes one of the most successful journeys of all time — the astronauts' flight to the moon. They were literally "off course more than 90% of the time and right on schedule." In fact, the astronauts, just like all of us, are in the business of course correction. The myth that we can make perfect plans and then follow them has done more harm than we can know. The amount of energy we put into hiding, denying and rationalizing our errors is doubly destructive to performance. First, it keeps our errors hidden so we don't begin to correct them until they're much larger than need be, and, second, that energy is no longer available to make corrections with. And this doesn't even begin to speak to the costs of deceptive, unethical attitudes.

## **It's the Wave's Wholeness that Matters...**

Long-term success is a function of traveling the whole Growth Wave, and to do this we must not let our eagerness for results or our avoidance of pain rush us through any phase. And, paradoxically, we must not let our fascination with any one phase pervert the next. Realities must not be allowed to limit Vision. Vision must not overwhelm the need for Systems. Systems must not interfere with Results. And our need for Results must not lead us to distort the Realities that are the foundation for the next Wave...