



William E. Caswell

Bill Caswell is an experienced coach of CEOs and senior executives around the globe. The author of 14 books, Bill has penned the 12-book series *The Respect Revolution* written, by a CEO for CEOs, as a guide to getting your company to *Excellence* and keeping it there.

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The Life of a Visionary

A young lady engineer recently asked me what it was like to be a visionary. Frankly, I hadn't thought of myself as deserving of that lofty appellation, but I answered her, nonetheless, as best as I could. She kept exploring the leading edges I had investigated over my lifetime, and then, after quite a few cappuccinos, she exclaimed loudly: "You have a tally long enough to be on anybody's list of visionaries"! I slunk as deeply as I could into my hard coffee chair. Then she asked me: "What did you learn from all of this?" I was taken aback. Now I had to think. I will share with you my answer.

1. First, the Visions

In a bullet format, I list the so-called leading-edges and what became of them.

- **COAXIAL CABLE FIX:** In 1962, as a student engineer, I was asked during the summer internship, to examine coaxial cable used to hook television around the world to central TV antennas (cablevision) and offer improvements. I implemented design changes that maintained the technical integrity of the cable yet was easier to manufacture. At the end of the term my boss told me that I had saved the company \$200,000,000.
- **ELECTRONIC METRONOME:** In 1963, while working at my first engineering job, I came up with a design of an electronic metronome, employing a uni-junction transistor, which I tested with my sister, a piano teacher to help her students keep time with the music. The chief engineer tested it on his daughter, finding it exciting. On passing the invention to my employer to exploit, the consensus was that no market existed for the device and so it died there and then. Today most metronomes are electronics and sell in the thousands each year.
- **ROTATING JOINT FOR AIRPORT RADAR:** Around 1965 I was asked to explore a difficulty of the coaxial connection (rotating joint) for radar used in the ground control approach (control towers) for guiding aircraft. Large power spikes caused the rotating joint to burn out too often. Using the technology I had learned in designing directional couplers of transferring power between two waveguides, I created a rotating circular waveguide, the lower part fixed and the upper part in motion. Amazingly, the damn thing worked! I am told it is used today in airports all over the world. The royalty rights were signed off to my employer. Not a dime extra for me.
- **THE REPORT OF REPORTS:** Beside running into a polar bear while alone and unarmed, enduring temperatures of -81°C (wind-chill) in 1966 in the far north, with a mathematician, I developed a report on the reliability of key scientific measurements. The report (verifiable mathematically by anyone) showed the accuracy of our measures could be off by as much as 30%, a result management did not want to hear. Within months, I was given my walking papers.
- **FIRING THE UNFIREABLE:** An electronics engineer in 1969 who knew nothing about sales, was thrust into a marketing role despite his protests. I shook up the sales agent structures, especially in England, Spain, Japan and Canada, getting rid of many of (firing) the boss's favorite cronies, before settling on a global marketing team. I conducted agent training sessions in Milano for Europe and in Ottawa for North America. Result: In a span of 2 years sales, doubled, financing us to build the first high-tech factory in Kanata, helping pave the way for Silicon Valley North.

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- **DENSIMETER:** About 1970 striking out on my own, I and my young team set out to develop a device to measure density of liquids such as beer, oil, alcohol and heavy water. We took a patent from the National Research Council of Canada and engineered a device whose vibrations of one 1 millionths of an inch gave consistent quality readings 100 times better than anything in existence. When a client, Kodak of Rochester NY, told us another device from Austria was better than ours, we abandoned the \$500,000 project. Later we learned the Austrian device had not worked out. But, by then it was too late as we were already on the path of a newer trend: software development.
- **PENTHOUSE:** House shopping with my new and pregnant wife, around 1976, we came upon a penthouse condo with a magnificent view of the Rideau Canal waterway on one side and the Ottawa city skyline on the other. When informed that the building, after one year on the market, had not yet sold one unit – because everyone wondered why none had sold – I took the biggest and best one for myself at a highly discounted price – against my wife’s fearful wishes. Within weeks the all the units had sold and I disposed of mine two years later at a huge profit.
- **ATLAS:** In the 1980’s at an international museum automation conference in Pisa, Italy, I proudly presented our company’s Atlas system whose software stored all a museum’s artifacts on a laser disc, which allowed the collection to be shared with other museums or with researchers without risk of damage to the artifacts. Although one of the world’s richest museums showed great interest in Pisa, they did not buy. Without a buyer to finance further development, we put the project on hold. Two years later, I visited that same museum in the US to find it had developed its own system based on the information I had so freely shared. Today every museum has such systems.

(There’s eight more points to this list whose dates become more and more current. If you want to read all of them, please email Alex.)

2. What was Learned

- a. Just because you have a great idea does not mean you will become rich. In fact, my greatest wealth came from a pretty ordinary idea – farming out a bunch of software programmers. My least amount of income came from my best idea.
- b. The mass of people (educated or otherwise) do what everyone else does, they are not prepared to weigh out the best option for themselves and follow it – if that option is not in common use. People are afraid to be the first on the dance floor. Expect nothing more.
- c. Contrary to the above, if you want a rewarding life, follow your passion. It may not make you rich financially, but it will make you rich spiritually and infinitely enchanted with life. It will lead to great relationships and more importantly, happy, and well adjusted, children.
- d. Listen to others if you want to develop – but add your own twist to make new ideas even better.
- e. Don’t try to squeeze your own list of successes onto one tombstone (or into one newsletter).

Good luck with your life,

Bill

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