

TRIBES

by Seth Godin

(excerpt)

JOEL SPOLSKY IS CHANGING THE WORLD.

Maybe not your world, but the world of programmers and software companies and the people who work with them. The way Joel is changing the world, though, is something every single one of us needs to pay attention to.

While Joel runs a small software company in New York City, his real passion is talking about *how* to run a small software company. Through blogs and books and conferences, Joel has changed the way many smart people think about finding, hiring, and managing programmers. Along the way, Joel has assembled a large and influential tribe of people who look to him for leadership.

A tribe is a group of people connected to one another, connected to a leader, and connected to an idea. For millions of years, human beings have been part of one tribe or another. A group needs only two things to be a tribe: a shared interest and a way to communicate. Joel provides both. He runs a profitable job board that attracts the very best programmers (and the best jobs) in the world. He even created the widely used Joel Test, which is a measure of how programmer friendly a job might be. A Google search on “Joel” returns seventy-six million matches, and Joel Spolsky is first, right where he belongs.

Tribes need leadership. Sometimes one person leads, sometimes more. People want connection and growth and something new. They want change. Joel’s leadership provided change. He’s given this tribe a lever to dramatically alter the way business is done in their industry. Along the way, he’s found his passion (and grown his company).

You can’t have a tribe without a leader—and you can’t be a leader without a tribe.

Long, Strange Trip

Forty years ago, Jerry Garcia and the Grateful Dead made some decisions that changed the music industry forever. You might not be in the music business and you may never have been to a Dead concert, but the impact the Dead made affects almost every industry, including yours.

In addition to grossing more than \$100 million during their career, the Dead helped us understand how tribes work. They didn’t succeed by selling records (they only had one Top 40 album). Instead, they succeeded by attracting and leading a tribe.

Human beings can't help it: we need to belong. One of the most powerful of our survival mechanisms is to be part of a tribe, to contribute to (and take from) a group of like-minded people. We are drawn to leaders and to their ideas, and we can't resist the rush of belonging and the thrill of the new.

When one Deadhead says to another, "2-14-70," it's like a secret code. The smiles and the hugs and handshakes define who we are—being in a tribe is a big part of how we see ourselves.

We want to belong not to just one tribe, it turns out, but to many. And if you give us tools and make it easy, we'll keep joining.

Tribes make our lives better. And leading a tribe is the best life of all.

Tribes Used to Be Local

Jacqueline Novogratz is changing the world. Not by leading everyone in her town, but by challenging people in twenty countries to join a movement. One at a time, Jacqueline is inspiring entrepreneurs in the developing world to create enterprises that enrich the people around them. She's helping create organizations that deliver clean water, ambulances, and reading glasses...and doing it in a scalable way that challenges expectations.

Jacqueline doesn't just love her job leading the Acumen Fund; she's also changing the very face of philanthropy. Her tribe of donors, employees, entrepreneurs, and supporters counts on her leadership to inspire and motivate them.

Geography used to be important. A tribe might be everyone in a certain village, or it might be model-car enthusiasts in Sacramento, or it might be the Democrats in Springfield. Corporations and other organizations have always created their own tribes around their offices or their markets—tribes of employees or customers or parishioners.

Now, the Internet eliminates geography.

This means that existing tribes are bigger, but more important, it means that there are now more tribes, smaller tribes, influential tribes, horizontal and vertical tribes, and tribes that could never have existed before. Tribes you work with, tribes you travel with, tribes you buy with. Tribes that vote, that discuss, that fight. Tribes where everyone knows your name. The professionals at the CIA are a tribe and so are the volunteers at the ACLU.

There's an explosion of new tools available to help lead the tribes we're forming. Facebook and Ning and Meetup and Twitter. Squidoo and Basecamp and Craigslist and e-mail. There are literally thousands of ways to coordinate and connect groups of people that just didn't exist a generation ago.

All of it is worthless if you don't decide to lead. All of it goes to waste if your leadership is compromised, if you settle, if you don't commit.

Many tribes. Many tools. I'm writing to you about both. The market needs you (we need you) and the tools are there, just waiting. All that's missing is you, and your vision and your passion.

In Search of a Movement

Some tribes are stuck. They embrace the status quo and drown out any tribe member who dares to question authority and the accepted order. Big charities, tiny clubs, struggling corporations—they're tribes and they're stuck. I'm not so interested in those tribes. They create little of value and they're sort of boring. Every one of those tribes, though, is a movement waiting to happen, a group of people just waiting to be energized and transformed.

A movement is thrilling. It's the work of many people, all connected, all seeking something better. The new highly leveraged tools of the Net make it easier than ever to create a movement, to make things happen, to get things done.

All that's missing is leadership.

Tribes Aren't So Squishy Anymore

Before the Internet, coordinating and leading a tribe was difficult. It was difficult to get the word out, difficult to coordinate action, difficult to grow quickly. Today, of course, instant communication makes things taut, not squishy. In today's world, Barack Obama can raise \$50 million in twenty-eight days. In the nonsquishy tribal world of this decade, Twitter and blogs and online videos and countless other techniques contribute to an entirely new dimension of what it means to be part of a tribe. The new technologies are all designed to connect tribes and to amplify their work.

Please note! Throughout this book, I'm pretty quick to use examples based on the Internet and some of the astonishing new tools that are showing up to enable tribes to be more effective. But the Internet is just a tool, an easy way to enable some tactics. The real power of tribes has nothing to do with the Internet and everything to do with people. You don't need a keyboard to lead...you only need the desire to make something happen.

And if you don't have that desire, don't panic. Sometimes it's okay not to take the lead, sometimes it's okay to let someone else speak up and show you the way. The power of this new era is simple: if you want to (need to, must!) lead, then you can. It's easier than ever and we need you. But if this isn't the right moment, if this isn't the right cause, then hold off. Generous and authentic leadership will always defeat the selfish efforts of someone doing it just because she can.

How Was That Syrah?

Gary Vaynerchuk runs Wine Library TV and he has a tribe. Millions of people around the world turn to him to narrate their passion for wine. He helps them discover new wines and better understand the wines they love. But Gary doesn't market to this audience, and he doesn't manage them either. He leads a tribe instead. It's an act of generosity and the fuel for a movement, not a marketing stunt. He doesn't push; he leads.

Were people writing about or talking about wine before? Of course. Information has never been difficult to come by. What makes Gary so successful is the way he uses a new medium and new techniques to communicate his passion, to connect people, and to create change.

And so a movement grows.

The Tribe Inside

Mich Mathews is the senior vice president of Microsoft's Central Marketing Group. Bill Gates and Steve Ballmer have relied on her to market Microsoft for about a decade.

You've never heard of Mich. She's not a pundit or a touring personality. Instead, she leads a tribe of thousands of people inside Microsoft who create and shape the company's marketing. The tribe listens to Mich; they respect her and they follow her. The attention paid by this internal tribe is a hard-earned privilege and a valuable responsibility.

This is a book for anyone who chooses to lead a tribe. Inside or out, the possibilities are huge.

The Opportunity

It's simple: there are tribes everywhere now, inside and outside of organizations, in public and in private, in nonprofits, in classrooms, across the planet. Every one of these tribes is yearning for leadership and connection. This is an opportunity for you—an opportunity to find or assemble a tribe and lead it. The question isn't, Is it possible for me to do that? Now, the question is, Will I choose to do it?

For a long time, I've been writing about the fact that everyone is now a marketer. The explosion in media channels, combined with the increased leverage of individuals within organizations, means that just about anyone can influence the marketing of just about everything. This book says something new. Everyone is not just a marketer—everyone is now also a leader. The explosion in tribes, groups, covens, and circles of interest means that anyone who wants to make a difference can.

Without leaders, there are no followers.

You're a leader.

We need you.

Something to Believe In

Tribes are about faith—about belief in an idea and in a community. And they are grounded in respect and admiration for the leader of the tribe and for the other members as well.

Do you believe in what you do? Every day? It turns out that belief happens to be a brilliant strategy.

Three things have happened, pretty much at the same time. All three point to the same (temporarily uncomfortable, but ultimately marvelous) outcome:

1. Many people are starting to realize that they work a lot and that working on stuff they believe in (and making things happen) is much more satisfying than just getting a paycheck and waiting to get fired (or die).
2. Many organizations have discovered that the factory-centric model of producing goods and services is not nearly as profitable as it used to be.
3. Many consumers have decided to spend their money buying things that aren't factory-produced commodities. And they've decided not to spend their time embracing off-the-shelf ideas. Consumers have decided, instead, to spend time and money on fashion, on stories, on things that matter, and on things they believe in.

So here we are. We live in a world where we have the leverage to make things happen, the desire to do work we believe in, and a marketplace that is begging us to be remarkable. And yet, in the middle of these changes, we still get stuck.

Stuck following archaic rules.

Stuck in industries that not only avoid change but actively fight it.

Stuck in fear of what our boss will say, stuck because we're afraid we'll get into trouble.

Most of all, we're stuck acting like managers or employees, instead of like the leaders we could become. **We're embracing a factory instead of a tribe.**

The irony is that all of this fear used to be useful. Fear of change is built into most organisms, because change is the first sign of risk. Fear of change in a huge factory is appropriate when efficiency is the order of the day. Today, though, the fear that used to protect us at work is now our enemy; it's now the thing standing in the way. Imagine

having worked at AOL or a mortgage broker or Sears. It might have been fun for a while, but it's no fun at all when the factory fades.

"How was your day?" is a question that matters a lot more than it seems. It turns out that the people who like their jobs the most are also the ones who are doing the best work, making the greatest impact, and changing the most. Changing the way they see the world, sure, but also changing the world. By challenging the status quo, a cadre of heretics is discovering that one person, just one, can make a huge difference.

Jonathan Ive is having a ball working at Apple, but he's also making a difference. He's leading their design team and feeding the Macintosh tribe with ideas they embrace.

Micah Sifry doesn't just enjoy the work he does every day at the Personal Democracy Forum; he's leading a fundamental change in the way we think about politics. Thousands of people depend on Micah's leadership, and in return, he spends his day engaged in work that matters.

Heretics are the new leaders. The ones who challenge the status quo, who get out in front of their tribes, who create movements.

The marketplace now rewards (and embraces) the heretics. It's clearly more fun to make the rules than to follow them, and for the first time, it's also profitable, powerful, and productive to do just that.

This shift might be bigger than you think. Suddenly, heretics, troublemakers, and change agents aren't merely thorns in our side—they are the keys to our success. Tribes give you leverage. And each of us has more leverage than ever before. I want you to think about the ramifications of the new leverage. I'm hoping you'll see that the most profitable path is also the most reliable, easiest, and the most fun. Maybe, just maybe, I'll be able to give you a push on the path to becoming a heretic yourself.

Why Should You Lead? And Why Now?

This book weaves together a few big ideas, which, taken together, form an irresistible argument. With tribes flourishing everywhere, there's a vast shortage of leaders. We need you.

My thesis:

- For the first time ever, everyone in an organization—not just the boss—is expected to lead.
- The very structure of today's workplace means that it's easier than ever to change things and that individuals have more leverage than ever before.

- The marketplace is rewarding organizations and individuals who change things and create remarkable products and services.
- It's engaging, thrilling, profitable, and fun.
- Most of all, there is a tribe of fellow employees or customers or investors or believers or hobbyists or readers just waiting for you to connect them to one another and lead them where they want to go.

Leadership isn't difficult, but you've been trained for years to avoid it. I want to help you realize that you already have all the skills you need to make a huge difference, and I want to sell you on doing it. The best thing is that you don't need to wait until you've got exactly the right job or built the right organization or moved up three rungs on the corporate ladder. You can start right now.