



A Wind Rose Can Make Sense of Forces Beyond Our Control **Hanson Hosein's Sixteen Tenets and 10,000 Words for Real-Time Leadership**

We are living in a time of intense transformation. This accelerated pace of change is exacerbated by the technologies we use. And we see its impact in disruptive social, economic and political trends. It demands a different kind of leadership. We need to make decisions quickly to the benefit of our stakeholders, while communicating credibly with them in an emergent situation.

When everything is changing faster than ever all around us, how do we lead and communicate with others in real-time? The danger is to turn in whichever direction the wind blows, without a strong foundation for what we are, and where we want to go.

As we lead, we are charting a new course. Embedded in that informational and human energy is much sought-after direction. We desire a prescribed route, even as we wonder which way the wind – that force beyond our control – wants to take us.

Thus the “Wind Rose.” Before we had the compass and its cardinal points, we harnessed the direction of the wind to our intentions, with this universal tool for guidance.

“Real-time” leaders push towards chaos to make sense of it as quickly as possible – even as others keep their distance. In such an uncertain situation, textbooks are useless, rulebooks optional. Expectations are low or non-existent.

When there is no hope, the traditional arbiters of success desperately look to unexpected sources for clarity. Those who have thrived in times of stability, are accustomed to a routine application of power. They are reliant on the systems that prop it up. They lack the necessary perspective of what is emerging on the periphery. They are too invested in the operation of the existing machine. They struggle to see that something distinct is rising independently of that machine. Should it fully materialize, what was once “the way,” is suddenly a dead end. Then where do we go?

Clearly, leaders make decisions and communicate with our stakeholders – those we serve and those who benefit from our guidance – regularly and often. But the window to react to emergent change has contracted enormously. We no longer have the luxury to wait and see before we are called upon to act. Technology has put us in a constant state of “going live:” our social media, connected apps, data-crunching artificial intelligence. It has only amplified the expectations of our employees, customers, constituents and citizens. They want faster responses in meetings, on-camera and on-stage. Yet, despite our unprecedented access to so much information, we cannot predict the upheaval that will increasingly elude our early-warning systems. So how do we navigate such turbulence, when it is easier than ever to make a wrong move?

The accelerated change hurtling us towards the future is exciting at times. But it is mostly disorienting. Things that we hold to be true – our foundation for making sense of the world – are in deep flux.



Once, the earth was created in seven days. Today, we know that it happened four-and-a-half billion years ago. Quantum mechanics now portend parallel realities. Think of the belief systems that this will upend should theory be proven true.

Such shifts are occurring more often now. We feel as if we are far out at sea. We have lost sight of the shore. We have lost our bearings. We lack confidence in where we are headed, and our ability to get there. This elevates our anxiety. Some of us want to return to where we began as quickly as possible. Others will paddle in a panic, going nowhere fast.

We should go about it differently. We should determine what matters most to us and to those for whom we are responsible. We should assess the present situation given that context, and how best to proceed. We cannot be sure that things will turn out exactly as we want. Still, we know that no matter what, we strive to be true to ourselves. We move as one. We maximize our strength, our capabilities, and who we are to each other. Rather than flail, we coordinate. We face the uncertain horizon together. We understand that the new world may be completely different from the one we knew. Yet we hold true to what we value most. We adapt when necessary – always in alignment with each other. That is real-time leadership. Wind Rose in hand, here are our sixteen tenets.

1. Be Powerless

The Wind Rose directs us to respect external forces beyond our reach. Imagine that we are now not just defenseless, but also powerless to shape what comes next.

We have a stake in the status quo. We would rather perpetuate it, than disrupt it. We would also rather see ourselves comfortably entrenched within existing power structures. Such a preservationist mindset makes us hostile to the new, the radical and the outlandish. Any sign of upheaval forces us to question our place in a world, within which we are otherwise comfortable. Therefore, we would rather not.

To do so obscures the oncoming wave of disruption. Some of it is seemingly benign: the incessant, self-perpetuating, compounding force of technological innovation. It seems far off at first. But should it cross the chasm into mass adoption, whole systems are wiped away. Then it threatens our very livelihood and sense of self.

Other storms have origins that are more natural. They are a culmination of factors that become too massive to ignore: climate disaster, global health crises, and political uprisings. They are intervening systems that ultimately collapse our defenses. In our haste to recover, we are more amenable to unconventional ideas. Those innovations can come from people who do not have power but seek it. This is the stuff of revolutions, when new narratives clash with old ones. In this way, power hangs in the balance. Stories support our institutions. When we no longer believe in the story, the institution loses credibility. A truly novel idea can inspire an unprecedented approach that ultimately becomes a permanent fixture.



Whatever the impact of these forces, approach them with a sense of humility and humanity. Should we seek to hang on too tightly to the tried and true, we will miss what is changing. We will not glean the necessary information about their origin, chance of success, and implications. This more open gambit deters immediate conflict. We associate our identity with our hold on power, or desire for it. Remove power from the equation, and we can set aside who we think we are, at least for a moment. A humble spirit of inquiry energizes a freer flow of ideas.

It is this counterintuitive mindset that pushes us into the uncomfortable territory of a new idea. Our mandate as a real-time leader is not to resist it. We should surrender to where it wants to go. In this way, it will reveal itself. We get to take its full measure when it fully exposes itself. Sometimes, it is best to understand in which direction the wind blows us.

That does not mean we are fueling an errant notion, pumping it with intellectual oxygen. Rather, by allowing it to flow, we can see it better for what it is. We can question what is really going on. Now we can see what is at stake – how serious this emergent idea is, its potential flaws and inconsistencies. This is a different form of critical thinking that circumvents collision. It gently applies pressure. We are feeling for changes in resistance, as one might do when examining a deflated tire. Once done, we either patch or change it. Either way, we improve our traction.

This principle goes against our present “zero sum game” of public inquiry. This is typically a more combative approach to any worldview that conflicts with ours. It signals our immutable position to the opposition, as much as it elicits approval from our supporters. This inflexibility is a product of our time and our tools. Our power – our identity – is in question. Everything feels unstable. With every argument and every point of contention, our state of being is at stake. This is existential dread: we will perish if we lose a point. Social technologies only amplify this deadly contest. They reward a sharpness of communication. They punish content that takes less intense middle ground. With our existence on the line, every ominous update compels us to raise the battle flag.

Faced with the unexpected, do the unexpected. Remove the stakes from the game. Come unarmed, with a beginner’s mind. Beginners do not have any perceived power. We are just starting out. We do not come to fight. We are here to learn. It is uncomfortable. It is foreign. It is connecting to something that contradicts us. Yet, the value is in the connection, not just the idea. It is a discipline of data-gathering, as we make sense of a world in transformation. It is a survival tool: in a moment of upheaval, we gather high quality information in this way. Who and what is behind this cataclysmic change? Why is it happening now? Most importantly, what do we need to do about it? In this way, we can start to build a new foundation for those we serve.

2. Look for Signals

The Wind Rose directs us to seek new intelligence in this time of upheaval. We must shift our expectations about what we know. In this way, we are more open to any signals – no matter how weak – that can show us the way.



We presently have access to information on an unprecedented scale. Its sources are formal and informal; traditional and non-traditional; verified and unverified; raw and processed data. This should provide a uniquely precise window into all that is happening and will happen. Yet, the view can be murkier than ever. We do not know where to place our confidence in this emergent knowledge ecosystem. The same forces that generate these new sources of information are also the cause of this unfathomable rate of accelerated change. Therefore, even if we could make sense of this moment in time, we would quickly be off towards the next shift.

It is tempting to surrender to such an overwhelming situation. But that is exactly what a real-time leader cannot do. Storms eventually end. Before they do, we should have sheltered those we serve, and ourselves. Moreover, once it is clear, we should be oriented in our desired direction.

It is mostly data gathering for now. It could also lead to a kind of pattern recognition. Over time, the emergent trend will be too obvious to ignore. Either way, we do not shut our eyes while the storm rages. Even if we must squint, we look for clues, signs and minute bits of information. This will afford us the slightest bit of clarity.

The multitude of alarm bells that bring us these data bursts does not overwhelm us. We take care not to quickly succumb to the next headline, white paper or influencer. Rather, this is akin to skimming through a thick book, or glancing over a large-scale map. We open ourselves to the flow of information in a form of data-gathering serendipity. We should have the choice of a multiplicity of regular sources that we can trust: news organizations, researchers, other leaders with front-line insights, industry-specific reports, and a well-curated social media platform or two.

Our diversity of methodology is as important as a diversity of perspective. Echo chambers of homogenous intelligence will not provide enough complexity to be of value. That approach will keep us too vested in the power we already have. It will fuel our bias to retain it, along with the status quo. The slight glimmer of uncomfortable truths on the horizon are what we seek, in the face of the reality of our unsettled state.

Consider insects. They are light and relatively weak. They are incredibly susceptible to external forces, with few defenses. Yet they are blessed with the gift of hyper-awareness. Compound eyes can see in an astonishing number of directions – a powerful peripheral vision. They often sense the slightest shift in their realities: from the careful positioning of an exterminator to an oncoming predator. Signals abound. They act quickly and accordingly.

We humans too can compound our signals from a multiplicity of disparate sources. The warning signs might be too bright to ignore. Hints of a new way of doing something could flash from a completely unexpected direction. One unique occurrence could cause something else to change in a way that would not have otherwise.



We must remain consistently aware to the slightest shifts in currents around us. Definitive outcomes remain elusive. But should something cataclysmic happen, we will be the first to assemble the pieces and grasp its totality. We then make sense of it faster for those that we serve. That is a form of real-time leadership.

3. Be Curious

The Wind Rose directs us to take an unexplored trajectory. It is unmapped and uncertain. There is adventure, excitement and danger ahead. Even if it leads nowhere, the novel movement opens us up to a more creative reflex. This serves us well when so much is beyond our control.

It also counters an understandable tendency to resist change. Change is disruptive. It consumes energy we could otherwise invest in doubling down on what already works. It is easier if someone else assumes the risk of testing a new idea. There is something to be said for coming in second, especially without a demarcated finishing line. It could be on the shores of a new world, replete with an unrealized bounty. It could be a precipitous cliff, on the edge of imminent oblivion.

Curiosity drives creativity. It is a desire to explore what we do not know. Fear and trepidation do not compel us. Rather, it is an energized joy where we revel in the discovery. To look for something new is a quest for a new reality. It may be no more under our control than the previous one. Still, there is value in knowing what comes our way.

That foresight integrates a fresh approach into what we are doing right now. It can invigorate and revitalize, as an antidote to stagnation. Maybe we are afraid to prod the angry beast. Still, far better to be “loaded for bear” – ready to act when the bear is nearby. There is no luxury in “wait and see.” We need a better vantage point. Opportunity or threat, it compels us to imagine a different future.

4. Connect with friction

The Wind Rose directs us to embrace the friction of connection with people and their ideas.

To engage meaningfully with someone else is not easy. It collides two separate sources of energy. We should respect and anticipate the changes that will occur. It is a form of entropy. The outcome is uncertain as these forces engage. But it produces something new – something surprising – as the previous state decays.

The friction itself creates its own energy as a form of heat. It is the act of rubbing two distinct perspectives together. It takes concerted effort.

Contrast this with when information production and distribution is too easy. Case in point: social media where we share any random thought, lost in the ocean of exponentially distributed thoughts



of others. Even when it is noticed, it incites a diametrically opposite idea — or worse, a completely unrelated one. Either way, our burst of effortless cerebral energy dissipates almost immediately. No one is really listening. We are so consumed with our own ideas and identities; we have precious little room for someone else's thinking. It may even threaten our own. This is *existential dread* - a form of fear that preys on the mind. In this way, the stakes could not be higher, despite the lowest barrier of entry into this global game.

Say it again: engaging another life force is *not meant to be easy*. If it were, it would not produce much of consequence. This takes work, focus, and deliberation. It is an acknowledgement that we are trying to create something new.

There is a strange kind of joy as we bring our energy into another's orbit. It comes with an element of surprise. Due to this interaction, something new is about to occur. Whatever our spiritual views, we commonly accept that a very long time ago, there once was nothing. And at some point, the universe — our universe — came into being. That was an act of creation. We are one infinitesimally small part of that universe. Yet, we synchronize with its intentions when we ourselves create something new.

That is the opportunity when we exchange ideas with another: we are more than the sum of our parts as our energies combine. We must acknowledge what is really happening here and proceed accordingly.

5. Inquire with Purpose

The Wind Rose directs us to confront an emergent idea with a spirit of inquiry.

Forces buffet us well beyond our control. How should we muster our limited strength to right our trajectory? We may be tempted to plant ourselves firmly. We want to take a stand, muscling ourselves against anything to the contrary. But that has only added to this state of chaos. We were unable to integrate our thinking with the apparent differences of others.

When confronted with someone else's new idea, we are tempted to draw a line in the sand. Our understanding of our universe is potentially threatened. This is who *we* are; this is what *we* stand for.

This is no time to dig in with an intractable stance. Such rigidity only makes it easier to topple us. With curiosity comes flexibility as we connect to something strange and new. It can loosen the interaction. It opens us up to a different kind of flow. This is how we discover what was heretofore uncharted.

This apparent stance of vulnerability does not diminish us. To inquire is to unleash a different form of energy. The question itself is a catalyzing force. We put into the engagement the work. Rather than a surrender of our power, we claim a different kind of control. That inciting question



frames the interaction. And even while we claim that ownership, the other person retains their agency in an otherwise unsettling situation. Anxiety lessens. It facilitates a greater exchange of information between unfamiliar parties. Counterintuitively, we gain a different sort of power through this form of surrender. Yet, it is what gets everything started. A necessary spontaneity puts us in a novel state. It is a flow of ideas enveloped in an aura of trust.

We have now set things in motion. Now we need to keep it going. Self-propulsion is the objective. We will keel over if we falter. The interaction must take a life of its own. Their first response can inspire our own reflection of what was just shared. We might even ask another question that incorporates a bit more of ourselves within it. Either way, this is a tender equilibrium we seek to sustain.

We begin to map out where we want to head in the short term. We can scan the road ahead, but not push too far. The relationship is as important as the ideas it generates. We do not want to lock our route in too quickly. Rigidity in direction could get us lost. We are no longer on our own. Part of this surrender includes remaining open to a new trajectory. After all, the map itself is in question during this time. We need as much support as we can find in charting what is ahead.

6. Synthesize for clarity

The Wind Rose directs us to bring order to informational chaos – if only for the moment – to reduce anxiety.

This is a fundamental output of a real-time leader. We are sometimes making sense of raw data so that it can be appropriately acted upon. This is our tactical role. We are also making meaning of an emergent bigger picture. We are setting the universe right for our community, even if temporarily. That is our strategic role. Both clarify and console.

Accelerated change does not occur in a vacuum. Rather, it is the exponential culmination of connected factors, which lead to a momentous shift. When we are confronted with a new idea, it is usually the confluence of several touch points. That is where we come in: charged with making sense of what is emergent for ourselves, for those we serve, and even for someone with whom we might be engaging directly about this new idea.

About that “anxiety” element. Change can be exciting. It is something ahead that is not what we would normally expect. But open water or a sky teeming with stars can be awe-inspiring for some and paralyzing for others. Anxiety compounds when we cannot see what is next. It can vary from nervous excitement to outright fear that our place in the universe is irreversibly disrupted. Those who do seek out what cannot yet be seen may enjoy the nervous anticipation – that is the bargain we have made. It is a singular way forward that will ultimately reveal itself. But when we are caught in the maelstrom of change, it can feel constant and infinite. That is a less fun form of stress.



When we are in a state of anxiety, we are less likely to embrace new approaches to present challenges. We may even double down on an existing position to shore ourselves up against the terror of oblivion. When that happens, we shut ourselves off from innovative solutions. Equally important, we are less likely to trust someone who does not share our same worldview, so urgent our need for comfort and stability. This crushes the opportunity for collaboration. It further impedes our ability to overcome massive challenges at scale.

To put things into context is to bring comfort to those that we serve. As we begin to grasp the emergent idea, how do we best explain it to others? We should do our utmost to frame it in relation to reference points they already understand. It is something closer to home, a haven. This inspires confidence, even if for that halting first step. In addition, it provides a sense of trust, more necessary than ever when everything seems strange, and everyone, a stranger.

7. Diversify our energy

The Wind Rose directs us to energize our subject, and our stakeholders, sometimes in divergent directions.

Real-time leaders perform at the top of our game. We push the focal point of an emergent idea (as we seek our personal best) to the limit. We inspire those who observe (our expectant supporters) to rally. It feels like it is impossible to do both simultaneously. It needs to happen rapidly and sequentially. We must be aware of the needs of both.

This is a delicate dance. The energy required is different. Our emergent subject requires focus ~ and intent ~ to tune in, to dig in and embrace meaning as it unfolds. Those who are not participating directly require something more oblique. It is a tacit acknowledgment that they are there. This is for them. They have representation. We are their ambassador. We are there on their behalf. We have their needs front-of-mind.

Despite this distinction between exploration and representation, there is one point of commonality: a need for confidence in our role. We are there as a trusted conduit between the new information and those who seek a distillation of it. Informed decision-making is crucial in this time of accelerated change. We facilitate that.

We have taken on unspoken, but essential duties. We are reflecting ideas, mustering energy. We have an awesome responsibility: to filter an unexpected concept through the needs of our stakeholders. In this way, something new and useful emerges. When successful, we are a catalyzing agent in an act of powerful creation.

This is not straightforward. Creativity is a forceful push against inertial forces protecting the status quo. That which already exists wants to quell the seismic activity of the unexpected – the disruptive and the destructive. This force that we unleash must be concentrated and courageous in



its intent. We must truly understand what we are bringing to life, and of the reflexive resistance that ensues.

This sounds cerebral. It is quite physical. We need to exaggerate some of our movements, amplify our voice. We want to catch everyone in the wave that we are generating. We are at the helm in the middle of a tempest – responsible for both direction and inspiration. We need to point, elevate our voice, mime movements of encouragement through intense exertion. It may not be an everyday, natural approach to human connection. However, it is necessary. We must set aside any self-consciousness. We are putting ourselves “out there.” As a real-time leader, we must be seen as capable of serving others’ needs. The energy that we generate will inspire and serve as a beacon. It is a symbol that our watch has begun and will endure.

8. Declare our values

The Wind Rose directs us to marshal our strengths and capabilities through a public mandate. This “declaration” comes from an understanding that we as real-time leaders share the same values, principles and ethics as our stakeholders. That no matter what comes next, the decisions that we make on behalf of our constituents will be as reflective of those fundamental attributes as possible. They are immutable and reflect who we are.

No matter how great the upheaval before us, our sense of collective self is what will feed our resilience. Once we reach our destination, we will adapt to whatever is novel and initially alien. But our values, principles and ethics will remain steadfast.

There is so much that is disconcerting and disruptive when we face a reality-altering idea. It is occurring more than ever, as change accelerates around us. Real-time leaders are expected to respond earlier than ever to these changes. They do so often without access to full information. Alternatively, they understand the implications of something that has yet to be fully realized.

This declaration serves as a guide in uncharted territory. It is even more useful when we struggle to see clearly ahead. It is a living document – a constitution – something to inspire, catalyze and fortify. It is the hard initial work before we set out on our adventure. By doing so, we understand what matters most to us. We state it clearly and openly.

A declaration anticipates the change in the course ahead, reflecting it in the universality of its core tenets. Sometimes we need to remind ourselves that a culture of innovation in the face of challenge was always there. We merely need to connect that legacy to a new path. In doing so, we normalize a spirit of creativity.

The creation of this document delves into what has come before. It is about what made us into what we are today. And it is a useful indicator of where we may be headed tomorrow. Draw that thread of continuity between past, present and future, and resistance dissolves. It also fortifies us for the marked journey ahead. This directional tool helps us turn at the opportune moment.



9. Find the narrative

The Wind Rose directs us to create a narrative as a map of meaning. It is an organizing force in the face of chaos, providing both direction and destination. We trust a good storyteller because we expect a satisfying payoff at the narrative journey's end. We can establish that trust in a similar way as we delve into an emerging concept.

To lead is to convince others to follow us – that the direction we have taken is the right one. The path forward may not be entirely clear to us either. But we may have a better sense than most which way to go. It is as important to set that direction, as it is to have full clarity prior to setting out. No one wants to wander a barren landscape incessantly before reaching a land of milk and honey. Unless, of course, we have set the expectation as to what it will take to get there.

To explore a new direction is a path of consternation and concern for our stakeholders. What is this new thing? Why does it matter? How is it useful to us? And where do we find the confidence to adopt this strange, uncomfortable way of life?

We assuage that anxiety by taking those questions into account in our narrative. This requires research, connection to experts, and an understanding of our stakeholders' priorities.

That is just the spark, however. We must filter that intensity of knowledge through own perception – of what we already know, of our own objectives, of how we sketch the bigger picture. While the main attraction could be the emergent idea and the one who extols it, we have another agenda. We must soothe the informational anxieties of our community. We are the creative force. It is our story to tell. Done properly, this will build respect, credibility, and understanding. We can hasten their acceptance of the change if we demonstrate its inevitability. Put another way, now that we all understand what is truly happening, we must act.

Action will change lives. It will disrupt personal narratives and identity. While that is upsetting, we cannot avoid such emotions in a time of upheaval. To make sense of this through story is to manage the turbulence. We are surfing the pent-up forces, leveraging momentum forward.

Our role here is crucial. We draw the map through the stories we tell. Anything otherwise just adds to informational chaos, elevating the sense of dread. We counter with narrative waypoints.

10. Surrender to the moment

The Wind Rose directs us to surrender to the moment. To engage deeply with another in the mutual exploitation of a new idea is a cerebral and emotional task. It is also a physical one. Whether we are face-to-face or screen-to-screen, we deploy various parts of our body – our eyes, our



ears, our mouth, our neck, our arms, our hands, our shoulders, our back — in service of the quest for new and surprising information.

It takes much to “let go” in such an instance. In the beginning, we tend to tighten up. We are so intent on getting it right, we get nervous in the spotlight with a stranger and a strange idea. It is especially hard when we are doing so in front of others, with their needs in mind.

It takes a lot of practice to get to the level of that triple connection: intellectual, emotional and physical. Nevertheless, once attained, it is no different from the approach of a professional athlete or musician. There is beauty, artistry, and a strange kind of effortlessness in the moment. We are bringing something new to the world. The emergent idea may have been shared before. People may already be familiar with it. But at this juncture, *we* are the differentiator. *We* are the conduit for the information, its energy and for the participants who anticipate its transformative force.

Like an athlete or artist, so much work has gone into that contained performance that we are there to *play*. To create and to be a conduit in service to others can be joyful. It is an amazing thing to play the role of sense-maker in real-time, at this time. Much is expected of us. We are also deploying a wealth of expertise and experience, which we have earned. To this, others ascribe credibility. It is why we are seen as a leader. We should revel in that, even in the heat of an engagement. It is working hard. It is playing hard.

It is okay to let go right now. We can let the big picture slip for just a second as we push deep into what is before us. We take a short pause for our assignment. We acknowledge the pleasure in the privilege that we have been given — and that we have earned. We can go one level deeper to get lost a short while in the idea-at-hand.

The risk is that we lose our train of thought. We can tap that intellectual vein for a short while. We also know when we need to move on. We can go so deep that we do not know how to return to the surface. That is why we need that narrative map. A quick refresh of where we intend to go, gets us back on track. Yet, we will not forget that one moment when we were at one with the idea and its messenger. It could change the whole tenor of the interaction. It could be the one shining thought that changes how others see this part of the world. On the other hand, it could just be the one memory that we will retain — of excellence, competence and connection. All are valid and might occur in the most unexpected of ways. So, expect it. Act on it. Know how to move on when it is over.

11. Maintain awareness

The Wind Rose directs us to maintain situational awareness. Real-time leaders focus on the present, while keeping an eye out for what is next. We also look and listen for cues from those that we serve — especially as their needs change.



We can feel when we have their attention. We can also tell when it wanes. Our connection to them is much more than just our words and ideas. The physicality of our surroundings matters equally. Can we sense distraction? We may not be hitting the mark with the subject-at-hand. Is something else happening in that space, some other disruption than the one we are exploring?

There is a rhythm to real-time leadership. We constantly test ideas and their relevance. What resonates for one person may do so differently for another. A diversity of solutions and approaches is paramount. Still, best not to linger too long. We push boundaries, but not so much that we lose the attention of others.

This is what it means to have a “third eye.” We keep the connection, The ideas flow. We stay on track with our narrative. We keep watch for environmental changes. We may not always have to react to them. Nevertheless, we are fundamentally engaged in the act of creation.

To create is to invite inspiration from unexplored corners. This includes unforeseen, unexpected discoveries from a real-time interaction. How might something new, something surprising bring new energy to our creation? Yes, we defend ourselves from potentially fatal distractions. We are also concurrently open to potentially mind-shifting opportunities. Even the narrative journey we have so carefully crafted could falter in the light of something new. It is an opportunity worth seizing: to engage in a real-life, real-time laboratory of ideas and people. In this way, we can see a collective way forward.

12. Adapt to new circumstances

The Wind Rose directs us to adapt in real-time to a new situation.

“Real-time” means things can change at any time. We control the present situation only so much: our expectations, the narrative direction and our own understanding of the subject-at-hand. In addition, as real-time leaders we are openly provoking the norm to grasp what is new. To poke and prod at something we have never seen before, leads to unexpected outcomes.

The second law of thermodynamics states, “heat tends to flow from a hotter object to a colder one.” But it’s not a spontaneous act. It requires the application of work. *We are* the ones doing that work. *We* bring the active energy of a new idea to a more static reality. What follows this transfer of energy?

Surprises are sometimes good: be they celebrations or unexpected opportunities. They can also be cataclysmic, such as a lightning strike that inflames a bone-dry forest. Or a global pandemic. We cannot prepare for every eventuality as a real-time leader in a time of accelerated change. But we *can* anticipate that more likely than not, the unexpected will arise. Forces are moving far too quickly for anything otherwise.



We have already fortified our position. We have read the signals. We have done our research. We have determined our direction. We have ascertained the needs of our stakeholders. That is a robust line of first defense as the storm approaches. Yet, what if it is so cataclysmic, so startlingly unusual that our typical shelter is no haven? We must avoid being swept away. We must quickly adapt.

It could be a slight shuffle to the side of the oncoming collision – if we see it coming. It also may be too late, given the magnitude and suddenness of the change. If that is true, we can only try to weather the now inevitable.

There is an unseen benefit though. To adapt to a new situation is, a form of creativity. To integrate the new – sometimes the cataclysmic – into our existing world takes both strength and imagination. To not do so is to hold on too tightly to what came before and that is no longer relevant. Of course, storms may suddenly change direction or die down without any notice. That is not for us to forecast. We must remain upright in any way we can so that we can learn from the situation-at-hand.

Our world is in upheaval. We must expect the unexpected. Something wants to be born. It is pushing and shaking what we once upheld as real, relevant and timeless. This is all incredibly disconcerting. There is an impending new reality. We are obliged to explore it further. Even as it takes our breath away, we must try to keep our eyes open. In this way, we can see and anticipate, while still holding true to what really matters to us – no matter what lies around that corner.

13. Do not be boring

The Wind Rose directs us not to be boring.

We seek to ascertain what is next. Much of it will happen regardless. It is our role to understand and to adapt. Still, we are by nature, explorers. We may set out on a tried-and-true route. That is how we get our bearings. It could be our only choice at that early stage.

Yet, as we push further away from our comfort zone, our choices multiply. Our routes fork. What benefit is there to adhering to the same well-traveled trajectory? Yes, we are less likely to get lost. Still, we instinctively grasp that one day, those could be roads to nowhere. So why not push boundaries now? Some will end up as dead ends. Other are fraught with too much risk. However, when we choose new directions, we could also find a world that was just waiting to be discovered.

“Boring.” It means “not interesting;” or “not relevant.” To be either is to not serve a situation where all is in flux. A real-time leader can only show the way if we have taken the less obvious way ourselves. It takes courage and a willingness to make room for new ways of thinking. We also stay alert. We cannot rely on muscle memory or rote movement to get from one point to another. There is no immediate sense of destination when we go off in a new direction. Our supply lines may stretch. We do not know how far we need to travel. We are just compelled to go this way. We



owe it to ourselves. We owe it to our stakeholders. If we cannot see what is on the horizon, how we can we expect others to follow us?

There is comfort, stability and predictability in ritual and routine. It is efficient. It provides peace of mind through well-worn expertise. It is also of absolutely no use when seismic change threatens the very foundations of our world. To tarry too long within what we cherish most, is to be caught unprepared and unready. All things must pass – great civilizations and empires always do. It appears that they are all passing much quicker than ever now.

There is excitement in this approach. Yes, disruption is profoundly disconcerting. We can also find joy in the unexplored and untrammled. Let us aside our fears of our loss of primacy and stature. Let us discipline ourselves to survey the whole landscape. It leads to timely creativity in our search for solutions to once-intractable challenges. It is a refreshing way to learn.

14. Muster our tools

The Wind Rose directs us to keep our supporting tools at the ready.

We acknowledge that real-time change demands our real-time leadership. Almost anything can happen at any time. We must maintain a state of anticipation and adaptation with this in mind. Our mental acuity is paramount as circumstances shift. Yet, as much as we do prepare, our focus can falter. It is inevitable: novelty and surprise are necessary elements to an emergent situation. That is when the tools that we keep close-at-hand get us back on the path.

Instinctively, we will reach for our devices. Technology is efficient. It provides spontaneous sources of information – measuring sticks for how we are doing at any point in time. We are used to those screens closer than arm's length for split-second consultations. There are also increasingly new ways to solicit stakeholder engagement. This is especially useful when we are exploring a new concept.

Should we leverage these tools, they should be additive, and not a distraction. Nor should they be the primary drivers of what we do. Otherwise, the technology will substantially alter our engagement and disproportionately draw our attention away from the subject-at-hand.

What we use should be simple, well-tested, and instinctive. We must be able to deploy these tools when necessary, and without much thought. Our mental and emotional connection must remain with people, not things. We must prioritize that connection.

Our choice of tools says a lot about our leadership. Have we considered who owns the output of our engagement? Who has access to it? How can we give more access to our stakeholders without inadvertently creating other barriers? Ideally, whatever we create belongs to our stakeholders, not to those who build the tools and us.



Consider then a simpler, more analog approach. It may compromise our convenience or the extension of our reach. But our engagement remains within our control. In-person and on-paper can ground our connection. We control what we can. With assurance and confidence, we bolster our interaction with others. We make more informed decisions in alignment with our principles and values. Technology can support and amplify. It never takes center stage.

15. Anticipate anxieties

The Wind Rose directs us to anticipate the anxieties of our stakeholders. Our constituents and community seek information to make good decisions under ambiguous circumstances. Their stress is elevated. We must recognize their state of mind. We do so in what we share, and how we share it. This is a fundamental element to successful communication.

Belief is an attribute to identity. The information we communicate can either support or threaten what someone believes. In turn, this could support or threaten their sense of self. We must be aware of this dynamic. We acknowledge it when necessary. We push past it even if the truth disrupts our stakeholders' sense of reality. Certainly, this could amplify existing anxieties. However, as real-time leaders, we seek to reflect an emergent new reality. It sets us all up for success. It also dispels the existential dread that underlies larger concerns about change.

If those that we serve believe that we are focused on their needs, we can earn their trust. It gives us greater latitude to move in a new direction. Certainly, we are intent on exploring a new idea. We must also set expectations from the outset. What are our intentions? What is potentially disturbing about this new direction? What utility can we glean from it? How can our stakeholders access these new concepts in real-time with us? Doing so will dispel doubts and lead to more learning for all of us.

There is no "sage on the stage" here. No wise captain at the helm. We are all on the same journey. It is easy to dismiss some fears as over-blown. Often, they could reflect an instinctive truth that motivates those who we serve. We must listen. We must reflect. We must learn. Doing so makes the engagement more collaborative. If all who participate feel that they have agency over the outcome, they are more likely to assimilate the emergent idea into their existing worldview. In this way, resistance tumbles. We are now all better situated for what comes next.

16. Be true and transparent

The Wind Rose directs us to be honest with ourselves and with our community. Something is pushing us down this path. It is compelling us to ask others to follow. Real-time leaders must practice this transparency from the outset.

We are hurtling towards the new. We will have to jettison some – or all – of what we thought once worked. This is a treacherous gulf to traverse. As real-time leaders, we are the focal point of



this moment to our stakeholders. As we are making the case for disruptive change, our own motivations will be scrutinized. We must not conceal or obfuscate. That would be fatal to our ability to bring everyone along. We are asking them to shift their mindset, their worldview, their sense of meaning. This could potentially obliterate previously comfortably held realities. It would provoke anxiety. They will also critically examine our reasons for advocating for this emergent idea. Why now? What is in it for us? Our very credibility is at stake.

Real-time leadership is a negotiation. It is an attempt to seek balance with what is and what *might* come to be. The sensibilities of others must be respected. People must be coaxed. Ideas must be delicately weighed and valued. As leaders in this moment, we could get carried away by what is fresh or exciting. We could also seek immediate action due to our intense trepidation of what is coming.

We should not take our reputation for granted. It might have been sufficient to get our stakeholders' attention. Yet will it be enough to change perceptions for good? Despite our ongoing attempts at diplomacy during this sensitive time, we cannot be all things to all people. That is not leadership. There will be discomfort. There will be disagreement. There will be attrition. All of this will be amplified exponentially if we are seen as obfuscating. Do we have something to hide? Any appearance of such a concern will quickly rob us of our momentum and authority. This focus will shift to our motivation. What is in it for us? This will derail any analysis of the merits of the emergent concept itself. Polarization ensues. Everything comes to a halt.

It is okay to disagree. We can do so, and still maintain respect. Our power emanates from the truth of the idea *and* our ability to face the truth. The facts should speak for themselves, even if it slows us down or calls our abilities into question. We as leaders must uphold such honesty. We will experience our own discomfort in making room for something new. This is how we model strength and agility to our stakeholders. Certainly, we should know where they are coming from. We should know where we want to go. They should also know where *we are* coming from ~ and why we want them to go somewhere different.

Let us create this level of trust from the outset. It is a good investment to make while things are still relatively calm. We are more likely to move as one – real-time leaders and stakeholders alike – even against the strongest of headwinds. In this way, we assure both direction and destination.



Storyboard: The “Wind Rose”

“It is extremely hard to discover the truth when you are ruling the world. Power is all about changing reality rather than seeing it for what it is. If you really want truth, you need to escape the black hole of power and allow yourself to waste a lot of time watering here and there on the periphery. Revolutionary knowledge rarely makes it to the center, because the center is built on existing knowledge.” — Yuval Hariri *21 Lessons for the 21st Century*

It’s a thirteen-mile bike ride to the studio. Three interview subjects and a three-camera shoot await. I’m listening to a book about the history of philosophy on bone conduction headphones. I’m cutting it close to the scheduled arrival time. But most of the ride is on a car-free trail, bereft of traffic lights. There’s little chance of unexpected obstruction. Still, I do stop twice and pull off to the side.

The first time is to take a call from one of my intended experts. Even an hour away from our recording start, I hadn’t heard directly from her. I wasn’t even sure that she was going to show up.

I answer the call immediately. We quickly get situated on the conversation we will have at the studio — hiring challenges from small business as they try to recover from a global pandemic. I’m relieved that this is officially on her radar.

Then, she asks how we’ll be conducting the virtual interview. I must reiterate that we’re doing this in-person, in a studio. Happily, it’s not far from her business. There’s more uncertainty now. Will she follow through? In this time of crisis, I wouldn’t blame her if she didn’t. Showing up in-person isn’t so mainstream anymore. So, I mentally prepare for her absence. It’s okay. Chaos, uncertainty, upheaval are the defining characteristics of this moment.

The second time I stop is to jot down a quick note. “Genesis: it’s not about whether it’s true, but why some believe it’s literally true.” My audiobook’s author is making the case for how certain thinkers have so disrupted our worldview (the sun doesn’t revolve around the earth; humanity was not created in seven days) that it sets us on a completely different course of understanding. Yet I know some people take their holy scriptures word-for-word. A younger me might scoff at them or want to engage in righteous debate, fueled by logic and research. Now, I understand how much stories matter to everyone. They shape our reality and help us make sense of what otherwise looks like chaos and oblivion. Older now, and more certain of mortality now than in my twenties, I need those defining narratives as well. I scrawl two other words in that same note: “fear” and “humility.”

So, the clarifying question at that moment was not, “The earth was created in seven days? How could that be true?” It was, “What motivates someone to believe that this really happened, despite the abundance of scientific information that says otherwise?”



The Book of Genesis may or may not be factual. Abstract historical account, or fictional metaphor for the creation of life, it is unequivocally *a story*. What fascinates me most now is how such stories get amplified to such an extent that they become “sacred.” These are narratives that define who we are, how we understand the world and most importantly, we don’t question too much — if at all. While we may want to scoff sometimes at this blind faith, there’s also real power in the belief that we associate with this kind of story. That power may be nothing more than the ability for such a narrative to endure for thousands of years, as civilizations, empires and tribes are wiped out. And yet, such resilience in the face of the sandblast of time deserves recognition — even if some of us don’t believe a word of it. Even if they inspire one tribe to eradicate another, merely due to a slight disparity in the agreed-upon narrative.

Those sacred stories can also come and go. Years ago, I had an even more unusual commute. I would sometimes drive down from one holy land, walk across the border, and stay on the shores of another. Where the legendary sea was parted by the leader of a fleeing group of slaves. A place where ancient pyramids still stand — their construction driven by a sacred story of gods that no longer inspire any devotion. And yet, this region is now dominated by not one, but *three* sacred stories, brought to life in its sands and cities. Whatever the faith, it has driven strangers to trust each other exponentially as they built great nations, while urging them on to destroy the nations of others.

So, it doesn’t matter whether Genesis is true. It does matter that some of us believe that it’s *literally* true. It’s also lazy thinking to state that religion is the root of death and destruction. Religion is a readily apparent set of sacred stories that help set order to the nature of things. They wonder at the mystery of life even as they provide *meaning* to life. We’ve also gone to war over differences in political philosophy, manifest destiny, racial supremacy and in defense of the vulnerable. If one form of sacred story didn’t exist, we would most certainly create another one to differentiate ourselves from the “other.”

Conclusion: these narrative forces are to be respected. Their relevance will wax and wane. We eventually recognize when it’s time to let go and make way for the next defining narrative. Today, we may look to the dwindling numbers of overtly religious people, a lack of faith in capitalism and democracy, our newfound allegiance to technological platforms, our concerns about equity and human freedom and observe: the old stories are dying, and new stories are nearly upon us. What does that mean?

I get to the studio on time. Usually, the wind along the lake blows against me at this time of day. There are no further epiphanies to jot down. Now it’s time to focus on the conversation-at-hand. I have mapped out what I want to cover. Still, I’m not entirely sure how it’s going to go. I never am, especially when cameras are capturing the session. Technology changes the dynamic, both for the guests, and for the role I’m called upon to play. I need to simultaneously focus on those in front of me as we tease out the subject and call upon their expertise — as well as on the people I can’t see. It’s a form of split-screen attention to validate the audience’s investment



in this content. In a way, I need to inspire them to take a leap of faith: that this story we're telling now will somehow help them make sense of a particular part of their lives. It may not be especially sacred, nor enduring. But these moments of attempted clarity do add up. As we lead such engagements, we're helping to chart a new course. Embedded in that information and human energy is much sought-after direction. We all need to know which way to go, even as we want to know which way the wind — that force beyond our control — wants to take us.

Thus the "Wind Rose." As I contemplated names for this work, I wanted something that indicated direction. First there was "arrow," which quickly led me to "manicule" (those pointy fingers in pre-20th century manuscripts), and then "compass rose." That final navigational aid led me to its progenitor, "wind rose." Before we had the compass and its cardinal points, we leveraged the direction of the wind for guidance. Meteorological services still use a more graphically advanced version of the wind rose to this day. I embraced both this historical concept as well as the present-day generic visual. More personally, my daughter's name is "Rose." And not to leave her brother Hendrix out, my favorite song by his namesake Jimi Hendrix is "The Wind Cries Mary." (Family crisis about playing favorites averted.)

So, the speed of a natural force, and its direction, succinctly summarized in a useful, universal tool. That seemed like a good starting point for this treatise. When everything is changing faster than ever all around us, how do we lead and communicate with others in real-time? The danger is to turn in whichever direction the wind blows, without a strong foundation for what we are, and where we might want to go. That's a recipe for disaster.

We're living in a time of intense transformation. This accelerated pace of change is exacerbated by the technologies we use. And we see its impact in disruptive social, economic and political trends. It demands a different kind of leadership. We need to quickly make decisions to the benefit of our stakeholders while communicating credibly with them in a highly emergent situation.

Nearly two decades ago, I realized that storytelling no longer needed to be the preserve of movie makers, journalists and authors. That the explosion in accessible digital technology and online distribution platforms would create both opportunity and obligation for organizations to create their own digital media channels. It seems obvious now, but it was not pre-ordained in the early years of this century. I experimented with these notions myself by quitting a well-paying job in national television news. I put my dwindling savings into a documentary film project. I promoted it through a "blog." Then I would ultimately craft a proposal for a university program that I thought urgently needed to exist based on what I learned from that project.

When I was asked to lead a graduate degree program in digital media and communication in 2007, I reimagined it with this premise: organizational storytelling that leveraged the digital revolution could lead to new opportunities to create trust and persuade others. The timing was perfect, as social and mobile platforms exploded on the scene. I wrote a book about it. I engaged some of the industry's top leaders on these issues on-camera and on-stage. I consulted for Fortune 100 companies. And the graduate program prospered. It was the first to



truly leverage social media into classes and offer a digital storytelling curriculum. It even advised the university itself on its nascent online strategies.

But as these startups grew up and went public, their scrappy user-generated content ethos mutated into an insatiable appetite to monetize user data. The high-water mark of social media may have been the 2011 Arab Spring, where citizens of that region used digital media to organize against sclerotic regimes. The 2018 Cambridge Analytica election data scandal demonstrated how these platforms could be easily corrupted to amplify a different kind of power. In between those two periods, the graduate program would pivot by adding curriculum that focused on people over technology, and how to create more trustful connections.

More recently, I decided that we needed to model our unique approach by creating a “Declaration of Communication Leadership.” It would serve as both manifesto and blueprint for decision-making in a time of accelerated change and outright upheaval. When everything begins with the qualifier “unprecedented,” textbook answers are elusive. We can only look to our own principles to align the decisions we make on behalf of our constituents, ideally through a publicly available declaration of our values.

And now, truth and trust feel even more elusive as everyone crafts their own realities. Misinformation and disinformation proliferate. Just as organizations did with storytelling at the onset of the digital revolution, do they now can create trustful refuges, especially when it comes to decision-making around technologies and larger, emergent trends? The coronavirus pandemic has only underlined the connection between a global crisis, the adoption of technologies to manage this crisis, and the social upheaval it all has provoked. How do we navigate in such context? How can we lead?

Fundamentally, we must develop a new methodology for organizations and leaders, so that we can help chart a near-future that we can say with certainty, will look *very* different from today.

Hanson Hosein
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