

Jack Uldrich

*Author of several provocative books, including *Jump the Curve*, Uldrich bills himself as the chief ‘unlearning’ officer, contending that we all have to shed assumptions that constrain our thinking, even our seeing. When asked, while viewing a short video, to count the number of times the basketball is passed among team members wearing the white shirts, most of us do exactly that. We somehow miss seeing a man in a gorilla suit walk through the players. We see what we’re conditioned to see.*

And that conditioning is sticky, Uldrich said. In nearly every audience if you ask people what color a ‘Yield’ sign is, many people shout out “yellow and black.” Which would have been correct four decades ago. They’ve been red and white since 1971.

Nine forces are doubling every 4 to 24 months. Everything from gene splicing to robotics to nanotechnology. Technically, this is *zenzizenzizenic* – something growing exponentially to the 8th power. That is what’s happening on multiple fronts today. Remember, Google’s only been with us for a dozen years. Five years ago, who’d ever heard of an ‘app?’ Now we’ve got prototypes out there for Google Glasses and down in Eden Prairie there’s a manufacturing company called Stratasyss that’s ‘printing’ objects – everything from a hearing aid to an automobile.

Not seeing around the corners, not noticing the trends and their pace, has big consequences. Ask the owners of Blockbuster. What’s happening in higher education offers a vivid example. Companies like Coursera are emerging to offer courses on-line. They’re good. And getting better. And the American Council on Education has started to say they’re worthy of ‘credit.’ Five courses already approved. They cost the customer \$89 each.

Still, it’s remarkably easy not to notice, especially disruptive change. Doubling is powerful but also sneaky. Imagine a pond where a single lily pad doubles each day for a month, by which point the pond is totally blanketed with lily pads. What percentage of the pond is covered on day 20? Actually, it’s one-tenth of one percent. (most guesses are much higher). Always, the high velocity change happens in the last couple of days.

So Uldrich’s message is we need more Awareness, more Humility, more Action. The best way to predict our future is to create it. Let’s go back to where we started, with our marvelous river and what nature gave us – always changing and always the same. And build the community we want.

Mark “Puck” Mykleby

A recently retired Marine Corps colonel, now working through the New America Foundation, Mykleby offered a surprising message – sustainability is the crucial strategy for our national security. In his final assignment, former Joint Chiefs of Staff Michael Mullen asked him and a colleague to design a new strategy for national security.

Mykleby was provocative, some of his comments were:

I had no idea what an emotional word ‘sustainability’ was. So, if you don’t like the word, substitute ‘kumquat.’ I don’t care. What matters is that we figure out that despite our reverence for the post WWII generation, *we* have to be the greatest generation – and now. The greatest challenge we have ever faced is global *unsustainability*.

Our national security is not about assessing military risks or dealing with China. All that thinking about win-lose, or force and power, or telling other nations what to do – it’s all crap when you consider what we’re up against. Our ultimate challenge is how we redesign our big systems like energy and education and agriculture. The math we use about growth isn’t working for us anymore. We have to shift from a quantitative model to a qualitative model.

I cannot overstate how serious this is. Take agriculture. Just in Minnesota 75 percent of our best soils are compromised. It takes 100 years to regenerate each millimeter of soil. There’s a huge opportunity for regenerative agriculture – make it 30 percent more productive, using 45 less energy. We need a 50 percent gain in productivity just to feed the world of the future.

Real estate development? 56 percent of Americans say they don’t like where they live. Pressed for details, they talk about features usually associated with what’s called ‘smart growth.’ Only 2 percent of housing starts have those features. Think of the demand – that’s three times the demand we saw when troops came home from WWII.

Relying on an economic model about services and retail – that’s not the way forward. We need to invest in sectors where the return is higher. At the New America Foundation we are organizing regions around the U.S. Remember: our founding document says “We the People,” not “Wait on Washington.”