

ORBITING THE GIANT HAIRBALL

by Gordon MacKenzie

Viking Press, 1996

- Every new policy is another hair for the Hairball. Hairs are never taken away, only added. Even frequent reorganizations have failed to remove hairs (people, sometimes; hairs, never). Quite the contrary, each re-organization seems to add a whole new layer of hair. The Hairball grows enormous. With the increase in the Hairball's mass comes a corresponding increase in the Hairball's gravity. There is such a thing as Corporate Gravity. As in the world of physics, so too in the corporate world: The gravitational pull a body exerts increases as the mass of that body increases. And, like physical gravity, it is the nature of Corporate Gravity to suck everything into the mass – in this case, into the mass of Corporate Normalcy. The trouble with this is that Corporate Normalcy derives from and is dedicated to past realities and past successes. There is no room in the Hairball of Corporate Normalcy for original thinking or primary creativity. Resynthesizing past successes is the habit of the Hairball.
- Orbiting is responsible creativity: vigorously exploring and operating beyond the Hairball of the corporate mind set, beyond “accepted models, patterns, or standards” all the while remaining connected to the spirit of the corporate mission. To find Orbit around a corporate Hairball is to find a place of balance where you benefit from the physical, intellectual and philosophical resources of the organization without becoming entombed in the bureaucracy of the institution.
- Renegades are tricky people to deal with. By definition, they resist being led. McCloskey's response was to draw on his uncanny talent for leading-without-leading. He understood that renegades go off on tangents; that was just fine with him. Flying off on a tangent is the first step in the process of going into Orbit.
- Hairball is policy, procedure, conformity, compliance, rigidity and submission to status quo, while Orbiting is originality, rules-breaking, non-conformity, experimentation, and innovation. Invention happens in Orbit. Orbits are paths related to the system, but not of the system.
- Civilization has a limited perception of Infinite Reality. And with a haughty self-assurance, it imposes that perception on us until we think it is our own. The same is true of the companies we work for. They have their perceptions of reality and they impose them on us. As a result, we are wrapped in a cocoon of realities perceived by others who came before us. It is a cocoon that gives us a sense of emotional security through connection to a shared belief. But it is also a shroud that binds and cripples us as surely as the ancient social abuse of binding Chinese women's feet crippled them.
- When you join an organization, you are, without fail, taken by the back of the neck and pushed down and down until your beak is on a line – not a chalk line, but a company line. And the company line says things like: “This is our history. This is our philosophy. These are our policies. These are our procedures. These are our politics. This is simply the way we are.” If you are not careful, you will be hypnotized by this line.
- If you are hypnotized by an organization's culture, you become separated from your personal magic and cannot tap it to help achieve the goals of the organization. In losing connection with your one-of-a-kind magic, you are reduced to nothing more than part of the headcount. Deep inside the Hairball.
- It is a delicate balance, resisting the hypnotic spell of an organizations' culture and, at the same time, remaining committed from the heart to the personally relevant goals of the organization. But if you

can achieve that balance and maintain it, you will be out of the Hairball and into Orbit, the only place where you can tap your one-of-a-kind magic, your genius, your limitless creativity.

- When a corporation prizes those who are heroically overworked in stress-filled jobs, a siren song whispers to everyone else in the organization: Make your job difficult, stretch yourself thin, stress yourself out and eventually you, too, may be honored with executive approval. This cultural seduction plays into the old illusion that if we just work hard enough and if we just work long enough, we will finally be found valuable, loveable and finally find security. Instead, what the seduction delivers – if we buy into it – is a workplace where the quality of life is continually eroded by contrived travail. Wouldn't a more promising choice be to turn your back on the Overwork As An End Itself Game and instead, enlist the hidden genius within you and develop the skills to play like a champion? (i.e. effortlessly)
- Teasing is a disguised form of shaming.
- When one of us finds the courage to risk to grow – to leave the status quo of the Hairball – that can be pretty threatening for the rest of us to witness. The threat is that we, too, might be expected to grow. And sometimes growing can be a frightening and painful experience.
- When I succumbed to my anger-turned-hate reaction to a fellow Hallmarker, who happened to make her living as a bureaucrat, I was choosing victimhood as my modus operandi. In doing that, I was setting myself up to become a prisoner of the Hairball that she was charged to maintain. Any time a bureaucrat (i.e. a custodian of a system) stands between you and something you need or want, your challenge is to help that bureaucrat discover a means, harmonious with the system, to meet your need.
- Masks cause little deaths – little soul deaths. When you wear a mask, nobody (not even you) gets to find out who you really are. When you wear a mask, nobody (not even you) gets to find out what you really need. And when you wear a mask, nobody (not even you) gets to find out what you really have to offer.
- The saving grace was that declaring my beliefs about the asphyxiating effects of mechanistic organization versus the vitalizing results of organic systems had an unexpected liberating effect on me. That experience of liberation through speaking my personal truths – along with the fact that my presentation caused no significant change of heart at Hallmark - convinced me that, in the future, my efforts would be best spent not in trying to change Hairballs, but in offering to midwife out of Hairballs anyone who longed for a fuller, more original work experience. This then became my cardinal path – a path that, to this day, continues to bring me both adventure and soulful richness.
- Orville Wright did not have a pilot's license.
- Temporary as these Orbits out of the Hairball may be, they are expeditions that promise finding in the chaos beyond culture antidotes for the stagnation of status quo.
- To be fully free to create, we must first find the courage and willingness to let go:
 - Let go of the strategies that have worked for us in the past.
 - Let go of our biases, the foundation of our illusions...
 - Let go of our grievances, the root source of our victimhood...
 - Let go of our so-often-denied fear of being found unlovable.
- You will find it is not a one-shot deal, this letting go. You must do it again and again and again. It is kind of like breathing. You cannot breathe just once. Try it: breathe just once. You'll pass out. If you stop letting go, your creative spirit will pass out. Now when I say let go, I do not mean reject. Because when you let go of something, it will still be there for you when you need it. But because you have stopped clinging, you will have freed yourself up to tap into the other possibilities – possibilities that can help you deal with this world of accelerating change.