



Portraits of Hyper-Success

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The Cause Effect

Success is the status quo.

Brains are nice. Necessary, even. Staff your team with the sharpest thinkers available to you, and you've stacked the odds in your favor. And success is good. But these days, it's also the cost of entry. There's nothing notable about it. Perhaps that is because the corporate definition of success has been watered down. Meeting the stated objectives, on time and on budget—has, for the most part, satisfied clients, customers, and bosses. Satisfied. As in 'satisfactory.'

Call us crazy, but striving for satisfactory left us feeling a little underwhelmed.

So began our quest to study success. We asked ourselves, "What does it take to move beyond the standard definition of success to something much bigger and bolder? What tools and strategies do leaders of iconic, breakthrough successes use to lead their teams toward the truly extraordinary—to the realm we call 'hyper-success?'" We asked because, frankly, we wanted the key to that kingdom.

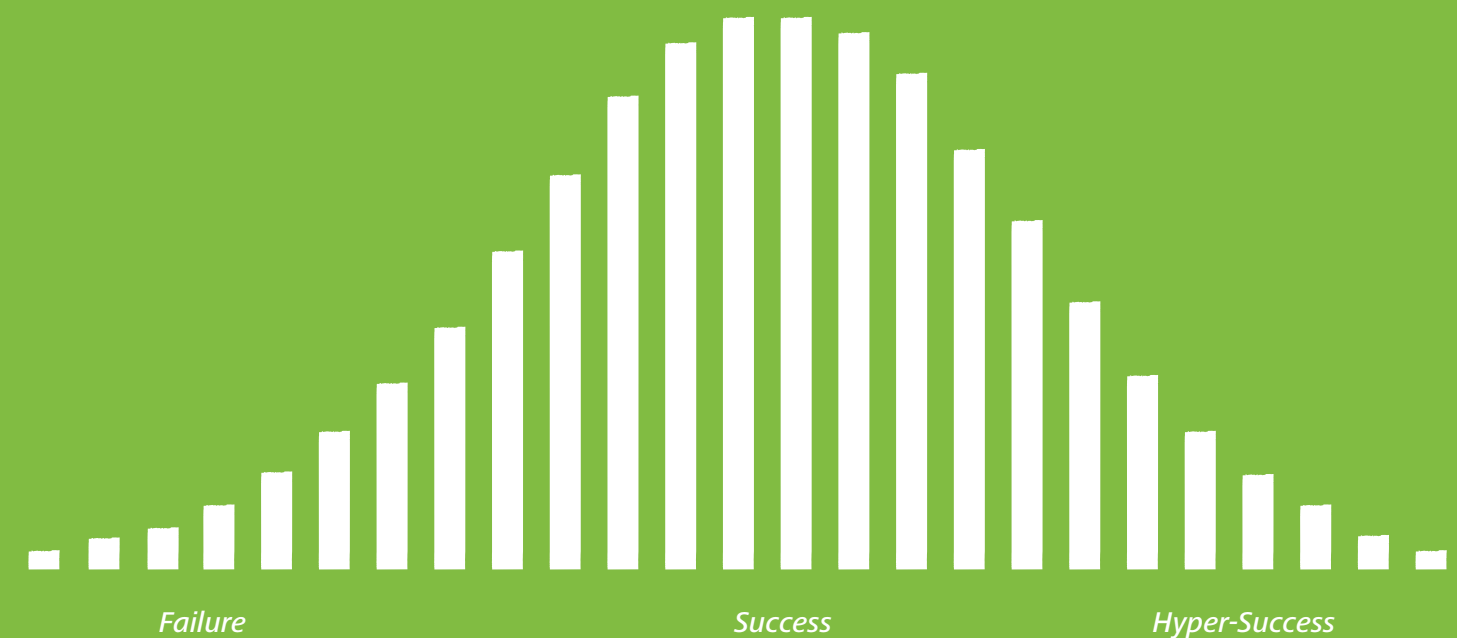
We sought out leaders of hyper-successful projects across an array of disciplines, from film-making to philanthropy. We specifically chose projects that had achieved extraordinary results, radically mitigated disaster, or forever transformed the status quo. Each one bucked the odds and did what most believed couldn't be done.

*What we learned is that these exceptional examples did have something in common **it's not so much what they did. It's why they did it.***

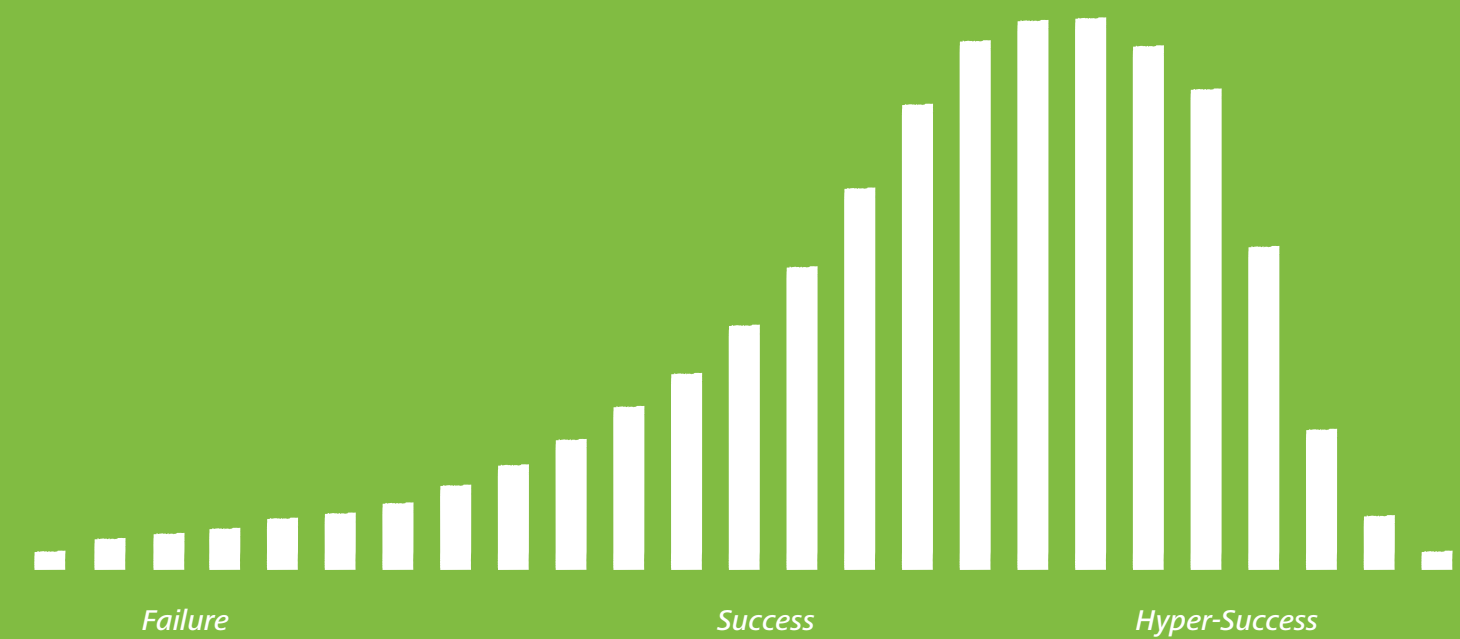
Hyper-successful projects have at their core a palpable cause. Rallying teams around this shared sense of purpose means tapping into their hearts. And when the entire team builds collective identity around a common cause, the project transcends "work" and becomes a mission. Games are changed. Tables are turned. Crises are averted.

We call this The Cause Effect.

What if we could push more efforts toward Hyper-Success?



on-time, on-budget, meet objectives, satisfy



change industry, avert crisis, mitigate disaster, astound

Dissecting Hyper-Success

Before we could start investigating hyper-success, our team needed to nail down what exactly we were looking for. What defines a "hyper-successful project," anyhow?

Armed with a clear understanding, we cast a wide net. Looking not only for business cases, but for examples from medicine, sports, music and politics. **We chose projects that had achieved breakthrough results, radically mitigated disaster or forever transformed industry norms.** Then we hit the road. We crisscrossed the U.S., conducting 61 interviews with leaders and team members from 18 hyper-successful projects.

Which ones made the cut?

hy•per-suc•cess•ful (adjective)

1. extraordinary results relative to the context/ industry in which they exist
2. in the face of extraordinary adversity (i.e. natural disaster), radically mitigating the damaging effects
3. of transformational nature, there's a before and an after the particular project

pro•ject (noun)

a group effort aimed at a specific goal within a limited amount of time

Portraits of Hyper-Success



Avatar
Grossed \$2.8 billion in worldwide ticket sales; highest-grossing film of all time



Partners In Health Haiti 2010 Earthquake

Treated 147,000 patients in six months after one of the world's most devastating natural disasters



iPhone 1
Put a computer in your pocket and redefined an industry (or two ...)



KONY 2012
Created the fastest-growing viral video in history, amassing 100 million views in six days



Moulin Rouge
Revived a genre as the highest-grossing musical film in over 25 years



Lucile Packard Children's Hospital Conjoined Twins Separation Surgery

Gave Angelina and Angelica Sabuco a shared opportunity to live their own lives



MV Cougar Ace
Salvaged 4,754 cars from a 55,000-ton carrier vessel tilted 60 degrees—in 42°F water

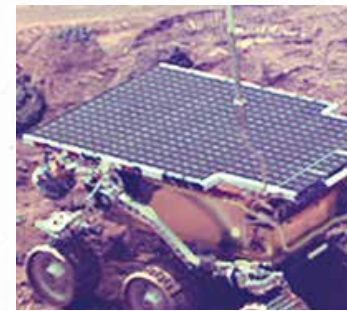


Life of Pi
Made the only movie with kids, water and animals to ever turn a profit (six times its budget)



The FDIC During the 08-09 Financial Crisis

Saved America from a second Great Depression



Sojourner
Landed on another freaking planet



Obama 2012 Tech Team
Kept Obama in office and revolutionized political canvassing thanks to coders, not campaign strategists



U.S. Navy SEALs
Executed many of the world's most dangerous missions



Cadillac VS. The World
Rebranded Cadillac as young, sexy and adventurous. No, really



Old Spice Ad Campaign
Launched the most successful viral advertising campaign ever



Santana's Supernatural
Sold over 30 million copies and won nine Grammys



The First Flash Mob
Spurred an online revolution and 195,000 Google search results (at our last count)



Hendrick Motorsports
Led two cars to nine NASCAR series championships over two decades



The 1991 Redskins
Built the best football team in history, statistically speaking¹

¹DVOA Analysis

Summary of Findings

To change outcomes from on-target to above and beyond, we knew we'd have to change behaviors. As we delved into the interview process, we asked hundreds of questions. We sought specific examples and minute details. Not "How did you communicate?" but "What did she say at that moment?"

Across all interviews, we uncovered one central theme: **the sense of a palpable cause.**

Whether explicitly stated or implicitly understood, the purpose of each project was articulated with passion and pride—think manifesto, not blasé mission statement. We validated this finding through a separate research effort studying high-performing teams at Deloitte.

That quantitative study found three factors correlated with the highest-performing teams: (1) ability to play to their strengths every day, (2) a sense of mission or purpose and (3) clarity around expectations. The second sounded strikingly similar to what we observed in our research.

We knew we were on to something, but the skeptics among us challenged, "Doesn't every company already have a mission statement?" Indeed, just having a mission statement didn't cut it. Only when that sense of mission was pervasive, infusing every aspect of the project, did we see The Cause Effect. As so often is the case, it wasn't the "what" but the "how" that mattered.

As we dug deeper, our conversations with the leaders of 18 iconic projects revealed six ways that these hyper-successful teams brought their cause to life.

Total Immersion

eating, sleeping and breathing the cause

Faith Over Fear

focusing on possibilities instead of risks

Underdogs & Enemies

fighting for respect and what's right

Singularity

doing one thing—flawlessly

The Mastery Mindset

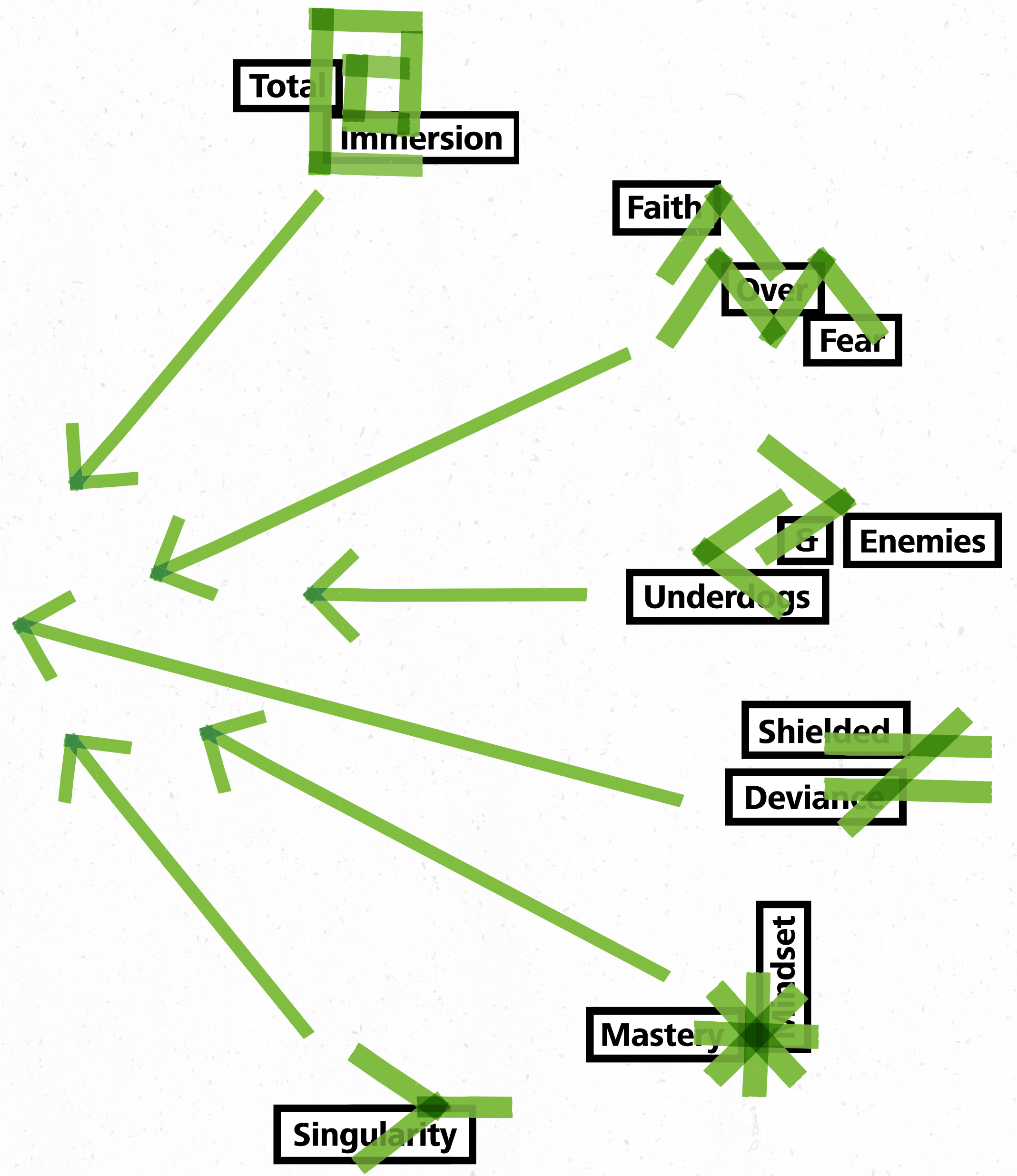
honoring the craft


Shielded Deviance

departing from business as usual

In the following pages, we take a look at the inner workings of The Cause Effect. We show you what makes hyper-successful teams tick and reveal the six ways they articulate, manifest and embrace their respective causes. If you, too, want to enter the realm of the extraordinary, consider the insights that follow—not as a recipe, but as inspiration for your journey.

Cause





The
Cause
Effect



**“There was a clear
beacon that guided
all decisions.”**

— Bob Borchers,
Product Marketing Manager,
the original iPhone

The Essence of Cause

“It was bigger than all of us. If it wasn’t, we would have given up ...”

— Bobby Bailey, Co-Founder, Invisible Children, KONY 2012

“I asked my captain, ‘Can’t we back off a bit?’ He responded, ‘No we can’t. It’s not about people quitting, it’s about giving them tools. This is a unique opportunity to shape them.’”

— Roger Herbert, PhD Candidate, former Navy SEAL

“The challenge wasn’t just technical; it was a Cause.”

— Harper Reed, Chief Technology Officer, Obama For America, 2012

A Case for Cause

A cause is the essence of all actions and decisions that drive a project. It’s both what you strive for, and what you honor. It answers the ultimate “Why?” But the cause can’t be yours alone. It’s crucial that everyone on the team embraces and internalizes it. It’s the common cause that bonds team members to one another and to the project, fueling them to surpass goals and attain hyper-success.

What Cause Looks Like: Rising to the Challenge

In 1997 the Mars Pathfinder landed on the surface of the Red Planet, containing within it the Sojourner—the first functional rover to land on Mars. To limit the burden on the Pathfinder host vehicle, the Sojourner’s development team was allowed just 10 kg for the rover—a nearly impossible feat.

Goals vs. Causes

A goal is something you set. A cause sets you. It grabs hold of your heart and head and gut and directs your course. While the goal is important to set and meet, the cause transcends the goal. Our research showed that there is a clear distinction between typical, stated goals and the cause each hyper-successful project honored.

	Goal <small>(the what, important, understood, rational)</small>	Cause <small>(the why, transformational, believed, emotional)</small>
Sojourner	<i>Land a rover on Mars.</i>	<i>Do the impossible.</i>
US Navy SEALs	<i>Successfully complete missions.</i>	<i>Honor the man I aspire to be.</i>
iPhone 1	<i>Enter the wireless phone market.</i>	<i>Build a phone people will fall in love with.</i>
Obama 2012 Tech Team	<i>Win the election.</i>	<i>Hack the campaign.</i>

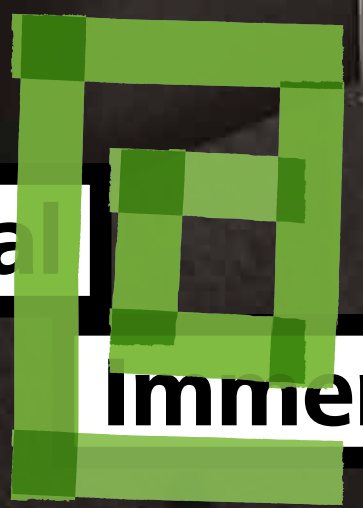
Notice anything? Hyper-successful projects have a cause that speaks from and to the heart. Their language is rich in emotional connectivity. Team members express their cause in words and images that create a vivid, compelling picture of the possibilities—as well as the daunting challenges involved.

Our research found that emotion runs high throughout these projects: from recruiting team members, to creating the project environment; from rallying the troops in the face of adversity, to leading them beyond their expectations for the possible. Their leaders embrace the inevitable emotional peaks and valleys of a project and use them to propel the team toward the cause.

Cause's Cohorts



Total
Immersion



**“We created a world
and showed
it to them
[the stars] ...
we seduced them
into the world.”**

— Fred Baron, Producer,
Moulin Rouge, 2001

“The physical space reinforced a sense of team, of no hierarchy.”

— Narwhal Tech Team
Obama For America 2012

“During ‘Hell Week,’ they will spend five nights without sleeping, going through incredibly difficult drills.”

— Roger Herbert
PhD Candidate, former Navy SEAL

Eat, Sleep and Breathe the Cause

People rally around causes that feel real to them—ideas not just stuck in the clouds, but grounded in the physically touchable and emotionally visceral. **Hyper-successful projects plunge team members into the gestalt of the cause.** They use physical spaces, experiences and iconic prototypes to create immersive realities. Team members are steeped in language that’s rich in emotion, stories, symbolism, imagery and sound. This shared experience of environment and language shapes a collective identity, emboldening the group to achieve the impossible.

What Total Immersion Looks Like: Baz-ackwards

Standard practice in filmmaking is to write a script, land the actors, then build the set. *Moulin Rouge* did the reverse.

Faced with a limited budget to make the highly stylized musical, Director Baz Luhrmann used the power of an immersive reality to “seduce” Nicole Kidman and Ewan McGregor into the lead roles. **Luhrmann’s first move was to build a vivid and evocative set replicating late 19th Century Paris.** By immersing Kidman and McGregor in the world of *Moulin Rouge*, he reckoned they would fall in love with the concept. The script would come later. They did. And it did. Then came the awards.

What You Can Do

1. Make your project’s cause physically tangible by creating spaces, prototypes, or visual stories that immerse rather than explain.
2. Identify the emotional context of your cause and craft rich stories, images, and messages that galvanize your audiences.

Some Questions to Help You Take the Plunge:

- What feelings should the cause evoke?
- What stories, metaphors, symbols or visuals can you create to win over people’s hearts to your cause?
- How can you emotionally connect your people to the ultimate beneficiaries of your cause?



Total Immersion: From explaining to enchanting



Faith

Over

Fear



**“We cannot
take negativity ...
it’s like a cancer.”**

— Todd Busch
Sr. Vice President & General
Manager Technical Services,
Crowley MV Cougar ACE, 2006

“We didn’t know everything, but there wasn’t anything we didn’t think we couldn’t do.”

— JPL-NASA Team
Sojourner Mission, 1997

“I sort of think of the earthquake as when somebody is trapped under a car and you ... lift the car.”

— Jon Laschner
Operations Professional & Haiti Program Manager,
Partners In Health (PIH), Haiti Earthquake, 2010

“Lots of people decide to leave; and for those who stay, we take them past their limits”

— Roger Herbert
PhD Candidate, former Navy SEAL

I Think I Can. I Think I Can. I Think I Can.

Despite the soaring ambition of these projects, discussion of risks often takes a backseat to conversations rooted in **optimism, improvisation and hope**. Team members know there are many possible outcomes, but free themselves from worrying about the unknown—not to mention the specters of fear and doubt that come with it. Hyper-successful teams constantly ask, “What would have to be true to make this possible?”

When they do meet obstacles, leaders urge team members to push beyond them. **These projects smash perceived limits and reveal, then push past, new ones.** Team members emerge changed, humbled, with deeper trust in and respect for each other. Many say the experience inspired their best work. They felt called to a higher level of excellence because of it.

What Faith Over Fear Looks Like: Titan-1, Poseidon-0

While en route from Japan to California with 4,812 Mazda vehicles, the Cougar ACE lost stability and fell into a 60-degree list to its port side. The cargo was deemed a lost cause given the extreme conditions, until the Titan Salvage arrived to rescue the passengers on board. Miraculously, it managed to save 90% of the cars on board.

Titan Salvage is known for harnessing human ingenuity over mechanical horsepower. Their leadership looks for a ‘possibilities’ mindset in their team members, and embraces Faith over Fear. General Manager of Titan Salvage, Todd Busch, can spot doubt easily. When he does, he fires the individual on the spot—**negativity is “like a cancer,”** he says.

What You Can Do

1. Look into the future and imagine your project tanked. Identify existing themes and patterns that could derail the project to reveal hidden sources of fear. Uncover limiting beliefs and assumptions, then uproot them by focusing on opportunities rather than fear.
2. Assess each team member’s willingness to push beyond their perceived limits. Be brutally honest. Once you know who prefers to be in the comfort zone, explore the motivating forces that work best to push them “over the edge” and go where they’ve never gone before.

Some Questions to Test Your Faith:

- How often are phrases like, “That’s impossible,” “We can’t, because ...” or “That’s not how it’s done here,” used?
- How would you rate your project, on a scale of 1 to 10, where 1 is a cake walk and 10 is extremely difficult? If there was an 11 representing impossible, what would that look like? What compromises would you un-make so you could achieve the ultimate instead of just the expected?



Total Immersion: From perceived limits to no limits



Underdogs & **Enemies**

**“We had a common
enemy—our host
vehicle”**

— JPL-NASA team
Sojourner Mission, 1997

“The humanitarian status quo really came after us, but that only made us more determined”

— Jason Russell
Co-founder Invisible Children, KONY 2012

“We had everything you don’t want in a movie: kids, animals and water.”

— Kim Cooper
Producer, Life of Pi, 2012

Fight the Good Fight

These teams are scrappy. Even if they’re perceived by others as “best in class,” they see themselves as eternal underdogs fighting a perceived enemy—but it’s rarely the competition. **Rather, the enemy tends to be the entrenched status quo**, manifested within their organization or in the insurmountable scale of the challenge. Grit in the face of opposition binds them together.

What Underdogs and Enemies Looks Like: Viral Humanitarianism

Invisible Children’s web film KONY 2012 detailed the atrocities of Joseph Kony and his Lord’s Resistance Army. The most successful viral video of all time, it garnered 120 million views in just six days—triggering international legislative action to capture Kony. **The team had a clear enemy in the warlord, but its motivation went deeper:** the humanitarian establishment, which opposed Invisible Children’s tactics, drove the team to push beyond the conventional to the audacious. also a more subtle one—the humanitarian status quo, which opposed Invisible Children’s innovative advocacy methods. The latter was perhaps a more passionate motivator than even Kony, and drove the team to do what others said could not and should not be done.

What You Can Do

1. Compile a list of your likely enemies—both obvious and subtle. Role-play with your team, taking on their personas and perspectives. Consider a future where they win. What does that look like? More importantly, how does it feel? Use the exercise to rally your entire team around this common enemy.

Some Questions to Get You Riled Up:

- Who or what drives you crazy, competes with you, or always opposes you?
- What do they do and say? How does that make you feel?
- How are you going to make this enemy known and visible? What’s the rallying cry for the team?



Underdogs and Enemies: From champion to challenger



Singularity

“We stayed laser-focused on one thing. That was on purpose.”

— Bobby Bailey, Co-Founder,
Invisible Children, KONY 2012



“Jim’s main ability is to stay on target, on a bull’s eye that is far, far away.”

— Jon Landau
Producer, *Avatar*, 2009

“When I’m in my zone I shut down on additional Information. You can’t let things distract you.”

— Jeff Zwart
Radical Media, *Cadillac versus the World*, 2012

What Singularity Looks Like: Twin Girls, Single Mission

Angelina and Angelica Sabuco are twins, born conjoined at the chest and abdomen. By taking on the girls’ separation surgery, Drs. Gary Hartman and Craig Albanese of Lucille Packard Children’s Hospital were in for a colossal challenge. They aligned the entire hospital around the cause, coordinating 14 specialists across 2 operating rooms for 10 hours of surgery.

“We were doing just this. The project required the rest of the department to relieve us of other duties.”
- Drs. Hartman and Albanese.

Free from distractions, they could focus exclusively on the planning and rehearsal of the complex surgery—a landmark moment in medicine.

The Power of One

Forget multitasking. **These teams do one thing and they do it right.** Their leaders insist team members keep their eyes trained on one project at a time and dive deep into their area of influence. This ensures they keep a laser focus on the objective, impervious to distractions or disruptions. They become fully absorbed in the cause and know the part they play in living it.

What You Can Do

1. A hyper-successful project requires you and your team to focus maniacally on the work at hand. This means one project at a time, with no outside work competing for your attention. To be clear: ONE. PROJECT. AT A TIME.
2. Within the project itself, commit to mono-tasking over multi-tasking. Seriously. No “yeah, but...” compromises.
3. Instead, ask all team members to take stock of everything that consumes their time. From there, note the barriers to achieving singularity and determine what’s required to clear the calendar for your people.
4. Sounds great in theory and impossible in practice, right? Not so. By bridging the gap with intentionality, you’ll stand for the *unusual* and lay the foundation for a future-defining project.

Some Questions to Get You Focused:

- Are the people on your project solely dedicated to it, or are they spinning a bunch of other plates? What outside work competes for their time?
- How will you create singularity for your team? What can team members do to ensure their own singularity when required?

Singularity: From multi-tasking to laser-focus



Mastery Mindset

**“We are ungodly
nitpicky. We
were not going
to compromise
anything.”**

— Jon Landau
Producer, *Avatar*, 2009

“Jim always had his eye on the target: tell the best story possible. We’re maniacal about the story.”

— Jon Landau, Producer, Avatar, 2009

“I’m not concerned with what others think... I do it for me, I don’t do it at all for the awards.”

— Jeff Zwart, Photographer & Film-maker, Cadillac vs. The World Campaign 2013

“If it’s the right wall, I’ll bang my head against it again and again.”

— Michael Slaby, Chief Information & Innovation Officer, Obama for America, 2012



I can’t get no satisfaction.

For hyper-successful teams, work is love—an art form that takes shape by writing code, building a model or drafting a persuasive argument. Working obsessively and diving into the details, they **hold themselves and their craft to the very highest standard: perfection.** Even (or especially) when others idolize them as the best in their field, they remain perpetual learners. As new challenges arise, they’re willing to set aside all they know so they can discover and embrace breakthrough ideas. They don’t work for the paycheck or next promotion. These corporate artisans are fueled instead by an insatiable desire to master the craft they love and honor.

What The Mastery Mindset Looks Like: Forget Life As You Know It

“Build a phone people will fall in love with ... Forget everything you know about making phones.” These were the directions Steve Jobs gave to Bob Borchers when he was hired to lead development of the first iPhone.

Borchers was tapped to lead the project after a seasoned career at Nokia—and swiftly abandoned every industry norm he was used to. In doing so, **he paved the way for a whole new user experience.**

The broader team shared Jobs’ pursuit of perfection. Says Borchers, **“You would sweat about details no one would care about—but it was part of its authenticity.”**

What You Can Do

1. Identify mission-critical areas where you need people to operate at their peak. Staff these areas with the most passionate, craft-driven people you can find – even if they’re not yet experts in that field. Give them enough time to truly explore, experiment and learn.
2. Pinpoint core challenges that are critical to the project, but hard to get right. Then set aside what you already know and consider how a variety of innovative thinkers might tackle the same challenges. Better yet, create a multi-disciplinary team of artisans who will naturally bring a diverse set of perspectives.

Some Questions to Help You Hone Your Craft:

- Do your team members love what they do, or are they mostly working for advancement, money, prestige, etc.?
- In which areas do your team, project, even company slide into ‘been there done that’ thinking? (Hint: it’s usually around the stuff you’re really good at.)
- Think of all that stuff, and ask yourself how some iconic person or unrelated company would approach it. Go way out there: Madonna? Disney? Elon Musk? Think broad.

The Mastery Mindset: From career-driven to craft-driven



Shielded

Deviance

“I am the sh*t
umbrella; we
were an odd
couple: hipster
and prepster.”

— Michael Slaby, Chief Information
& Innovation Officer,
Obama for America, 2012



“The eye of Mordor didn’t land on us until two months before ... by the time it did, it was too late.”

— Bill Layman & Donna Shirley, JPL-NASA team, Sojourner Mission, 1997

“If James [Cameron] is talking to the Fox executives, he is not creating.”

— Jon Landau, Producer, Avatar, 2009



Shielded Deviance: From director to defender

To Honor and Protect

These projects are deviant.

They are, by their very nature, operating outside of the existing norm. Because of this, they need protection. Leaders can step up by shielding the integrity of the project and its cause against assaults and disruptions. The Shielders assure the vision will not be sacrificed or swept up by the unrelenting lure of the status quo.

What Shielded Deviance Looks Like: Deflector Shields Up

When Michael Slaby hired tech guru Harper Reed as Chief Technology Officer for Obama for America 2012, he catalyzed a sea change in campaigning-as-usual. The team rocked the boat: changing the role of technology and transforming get-out-the-vote ground operations. When met with the predictable resistance of the status quo, **Slaby acted as a shield for Reed’s team so they could keep their eye on the target, uncompromised.** Both saw this protective dynamic as a powerful force guiding their hyper-success.

What You Can Do

1. Identify the ways you want and need your team to be deviant, as well as the aggressors who may get in the way. What forces will act as a gravitational force, pulling you back toward the status quo? Name these individuals and incentives. Then build specific defenses or identify defenders to protect the cause and the team from interference and unwanted influence.

Some Questions To Inspire Deviance

- What does the status quo look like at your organization?
- What does that status quo say and do when anyone tries to deviate?
- Who gets to be the sh*t umbrella?



The Beginning

(conclusion)

Striving for the extraordinary. Doing the unheard of. Embracing deviance.

Building, honoring, and defending a cause-led effort takes guts. (Achieving the impossible isn't for wimps.) Many of the leaders we spoke with put their careers on the line, pursuing the extraordinary instead of preserving their reputation.

Sound daunting? You bet. But when the alternative is a 'meh' future of satisfactory results, it's well worth the gamble.

What we learned through investigating each of these projects has made us eager to embrace and spread The Cause Effect. And we invite you—dare you, even—to join us as we push past the usual:

From explaining to enchanting

From perceived limits to no limits

From champion to challenger

From multi-tasking to laser-focus

From career-driven to craft-driven

From director to defender

From business-as-usual to hyper-success.

Deloitte.

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