



## **Edgewalkers: Leadership and the New Global Humans**

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Something is shifting dramatically on our planet. It is disruptive and disturbing. It creates turbulence and unpredictability. It is frightening and filled with challenge. It is the breakdown of the old ways of doing business and the potential for huge breakthrough in the creation of new systems. What we are seeing is the emergence of a global awakening of humanity, an awakening of our interconnectedness with each other, and with all of life. There is early and tentative evidence of an awakening to an embracing of our planet as a living system, as Gaia.

This chapter traces some of the history of this awakening and examines the spiritual and practical implications for leaders who can guide us into a better future. These leaders are the Edgewalkers. Their primary identity is not wrapped up in the organization that they work for, or the state or province that they live in. And while they may love the country of their citizenship, they see themselves more as members of the human race and as citizens of planet Earth. They are people who walk between worlds and build bridges between different worldviews. They stand with one foot in the present reality and another foot in the future. These new global

humans, these Edgewalkers, are the ones who can lead humanity into a future based on peace, sustainability, social justice, equality, and enough for all.

Edgewalkers operate on the margins, not in the center of the mainstream. The center is committed to maintaining stability, and to maintaining its privileges, wealth, and power. When these privileges, wealth and power are used to create a better world for all, and not just the rich and powerful, then this stability is a great contribution to society. But far too often privilege, wealth and power are used to create more privilege, wealth, and power. The rich get richer and the poor get poorer.

The news is filled with natural calamities and social upheavals. It could be easy to become discouraged, frightened and selfish in this environment, and some people have. But that response will not move humanity forward. A new form of leadership is emerging in response to the world's needs, but that story does not make headline news. It is a quieter, below - the - surface kind of story. It is a story that needs to be told so that people can have more hope and courage.

We will examine some of the historical underpinnings of the concept of the new global human. This discussion will be followed by a brief overview of current thinking in both religious and business literature on the shift from an egocentric world to a more worldcentric consciousness. These reviews are offered with the recognition that the thinking being shared here is from the margins and the edges where system transformation is born.

## **Historical Underpinnings - The Evolution of Consciousness**

In *The Future of Man*, Pierre Teilhard de Chardin describes mankind as being divided into two irrevocably opposed camps. “one looking towards the horizon and proclaiming with all its new-found faith, ‘We are moving,’ and the other, without shifting its position, obstinately maintaining, ‘Nothing changes. We are not moving at all.’”<sup>i</sup>

Writing in 1920, Teilhard de Chardin described a world where the mindset of most people was that life did not change much from day to day, or even from generation to generation. He uses the metaphor of a raft drifting purposelessly on a shoreless sea. The only thing that gave meaning in this bleak worldview was a commitment to serve God and to follow his commandments. De Chardin was a paleontologist, geologist, philosopher and Jesuit priest. He was deeply involved in the study of evolution – both physical and spiritual. His studies of the earth and living systems convinced him that the physical world continually evolves. His mystical experiences and his studies of the human condition convinced him that human consciousness is continuing to evolve, and even that Christ is evolving.

Teilhard de Chardin foresaw the coming shift of human consciousness, of which he spoke of at a conference in the Paris, stating: "For the observers of the Future, the greatest event will be the sudden appearance of a collective humane conscience and a human work to make."<sup>ii</sup> His description of this emergence of collective consciousness, written nearly 100 years ago, is inspiring and prescient.

[W]e newcomers of the twentieth century are coinciding in time and place with a happening which is as massive as the initial formation, vitalizing, and humanizing of the earth, and is developing at a tempo which keeps pace with our own experiences. This happening is the awakening of the sense of man, by which I mean that terrestrial thought is becoming conscious that it constitutes an organic whole, endowed with the power of growth, and both capable of and responsible for some future.<sup>iii</sup>

He could not have known of the impact of the Internet, television, and air travel on our ability to be connected globally. He died in 1955 and never experienced the profound moment on July 20, 1969 when Apollo 11 landed on the moon and Neil Armstrong stepped out and said, “One small step for man, one giant step for mankind.” He never saw the iconic photo of the earth taken from space on December 17, 1972 titled The Blue Marble, which raised all of humanity’s consciousness of our shared, irreplaceable home.

While the Catholic faith may not have welcomed the idea of the continuing evolution of humanity, the Baha’i faith completely embraced it and made it a central tenet of the religion. The Baha’i faith was founded in the nineteenth century by the prophet Bahá'u'lláh. The following is from the Baha’i faith website.

The imperative of establishing and perpetuating the general peace of humankind is a central component of Baha’i teachings. In the latter part of the nineteenth century, Bahá'u'lláh called upon the world's rulers to reconcile their differences and to "lay the foundations of the world's Great Peace." He proclaimed that "The earth is but one country, and mankind its citizens."<sup>iv</sup>

This religion is the newest of the world’s major religious traditions, and while all faiths have peace as a core tenet, the Baha’i faith was the first to develop the idea of “Unity in Diversity.” Michael Novak, noted religious scholar, writes, “Unity in diversity is the highest possible attainment of a civilization, a testimony to the most noble possibilities of the human race. This attainment is made possible through passionate concern for choice, in an atmosphere of social trust.”<sup>v</sup>

Religion is not always seen as contributing toward the evolution of human consciousness, with many people believing that it is one of the primary causes of violence in the world. Many horrific acts have been committed in the name of religion. In our current times, where the media

focuses on fundamentalism and terrorism, we can easily come to believe that we are witnessing the decline of Man, not the rebirth of a new consciousness. What sells are stories about war, terrorism, murder, and atrocities. Steven Pinker, a professor of psychology at MIT, challenges the prevailing belief that the human race is more violent than ever.<sup>vi</sup> In a Ted Talk in 2007, he stated,

Violence has been in decline for long stretches of time, and . . . today we are probably living in the most peaceful time in our species' existence. . . . The decline of violence is a fractal phenomenon. You can see it over millennia, over centuries, over decades and over years, although there seems to have been a tipping point at the onset of the Age of Reason in the 16<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>vii</sup>

Pinker documents the decline of violent death due to war as well as the decline of one-on-one murder. By every measure, we are becoming less violent. Pinker attributes this development to many things, including a greater valuing of human life and an understanding that our well-being is intertwined.

### **The New Global Human in Today's World**

In the past, it was primarily the purview of religion to hold the vision of peace on earth and a world that works for all. Different terminologies have been used for this vision, including the Kingdom of God, Heaven on Earth, and collective consciousness. We are now moving into a time where this vision of humanity is being spoken about in business, in government, in science, and most particularly in conversations about sustainability.

Jean Houston describes the time we are in as "Jump Time,"

. . . the changing of the guard on every level, in which every "given" is literally up for grabs. It is the momentum behind the drama of the world, the breakdown and breakthrough of every old way of being, knowing, relating, governing, and believing. It shakes the foundations of all and everything. And it allows for another order of reality to come into time.

Jump Time is a whole system transition, a condition of interactive change that affects every aspect of life as we know it. The vision of change I am describing is generally optimistic. It focuses on the emergence of patterns of possibility never before available to the Earth's people as a whole. This optimism is, paradoxically, based on the recognition that virtually every known institution and way of being is currently in a state of deconstruction and breakdown.<sup>viii</sup>

A growing number of conversations are exploring this whole system transition and creating models and systems for the future. For example, each month John Renesch – author, speaker and futurist - hosts a teleconference dialogue based on the premise that our current institutions and worldview are not working. He asks the question, “What would our world look like if we withdrew our energy and resources from the current system and put them into the creation of new systems that would create a better future?” In his book *Getting to the Better Future*, Renesch describes humanity as being in its adolescence, and calls for us to collectively move into adulthood, with a sense of responsibility for our actions.<sup>ix</sup>

There are many models of the evolution of consciousness, of humanity moving into adulthood, including spiral dynamics<sup>x</sup>, evolutionary enlightenment<sup>xi</sup>, the chakra system, Kohlberg's model of moral development<sup>xii</sup>, Fowler's levels of faith<sup>xiii</sup>, and Cook-Greuter's theory of ego development.<sup>xiv</sup> Ken Wilber created a meta-model of the development of human consciousness that begins with an ego-centric consciousness (with only awareness of one's self and one's own needs), evolves into a sociocentric consciousness (an awareness of the other and his or her needs), and at the highest level a worldcentric consciousness (an awareness of one's self as a responsible and adult member of the human race).<sup>xv</sup>

In past times, the only people concerned with the development of a higher level of consciousness were the priests, shamans, and prophets. In a sense, it was a specialization. Today the new global humans – in all faith traditions and cultures – are opening up to the idea of

expanding one's consciousness and using body, mind, emotion and spirit to develop to the fullest of their capability. There is a critical mass of new global humans emerging. They go by many names,<sup>xvi</sup> and the best documentation of this emergence is the Cultural Creatives study<sup>xvii</sup> by Michael Ray and Sherry Anderson. Ray and Anderson's research shows that Cultural Creatives, those who value personal growth, diversity, spirituality, sustainability, global thinking, and social change, are at least 28% of the adult population in the United States and Europe.

Many forces are driving the emergence of the new global human in our time. One of the most articulate voices about this shift is Barbara Marx Hubbard, one of the co-founding board members of the World Future Society.

Conscious evolution is occurring in our generation because we are now gaining an understanding of the processes of nature: the gene, the atom, the brain, the origin of the universe, and the story of creation from the big bang to us. We are now changing our understanding of how nature evolves; we are moving from unconscious evolution through natural selection to conscious evolution by choice. With this increased knowledge and the power it gives us, we can destroy the world or we can participate in a future of immeasurable dimensions. Into our hands has been given the power of codestruction or cocreation.<sup>xviii</sup>

Each of these writers offers a consistent message about humanity being at a choicepoint.

Renesch writes in his latest book, *The Great Growing Up*

There's a greater destiny awaiting us as a species – a destiny that we have scarcely come to know. The American Dream envisioned in 1776 might have been an early peek into this destiny, but it was focused on creating an all new society in the Americas. This was a huge step at that time, to forgo monarchy and start a brand new human experiment. Now, a quarter of a millennium later, it is time to take another huge step, focused on creating an all new society for the world. It is time to be united, as de Chardin foresaw, “in a common passion” or a unifying “sense of Earth.” The Great Dream is focused on all of humankind. It is hardly about competing with one another over the symbols of a consumptive materialism. ... The question before us is whether we are to remain the slaves to our circumstances or we achieve mastery over them.<sup>xix</sup>

Humanity is in a time of crisis. Collectively we are looking for and needing to step into new models of leadership. Within this critical mass of new global humans, there are people who are called to live as new models of leadership because of their spiritual values, their vision of a better world, and their natural inclination to be on the leading edge of the future. These leaders are the Edgewalkers. It is the Edgewalkers who can tip the balance between codestruction or cocreation.

### **New Leadership Qualities and Skills<sup>xx</sup>**

Twenty years ago I began studying leaders in a variety of settings who had a deep commitment to their faith and spiritual inner life. The common worldview at that time was that being values-centered was the kiss of death for a powerful and successful career, and that anyone who tried to lead that way was soft and wishy-washy, not to mention out of touch with the realities of the business world. But I found scores of spiritually-based leaders who are extremely successful at what they do. These leaders are adept at responding to change, and pioneers in creating transformational change in the systems where they work.

These Edgewalkers are worldcentric and have an unusual combination of skills and interests, and they combine these in unique ways to accomplish the kinds of changes they want to see in the world. Edgewalkers are optimists and have a positive view of the future.

### **Five Edgewalker Qualities of Being**

There are five “Qualities of Being” that are inherent in those people who are always on the leading edge. Most of us have the seeds of these qualities in us, but some people more naturally have been able to develop and integrate them. These qualities are an integral part of the Edgewalker’s nature, without even having to think about it. They are inherent strengths or gifts.



From a managerial perspective, it is easier to select for these qualities, than to try to develop them in people. In other words, if you were trying to increase the number of Edgewalkers in your team or organization, you would want to create ways to identify people who already have these qualities. These five qualities are Self Awareness, Passion, Integrity, Vision, and Playfulness.

Self-awareness is central to being a new global human and becoming an Edgewalker leader. All other qualities and skills flow from self-awareness. These leaders diligently do the inner work required to enhance their self-awareness, including prayer, meditation, yoga, journaling, and psychotherapy. They take the time for self-reflection on a regular basis. I was surprised to learn that spending time in nature was their most preferred method of self-reflection.

Edgewalkers are passionate and intense and do not tolerate small talk or time wasting activities. They have a mission and a strong sense of urgency in accomplishing what they are here for. Lance Secretan writes, “The greatest leaders in history all saw a beacon beckoning to them from the future – a Cause. They had a clear vision of the world they sought to create and a burning passion to bring that world into existence. For them and many others, their Cause defined a future world brightened by the light of their dream.”<sup>xxi</sup>

One of the qualities that contributes to the intensity of Edgewalkers is their strong sense of integrity. They are values-centered and have very high standards of behavior for themselves, and often hold high standards for those who work with them. They are trustworthy, and they keep their promises. They do not take commitments lightly, people know that they can be counted on.

Edgewalkers are visionary, and they literally have visions. It is a part of the way they walk between worlds, as the shamans of old have done. They have one foot in the material world and one in the spiritual world, and they feel guided by God, the Transcendent, Allah, or whatever name they use for something greater than themselves. They trust their inner knowing and are not afraid to act on what they see, even in the face of no agreement.

Many other leadership theories describe these four qualities, but the one quality that I found in my research that I have not seen in the leadership literature is the quality of playfulness. You can often recognize Edgewalkers by their eyes. When they look at you, they are clearly and completely focused on you and listening deeply to what you say (and even to what you are not saying). And when you least expect it, you will see a sudden twinkle or spark of humor. This humor is one of the creative aspects that allow them to be problem solvers in situations that stymie many others. Edgewalkers have an unusual way of looking at problems and opportunities and their playfulness allows them to see possibilities and to bridge seemingly unrelated things in ways not obvious to others.

### **Five Edgewalker Skills**

In addition to these five qualities, Edgewalker leaders have five non-traditional skills, which they consciously develop. They are likely to have many of the traditional managerial skills in fields such as finance, marketing or technology, but what distinguishes them are these five skills that are more in the domain of emotional and spiritual intelligence. They are: Knowing the Future, Risk-taking, Manifesting, Focusing, and Connecting.

There are three ways of knowing the future. The first is the traditional way of predicting the future based on what has occurred in the past. From a business, government and military

perspective, this way of knowing the future is based on data and is logical and analytical. It serves us well when we are in a stable environment. Nassim Nicholas Taleb, author of *The Black Swan*, makes a strong argument that too many people assume that the world's phenomena can be plotted in a bell curve and therefore are predictable and controllable. "Our world is dominated by the extreme, the unknown, and the very improbable (improbable according to our current knowledge) – and all the while we spend our time engaged in small talk, focusing on the known, and the repeated." <sup>xxii</sup> He is not a fan of the traditional way of knowing the future.

Taleb would also not be a fan of the second way of knowing the future – the use of intuition. But the scientific evidence for intuition is overwhelming. <sup>xxiii</sup> Edgewalkers have a way of walking into the invisible world and seeing what wants to emerge in the future. The prevailing paradigm is that all major decisions should be made based on data and rational thinking, but the truth is that the majority of leaders trust their gut, or intuition, and then rationalize their decisions with data analysis. <sup>xxiv</sup>

The third way of knowing the future is to visualize the world you want to create and then to take steps to make it happen. Co-creating the future is an Edgewalker specialty, although Edgewalkers are also often very good at the traditional and intuitive ways of knowing the future. They are strong critics of what is not working, and they set about to create alternatives that have the potential for serving the common good. They are the social entrepreneurs and they are willing to experiment with new forms and structures. Everything is opportunity for learning and adaptation.

The second Edgewalker skill is risk-taking. People often describe Edgewalkers as courageous and as huge risk-takers, but they don't see themselves that way. They have an inner

knowing that the course they have chosen is the right one. They feel divinely guided. Other people may call them crazy, and for an Edgewalker that is often the sign that they are on the right track because they are following the road less travelled. The key to effective risk-taking is to be clear about your calling and to trust your intuition about the steps and actions you need to take.

The third Edgewalker skill, manifesting, is the ability to take a thought, idea or vision and turn it into reality. This is the task-oriented and ‘doing’ aspect of using spiritual wisdom in leadership. The first step of manifesting is mental work – creating a clear vision of what you want to bring into being and using positive affirmations as a way of energizing that vision. The second step is what 12 step programs call “doing the footwork.” Many spiritual people get wrapped up in prayer, meditation, and or affirmations, and then just sit there waiting for something to happen. The Edgewalker walks between the spiritual and material world by envisioning what’s possible and then taking symbolic and concrete action to make it real.

Focusing is the fourth Edgewalker skill. Focusing is the ability to be very centered and to give all your attention to an action or project that has significance and importance. Neal writes,

It is very easy, in this complex, multitasking world, to get pulled off track with the creation of something that has never existed before, whether it is a new product, a new business, an innovative marketing campaign, or a unique style of leadership. The forces of entropy conspire to keep you and the world in a state of equilibrium. It takes tremendous skill and discipline to stay on track and to stay on the leading edge, where it is often less than comfortable.<sup>xxv</sup>

One of the myths of our time is that multitasking is a good and effective way to manage one’s time and activities. Clifford Nass, a sociology professor at Stanford, conducted a study of high multitaskers and learned that multitasking confuses the brain. “People who are regularly bombarded with several streams of electronic information do not pay attention, control their memory or switch from one job to another as well as those who prefer to complete one task at a

time.”<sup>xxvi</sup> Each of the spiritual traditions offers some form of contemplative practice for the purpose of making direct contact with the Transcendent, and these practices have the side benefit of helping the practitioner to practice being focused.

The fifth and last Edgewalker skill, connecting, is the ability to make connections between seemingly unrelated ideas and processes. This creates a capacity for building networks and linking people to each other. This ability is the basis for creativity, for an expanded worldview, and for influential new ideas. Gladwell writes about the connectors who create social epidemics.<sup>xxvii</sup> When you see yourself as a global citizen, it becomes natural to look for patterns on a global scale and to sense new possibilities for humanity and the planet. Often, people who are strong on the connecting skill have lived in more than one culture, or have had professional training in more than one field. They have learned to think in more than one language, and have been immersed in more than one worldview. This allows them to be bridge builders and translators for others. And since they tend to live and work on the edge of systems rather than in the center, they often serve as the voice for the disenfranchised and disadvantaged.

### **Development of Edgewalker Qualities and Skills**

Our universities and our corporate training departments have been narrowly focused on developing practical business skills in our leaders. They have been missing a very important spiritual dimension, and the result has been soulless, materialistic, and sometimes unethical leaders in our institutions. It is time to begin developing the whole person – body, mind, emotion, and spirit. It is time to begin recognizing and developing the five Edgewalker qualities skills outlined here.

In order to do this, leadership programs need to explicitly address the spiritual nature of being human. They need to help people identify their core spiritual values, and to encourage people to follow their calling. These programs need to incorporate art, music and poetry as a way of tapping into the spiritual. Leaders should be encouraged to take on or deepen a contemplative practice. Program participants need to spend time in nature, with guidance on how to see nature as a spiritual teacher.<sup>xxviii</sup> Timeless wisdom, spiritual values, and contemplative practices are essential for bridging what is best about the past with what is being called forth from the future.

## **Summary**

Humanity is evolving, and the traditional forms of leadership and organizational structure are not enough to bring us into the new consciousness. The new global humans are finding one another and are engaging in dialogue, dreaming, and actions that will lead to the creation of new systems able to integrate the spiritual and the material worldviews. We are witnessing a wave of breakdowns of systems that have overreached their limit of effectiveness. These systems served their purpose in moving humanity along, but many of them are beginning to do more harm than good.

You must have breakdown to get to breakthrough. Breakdown requires a different kind of mindset than stable and predictable environments. The types of leaders who were needed to maintain the old systems are not the best leaders for the future. We need leaders with Edgewalker qualities and skills to help build a world that works for all.

In general, businesses and other institutions do not understand or value these new global humans and emerging Edgewalker leaders. But the future of business depends on their creativity, their bridge building, and their values-centered way of leading. Businesses need to be more flexible and responsive to unpredictable change, as well as more ethical, more committed to sustainability, and more concerned about the collective good. They need to honor and develop their Edgewalkers.

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<sup>i</sup> Pierre Teilhard de Chardin. 1973. *Toward the future*. New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, p. 11.

<sup>ii</sup> Retrieved from [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pierre\\_Teilhard\\_de\\_Chardin](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pierre_Teilhard_de_Chardin), March 24, 2011.

<sup>iii</sup> Pierre Teilhard de Chardin. 1973. *Toward the future*. New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, p. 13.

<sup>iv</sup> Retrieved from <http://info.bahai.org/article-1-3-2-19.html> on March 23, 2011.

<sup>v</sup> Michael Novak. 1983. Epigraph opening *Unity in Diversity: An Index to the Publications of Conservative and Libertarian Institutions*.

<sup>vi</sup> Steven Pinker. 2011. *The Better Angels of Our Nature: Why Violence Has Declined*, New York: Viking Adult.

<sup>vii</sup> [http://www.ted.com/talks/lang/eng/steven\\_pinker\\_on\\_the\\_myth\\_of\\_violence.html](http://www.ted.com/talks/lang/eng/steven_pinker_on_the_myth_of_violence.html)

<sup>viii</sup> Jean Houston. 2000. *Jump time: Shaping your future in a world of radical change*. New York: Jeremy P. Tarcher/Putnam.

<sup>ix</sup> Renesch, John. 2002. *Getting to the better future: A matter of conscious choosing*. San Francisco: New Business Books.

<sup>x</sup> Beck, Don and Christopher Cowen. 1996. *Spiral dynamics: Mastering values, leadership, and change*. Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing.

<sup>xi</sup> Andrew Cohen. 2011. *Evolutionary Enlightenment: A New Path to Spiritual Awakening*, New York: SelectBooks.

<sup>xii</sup> Power, F. C., Higgins, A., & Kohlberg, L. (1989). "Lawrence Kohlberg's Approach to Moral Education." New York: Columbia University Press.

<sup>xiii</sup> Fowler, J. W. 1981. *Stages of Faith: The Psychology of Human Development and the Quest for Meaning*. San Francisco, HarperCollins.

<sup>xiv</sup> Susanne R. Cook-Greuter. 2000. *Mature Ego Development: A Gateway To Ego Transcendence?* *Journal of Adult Development*, Vol. 7, No. 4, 2000 pp. 227-240

<sup>xv</sup> Wilber, Ken. 2001. *A Theory of Everything: An Integral Vision for Business, Politics, Science and Spirituality*, Boston, MA: Shambhala Press.

<sup>xvi</sup> For example, Sandra Waddock (2008) calls them pragmatic visionaries. Frost & Egri (1994) call them intellectual shamans.

<sup>xvii</sup> Ray, Paul & Sherry Anderson. 2000. *The cultural creatives: How 50 million people are changing the world*. New York: Harmony Books.

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<sup>xviii</sup> Barbara Marx Hubbard. 1998. *Conscious evolution: Awakening the power of our social potential*, Novato, CA: New World Library.

<sup>xix</sup> John Renesch. 2011. *The Great Growing Up: Being Responsible for Humanity's Future*, Hohm Press.

<sup>xx</sup> The material from this section is based on the book by Judi Neal, *Edgewalkers: People and organizations that take risks, build bridges, and break new ground* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2006).

<sup>xxi</sup> Lance Secretan, *Inspirational Leadership: Destiny, Calling and Cause* (Toronto, Canada: MacMillan, Canada, 1999).

<sup>xxii</sup> Nassim Nicholas Taleb, *The Black Swan: The Impact of the Highly Improbable* (New York: Random House Trade Paperback), xxxii.

<sup>xxiii</sup> See, for example, Lynne McTaggart's book *The Field: The Quest for the Secret Force of the Universe* (Harper Paperbacks, 2008) and Dean Radin's book *Entangled Minds: Extrasensory Experience in a Quantum Reality* (Paraview Pocket Books, 2006).

<sup>xxiv</sup> Robinson, Lynn. 2006. *Trust your gut: How the power of intuition can grow your business*, Chicago, IL: Kaplan Publishing.

<sup>xxv</sup> Neal, op cit., p. 47.

<sup>xxvi</sup> Adam Gorlick. 2009. *Media multitaskers pay mental price, Stanford study shows*. Stanford Report. August 24, 2009.

<sup>xxvii</sup> Malcolm Gladwell. 2002. *The tipping point: How little things can make a big difference* (New York: Little, Brown & Co.)

<sup>xxviii</sup> An outline of a program like this is in the appendix of Neal, op cit. *Edgewalkers*.