

## We live in a Tom Peters World



The world of business is in phenomenal transition, as the power centre moves across the Pacific "at the speed of light", says, arguably the world's top management guru, Tom Peters, appearing in person last week at the Sandton Convention Centre, Gauteng, and the Cape Town International Convention Centre.

 By [Terry Levin](#) 5 Jun 2005



2005 sees Tom Peters bashing his new bible - "RE-imagine! Business Excellence in a Disruptive Age". The title was inspired by the post-9/11 New York Times headline - "Don't rebuild, re-imagine".

Best known for having co-authored "In Search of Excellence" in 1982, which was subsequently ranked as the "greatest business book of all time", Peters says other big changes we will see in our lifetime are in the area euphemistically known as "Life Sciences" whereby, unfettered by political constraints, we will be busily at work building more human beings! As if we do not have enough already.

A new book by Clyde Prestowich about the shift in power from west to east is called "3 Billion New Capitalists", and explains how China is and will continue to change the world's competitive dynamics with a rapidity never experienced in human history.

Peters has his kitchen timer set on 26 minutes, to remind him that every time it goes off, another new foreign-owned factory has opened its doors in China - 60 000 in the last three years - and counting! Another slide features the number 43 - the number of hours between each opening of a new foreign owned R&D lab in China. Never again are you or I likely take a new pharmaceutical drug that wasn't discovered in China. And when we think we've finished with China, what do we get - more China - the depth of their labour force seems infinite and the further you go out of the main centres, the cheaper the labour becomes.

But let's not take a defeatist attitude. To be a superb business strategist in 2005, you only need to know two things: "Don't try and compete with Walmart on cost or China on price". Where does that leave the rest of us? The Tom Peters - and only response - to these sorts of shifts and the technological changes that will see millions of jobs automated in the near future is: as you would by now probably have guessed, "Re-imagine - Innovate or Die!" Yet despite this opportunity, not one of the Top 15 business school programmes in the US offers a course in design, creativity or innovation!

The enemy of the incremental change and large corporate mergers, Tom Peters is also a student of naval strategies the world over - his favourite quote by Horatio Nelson: "the other Admirals were more frightened of losing than anxious to win" is key. An example of this anxiety to win is demonstrated by Singapore - re-imagining itself the "arbiters of South east Asian cool". Able to offer only one worker where you could get 10 in India or 13 in China, their only option is to add value, via innovation.

Peters trashes big companies as "fundamentally useless". Of the top 100 US companies in 1917, only GE still outperforms in 2005. One out a 100. In the light of the above, Peters jokes that he's often asked by young entrepreneurs how to build a small company from scratch... his response: "Buy a large one and just wait."

"Re-imagine!" offers all you ever wanted to know about avoiding this inevitability.

In a South African context, to fulfil our original and only real objective of "a better life for all", we do not need one leader, we need thousands. Tom Peters offers a 50 point guideline for the leaders of tomorrow including... "be angry at the status quo, be optimistic, allow failure, make big mistakes, hang out with freaks express passion, accept responsibility, do stuff that matters..." or as Richard Branson puts it, "take on projects that upset industry applecarts".

Oh and by the way, if still you're unclear as to what an African Renaissance is, perhaps you should refocus under the banner: "Africa, Re-imagine". A Renaissance does not happen in a craftmarket. Go big, or learn speak Chinese.

[Download Tom Peters' 200 slide PowerPoint presentation.](#) Source: [FrontFoot](#)

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