CHAPTER 4

HOW WE WORK: DELUSIONS OF PRODUCTIVITY

We are becoming the servants in thought, as in action, of the machine we have created to serve us.

---John Kenneth Galbraith

I've often joked that being an organizational development consultant is akin to being a professional voyeur. Over nearly two decades I've had the good fortune to work with dozens of the most successful companies in the world, as measured by both their financial success as well as their progressive attitudes. Many of my clients have been leaders in their industries, as well as organizations that regularly appear on all the lists of the "best places to work" for employees. I have gathered a treasure trove of knowledge about how people work, what gets in their way, and what helps. I have also been witness—with a front row seat—to how the work world has changed. It continues to do so. Most organizations see themselves as highly unique, and this is true to some extent, but while each organization has its own footprint, the issues relative to how people work—what they struggle with and what enables them to work more effectively—remain surprisingly universal.

Work is being transformed all around us, and the pain of this transformation runs wide and deep. Similar to the transition from an agricultural to an industrial economy in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, we are in the throes of moving from an industrial to an information age. In this modern age, we are facing new problems about how we spend our time at work, and at home. Finding solutions today requires different approaches. For much of human history, accessing information and connecting with others have been key challenges to overcome; over a dramatically short window of

time, this is no longer the case. No longer do colleagues working on opposite sides of the globe need to send the findings of their research through the mail, which would take days or weeks to arrive. Now a quick email with the report attached electronically will do the trick within minutes—and because it is so easy to share, communication may include several work-in-progress versions. No longer does a professional have to keep up with new developments through yearly conferences and reports in monthly or quarterly industry publications. Now, countless online sources jam their email boxes with the latest and greatest information. No longer do we turn off from work when we get home because all the files are in the office. Now, at the touch of a keyboard, we can access nearly everything we might need to keep working—anytime and anywhere.

Organizations and how they operate are evolving, but we are living day to day in the transition where vestiges of the old and new work norms combine. All the while, each of us is faced with the very practical challenges of caring for our families as well as finding—and/or creating—work that we care about *and* pays the bills. We are continually pushed out of our comfort zones as we learn the new rules, and often it feels like a struggle.

In order to work differently—and better—we need to understand how we are working currently and the very real impacts of our current approach on individuals and on organizations. This chapter highlights real-life examples of work teams and individuals who are positively transforming their work approaches, and they serve as inspiration for what you can do—as an individual, a colleague, a manager, a leader—to move us collectively in the right direction as our work lives continue to evolve. **...**