

Q SEARCH

Cart
My Account
Downloads

Explore ▾ | TODAY ON HBR | BLOGS | THE MAGAZINE | BOOKS | AUTHORS | STORE | Harvard Business School

Subscriber edition

Gino Bondi | Sign out ▾

THE MAGAZINE July–August 2010

[Buy Reprint](#) | [Idea in Brief](#)

How Will You Measure Your Life?

by Clayton M. Christensen

Editor's Note: When the members of the class of 2010 entered business school, the economy was strong and their post-graduation ambitions could be limitless. Just a few weeks later, the economy went into a tailspin. They've spent the past two years recalibrating their worldview and their definition of success.

The students seem highly aware of how the world has changed (as the sampling of views in this article shows). In the spring, Harvard Business School's graduating class asked HBS professor Clay Christensen to address them—but not on how to apply his principles and thinking to their post-HBS careers. The students wanted to know how to apply them to their personal lives. He shared with them a set of guidelines that have helped him find meaning in his own life. Though Christensen's thinking comes from his deep religious faith, we believe that these are strategies anyone can use. And so we asked him to share them with the readers of HBR. To learn more about Christensen's work, visit his [HBR Author Page](#).

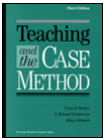
Before I published [The Innovator's Dilemma](#), I got a call from Andrew Grove, then the chairman of Intel. He had read one of my early papers about disruptive technology, and he asked if I could talk to his direct reports and explain my research and what it implied for Intel. Excited, I flew to Silicon Valley and showed up at the appointed time, only to have Grove say, "Look, stuff has happened. We have only 10 minutes for you. Tell us what your model of disruption means for Intel." I said that I couldn't—that I needed a full 30 minutes to explain the model, because only with it as context would any comments about Intel make sense. Ten minutes into my explanation, Grove interrupted: "Look, I've got your model. Just tell us what it means for Intel."

- Email
- Tweet This
- Post to Facebook
- Share on LinkedIn
- Print

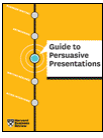
FEATURED PRODUCTS



Buy-In: Saving Your Good Idea from Getting Shot Down
by Lorne Whitehead, John Kotter
\$22.00
[Buy it now »](#)




Teaching and the Case Method, 3rd Edition (Hardcover)
by C. Christensen, Abby Hansen, Louis Barnes
\$39.95
[Buy it now »](#)



Guide to Persuasive Presentations
by John Clayton, John Daly, Isa Engleberg, et al.
\$19.95
[Buy it now »](#)



November 2010



FEATURE
[Winning in the Green Frenzy](#)

COLUMN
[Wealth and Jobs: The Broken Link](#)

SYNTHESIS
[From Lone Hero to a Culture of Leadership](#)

THE GLOBE
[How to Conquer New Markets with Old Skills](#)

[Subscription Help »](#)

[Table of Contents »](#)

TODAY ON HBR



- MANAGING YOURSELF**
[How Much Are You Worth?](#)
- CHINA**
[How the U.S. Should Fight Its Trade War with China](#)
- LEADERSHIP**
[Which of These People Is Your Future CEO?](#)
- ENTREPRENEURSHIP**
[Don't Give Cash Performance Bonuses in a Loss-Making Company](#)

[Latest Blog Posts »](#)

I insisted that I needed 10 more minutes to describe how the process of disruption had worked its way through a very different industry, steel, so that he and his team could understand how disruption worked. I told the story of how Nucor and other steel minimills had begun by attacking the lowest end of the market—steel reinforcing bars, or rebar—and later moved up toward the high end, undercutting the traditional steel mills.

When I finished the minimill story, Grove said, “OK, I get it. What it means for Intel is...,” and then went on to articulate what would become the company’s strategy for going to the bottom of the market to launch the Celeron processor.

I’ve thought about that a million times since. If I had been suckered into telling Andy Grove what he should think about the microprocessor business, I’d have been killed. But instead of telling him what to think, I taught him how to think—and then he reached what I felt was the correct decision on his own.

That experience had a profound influence on me. When people ask what I think they should do, I rarely answer their question directly. Instead, I run the question aloud through one of my models. I’ll describe how the process in the model worked its way through an industry quite different from their own. And then, more often than not, they’ll say, “OK, I get it.” And they’ll answer their own question more insightfully than I could have.

My class at HBS is structured to help my students understand what good management theory is and how it is built. To that backbone I attach different models or theories that help students think about the various dimensions of a general manager’s job in stimulating innovation and growth. In each session we look at one company through the lenses of those theories—using them to explain how the company got into its situation and to examine what managerial actions will yield the needed results.

On the last day of class, I ask my students to turn those theoretical lenses on themselves, to find cogent answers to three questions: First, how can I be sure that I’ll be happy in my career? Second, how can I be sure that my relationships with my spouse and my family become an enduring source of happiness? Third, how can I be sure I’ll stay out of jail? Though the last question sounds lighthearted, it’s not. Two of the 32 people in my Rhodes scholar class spent time in jail. Jeff Skilling of Enron fame was a classmate of mine at HBS. These were good guys—but something in their lives sent them off in the wrong direction.

[The Class of 2010](#)

As the students discuss the answers to these questions, I open my own life to them as a case study of sorts, to illustrate how they can use the theories from our course to guide their life decisions.

[1](#) [2](#) [3](#) [4](#) [5](#) [Next Page »](#)

Clayton M. Christensen (cchristensen@hbs.edu) is the Robert and Jane Cizik Professor of Business Administration at Harvard Business School.

COMMENTS

Posting Guidelines

We hope the conversations that take place on HBR.org will be energetic, constructive, free-wheeling, and

MOST READ

MOST COMMENTED

- [1. The Michelle Obama Effect](#)
- [2. Vision Statement: How This First Lady Moves Markets](#)
- [3. What Not to Spend Your Time On](#)
- [4. The Four Capacities Every Great Leader Needs \(And Very Few Have\)](#)
- [5. How Much Are You Worth?](#)
- [6. Why Is it So Hard to Be Kind?](#)
- [7. How Will You Measure Your Life?](#)
- [8. Six Keys to Being Excellent at Anything](#)
- [9. Six Extras that Build Power and Leadership](#)
- [10. Is Your Culture Too Nice?](#)



Kellogg
School of Management

FULFILL YOUR GOALS
Find a program that's right for you.



What if you could take 8 essential steps toward getting started with business analytics? You can.

[CLICK HERE FOR WHITE PAPER.](#)

sas

STAY CONNECTED TO HBR



Facebook



Twitter



RSS



iPhone

provocative. To make sure we all stay on-topic, all posts will be reviewed by our editors and may be edited for clarity, length, and relevance.

We ask that you adhere to the following guidelines.

1. No selling of products or services. Let's keep this an ad-free zone.
2. No ad hominem attacks. These are conversations in which we debate ideas. Criticize ideas, not the people behind them.
3. No multimedia. If you want us to know about outside sources, please link to them, Don't paste them in.

All postings become the property of Harvard Business School Publishing

The editors



PARTNER CENTER

The Value Driven Supply Chain

Delivered by

A live webinar with Reuben Stone.

Wednesday, November 3 at Noon EST

2010 Medical Innovation Summit

Obesity, Diabetes & the Metabolic Crisis

November 1-3, 2010

ClevelandClinic.org/summit

Looking for the best ideas in business? Now there's an app for that. HBR blog posts, podcasts, videos, and more. Download HBR Today for your iPhone or iPod touch »

CFO Perspectives: Making Smart Decisions in Difficult Times
CFOs rely on credible information to make confident decisions about strategies to bring competitive advantage in difficult times.

Management Magnified: Getting Ahead in a Recession
Analytic decision making is why these organizations are not intimidated by troubled times. Click here for Economist Intelligence report.

Q SEARCH

EXPLORE HBR

Topics

- Change Management
- Competition
- Innovation
- Leadership
- Strategy

Skills

- Emotional Intelligence
- Managing Yourself
- Measuring Business Performance
- Project Management
- Strategy Execution

Industries

- Finance & Insurance
- Health Care Services
- Manufacturing
- Media & Telecommunications
- Professional Services

HBR.ORG

- Today on HBR
- Blogs
- Books
- Authors
- Guidelines for Authors

MAGAZINE

- Current Issue
- Subscribe
- International Editions
- Guidelines for Authors

CUSTOMER SERVICE

- Subscriber Help
- Products and Website Help
- Return Policy

KEEP UP WITH HBR

- RSS Feed
- Email Newsletters
- HBR on Twitter
- HBR on Facebook
- HBR on YouTube
- Podcasts: Audio and Video
- Harvard Business Mobile
- Webinars

STORE

- HBR Article Reprints
- Case Studies
- Books
- Book Chapters
- CDs and Audio
- Special Collections
- Balanced Scorecard Report

ABOUT HBR

- Contact Us
- Advertise with Us
- Newsroom
- Guidelines for Authors: Magazine
- Guidelines for Authors: Books
- Guidelines for Authors: Web
- Information for Booksellers/Retailers

HARVARD BUSINESS SCHOOL

- Harvard Business School
- HBS Executive Education

HARVARD BUSINESS PUBLISHING

- About Us
- Careers
- Higher Education
- Corporate Learning



