

INTRODUCTION: WHAT'S EATING GLEN PETERSON?



GLEN PETERSON OPENED HIS EYES AND INSTINCTIVELY brushed the back of his thumb across his lips in a quick search to track down any stray drool unbecoming of a well-mannered adult. A scan of the other snoozing passengers in the business-class cabin told him it would still be hours before his flight from Melbourne touched down at LAX.

“Now what?” he muttered to himself.

During his two decades of international travel, Glen had developed a habit of popping two Advil PMs shortly after takeoff, which usually knocked him out until the pilot announced the final descent. But this time was different. Glen had woken up just a few hours after falling asleep. He couldn't stop thinking about a comment that Priya—one of his most trusted team members and vice president of Davis Medical's Asia-Pacific region—had made during a team dinner in Melbourne the night before.

The dinner capped off a standard two-day meeting with key leaders from the Asia-Pacific team to check in on a number of key initiatives, and to discuss the rollout of the new strategy Glen's leadership team had put together a few weeks before. Glen had his assistant arrange for dinner plans at a family-style Italian restaurant, because he liked the low-key atmosphere and always felt that the simple act of dishing your food from

common bowls was a solid, if not so subtle, way to reinforce the value he placed on cohesion and collegiality among his teams.

To Glen's dismay, the meal revealed more confusion than cohesion.

When the heaping dishes of food were placed on the center of the table, everyone just sat there for a moment staring at the massive spread of edible options, trying to decide where to begin. That's when Priya leaned over to Glen.

"It's funny," she said.

"What's that?" Glen had asked with a big smile, his eyes still fixed on the feast before them.

"I always get slightly nervous when I eat at a place like this." She shook her head and smiled sheepishly. "I look at all this delicious food, and I know that my stomach will not afford me all the space I need to try everything. So I have to choose wisely in the beginning, or I might not make it to the very best entrees."

"I know *exactly* what you mean!" Glen laughed. "Unfortunately for me," he said while patting his stomach, "I think I have a little *too much* spare room for sampling these days."

"Perhaps," Priya chuckled. Then her eyes narrowed. "Our new plan for the business is kind of like that," she said. "We have all these different bowls laid out before us, each of them filled up with heaps of initiatives and deliverables. It all looks so delicious and exciting, but something about it also makes me slightly nervous."

"Yeah, I guess anytime we do something new it is always a little exciting and a little nerve-wracking at the same time, isn't it?" Glen said.

"Yes, I suppose so," Priya continued. "But Glen, I think my concern about this plan is about more than just the anxiety of doing something new."

"Okay, now you've got me curious," Glen said. "Please do continue."

"It seems as though we have identified some rather significant changes to the way we want to do things in the coming year, correct?"

"Yes, you could certainly say that," Glen said.

“Well, I shared the plan with a couple of my savvier team members, James and Caroline, and—”

“Of course. I like them both a lot,” Glen said. “Caroline in particular always impresses me.”

“Yes, they are both very bright, Glen. That’s what concerns me.”

“Wait. You’re *concerned* that you have two really bright team members? I think we need to give you more things to worry about,” Glen said with a grin.

Priya laughed.

“I’m sorry,” Glen said. “I interrupted you. Please go on. What concerns you?”

“Well, I asked them to explain the new plan to me the way they thought they would explain it to their own teams, and to tell me how they would go about their work differently each day given this new strategy. I wanted to test the plan on them—to see what stood out to them and . . . ,” Priya looked away for a moment, searching for the right words.

Glen leaned in. “And . . . ?”

“They are two of the highest performers we have in our department and they almost completely missed the most critical changes to our plan this year. I suppose it’s not fair to say that they ‘missed’ the changes. They did *mention* them. But I believe they missed the *significance* of the changes, and the implications for what they should be doing this year. The core of our plan is different in very important ways compared to what we’ve been doing in prior months. We are going to produce devices for a new target market that we’ve consciously avoided for as long as I’ve been with the company. To succeed, we really need our best people on the front lines thinking creatively every day about the new direction so they can spot the opportunities you and I can’t see from our vantage point.”

“Absolutely,” Glen confirmed. “No question that we’ll have to shift our focus.”

“But . . . *are we?*” Priya’s eyes shifted upward as she searched again for the right words. “Does our plan truly reflect a change in focus?”

Glen looked puzzled as Priya let her question hang there. “I *think* so,” he said with a twinge of uncertainty in his voice.

“Glen, you know that I fully believe in our new direction. It’s just that we produce so many new features and products every year that I’m afraid our people won’t fully grasp why this one is different. This product fundamentally alters the terms of our relationships with customers. The margins will be different. The value proposition will be different. And James and Caroline don’t fully comprehend how this plan changes much about what they do each day. They believe that their basic goals and priorities are the same as last year and the year before, plus with only the small addition of a couple of more priorities.

“And to be honest, Glen, I believe they are disappointed. James and Caroline can see the same opportunities that those of us on the leadership team identified at the planning retreat. They know how much healthcare reform is going to change the way we need to do business. And I think they were actually hoping for something a bit more . . . *radical* than the plan we produced. A plan that is undeniably different from previous years. They want to see a change as much as we do, but . . . well, they just aren’t seeing it in the plan we’ve presented to them.”

Glen felt his cheeks turning crimson. A decade or so ago, Glen might have snapped back with a pithy defense of the plan. He would sharply suggest that perhaps Priya just hadn’t articulated the plan correctly. But with years of conscious effort Glen had trained himself to take a deep breath first in order to give his rational brain a chance to grab the tail of his lizard brain before it spewed out a conversation-killing rebuttal. After a moment, he realized that even if Priya hadn’t presented the plan clearly enough, the failure was still *his* failure because it meant that *he* hadn’t articulated it clearly enough to her.

“Hm. That’s interesting,” he said. To buy himself a few moments for collecting his thoughts, Glen reached for the fettuccine bowl and scooped some onto his plate. As he dug the spoon back into the pile of pasta, the untouched quinoa (pronounced “KEEN-wah”) dish in the center of the table

caught his eye. Then it hit him. *Quinoa*, he thought to himself. His wife had just recently introduced him to this so-called ancient grain that looked a lot like rice to him. But she explained that it was a healthier alternative to most of the standard pastas for which he had a lifelong weakness. He determined that a little extra quinoa would probably do his diet some good. So, tonight Glen had ordered quinoa in addition to the lasagna, the fettuccine Alfredo, the spaghetti bolognese, and the other staple Italian dishes.

That was the problem.

Glen slowly shook his head. “You’re absolutely right. The changes to our plan are like the quinoa.”

Priya raised a curious eyebrow and cocked her head to the side.

“The strategic shifts we’ve made are going to get lost in the smorgasbord of ongoing initiatives. We’ll get things done this year, efficiently and effectively, just like we always do. But they won’t be the *right* things . . . or at least not enough of the new things that are going to move us in that new direction.” Glen paused and let out a big exhale. “I just assumed that simply ordering the quinoa would not only make *me* eat it, but that everyone else would notice something new on the table, and also dig right in.

“But they won’t, will they?” Glen asked rhetorically. “Purely out of habit, they are going to reach for the stuff they have always reached for—the quality assurance guidelines, the margin increases, the supply chain improvements . . . all the stuff we talked about last year. And I won’t be able to blame them, because a few months ago those *were* the right answers.”

Priya nodded. “That’s what I’m afraid of, yes.” She dug a serving spoon into the quinoa dish. “Somehow we have to get our people to instinctively reach for these new key objectives *first*. And I’m afraid that six to eight months from now will be too late. As quickly as things are changing, Glen, I’m afraid we might have to pursue another new set of priorities two or three more times before this year is even over.”

Now, 35,000 feet into the night sky somewhere over the black abyss of the Pacific Ocean, Glen Peterson sat in silence. His conversation with Priya played on repeat in his mind. Every time, like a scratch on a disc, the dialogue stops at the same spot: *six to eight months from now will be too late.*

He looked out the window at the darkness. “What are we missing?” he thought. All the pieces were in place. All the dominoes were lined up. What else could he possibly do to get them to start falling?

Glen slipped on his reading glasses and scrolled through his strategic planning documents on his iPad. After briefly flipping through the slide deck he had presented to the corporate planning committee, he scrolled down the projections spreadsheets looking for some kind of clue, some sort of hint about where to go next. When his eyes drifted down to the spreadsheet’s twelfth row titled “inPulse acquisition” he paused.

inPulse was the flagship product of a startup device maker that Davis Medical had just acquired. It was a good product that had already passed nearly all its clinic trials. But Glen and his team realized it could be much more than that. The inPulse products were designed for an altogether different customer group than Davis’ traditional customers. Unlike virtually all of Davis’ hundreds of other devices, inPulse was a product that fell squarely on the value-side of the so-called “volume-to-value revolution” in healthcare. That meant that the inPulse project could be a powerful symbol of the new direction in which Glen wanted to take his division.

Yet James and Caroline—the canaries in his division’s coal mine—barely even noticed it on the plan. How much clearer could he make it? After a few moments staring at the words “inPulse acquisition” Glen looked up from his tablet.

“Could it really be that simple?” he wondered to himself.

His squinted eyes slowly began to open wider as the answer took shape in his mind. He was beginning to feel that old, familiar surge of dopamine flood his brain—the one that so often transformed his anxiety into excitement, and reminded him why he loved his work.

He quickly slid his iPad over to the edge of the tray table, and leaned ahead to reach under his seat for the pen and the yellow legal pad that he always carried in his tote bag.

At the top of the legal pad, he scribbled “quinoa = inPulse” and circled it.

Then a few lines below that he wrote “Fettuccine = _____.” He paused for a few more seconds to think before scribbling down “market intell.” on the blank line. Then he wrote “supply chain effic. proj.” and then “X-cath. quality enhancements” underneath that.

quinoa = inPulse

fettuccine = market intell.

supply chain effic. proj.

X-cath. quality enhancements

That was it. If he could just make it clear that not only was the inPulse acquisition a top priority for the next year, but then call out the specific projects that were now a *lower* priority it might just send the unmistakable message to his team that something important had changed. And his decision might just trigger a domino effect of decisions that would shift the focus of his entire division in a matter of weeks, if not days.



THE LEADER WITH A THOUSAND FACES

To paraphrase the writer Joseph Campbell, Glen Peterson is the leader with a thousand faces. Glen's story is *your* story. Whether you run a Fortune 500 company, lead a hospital unit, manage a project team, own a small business, or temporarily preside over a parent-teacher association, you have almost certainly faced the challenge of inspiring a group of people to shift their focus quick enough to pursue a new set of objectives, sidestep a new threat, or seize a new opportunity. The protagonist here, Glen P., is actually a pseudonym for any

Great Leader Executing a New Plan. He is an amalgam of the real leaders you'll read about in the following pages.

There are two ways for a Glen P. to approach change. You can change by addition or you can change by decision. The Latin root of the word "decide" is *caidere*, which means to kill or to cut (think: homicide, suicide, genocide). Technically, deciding to do something new without cutting something old is not a decision at all. It is merely an *addition*.

Change by addition is the hard way. It complicates plans, distracts leaders, frustrates team members, and pretty much guarantees that nobody will eat the quinoa. Not only is change by addition painfully slow, it also promotes nightly bouts of sheep counting when you would rather be sleeping.

Change by decision is the simple way.

Decisions are the most fundamental building blocks of change. Change stalls precisely because those decisions aren't happening—at the top, in the middle, or somewhere on the front lines.

After his conversation with Priya, Glen Peterson realized that he was adding new priorities on top of old priorities. By the time you finish reading *Domino*, you'll see that the answer to Glen's question "could it really be that simple?" is "yes." Inspiring people to change directions really is that simple. Contrary to what most of us have been conditioned to believe, inspiring change doesn't require uncommon intelligence, a charismatic personality, a complicated plan, or even an awe-inspiring vision. The truth is much simpler. It's not magic. It's a combination of science and common sense. All the stories and all the research you'll discover in this book point to one simple truth.

If you can make a decision, you can inspire change.



SHARP TURNS AND WIDE CURVES

Assume for a second that you're on your way across town for one of your kids' birthday parties. You are just coming home from work in your car and your husband has the kids with him in the minivan. You know the way to the party, but your husband

does not, so you'll have to lead him there. Along the way, you'll have to lead him around two kinds of turns.

One kind of turn will involve following the curves in a winding road. These curves are in plain sight, and everyone knows they are coming for miles in advance. Unmistakable signs leading up to the curve say "winding road ahead." Then, when you get a little closer, more signs say "curve ahead." Then, just before you come to the bend, a sign will say something like "slow down for curve." Even if your daydreaming husband missed all of those other signs, it is virtually impossible to miss the whole series of bright yellow arrow signs pointing directly to the curve while you round it. As if that weren't enough, the actual pavement rounding the curve is slanted downward in a way that practically forces your husband's tires to turn without him even moving the steering wheel. The road is literally turning with him around the curve.

An intersection requires a different kind of turn. This time the road doesn't help you out. In fact the road almost dares your husband to keep going straight like the rest of the traffic is doing. So if ol' daydream believer is too busy singing along with Taylor Swift or ruminating over his fantasy football lineup to notice you switch lanes and turn, then he is going to miss the turn. That means you're going to end up at Chuck E. Cheez's all by yourself. Nobody wants that.

Most "change management" in big corporations is devoted to the kinds of change that resemble a curve in the road. These are choice-less changes. They include things like software upgrades, reorganizations, and mergers or acquisitions. On Friday you logged into the old software system, and on Monday morning you logged into the new one. Love it? Hate it? Doesn't matter. The old system simply doesn't exist anymore. One day the sign above your office building said "Wachovia" and the next day it said "Wells Fargo." (Ah ha! So that's what all the sawdust, orange tape, and blatant dress code violations were all about during the past six months. It wasn't a Village People revival after all!) The curve came and went and you didn't really have to do anything except show up. Even if the people following you

around this curve are not paying any attention at all, those changes still happen. Of course, they are easier if you get “buy-in” from your team. But one way or another, the change happens.

I'm not saying those changes are easy. But I am saying that those changes are impossible to miss because the road itself turns. You have to intentionally drive off the road in order to miss that change in direction.

But not all changes work like that. When you switch lanes or turn the corner at an intersection, the people behind you have to consciously decide to follow you instead of continuing to go straight. These changes are choice-dependent—the people following you have to intentionally decide to turn with you. If you don't get their attention, they'll fly right by you. These are the strategic shifts that are becoming more and more essential for leaders at all levels of an organization.

So how do you make sure the people behind you stay with you while making these more subtle turns?

First, you have to get your followers' attention, and let them know which direction you plan to go. That's why you signal your turn by using the “blinker” on your car. It tells the cars behind you, “Hey, I've made a decision. I'm not going to keep going this direction anymore. Instead I'm going to turn soon, and when I do I'll be turning right and not left.”

Second, you have to check your rearview mirror to verify that the people following you have decided that they too are going to turn. Since you can't read their minds you have to constantly check your mirrors to see if they have in fact turned on their own blinkers. If you don't see their blinker flash on, then you know you need to slow down and make sure you have their attention before you arrive at the intersection.

Use your blinker. Check your mirrors. You can do that right? Yes, I thought so. Your mother was right. You are special.

At the risk of spoiling the rest of the book—yes it's *that* good—here's what you can expect. The first section, *Driving Change*, is all about making decisions that signal a turn or a lane change for your group. You'll discover how to make those

decisions, how to help your team stay with you during the change, and the research that explains why this is all so darned effective. You'll also learn how to conduct a proper permission ceremony, orchestrate a 90-day sprint, and create a series of waitlists for all that clutter—er, I mean, for all those important initiatives that need to be put on hold in order to drive home the change.

In the final section, *Adapt to Change*, we'll zoom out so you can see how these core principles lay the foundation for a more agile way of doing what your team needs to do every day, regardless of any official “change initiatives.” Because, let's face it, when is the last time you weren't either trying to cope with, or planning to drive, some kind of change? As soon as today's change is over, there will be two more changes waiting to take its place. Change is to leadership what water is to fish.

So without further ado, let's start eating, driving, swimming, and mixing more metaphors.