

THE  
**BEAUTY**  
OF THE  
**BEAST**

*Breathing  
New Life into  
Organizations*

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author of the bestselling  
*Getting Things Done When You Are Not in Charge*

An Excerpt From

*The Beauty Of The Beast:  
Breathing New Life Into Organizations*

by Geoffrey M. Bellman

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# Preface

*“First, we shape our structures. Then, our structures shape us.”*  
—Winston Churchill

Organizations are the world’s 21st-century dilemma. They are magnificent and mad, wonderful and wretched, crazy and compelling. They make so little, and so much, sense. Never before has humankind been able to bring together so many global resources within common form and purpose. Our ability to create organizations exceeds our ability to control them; they have power beyond imagining.

Organizations are a personal dilemma as well. We rely on them and rail against them. They promise us gratification; we promise to pay within ninety days. They lend us their resources in return for our loyalty. We search for our meaning through them as their suppliers, customers, workers, citizens, beneficiaries, and victims. We live in hope and fear of the consequences of their actions. We

are living a science fiction take: “We have created a monster!” The monster may be called agency, or government, or health care, or education, or corporation. We all live and work around these beasts—all of them, but especially corporations because of their accelerating power in the transformation of the global marketplace.

This book’s title alludes to the fairy tale in which a merchant gives his pure-hearted daughter, Belle, to the Beast in exchange for his own life. Belle, despite her initial horror, chooses to look for the best in the Beast and gradually finds it. In fact, she finds fulfillment where she at first felt revulsion. This book is for the Belle in each of us, encouraging us to face and find life where we stand, to choose in this moment to create the next. By choosing, we breathe the new life into organizations that we all so urgently need.

## Who This Book Is For

Many of us are as intrigued with the potential of organizations as we are disturbed with the reality; we are drawn into relationships with these bureaucratic beasts out of attraction as well as necessity. Millions of us join our personal purpose with organizational purpose, hoping for the best and making the most of this uneasy marriage . . . for better or for worse, for rich or for poor, in sickness and in health. We live in the struggle to find meaning within structures that were not built with us in mind.

Many of us recognize how essential organizations are to what we have achieved and what we will become; we see the immense potential they represent. We know they figure in the future of life on this planet. We are part of a highly educated workforce that each day steps into organizations that have not caught up with what we have learned about ourselves. We seek our actualization in organizations put together for other purposes; we feel our schizophrenia as our minds and hearts proclaim the possibilities

and our organizations proclaim the limitations. We are seeing more attempts at creating productive organizations filled with human accomplishment and spirit, but there is so far to go. This book is for people who know this line of thinking and want to continue it.

## Why Read This Book

**W**e need new perspectives on what organizations are for and how to change them. Our organizational models of immediate gratification for the few are not working for the many. There must be ways of working that honor long-term aspirations and fulfillment. We need grand expectations, so big they cannot be realized in our lifetimes. We need to awaken to and work toward these immense purposes, measuring our progress toward fine aspirations for tomorrow—rather than continually gratifying ourselves today.

This book helps you step back from organizations to ask: Why do we keep creating these creatures that fall so far short of our dreams for them? What is our role in doing this? And the book helps you move in close to consider why you give so much of your life to these occasionally exhilarating and often frustrating beasts.

This book helps you imagine what people can do together and how they might do it. It engages you in thinking about what you could do at work, and offers you ideas on how to do it. It guides you in a personal and organizational exploration in search of purpose, contribution, community, and identity. Its many questions open you to answers you have not yet considered, while its content will inspire your daily work. It's a book to be read frequently over time, allowing its ideas to soak into your thoughts and actions. This book helps you embrace the organizational world as it is while working hard to change it.

## How This Book Is Structured

As the title suggests, the organization is beauty *and* beast, not Aseparate but joined within one form. This creates a necessary inner tension, which the organization is intent on resolving. The book is about using that tension to propel the organization forward toward its dreams while staying rooted in its reality.

Part One declares the beastly side of organization and asks us to face and, eventually, perhaps even embrace it. This part helps us acknowledge what we hate and love about these creatures, as well as what we gain and lose in the process. We will see how needs for achievement, stature, and predictability result in our complex bureaucracies. We come to a greater understanding of—and respect for—the power of the beast in ourselves. And amid all of the tension and struggle, Part One underlines the reality that organizations in some form are indispensable to a more productive and fulfilled human community.

Part Two begins the search for beauty and life in organizations. It helps us define the organizations and lives we aspire to over the long term; we will begin to seek beauty and life at work. Part Two helps us imagine the organizations we want to create, offering eight aspirations necessary for organizations to live not just next year, but for centuries. It helps us begin looking for answers where they might be found, rather than continuing to search in places where no answers are available. And since there are many encouraging signs of life in our organizations; a few of them are offered here.

Part Three is about the choices that bind the beauty and the beast of the organization together. It helps us recognize the necessary tension and vitality in this marriage and offers twenty renewal assertions holding organizations together for a better future. These assertions help us breathe new life into the work we are



now doing—refreshing our meetings, reformulating our discussions, renewing our organizations.

Part Four offers three applications of renewal of life: within a large organization, within a work team, and within you, the reader of this book. These examples are intended to launch us toward our own aspirations, to put our ideas into practice.

Briefly, this book is about facing the organizational beast (Part One), searching for the beauty we aspire to (Part Two), and making the daily choices that renew organizations and ourselves (Part Three). It's about committing to the work world as it is, discovering what it can be, and delighting in our work of changing it.

## Acknowledgments

If the chapters of this book were heavily footnoted, those notes would be longer than the book! The resources section at the end of the book lists a number of writers to whom I am indebted, but by no means all. If you see an idea here that relates to a conversation we have had or something you published, assume that you helped me learn what I've now written as my own.

Six reviewers read this book in a form that only vaguely resembles what you now hold in your hands. They struggled through seventy pages more than you will see; hardly a page of that manuscript did not receive a note from at least one of them. Their comments were profoundly influential and I am deeply grateful. I thank each of them: Stewart Lanier, Jennifer Leigh, Jeff Pym, Sheila Kelly, Frank Basler, and Allan Paulson. Sheila also edited the final draft and helped shape it to what you see—testimony both to her talent and to the strength of our marriage.

This is my third book with Berrett-Koehler and, as I have come to expect, Steve Piersanti and his staff have immersed me in their

expertise and care. I am fortunate to be with a publisher—with an organization—that aspires to create what I write about in this book. Thank you all, again!

Over the last four years, I have been part of the Community Consulting Project, a small group of invested citizens that learns about organizations and consulting by working in Seattle's not-for-profit community. My work with voluntary organizations opened my eyes to possibilities for the corporate organizations I have served most of my life. I am grateful for what CCP has given me; I think it shows in these pages.

And lastly, I acknowledge the Woodlands Group; you can find all of their names on the dedication page. This small and voluntary organization has been meeting quarterly for close to twenty-five years. I have attended almost every meeting; you can imagine how important these people and our purposes have become to me. We have learned together about life and work in organizations, and in the process have become a small and loving organization ourselves. Our meetings have become a celebration of our lives, our work in the world, and our little community. This group lives and breathes the aspirations of this book.

Geoff Bellman  
Seattle  
November, 1999

## Part One

# Facing the Beast

**M**ost organizations are beastly creatures to live with and guide; they have developed power, energy, and intelligence beyond what most of us ever imagined. Many of us pull away from these beasts, automatically assigning them less humanity and heart. We see their primitive power and we stand back from their threat and unpredictability. Our fears often turn to prejudice; we “know” what an organization is before we experience it. Part One is about facing these beasts, facing the truth of their ugliness, and eventually coming to terms with them. It’s about taking the early risks that allow us to learn more about organizations and appreciate them for what they are—rather than what we imagine. We are like Belle in the fairy tale, our lives are at risk and we must choose how we are going to see the Beast before us. And we will make her choice: We will proceed with the belief that there is something deeper here, something to be appreciated, if we open ourselves to it. This is a courageous step full of faith, and we may not be rewarded as Belle was. We may not live happily ever after. After all, what we are living is not a fairy tale.

Organizations are with us and will be with us as long as humans exist. Face it; face them. Imagine throwing your arms

around this huge, powerful, hairy creature you call the organization. . . . Imagine looking it in the eye, knowing it deeply, finding what there is to appreciate. Read this part of the book with the intent of looking deeply. And, while looking at the organization, take a good look at yourself, notice the eyes through which you see organizations. We each use our view of organizations to define and judge them. What is the view you hold?

My view is that the beginning of the beauty we aspire to is here; we just have to see it. The path to the organization we dream about runs through the door of the organization we live in; we must walk it. There is no transporting ourselves to a new and more perfect organizational world. This is it. This is as perfect as worlds come. So we begin here, holding our dreams and living with the reality. Whatever we will do to move ourselves or this organization in the direction of our aspirations will begin right here. This is a hard truth to swallow when we are deep in our disdain for, or hatred of, or revulsion for, an organization. This is not a truth we want to hear. But it is the truth: Face the Beast.

## Chapter 1

# Hating and Loving Organizations

**A**s with many relationships, ours with organizations varies from problematic to traumatic to romantic to ecstatic . . . but they are seldom static. Pursuing our individual purpose within a larger community can be troublesome, whether we are deciding about working on a team, or going to a family reunion, or choosing our telephone service provider. An array of thoughts, emotions, and questions comes to the fore, provoked by what we might gain or lose through making this commitment. Today's huge organizations incite larger emotions as we become one among millions in their databases. We have more choices than ever before, but we must choose from among the options they offer. "Press the number one on your keypad if you want. . . ." We have less direct influence on forming those options: one hundred television channels and nothing is on. We know the feelings that arise as we try to get what we want from a large organization. We are locked in a close tight dance in which we don't name the tune, don't get to look our partner in the eye, don't get to lead—and it's a rather hairy partner at that! At least it can feel that way.

Or it can be wonderful. Websites that show and tell all you need to know for a purchase without ever leaving home . . . clothing made to fit you . . . information at your fingertips through search engines . . . the handiness of credit cards . . . the cell phone. . . . These are just a few examples of services and products meeting your needs better than before. Large organizations serve us best when they can offer us what we want quickly and conveniently and routinely. The dance can be smooth and satisfying when we name the right tune.

This chapter extends the dance, helping you explore your relationships with organizations, what you get and give in the process. This chart shows what you will be working with:

	Hating	Loving
Help	How Does Hating Organizations Help You?	How Does Loving Organizations Help You?
Harm	How Does Hating Organizations Harm You?	How Does Loving Organizations Harm You?

This two-by-two matrix shows dynamics among hate and love, harm and help; its questions ask you to look into your own experience with organizations. The questions could have been, “How does loving/hating *this* organization help/harm you?” In fact, you may find it useful to read this chapter with a particular organization in mind—one with which you have a long term, or at least interesting, relationship. It could be a company, a school, an agency, a church, a marriage, a scout troop, a political party. The matrix pushes you toward polarities—love<>hate and help<>harm—and encourages you to exaggerate your responses along the way.

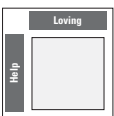
Imagine forty people in four teams recreating this matrix, each team moving to a separate quarter of the room to deal with one quadrant with its question. Imagine the teams answering the questions and shouting their answers across the room to each other. That's what happened on an early outing with this matrix, provoking thought, passionate expression, feelings, and hilarity as people reflected on themselves. I want to provoke this kind of expression and energy in you. See, hear, notice what questions you care most about; call out your confluence and contradiction; define your relationship with organizations as you fill the boxes with your answers. Take time to answer the questions now. My bet is you will be intrigued with your answers—and the feelings that accompany them.

After completing the four quadrants:

- ✧ Which is the most compelling quadrant for you?
- ✧ Where (if at all) are you most clearly aligned?
- ✧ Where (if at all) do you see dilemmas?
- ✧ What can you say about yourself now that you might not have said before?
- ✧ Who would be interested in discussing this with you?

This matrix is a simple way of teasing out the sources of our discontent, and pleasure, with the organizational beasts around us, allowing us to search out the source of our energy for organization work. To aid your exploration, I will make my own trip around the four quadrants. I will share my experience with loving and hating organizations to stimulate your thoughts and feelings.

## Love and Help



Large organizations are more fascinating to me today than when I began working with them years ago. I am intrigued by their personalities, their behaviors, their unpredictability. I see them as individuals with many of

the same characteristics as people. I love to watch them, participate in them, help build their success, and continue to figure out what “makes them tick.” Though I’m convinced they are unfathomable, I continue trying to fathom them.

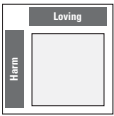
My fascination with organizations was fed as I left full employment in one to begin consulting to many. From the inside, I had a deeper appreciation of the workings of the organization I was then serving. I also turned its peculiarities into generalizations: What I found wrong with my employer I “knew” was wrong with organizations in general. From the outside, after years of working with hundreds of companies, I see how much they have in common and how much my learning about one is applicable to others. Much of my work has been spreading learning across organizations, assuring each that their problems are not as unique as they might imagine in their more anxious moments.

I still love the anthems and rhythms created when crowds of people, sharing some common purpose and acknowledging roughly the same boundaries, try to do something together. I’m intrigued by how much the donut makers, god worshippers, insurance sellers, ball players, star seekers, steel makers, and salmon savers have in common. They are much more similar than different when I watch them work. Just as people are similar in their outward makeup (arms, legs, language, habits) so organizations seem to work in similar ways regardless of purpose, and I have been privileged to watch all of that—and get paid for watching!

My love for organizations has helped me in numerous ways. First of all, it has fed me for over thirty years. Organizations have fed my mind, heart, and family. Organizations have made me a part of their large purposes; they have put their resources at my disposal. They have given me other people who are also on “my side”; my power in the world has been multiplied through working with them. Working with organizations has allowed me to be influential, and I have made a number of good friends along the way.



## Love and Harm

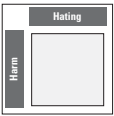


My love for organizations causes me to believe in them, to dismiss critics and doubters too early. In the process, I lose the benefit of other perspectives that would help me make better choices. My allegiance to organizations comes with blinders. Other more independent people have drawn back from my willingness to appreciate or ascribe good intentions to these monoliths. In the heat of discussion or resolution of conflicts, I often forget that I am making assumptions about organizations that are different from and no more valid than others' assumptions.

In my life as an organizational observer and player, organizations have given power to me and I have given them a power over me. I have supported their definitions of success in the work we did together. I certainly influenced them, but they decided whether I would be there to influence them. As I gained intimate knowledge of them—especially corporations—I became more like them. They defined their game and I played it. I continually reminded myself of the larger, personal life game I was living, but returning to their halls and meetings year after year affected my independent thinking and choice. I've prided myself on my independence, but I have also fooled myself. My ego, loving the strokes that come with successful organization work, often equates and mistakes that success with human progress.

My work with organizations has usually involved money. I want to assign high motives to organizations that pay me well and often; I have distorted my reality to fit theirs. In addition to keeping me from addressing the needs of worthwhile organizations with no money, my actions say that organizations with money are the most important in the world. How much have I lost in this bargain?

## Hate and Harm



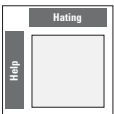
I often hate what organizations do, what they do to people, what they do to the world. Years of working with corporations have refined my disgust for what they are capable of doing in the service of control, speed, and greed. Recent times have created companies hugely distorted toward profit. Often stakeholders like the community or suppliers are neglected in favor of immediate returns for the stockholders and management. The profit motive becomes an organizational cancer growing faster and out of proportion to the rest of the corporate body; profit crowds out all other purpose and consumes energy needed for wider corporate health. Traditionally, the church or the state or the military perverted power. Now in our market-driven society it is corporations that abuse the power derived from their amassed wealth.

My fixation on the faults of organizations reduces, or eliminates, any sense of personal responsibility for what they are doing. I separate them from me, make them objects to despise, worthy of my hatred. They are wonderful villains! I diminish and lift myself at their expense. They become smaller, I become larger. I inflate my goodness and their badness. Hating them distorts my views of myself.

Large organizations have the potential to bind human energy in the service of greater good for all of us. They present the possibility of human communities that unite our spirit. They can hold out the promise of widespread fulfillment and happiness. Sometimes I hate them because they fall so far short of this potential—the same reasons I occasionally hate associates, friends, and myself. My expectations of them come from my expectations of myself. Since I hate it when I fall short, I hate it when they fall short. I project onto them what I expect of myself and they don't make it. I am disappointed in them because I am disappointed in myself. . . . And my diatribe against organizations turns on me!

That's how it is for many of us. The words vary, but the melody is the same: We often expect of others what we expect of ourselves. To the extent we are punishing ourselves, we will punish others for similarly perceived shortcomings. To the extent we are accepting of ourselves, we will be more accepting of others. That punishment or acceptance often extends more easily to faceless organizations that are safer to blame than to an individual who might retaliate.

## Hate and Help



The organizational failings of my clients are a dependable source of inner turmoil: Can I continue to support organizations that damage the world and its people? To what extent am I selling out? My hatred of their abuses is one source of energy to change them and the world in some small ways. The gap between what they do and could do calls out for action. Organizations are powerful in the world; I have skills useful in changing them. If I want to make a difference, what better place is there for me to act? It makes sense . . . and, I can imagine myself as just what they need—a missionary to the heathens, a breath of fresh air, a light in the darkness. All those fantasies feed my sense of importance to them, to the world, and to myself. Even without the fantasy, the reality of organizational shortcomings and potential helps me act.

Here is some surprising, shadowy help coming out of my difficulties with organizations: With time, my pattern of concerns about organizations have boomeranged. I have considered: Why do I hate these abuses so much? Why am I disturbed again and again over what I see? No one is asking me to hold that concern or emotion. Gradually I am realizing that what I hate in organizations is often what I hate in myself—that part of myself I have yet to come to terms with. With this perspective, I find my intense response to what is going on out there in a particular organization hints at something unresolved within myself. Yes, there truly are

problems out there, but the problems inside myself are the more compelling; they affect and distort my views on everything. This unintended, backhanded gift coming from organizations has helped me look into and learn about myself.

## Summary

Expectations of myself have been a vital source of energy for the organizational change work I've done over the years. My self-imposed expectations allow me to pursue this work more vigorously. I have helped organizations reach for what I wanted to become myself. For years, I thought that my ideas were complete, that I was complete, and that I was taking that completeness to organizations. I gradually became aware that my energy for my work was an attempt to fill in what I lacked. I needed others to change because I needed to change. That is still true today, but much less than ten years ago. As my acceptance of myself has increased, so has my acceptance of other people and of organizations. Perhaps my experience has something to do with your own:

- ✧ How do you project your aspirations and limitations onto organizations?
- ✧ Of all that is there, what are you choosing to see?
- ✧ How did your early life prepare you to see organizations as you do?
- ✧ What is the agenda you bring to each organization you work with?

We do not control the organizations we work with and we are only with them part of the time. We have more control over ourselves, and we are with ourselves constantly. This suggests that any efforts at changing an organization might start with us also. Return to the opening matrix for this chapter and replace one word: Replace "organizations" with "myself." My work with organizations begins with myself.

The choice to begin our work on organizations with ourselves is a hard one, and usually not reinforced by the people around us. But let's face it, the approach of placing all the blame and responsibility on organizations has not made people any happier. Millions of people have not become more fulfilled by declaring that someone or something else is responsible for their anger and emptiness. Then, when you take responsibility for your life, you often have to work with others who still lay all of the responsibility on organizations. This does not make your choice any easier. Perhaps you could engage them in an exploration of what they gain and lose in their own hating and loving of an organization. Perhaps you could figure out a few actions you could take together that would more likely bring all of you a bit more happiness in your work. Pay attention to what they love, to where their passion is, to what brings them to life. That's a peek into the possibilities.

this material has been excerpted from

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