

The Supernova Advisor

CROSSING THE INVISIBLE BRIDGE
TO EXCEPTIONAL CLIENT SERVICE
AND CONSISTENT GROWTH

Rob Knapp



John Wiley & Sons, Inc.

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*This book is dedicated to my wife, Marcia,
and our children, Courtney and Christopher.
Their patience and faith kept my travels
from becoming absence. Their enthusiasm
inspires me almost as much as their love
nourishes me. The rest of my life is dedicated
to returning everything they have given.*

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Foreword

When Rob Knapp asked me to contribute the forward on his Supernova book, I agreed straightaway. But before we go forward, let me take you back a bit. I'm considered somewhat of an expert on helping leaders create changes in people—changes that result in a better bottom line for their organization. At least, that's the work I get paid to do.

It's no secret that getting people to change themselves, not because they have to, but because they want to, defines the word *leadership*. The drama plays out when a leader is coaching others to willingly get out of their comfort zone, jump into their learning zone, and start to think and behave in new or different ways. This is the most difficult assignment that any leader can tackle, whether as a parent, teacher, minister, priest, rabbi, boss, or friend. When that's happening, change is happening, and it's a leader's job to spark those happenings.

Rob Knapp is one of those rare leaders.

Rob and his teams have gotten a PhD in the hard knocks school of leaders leading change. Better yet, they've transformed what they've learned into a powerful change system called Supernova. This is a can't-fail change system that anyone who's willing to do the work can accomplish. How do I know? I saw it happen, saw it with my own eyes, saw it big time, and saw it create fabulous results for all the players in the game.

Okay, *now* we can move forward. I want to take you forward into your future so you can see what I saw.

I saw Rob and his teams leading groups of stubbornly entrenched people to willingly transform themselves by turning to a new path of future possibility that truly set them free. It's the path of the Supernova advantage.

And that's only half of the story. As a client of one of these Supernova teams, I experienced all the Supernova customer

benefits that set *me* free. Okay, you got it; I'm a huge Rob Knapp fan, just as you'll be by the time you get to middle of Chapter 1 in this book. Rob makes you want to follow him because it will set you free—free to become the most successful and fulfilled advisor coach in your niche of the world. I can sum up in two words what you'll want to do after you've read the last page: *Clone him.*

Rob Knapp is a rare person who can lead a traditional command-and-control organization through genuine sustainable change. And when that person is neither the commander nor the controller of that organization, it's beyond rare. It's remarkable. It's in the realm of phenomenal.

Look, my business *is* change—studying it, coaching it, inhabiting it, and inhaling in very personal terms—and I've never encountered anyone like Rob Knapp. In the dictionary of Larry Wilson, look up *change agent* and you'll see Rob's picture. Look up *Supernova* and you'll see a couple of thousand more people who successfully changed the way they work because, through Rob's teaching, they changed how they even thought about work. They weren't *told* to change; they changed because Rob and his teams showed them an idea powerful enough to overcome all the negative barriers to change.

The role of any leader is to bring about change, not because change itself is inherently better than the status quo, but look out the window and notice that our whole world is changing. Staying put is a recipe for failure, so it's a leader's prime responsibility to get others on a better path to success and fulfillment. It's then they'll want to develop themselves so they too can become leaders in the rapidly changing cultural landscapes we all inhabit. Rob's not the first guy to figure this out. In fact, the need to continually evolve with, or ahead of, the business environment is becoming a basic survival strategy in every leader's tool kit.

So why, then, is change so hard to execute, and how did Rob and his team accomplish it? The answer awaits you, but I'll offer this preview: Rob realized that leading people to change is an emotional challenge, not merely an intellectual one. When Rob

invited the financial advisors of Merrill Lynch to follow him onto the invisible bridge, he didn't hire teams of hotshot outsiders. He tapped into the emotions of the people within the Merrill culture, and refocused them with imagination, intuition, and, yes, intelligence. There were some very rational, left-brained reasons why adopting Supernova made sense, and Rob integrated them within an argument as emotionally powerful as it was intellectually sound.

The adoption of Supernova was a phenomenon in another way, too, equally as compelling. It arose from the field, where the problems were felt and the answers were forthcoming when true leaders give expectations, permission, and protection to their followers to do so.

In most organizations, attempting change is driven too much from the top. Solutions are fashioned not from collaborating with the field, but by pushing down “do what you're told to do” from those furthest from the customer. No invisible bridge, just planks to walk and orders to follow. The Supernova story has a totally different look and feel and produces more results with less effort and far less stress.

It's a story of the people—the little people—trusting each other and leading each other to the promised land of fruits and honey.

All that being said, Supernova wasn't the focal point of reorganization. There were no special project teams pulled away from their day-to-day jobs. The people at the center of Supernova simply volunteered to help spread the word about a better way to serve their clients and grow their business. Why? Their visibility certainly wasn't going to help them advance through the organization, and there were no bonuses waiting on the other end of a successful implementation.

The people who preached Supernova simply did so for the good of their peers. Why do soldiers fight? Not for a flag, but for each other. Not to overdo it, but this group led this collaborative change process for one another. And, I'm delighted to report, for their clients—clients like me. Now that's different!

As I said, I'm a loyal client of a Merrill team that adopted and still practices Supernova. They execute the model expertly, and they continue to grow, and so do I. I love to recommend them. They treat me as though I'm one of their best clients, and it's not because I have tens of millions parked with them. It's because of their Supernova mind-set.

You'll learn all about the magic of the model as you read Rob's book.

As a client of a Supernova team, I really relish the service and the investment expertise. I have a financial plan based on my life plan; my investments are built around that financial plan, and I get a phone call every month, four reviews and two in person. I also appreciate that my team has time for me if I have a problem, and it is resolved quickly. This is very different than my previous experience. I am eager to refer business to my financial advisor team. They, too, treat me as though I am one of their best clients. I know why now. It's because of Supernova. And Supernova is because of Rob Knapp.

I'll never forget watching Rob as he retold the story of Indiana Jones standing on the cliff, torn between his fear of falling and his trust that the bridge would hold him. Trust won out for Indiana Jones, and for the thousands of professionals who crossed the bridge. Rob's gift then, and now, is that he knows that trust is the glue that advances all of us as professionals and enriches us as humans.

So *The Supernova Advisor* is as close to cloning Rob as you can get. His genius is in here, as well as his creativity and generosity. Don't just read this book—devour each and every practice as though your future depends on it, because it does. Cross the bridge, and be sure to bring your customers along with you. When everybody wins, the world *is* a better place. Thank Rob and yourself for making a difference in so many lives. So Be It!

LARRY WILSON
September 2007

Larry Wilson is widely considered one of the foremost thinkers, speakers, and doers in the business world today. He founded two premier companies:

Wilson Learning Corporation (1965), a more than \$50 million training and research organization; and Pecos River Learning (1985), a change management and leadership development organization. These companies Larry founded have carved new territories in how we think about business, customers, and ourselves. Larry's newest venture is called Wilson Collaborative, a new business model for new thinking leaders.

*As an author, his writings are world renowned. In 1984, he co-authored the best seller *The One-Minute Sales Person* (Morrow, 1984), which sold over one million copies. His other best-selling books include: *Changing the Game: The New Way to Sell* (Simon & Schuster, 1987) and *Stop Selling, Start Partnering* (John Wiley & Sons, 1997). His latest book, *Play to Win! Choosing Growth over Fear in Work and Life* (Bard Press, 1998), was selected *Best Business Book for 1999* by *ForeWord* magazine as well as winning the prestigious *Benjamin Franklin Award for Best Business Book for 1999*. He is a Senior Fellow at the College of Education & Human Development, University of Minnesota. In May 2005, Northland College granted Larry an honorary PhD in business.*

Acknowledgments

Supernova was created in the rarest of spaces, a place without ego, a region where the personal pronoun “I” yielded to a larger purpose. Supernova was brought to life by a group of people, to help a large group serve an even larger group. We created a new way to work, and grow, and serve. Here, I honor their courage and celebrate their success.

To chronicle my appreciation, Supernova’s initial practitioners are the best place to begin. We called them “Pioneers” because they were truly the first to venture into this new territory. They took the leap of faith and stepped onto the invisible bridge first—George Kempf, Tony Singh, Jim McEnerney, and Hagood Ellison were Supernova’s most persuasive spokespeople, not because of what they said but because of what they *accomplished*. You’ll read some of their stories in the chapters ahead.

Jim Walker, the Chief Administrative Officer of Merrill Lynch, helped us develop the solid footing that Supernova rose from. His contribution to “8 Steps to Success” was Supernova’s genesis. Jim did all the original research to support what we felt intuitively. He brought researchers from Harvard and MIT into the conversation and invited them to poke and probe at Supernova, to test it in laboratories, and tell us the truth about what we had created. As CAO, Jim gave us the executive air support we needed, and he stood with us on stage at that very first rollout meeting in Boston. His very presence said simply, “I believe.” And I am very grateful.

Jeff Ransdell did more than give the model its wonderfully appropriate name. He also gave us the confidence to take Supernova on the road to other Merrill Lynch districts. He knew that peer-to-peer transmission was the only way this disruptive idea could thrive. Jeff helped construct the core pieces