

OFF THE WALL THINKING

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Forward

The Green Monster

If you are a baseball fanatic, you know all about the Green Monster. If you are not “into” baseball, the term probably has no meaning at all. For those who have never heard the term, on the following page is a photograph of the Green Monster – along with an historical shot of the beast in 1914.

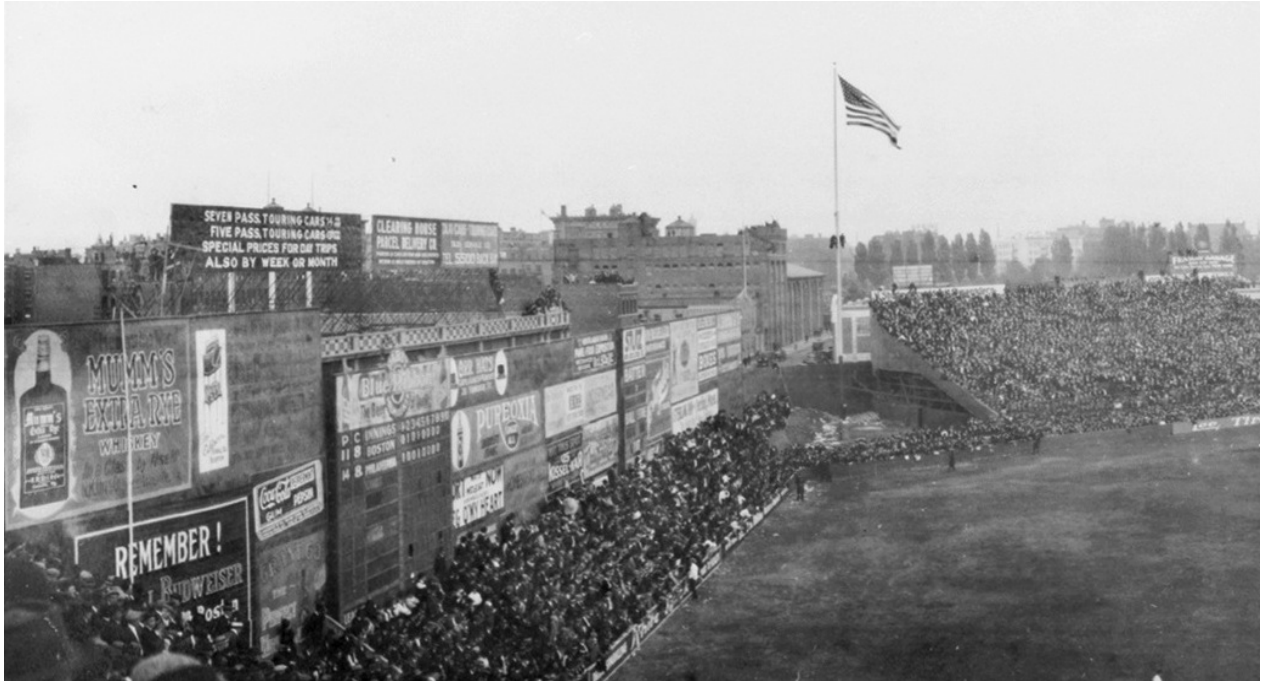
The Green Monster is the moniker for the left field wall at Fenway Park, the home field of the Boston Red Sox. It is 310 feet from home plate and is the highest wall in Major League Baseball, 37’ 2”. The wall was painted green in 1947 and over the years accountments have been added as you can see from the photographs.

In addition to being high and green, the Green Monster has a disturbing attribute. It is said that baseballs which hit the wall rebound at unpredictable angles. This has given rise to the term “off the wall.” The term is an apt title for this book because the best ideas for books, movies, products, solutions and technologies start as “off the wall” concepts.

Unfortunately, a caveat is needed here. Generally speaking, the term “off the wall” is meant to imply something different in the negative sense. The very origin of the term implies that the “off the wall” baseball is a bad thing. The baseball was supposed to hit the ball and bounce in a predictable direction, but it leaves the Green Monster in another. It is therefore unpredictable, and unpredictability is a *bad* thing, particularly in a world where we honor logical, rational action. Supposedly, everything runs best when it is like a fine-tuned machine.

If you believe that, this is **not** the book for you.

And here it is in 1914.



In reality, all is organized chaos. Everyone knows this. Wherever you happen to work – private sector, military, business, nonprofit or on contract – you are probably surprised that anything gets done at all. If it wasn't for the “last minute” nothing would get done. Meetings are meaningless and good ideas and concepts die before they are born. If you leave the job and come back five years later, all the people have changed but the chaos remains.

Which is the reason many people leave the rat race and start their own businesses.

Before the turn of the century, starting you own business was a fiscal nightmare. Unless you had cash your chance of success was minimal. Now, courtesy of the internet, anyone can start a business in their garage. The cost of making *things* has come way down. If you don't believe that, find an advertisement for a computer in 1995 and compare the sales price of a

bigger, better, faster computer today. Buying online is putting hundreds of thousands of retail sales people out of work. You no longer need a realtor to find that perfect home and if you are looking for a hotel in San Francisco, any one of a dozen web sites can get the best room at the best price. Books are now POD, Print on Demand, which mean an author does not have to shell out thousands of dollars to print 500 copies of the work and then piecemeal them across town. The internet has changed the face of business. It has made marketing cheaper and faster and thus more efficient.

But there is still the rub. Computers and the internet do make you faster, but they do not make you smarter. Be you producer or technology geek, the basic rule is still the same. If you do not have something unique to offer you have nothing at all. We no longer live in a world where the “same old/same old” is the path success. People who live the “same old/same old” working for other people and watching the clock tick backwards from retirement.

Chapter 1

FOLLOW NO RULES

Why doesn't Buick rhyme with quick?"

My father was a Holocaust refugee. When he came to the United States in 1939 he was fluent in Italian, French and the local dialect of Torino. He could read Greek and Latin. Over the years he became fluent in English and conversational in Spanish. Of all the languages he learned to speak, he said American English was the hardest language to learn. Why? Because there are no rules in American English. Well, there are *some* rules but violate them with impunity. For instance, it's "i after e except after c," right? Well, then what about

agreeing	albeit	ancient	atheism	beige
being	caffeine	decides	deify	deign
deity	eight	either	feisty	freight
heifer	protein	rein	reinforce	reinstall
science	seeing	seine	seize	species
their	veil	vein	weird	weighty

Even our pronunciation of letters varies. As an example, pronounce the word *ghoti*.

Having a tough time? Need some help? All right, pronounce the "gh" as in the word "tough," the "o" as in the word "women" and the "ti" as in the "nation." Put them all together and what do you have?

Then there are words we actually use. We drive on a parkway but park on a driveway. We recite at a play but play at a rectal. We ship cargo by truck but send cargo by ship. Our noses run but our feet smell. Fat chance and slim chance mean the same thing and your house will burn up while burning down. You fill in a form by filling it out and an alarm goes off by going on. English has words that are pronounced the same but spelled different – too, two, to and lyre, liar and lier – and there are words that are spelled the same, pronounced the same but have more

than one meaning: lead, dove, desert and bass. While other languages require that every letter in a word be pronounced, in American English there are silent letters – like the “k” in “knight” and “knee,” the “g” in “gnu,” the “b” in “bomb” and “comb” as well as the “g” in “sign” and “u” in “guitar.” Quick and Buick should rhyme but don’t and some words have no vowels at all – rhythm and by – even though every school child is taught that every word has to have at least one vowel. Oh, and it is “an hour” but “a horse,” “a harlot” and “a harbinger.” And why does the “c” in “musician” different from the “c” in “musical” since one is root of the other? Then there is a term like “next Thursday.” If today is Saturday, when is “next Thursday?” Is it in five days or 12 days?

We even add letters or sounds where convenient. There are people in New York who live on “Lawng Island,” own a home in Massachusetts in “Bellricka,” have an uncle who grew up in “Missouruh” or an aunt living in “Norlans.” [There are more oddities of the American English language in the Appendix courtesy of the internet.]

My father also noted an expression in American English which talk a paragraph to explain in every European language: “I would if I could be I can’t, so I won’t.” Americans have no problem understanding this logic but in French and Italian, “would” and “could” are the same word as are “can’t” and “won’t.”

What’s the point?

In America, there are no rules. We *say* there are rules but when it comes right down to the brass tacks, w-e-l-l-l, things are a bit different in the “real world” then they are on paper. There are a lot of reasons for this disconnection. Rich people don’t go to jail as often as poor ones for the same crime. Big companies get away with white collar crimes more frequently than small ones. Women make less than men at the same job because, well, they *are* women, and there has

not been an ethnic, religious or racial group on earth which has not suffered outrageous discrimination in the United States that was winked away by Congress, the courts and communities. On the other hand, there is not an individual man, woman in child in America who cannot point to some outrageous incident in their lives illustrating how unfairly they were treated. Welcome to the life in the U. S. of A.

But there is a flipside to this outrage of social injustice. In America, unlike any other nation on earth, you can succeed despite the odds. Every success in America can point to an outrageous injustice along the way. Every success ends with someone overcoming that injustice. What is most prized in the United States is creative thought combined with tenacity. When combined, the two create wealth that never before existed. The world is replete with people with oceans of knowledge but without a teaspoon of creative thought. Knowledge will keep you employed but “off the wall” thinking will make you a smashing success. Civilizations move forward on creative thoughts. The reason we have a vibrant economy is because individuals of all races, colors, religions and sex have transformed ragged ideas into products in their garages, living rooms and dens. Today there are thousands of companies on the New York Stock Exchange and NASDAQ courtesy of those creative concepts and not one of those companies had a smooth start.

In America, there are no rules. Anyone can succeed. Being white, male, black, Muslim, Quaker, female, handicapped, born on the wrong side of the tracks or with a silver spoon in your mouth is not a detriment to success. You make your own luck and, as Thomas Jefferson famously said of luck, “the harder I work the more I have of it.”

This work is a compendium of “off the wall” concepts. It is not meant to be a definitive list of good ideas, just the snapshot of interesting, provocative actions. The point of the book is to

convince you to become an “off the wall” thinker. Learn from other people’s successes. Maybe you can retread one of the ideas in this book to use in your life. Or an idea can lead you to other concepts. Never stop learning and never stop thinking “why not?”

Maybe, just maybe, one person reading this book will see one idea from the past that never took off and says to himself – or herself – “you know, with a little change here and a tweak there, some software and a marketing sweat, I could make this idea work!” I salute that person and that is the reason I have written this book.