

The Art of the Three Year Plan

By Chris McDowell, with special thanks to Mikki Herbold
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Movie time

The 2008 film, **Flash of Genius**, tells the story of an inventor named Robert Kearns and his legal battle against the Ford Motor Company when they developed an intermittent windshield wiper based on ideas the inventor had patented.

Play scene 16 “Nothing New”.



Background

Chris McDowell

My background is originally in educational media – audio, video, graphics, film, and photography. In 1991, I started working at Douglas College as a Media Production Technician, a generalist in what was then known as Instructional Media Services. Instructional Media Services consisted of a cluster of one, two and three person teams with widely varying job descriptions.

I am now called an Educational Technology Specialist in the Academic Technology Services division of the CEIT department, Centre for Educational and Information Technology.

My area is made up of people with many different duties and skill sets. I write instructions and train the college community on educational technology - hardware and software. Among various other duties I perform Event Support with two other people.

Leadership

New leadership came into play at CEIT, the Douglas College Centre for Educational and Information Technology. This is also true of the Administration.

Leaders who listen and problem-solve with staff.

Inciting Incident

It is a common practice in movie-making, that something takes place that acts as a catalyst for change.

‘The inciting incident jolts the central character out of her or his everyday routine.’

For me, my new Manager asked me to manage event support in order to reduce and eliminate it.



My sister Karen, an experienced business woman, listened to me talk about the challenges I was facing. Karen said, “You need a three year plan.”

This is Karen with her daughter and me in Stanley Park.

(Copyrighted image for this PowerPoint only.)

Executive Summary – page one of the plan

“The Douglas College Strategic Plan 2010-2015 aimed to enrich the College culture with expansion of conferences held at Douglas College, additional speaker series, more student engagement award events, leadership roundtables, and more events of all kinds. At the same time, also as a result of the Strategic Plan, the Douglas College population has expanded rapidly.”

“The end result has been greater and greater demands on Event Support.”

Current State – part of the Executive Summary

We setup microphones, mic stands, and XLR cables and then connect them to an audio mixer and an amplifier which in turn sends the audio signal out to two or more speakers on stands, all wired together with ¼" cable which is carefully gaffer taped into position to prevent tripping. Then we break it all down at the end of the event and put it away.

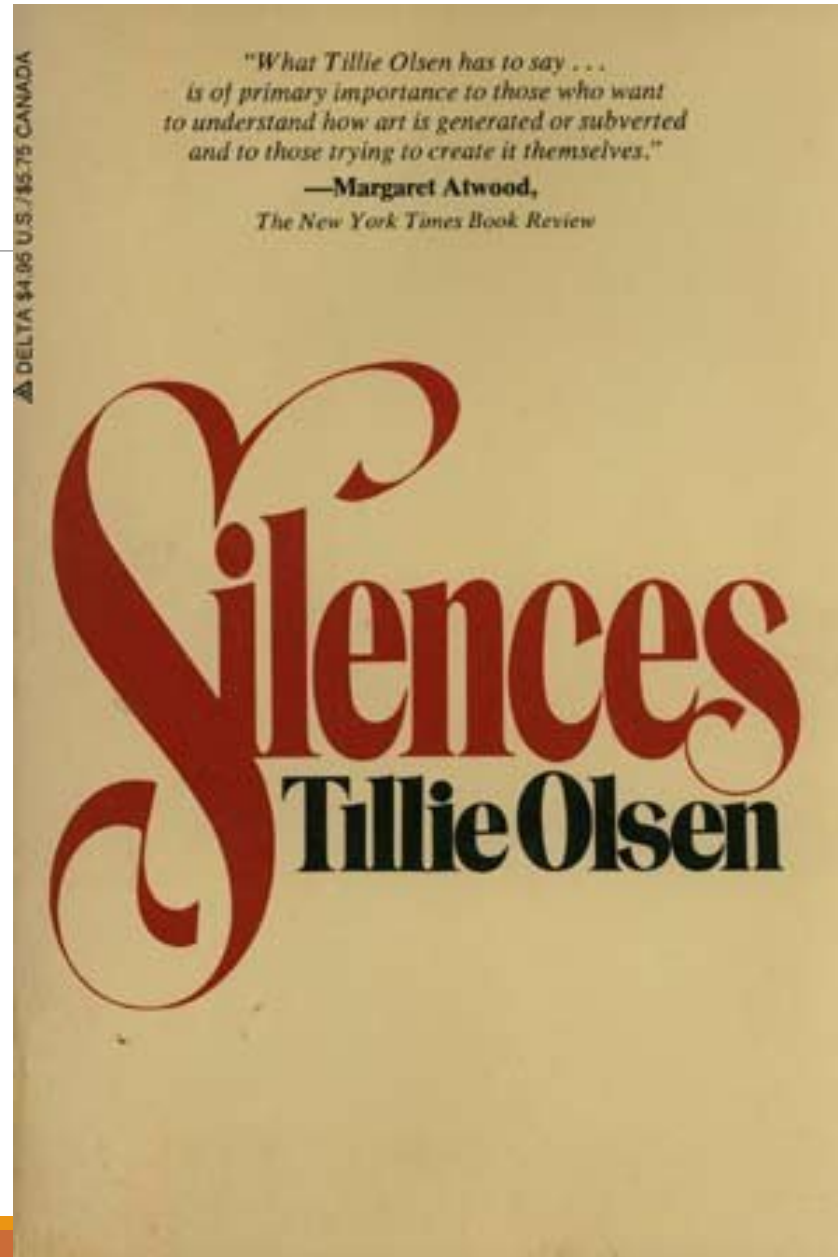
If the client needs display, we setup a projector, screen, laptop, video player, cables, power, etc. Then break it down at the end and put it away.

Tactical Plan – final paragraph of Executive Summary

“Moving forward, we hope the administration will agree that it is cheaper to build features into a new house rather than to renovate an existing one.”

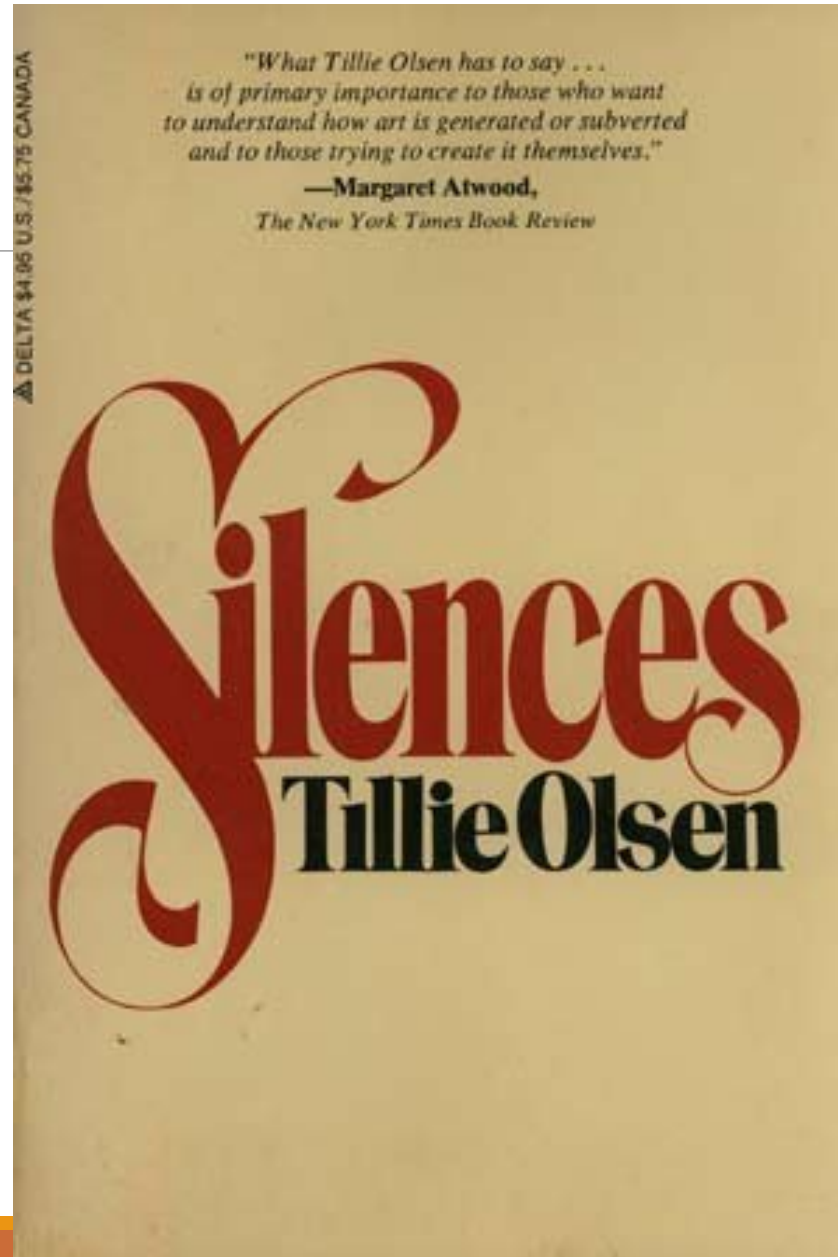
(Thank you Karen for contributing this easily understood, practical vision for the future.)

Writing



Applying ideas from this 1978 groundbreaking book helped me to write the plan.

Writing



Keep an idea book.

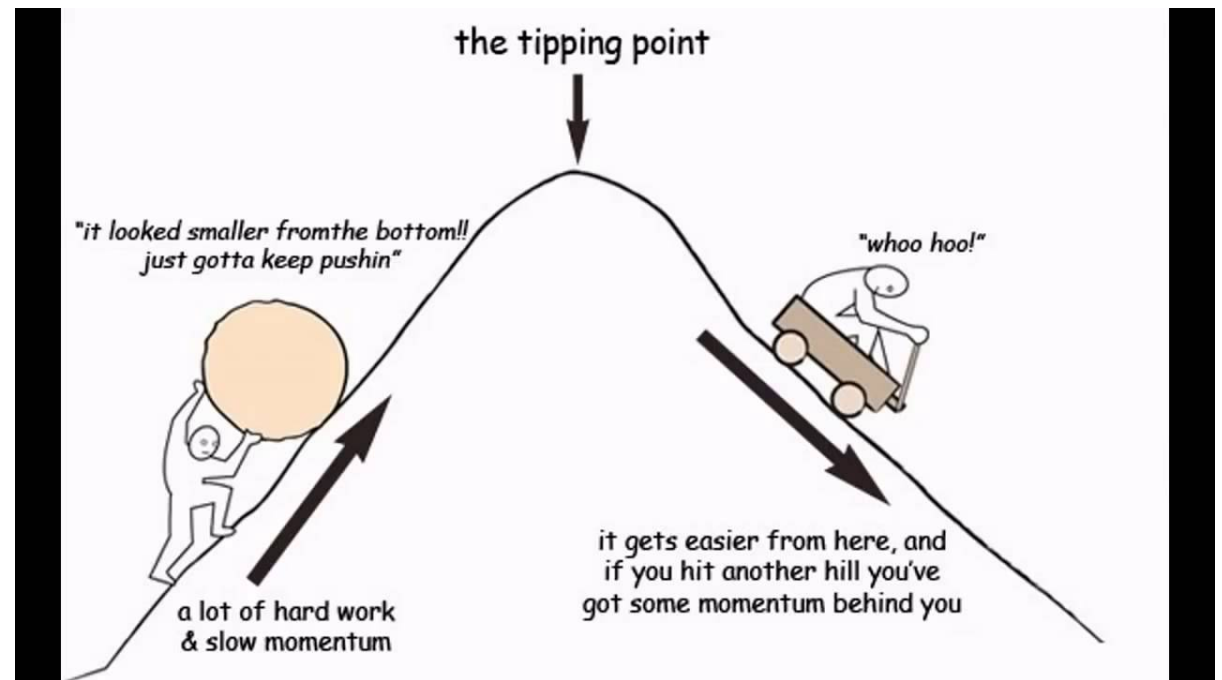
Write your ideas down asap.

The Tipping Point:

How Little Things Can Make a Big Difference

by Malcolm Gladwell

In exploring the spread of information, ideas and change, Gladwell talks about people who are “Conductors” of change.



Tipping Point Partners

At Douglas College we identified the appropriate institutional “Super Conductors”: for event support these would be the Library, Facilities Room Bookings, and the CEIT Help Desk.

Working with my Manager, we held multiple meetings, discussions really, to ensure people’s willingness to expand college infrastructure to include PA features. Their support and understanding was crucial.

They willingly agreed. At this point I became a Conductor of information to them.

Room Technology

Each year of the plan the Educational Technology Integration Specialists and I brainstormed new infrastructure with plug and play features that could be built into existing spaces to reduce event support.

Once installed, wireless and wired microphones, cables and stands were provided to the Library to loan out to internal and external clients.

The Library has been extremely supportive and were gracious and enthusiastic as they added to their workload in order to make a self help PA system approach work. Facilities staff has also been wonderful to work with on new policy and features.

No work is greater than its smallest details

The devil is in the details:

How carefully the details are planned and attended to determines the success or failure of a three year plan.

When it comes to technology, this is especially true. An installation that is 90% operational can be an embarrassing training failure.

Yet it is normal for installations to not work that well at first.

Guiding principles

Design, programming and installation of targeted audio-visual technology configurations and upgrades throughout college

Standardization of technology to create user familiarity

User friendly interfaces

Pilot projects – test phase first to ensure viability

Documentation and training i.e. supported self-help

Simplicity and user self-sufficiency: plug and play setups/infrastructure

Improved, realistic communications and policies

Policy and Access

Event Support web page

<http://www.douglascollege.ca/employees/ceit/forms/event-request-form>

We set timeline boundaries of 10 business days in advance, while creating online Event Support Request forms to capture full information from the client.

Detective work

I discovered that internal clients were booking complex rooms on behalf of external clients, creating last minute chaos for the Help Desk and on-call service technicians.

FINE TUNING POLICY

“Employees organizing an event on behalf of an external client are required to take responsibility for the event. This responsibility entails testing equipment and passwords ahead of time, and performing setup and breakdown the day of the event. CEIT provides training for employees only.”

More fine tuning of policy

Last minute Saturday morning trouble calls in Lecture Theatre A1470 were solved by changing room rental policy for that room.

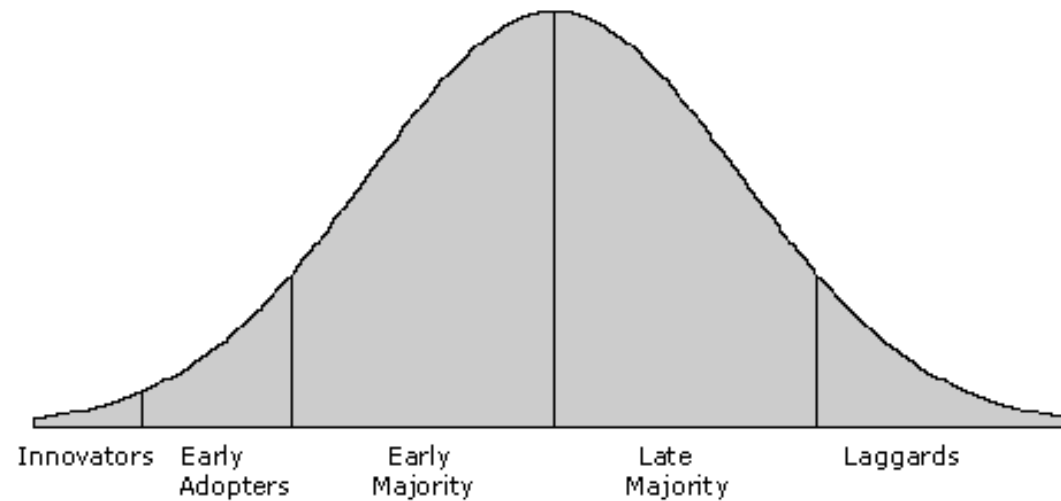
External clients renting room A1470 are now obligated to rent the A1470 wireless microphones as part of the room rental package. (Matching wireless receivers are “on” and plugged into the PA system in a locked cabinet at the front of the room.)

Facilities personnel came up with the idea of changing the rental agreement. This then prevented clients from refusing to pay extra for microphones (then demanding them the day of their of their event.)

Training

Room Technology and Instructions

<http://rtl.douglas.bc.ca/>



Every set of instructions are posted both online and in the rooms.

Training

Instructions

Lecture Theatre,
room A1470



Nuts and bolts

Executive Summary – including Current State and Tactical Plan

Year 1

Year 2

Year 3

Roadmap to workload reduction

Detailed Analysis of events each year to prove plan is reducing workload

Year 1 example – repeat these headings for years 2 & 3

Systems Installations/Upgrades

- Design and install PA infrastructure in A1470 Lecture Theatre
- Display upgrade for Douglas Room

Proposed Procedures and Policy Changes

- 10 business days in advance
(posted online and in Event Support Request Form)

Technology Training/Communications

- Launch A1470 and follow up with hands on workshops

Proposed Charter/Capital Requests

- COQ campus: A1470 ceiling speakers and installation, new desk, TLP 350 touch panel, etc.
- NW campus: Douglas Room projector and screen

Identifying lasting solutions

Background:

Post secondary institutions received provincial funding to establish Aboriginal Gathering Places to provide support and increase the success of aboriginal students. At Douglas College this is the most desired space to hold a conference or any event.

Why? It's beautiful and it is the only dedicated conference space in the entire college. All other spaces used are divided classrooms or cafeterias, lecture theatres, hallways or atriums.

Solution:

While working on the plan I discovered that what the college really needs is **dedicated year-round conference space at each campus**. I call it a flexible learning space/conference centre. (Just a dream at this point.)

The three year plan never ends

Start again at Year 1 and if possible try to involve more departments in the initial brainstorming phase.

Analyze data to evaluate how the whole system is doing: are there areas of the plan that did not take root? Are there areas of service that are taking a lot of labour and exhausting staff?

What areas of Communication or Partnership could use some attention?



Teamwork is the secret to success



My colleagues are dear
to me!

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DOUGLAS COLLEGE

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