



In the words of a John Lennon song "life is what happens when you're making other plans."

Engrossed in a consulting engagement in San Francisco and family matters back in Boston **left me feeling a bit bicoastal (or was that just the airplane food)**. In addition, with the client's office only 2 blocks from beautiful [ATT Park](#), I also got caught up in the Giants biennial run for the World Series, singing [Steve Perry/Journey songs](#) during the seventh inning stretches.

As luck would have it, I had the good fortune of having family in Marin County to stay with during the engagement. While occupying their guest house, **Cousins Jan and John** invited me over for a home cooked, gourmet dinner. I jumped at the opportunity (and of course, the short commute!).

After dinner and some wine, the once convivial conversation got personal. "You know" said Cousin Jan, eyeing me like [MadBum](#) (Madison Bumgarner, SF and MVP pitcher) deciding what pitch to throw the opposing batter. **"Don't take this the wrong way" she said "but there's something I've been meaning to tell you."** I expected the curve but got the fastball instead.



"I hesitated to mention it but it's **your white tube socks**, they make you look old when you're wearing shorts and sneakers. **Nobody in Marin wears them.**" Sure enough, a trip to the local gym bore out this observation. So before you could say **"Amazon Prime"**, with my peds in hand and my fashion faux pas repaired, I was confident in my **"West Coast styling."**

Or so I thought. Cousin Jan smiled approvingly. "Those look great on you!", she said as she leaned in for her next pitch. **"You know, there are some other things you might want to work on..."**

Show Me the Curve!

Look, I'm no fashionista (apparently) but the saying goes that **you dress for the life you seek, not the life you have**. Similarly, as a executive, while your business operates in the here and now, you and your team must be actively positioning the company or organization to meet its objectives based upon the business conditions you anticipate.

Other than chance encounters with well meaning relatives, how do you know if and when its time to **"change your socks"**? And while changing your business model is certainly not as simple as entering a few clicks on line, **"Do you pivot or do you persevere"**?

Many companies adopt **internal processes**, involving systemic intelligence and opinion gathering, feedback and communication for continuous learning and innovation. Larger firms often set up **design teams, sandboxes or independent businesses** to explore new customer segments and technologies. In smaller firms, having the agility to spin out new product versions quickly allows them to pivot to new business models if needed if the market demands.

Ultimately though, **any choice requires judgment and courage**. For example, after years of customer requests, McDonalds decision last year to offer all-day breakfast to boost lagging sales is an interesting case in point. An increasing demand for healthier, low cost meals appealed to customers in the current economy but the change required upgrading and reorganizing thousands of kitchens to deliver the menu change, especially many owner operated franchisees. **Corporate giants may or may not be able to dance but they can pivot!**

So if you're looking to stand out in a way that supports your value proposition, go for it. Just make sure you're prepared to pivot if fashion or the market dictates. **As we neo-Californian hipsters say, you'll "go tubular, dude"**.

A few questions for further discussion:

- What is your organization's core value proposition?
- How does your company handle the "pivot vs. persevere" decision?
- Does anyone need size 14 white tube socks (slightly used)?

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“ Those who cannot change their minds cannot change anything”
- George Bernard Shaw



Thanks to the Polacheks for their love and support while in SF as well as the folks at [ServiceSource](#), [Anaplan](#), [Twelve C](#) and [KPMG](#) for an inspirational and "pivotal" project.



A shoutout to **Max Bazerman**, HBS professor and author of ["The Power of Noticing: What the Best Leaders See."](#) Written by a leader in applied behavioral psychology, the book illustrates how to make better decisions while noticing the world around you.

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