



# *Outside Influences:* *Catalytic Concepts* *For Understanding* *How the World Really Works*

By Don Freda

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## **ABOUT THE BOOK:**

“*Outside Influences* offers sound analysis and practical advice presented in a tremendously enjoyable and thought provoking style.”

*Rich Steele, President/CEO  
Brandywine Valley Consulting*

Our life journey is a mosaic of experiences, encounters, interactions, and ideas. What happens on our journey makes up the stuff of life and determines the outcome of the adventure.

Most of what has been written about the journey, life and success deals only with the internal factors we can influence. *Outside Influences*, a refreshing, stimulating new book with a different point of view, also addresses the dynamic forces swirling around outside of ourselves that affect the direction and ultimate meaning of our lives. This elegant, complex choreography of inside and outside forces is not something to be feared, but to be acknowledged and understood.

*Outside Influences* contains eighty-four catalytic concepts to stimulate your thinking, stretch your mind and help you calibrate the healthy tension between where you are and where you want to be. *Outside Influences* is not just about gaining more success—it’s also about coming to peace with some of the contradictions so apparent in life. When the idiosyncrasies of the system manifest themselves, you will understand what is happening and then be able to appreciate the bounty or cope with the challenges.

Don Freda is an accomplished serial entrepreneur, consultant, and speaker. He has launched several successful corporations, one of which continues to produce annual sales in excess of five hundred million dollars.

## **SELECTIONS FROM *OUTSIDE INFLUENCES*:**

### **THE SOURCES OF OUTSIDE INFLUENCES (pages 98-102)**

There are three different kinds of influences beyond ourselves and the things we control that can and do affect our lives on a regular basis.

#### *1. Random Events*

Random events are occurrences with no identifiable reason for them to happen at a particular moment. You're in a hurry to get somewhere and a little old lady in a 1979 Rambler pulls out right in front of you going 10 mph below the speed limit on a winding two lane road. I'm going to talk about "Random Events Theory" a little later in this chapter but I want to identify and distinguish random events from other outside influences. Many things happen in life, and in business, that are random and unexplainable. No matter how hard you look you cannot completely identify or fully explain why and how they occur. The old lady could have just as easily gotten to the intersection 5 seconds later and you would have been long gone. The weather, in any particular place, on any particular day is random (although many of us do control where we live and can therefore choose the climate we prefer) and has a way of reminding us of Mother Nature's more playful side from time to time.

#### *2. Actions and Decisions of People Outside of Our Sphere of Influence*

Right at this moment, as you read this sentence, someone that you don't even know, and certainly never met, could be making a decision or taking an action that will affect your life. Different from random events, these outside influences are the result of things that other people do. Our "sphere of influence" is our personal world, the people, places, and things we interact with, the organizations we are a part of, the facets of our lives we engage with each day. Beyond that relatively tight circle is a whole world that we are connected to.

Here at the beginning of the new millennium, men like Pervez Musharraf and Vladimir Putin (whom I assume you have not met) are making decisions and taking actions that could literally affect the direction of world history. There are many other people who we do not know that could intrude on our lives in some way. Supplies of key materials can be interrupted by political unrest in a foreign country. Someone could be digging to build a pool and hit a water main or power line near your house. Someone you're counting on may drop the ball, leaving you high and dry. On the plus side, researchers could develop a cure for a disease that plagues a loved one. A new restaurant could open up close to your home and become a family favorite. Perhaps some brilliant man could write a book that you find enjoyable and interesting. The Internet may be called the worldwide web, but

in fact, the world itself is an intricate web with countless connections and interdependencies. Almost everyday we're affected in some small way by things we are not even aware of and people we've never met.

We want to reach out, expand our knowledge and understanding of the world around us, as well we should. Knowledge is power and power lets us exert influence. We want to know what is going on. But a minnow has a better chance of swallowing a whale than we have of grasping all of the widespread factors that affect our lives and our careers. It's a massive and complex system with vast connections and implications.

### *3. Actions and Decisions of People Within Our Sphere of Influence*

Within our sphere of familiarity people we know are making decisions and taking actions all the time. Throughout our childhood, we rely on our parents' judgment but we are also subject to their circumstances. There's many a person who grew up in a particular town because their dad was transferred there and that became a defining decision for their development as children. If you look at people's lives closely you'll see a great deal of randomness comes into play in life circumstances, and decisions play off those factors. Each day, many known and unknown actions and decisions of others influence us. What is your number one competitor thinking and planning? People get jobs through personal introductions. Couples meet and fall in love as a result of age-old friendly matchmaking activities. What does your boss have on his or her agenda? What is your top salesperson contemplating? What about the owners of the company you work for? Did you know your neighbor was planning a big graduation party for his son this spring? Actions taken by those within our "sphere of influence" affect our lives to one degree or another. Things that happen in the lives of those we love affect us directly, yet we seldom have any ability to influence them. To paraphrase John Donne, no one is an island.

So the sources of outside influences can be completely random, or the result of actions and/or decisions made by others, some of whom we know, and some we do not.

### **INCOMPREHENSIBLE INFLUENCES (pages 110-113)**

The world we live in is a huge and knotty place. To call it multifaceted is a gross understatement. Most of the factors that affect us we are aware of and acknowledge. But there are some that are beyond our comprehension or awareness. Our world, where we feel safe and (for the most part) in control, has some things going on beneath the surface. Sometimes they manifest themselves after the fact so at least we understand retroactively, but other times we're never exactly sure what was at work.

For decades the average American was oblivious to the rise of fanatical fundamentalism within many Muslim nations of the world. The fact that we were unaware of it did not change the reality of its existence. The entire world became

acutely aware as this hateful, evil sect intruded on our lives with their cowardly acts of terrorism.

Acumen is vital to success in any field and people who have risen to positions of authority usually possess a great deal of knowledge about the inner workings of their organization. But, if you work in a large organization, regardless of your position, I can say categorically that you do not know everything that is going on around you. Furthermore, there are unseen dynamics in other companies you may rely on. Things happen all of the time that we cannot explain, even retroactively. We've all been party to many conversations like this: "What happened here?" or "How could this occur?" Answer: "Well, we're not exactly sure."

Nobody fully understands what drives the stock market, for instance; if they did, they would be rich beyond imagination, but the stock market is not "understandable." It is a complicated dynamic system, like the economy at large and therefore subject to forces beyond our comprehension.

Retired Fed Chairman Alan Greenspan is one of the wisest and most respected economists on the planet. He has consistently demonstrated a grasp of the economy, which served our country well throughout his tenure. I watched with interest his testimony to a senate subcommittee on the economy in late February 2002. Mr. Greenspan was asked if the economy would not have slipped into a recession in the fall of 2001 had it not been for the terrorists' attacks of September 11<sup>th</sup>. Mr. Greenspan shot back without a moment's hesitation that it would be impossible to speculate how the economy "would have" performed. What struck me was that here we had arguably the most well-informed, brightest, most astute man there is on the subject, asked to look backwards and factor out the effects of a catastrophic event (as opposed to making a prediction) and his immediate response was essentially to say that it was impossible to do so. What does that tell us about anybody's ability to predict where the economy is going? It's just too complex. In fact the word complex is terribly inadequate for describing it. It's more like "complex to the one millionth power." It's just too big to comprehend. All we can do is watch it unfold before us and try to understand what's happening and even that is a challenge.

Other influences we do not comprehend because we are not aware of them. We do not see allergens in the air or microbes in our food. We may become aware of them later when the symptoms of their havoc emerge. There could be something slowly going wrong in our automobile, our computer, our air-conditioner, or our body. Just because we don't see and aren't aware of these things doesn't mean they aren't there. If you work in an organization, it's a very safe assumption that things are going on that might affect you that you are not yet aware of.

Within the atmosphere of these swirling influences, we navigate much as a skilled sailor does, using the wind and currents (outside influences) to reach his destination. Our life is a mosaic of experiences, encounters, interactions and ideas. Through our senses we each absorb a different set of factors, which again (over and above genetics) makes us unique because our lives are so different. The myriad of options and countless circumstances dynamically evolve and we reflect back to the world all that we see, hear, touch, taste, feel and think. The interplay between inside and outside influences produces this elegant choreography we call

life. Its layers unfold and reveal its inner beauty much as a rose opening to the sun on a spring morning. This complex interaction is not something to be feared, but acknowledged and understood.

### THE SERENDIPITY OF SUCCESS (pages 241-243)

Knowledge is its own reward but there are other advantages to understanding the affect of *Outside Influences*. Clearly, understanding how the world works better prepares you to function in it. Denying or superseding the reality with our complex belief systems surely does not give us any advantage.

Yes, to a degree life is an adventure that happens to us as opposed to being unilaterally directed, created and forged by us. Understanding this engenders a sense of wonder and anticipation as each day offers opportunities for exploration and expansion. It's a lovely thing to watch life unfold and to set our sails and rudder as dictated by the winds and currents.

People who have little faith in the noble nature of mankind have been afraid to acknowledge outside influences for fear that people would abdicate responsibility for their lives. That is neither the recommended nor the likely response to this awareness. *Outside Influences* starts with a high concept of people and belief in their passion and motivation. People who get it know that they must still take personal responsibility and they open themselves up to the possibilities of the universe. In many ways these ideas increase motivation, or at least the ability to maintain motivation, because they accept that things don't always turn out as intended. Since that's understood, when problems occur, which they often do, people are better able to cope and keep trying. They don't feel like a failure, only that the particular thing they tried didn't work out.

Almost everything beneficial we've been taught and have believed about achieving success has been designed to do one thing, get us to try and keep trying. Just as many of us were told as children, if you're good little girls and boys, Santa Claus is going to bring you some nice toys on Christmas. Our parents told us that with good intentions even though it was not exactly true. So, too, we were told the stories about the keys to success. They are told to us with our own best interests at heart and they do occasionally lead to success, to keep us trying in the face of adversity. It's simple really; success is most often the result of thousands of small experiments. It's trial and error to the nth degree until the right formula is uncovered. It can be hard to determine the effects of outside influences, but you can always rest assured they are there.

Remember, the one thing all successful experiences have in common is that somebody tried something. Beyond that, you may be able to identify certain common traits in successful people, but nothing is universal except trying. Successful people come from all backgrounds and all walks of life. They see the world quite differently and they understand the path to success in different ways. That's the beauty of it—success is available to everybody, as long as you keep trying. It's a combination lock and the best thing to do is to keep turning the dial. Eventually the tumblers will fall into place and success will open to you—then you can explain to everybody the keys to your success.

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