

## THE BIG IDEAS

### The Seventh Sense

What is it?

### The Illness of Our Era

= Insanity.

### Proper Effort

Can you be that disciplined?

### Psych. Hard Gatekeeping

Battle for war and peace.

### Complicated vs. Complex

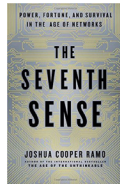
Big difference. Our lives = complex.

### 10,000 Year Clock

Think longer-term.

### Revolution's Call

Terrifying + wonderful.



# The Seventh Sense

Power, Fortune, and Survival in the Age of Networks

BY JOSHUA COOPER RAMO · LITTLE, BROWN AND COMPANY © 2016 · 352 PAGES

“This book is the story of a new instinct, what I have called the Seventh Sense. If Nietzsche’s sixth sense was tuned for a world of changing industrial power, the Seventh Sense is meant for our new age of constant connection. I don’t just mean connection to the Internet, but to the whole world of networks that surrounds and defines us everywhere now. Financial webs. DNA databases. Artificial intelligence meshes. Terror or narcotic networks. Currency platforms. Connection—and ever faster, smarter connection—is transforming our lives just as trains and factories tore into Nietzsche’s age. As a result, we live in a world that is both terribly exciting and awfully unsettling. A financial crisis that seems to drag on endlessly, despite the efforts of our best minds and most energetic central banks. A historically expensive decade of war against terrorists that produces more terrorists. A global ecosystem that seems beyond repair. New pandemic diseases arriving like clockwork every year. Endless refugee waves. Domestic politics that have been transformed into shouting extremism. The point of this book is that every one of these problems has exactly the same cause: networks. And by understanding how they work, we can begin to shape this age, instead of being used by it. ‘Man’s habits change more rapidly than his instincts,’ the historian Charles Coulston Gillispie once wrote. That’s us. We have all the habits of a new age. The phones. The emails. The ADD clicking of our keyboards. The hand sanitizers. Now we need to develop the instincts. Because anything not built for a network age—our politics, our economics, our national security, our education—is going to crack apart under its pressures.”

~ Joshua Cooper Ramo from *The Seventh Sense*

*“This book is for those who will have to build and manage machines that are smarter than humans, for those who will create a new network, and for all of us who want to turn the energies of a disruptive age to constructing an order that feels secure and just.”*

~ Joshua Cooper Ramo

This is a fascinating book. It reads like gripping, can’t-put-it-down fiction.

And, [Joshua Cooper Ramo](#) is a fascinating guy. He is currently the co-ceo and vice chairman of Kissinger Associates and a board member of FedEx and Starbucks. He spent years living in China (where he became fluent in Mandarin) and was the youngest senior editor + foreign editor in the history of *Time* magazine where he wrote 20+ cover stories earlier in his career.

This book is very different than the types of books I usually focus on. It’s not “self-development” per se; it’s more like “state-development”—as in, the optimal politics for our nation and world.

The main thrust of the book is that we are entering a revolutionary time—an epoch of networks and extraordinary connection. Joshua believes our great-great-grandchildren will call this era something like the “Great Connection.”

Although Joshua briefly touches on the role individuals will play in the book, his primary focus is on a macro level. I’m going to leave the high-level intellectual discussion on global war and peace for the book and see if we can find ways to bring this meta-level awareness down into our lives with some practical wisdom we can apply to our lives TODAY so that we can each play a powerful role in these revolutionary times.

*"The Seventh Sense—which is a feeling of how networks work that is joined to a sense of history and politics and philosophy—has let us understand the origins of this dynamic. It has shown us that disruption is not a sign of chaos or unpredictable surprise, even if it looks that way from the headlines. Rather, it marks a huge construction project."*

~ Joshua Cooper Ramo

## WHAT IS THE SEVENTH SENSE?

"The Seventh Sense, in short, is the ability to look at any object and see the way in which it is changed by connection. Whether you are commanding an army, running a Fortune 500 company, planning a great work of art, or thinking about your children's education, this skill marks an understanding of power now. It means the ability to contemplate not just the extraordinary features of modern life but also the quotidian—a soldier, a share of stock, a language—and immediately know that connection changes the nature of an object. A medical diagnostic machine is impressive; one that is connected to a database of information that can accelerate and improve or perfect a diagnosis is revolutionary. The act of linking our bodies, our cities, our ideas—everything, really—together introduces a genuinely new dynamic to our world. It creates hyperdense concentrations of power. It breeds fresh chances for complex and instant chaos. To follow the logic of the French philosopher Paul Virilio for a moment, 'When you invent the ship, you also invent the shipwreck. When you invent the plane, you also invent the plane crash.' Surely we can count on the network to invent the network accident—and many of them. The emergence of surprise, of tragedy, of wealth and hope will be more common now than in less revolutionary times. We all face possibilities and vulnerabilities we only dimly understand."

Let's start by defining the Seventh Sense.

In short, it's the ability to see the power of NETWORKS that create hyper-CONNECTIVITY in *every* (emphasis on every) aspect of our lives.

Those who develop this Seventh Sense—this ability to see the way everything is changed by connection—will have more power than those who don't. Explaining why this is so important and helping us cultivate this Seventh Sense is, of course, what the book is all about.

Couple notes: Joshua makes the point again and again that we are living in REVOLUTIONARY times. Not kinda sorta interesting but REVOLUTIONARY.

The day before I read this book, I interviewed Pulitzer-prize winning writer [Charles Duhigg](#) (see Notes on [The Power of Habit](#) + [Smarter Faster Better](#)). He made the same point—remarking that our current era will be seen to be as disruptive as the agrarian and industrial revolutions.

Joshua tells us: *"Centuries from now, our great-great-grandchildren will look back at our age and name it, as we have named the Enlightenment. Perhaps they will call this era the 'Great Connection' or the 'Great Enmeshment' or some such."*

Whatever our era will eventually be called, it is *revolutionary*. Never before has everything been so connected.

And, we need to remember that just as inventing a ship also invents the shipwreck, this connectivity comes with connectivity crashes. Although the book focuses primarily on global crashes, let's take a quick look at how this era is negatively affecting us individually.

## THE ILLNESS THAT WILL MARK OUR ERA? INSANITY.

"'People are now constantly connected to computers and machines, and this is changing the way we think,' he said. 'People just cannot make sense of what is happening. There is no respite. The world is going to go faster and faster in this regard.'

'In the nineteenth century the biggest threat to humanity was pneumonia,' he continued. 'In the twentieth century it was cancer. The illness that will mark our era, and particularly the start of the twenty-first century, is insanity. Or, we can say, spiritual disease.' He paused. 'This next century is going to be especially turbulent. It has already begun. And when I say 'insanity' and 'spiritual disease,' I don't only mean inside the minds of individuals. Politics, military, economics, education, culture, and medicine—all these will be affected.'"

*"Fluency in any second language in the future will be an arcane specialty. Better to teach the kids how to build an artificial intelligence program, or to debate the moral reasoning of Confucius and Socrates, than how to order dinner in another language."*

~ Joshua Cooper Ramo

The "he" Joshua refers to is Master Nan. Joshua kicks the book off with a story of how he met Master Nan—a Zen (Ch'an in Chinese) master who was one of the most influential thinkers in modern China. (His books have sold millions of copies and he was revered until his recent death. Note coming soon on his core book.)

So, let's take a quick stroll through history's most prominent illnesses to get a sense of our place in history and a clearer sense of our current challenges.

We start with the 19th century—its industrial revolution and rapid urbanization created dirty, packed cities. Enter: pneumonia.

The 20th century, with its scientific explosion and creation "of plastics and artificial, untested, unsafe materials had torn away at our genetic base and brought a plague of cancers."

The 21st century? Our modern era of constant connection is (as you may have noticed) HAMMERING us with an unprecedented amount of information—more than we can possibly integrate. Enter: *insanity*.

Insanity.

That's a strong word. And, unfortunately, a very accurate one. The root of this pervasive insanity/spiritual disease? Although hyperconnected to everything around us, we're oddly DISCONNECTED from ourselves. That's not wise.

We need to cultivate our Seventh Sense to SEE this—embracing the power and opportunities of connection AND preventing the spiritual shipwrecks that can result.

Here's the type of effort Master Nan tells us is required for our journey:

## CAN YOU BE THAT DISCIPLINED?

"'Su Qin started as an idealist, like you,' Master Nan said. 'He failed. Su Qin was humiliated in trying to advise kings. Even his kin were embarrassed. His sister and mother refused to let him return to the family home. He was in so much pain over this embarrassment that he sat in front of a desk and read every book of history he could find for seven years. He tied his long hair to a beam above his desk so that if he fell asleep it would hold his head up. Sometimes he would stab a knife into his thigh to keep him awake.' Master Nan's voice was rising, his speech picking up pace. 'But in the end, he learned. Su Qin learned. You should study him. If you do this, if you are sincere, if you work hard, if you learn these ideas, you can understand. Can you be that disciplined?' The room was dead quiet now. No one looked at me. In the silence, one of the guests passed around a plate of cut fresh fruit and cherries and sweet dried dates."

Master Nan had a campus where China's elite would convene. Joshua tells us about an intimate dinner with Master Nan in which he asked him how to begin a quest to understand this age.

At which point the Master unleashed an awesomely Zen-intense reply—chastising Joshua for thinking he could attain this wisdom easily.

Nope. He'd have to be like Su Qin—one of the of the great advisors of ancient China—and come by this wisdom with extraordinarily focused intensity for a long period of time. (*Grit*, baby!)

Good news: If you are sincere, if you work hard, if you learn these ideas, you can understand.

The question is: Can we be that disciplined?

And, the challenge, of course, is that in our modern world polluted with the insanity of get-it-quick-or-don't-bother thinking, this discipline is rarely prized.

Now, I don't have any hair so tying it to the ceiling is not an option. Otherwise, I'm in.

You?

*"Never give in, never give in, never, never, never-in nothing, great or small, large or petty, never give in."*

~ Winston Churchill

Now let's look at one of the things we'll want to get good at.

## PSYCHOLOGICAL HARD GATEKEEPING

*"Are you the gatekeeper? Or  
the gatekept?"*

~ Joshua Cooper Ramo

"Hard Gatekeeping can be summarized simply: The development and control of the physical and topological spaces that will define any nation's future security. Financial markets. Information and physical infrastructures. Trading blocs. Alliance structures. Technology cooperatives. Currency arrangements. The goals of Hard Gatekeeping are also simple to state: to protect those inside the gated order, to make security and innovation more efficient, to accelerate certain kinds of connection and dampen others, to manage links to the non-gatekept world, and to use that 'in or out' leverage to affect the interests and plans of others."

Hard Gatekeeping.

That's how you make sure you get the best of a networked world while keeping out the worst.

You don't build WALLS—we need to be connected with the rest of the world in order to thrive. We build GATES—selectively allowing certain information/people/etc. in while blocking others.

Joshua talks about global war and peace to demonstrate how we should think about setting up these gates related to everything from national security to financing markets. It's mind-bending.

For our purposes, we'll move from the level of a nation to the level of an individual psyche and talk about our PERSONAL war and peace. Who will win the battle within ourselves? The best within or the worst?

A key tactic in this battle is to practice Psychological Hard Gatekeeping.

What would that look like?

Well, just as a nation will need to get *very* good at identifying and keeping destructive forces OUT of its network, we will need to do the same.

How? Start with the most basic discipline to UNPLUG from the distractions and PLUG IN to wisdom. Swapping out the useless with the profound so we can see how to play our role in these revolutionary times.

Again, we're not talking about putting your head in the sand and moving off the grid and completely checking out. That would be an abdication of our responsibilities in these revolutionary times rather than an active engagement. Remember: Gates not walls.

We're talking about making TINY decisions to cultivate our wisdom and spiritual health. Meditating before hopping online. Choosing what sites you allow into your consciousness, recognizing the fact that a) your brain can only handle so much information and b) every tiny bit of information you allow in is influencing you—the effect of any one bit might be small, but when you aggregate and compound that over time, the effects are profound.

In a world of insanity, the world needs more wisdom.

What's one way you can put up some Hard Gatekeeping today—allowing more wisdom in and limiting the crazy?

P.S. Another gem from my chat with Charles Duhigg applies here. I asked him what one piece of wisdom he would share with someone passionate about optimizing his or her life. He said, *"Protect the eccentricities that allow you to think."*

He cited Bill Gates and his two weeks off to read and think. Andrew Carnegie and his morning bath. They DISCONNECTED so they could connect to something bigger than themselves and get clarity they simply wouldn't have otherwise.

What are YOUR eccentricities that allow you to think? Protect them.

## COMPLICATED VS. COMPLEX

*"That such predictions are often wrong and that we're so often surprised by events in economics or politics—is a reminder that complex systems like economies or elections are filled with mechanisms that upset the hopes of overconfident planners. Too often we look at some puzzle, say Iraqi politics or income inequality, and think it is merely 'complicated.' We should know better."*

~ Joshua Cooper Ramo

"When Holland chose the word 'complex,' he was making an important distinction. *Complicated* mechanisms can be designed, predicted, and controlled. Jet engines, artificial hearts, and your calculator are complicated in this sense. They may contain billions of interacting parts, but they can be laid out and repeatedly, predictably made and used. They don't change. *Complex* systems, by contrast, can't be so precisely engineered. They are hard to fully control. Human immunology is complex in this sense. The World Wide Web is complex. A rain forest is complex: It is made up of uncountable buzzing, connecting bugs and birds and trees. Order, to the extent that it exists in the Amazon basin, emerges moment by moment from countless, constant interactions. The uneven symphonic sound of *l'heure bleue*, that romantic stopping point at dawn when you can hear a forest waking bird by bird, is the sound of complexity engaging in a never-the-same-twice phase transition."

Complicated vs. Complex.

There's a big difference and we want to embrace it in our lives. As we strive to optimize + actualize, we often want to believe that our lives are simply "complicated"—hard to figure out but once you do, you're all set.

But, our lives are NOT complicated. They are COMPLEX. Very big difference.

With the wisdom to see the *complexity*, we realize that our lives are incredibly dynamic. We're NEVER going to figure it out once and for all. As [The Tools](#) guys say, we're never going to be exonerated from all future effort. Life will A.L.W.A.Y.S. present new challenge.

Embracing that reality is a very wise thing to do. Are you?

P.S. A helpful metaphor comes to mind that [Osho](#) shared back in the day. He tells us that our lives will never be perfectly balanced. Balance is a VERB not a noun. Life is more like walking over a tightrope than walking down the street. It's COMPLEX—requiring us to engage in this moment with the ever-changing demands of reality. Let's do that.

## THE 10,000 YEAR CLOCK

*"It means that the battlefields of power, which for most of human history have been over the control of space and territory, will now become—rather incredibly—about the control of time."*

~ Joshua Cooper Ramo

"Stewart Brand, one of the supporters of the clock and an early member of the New Caste too, would tell you that the idea for the clock emerged from a desire to emphasize, to *physicalize*, the importance of longer-term thinking in a way that no one could forget. We've all arrived now, Brand and the other clock masters worried, at a moment in history when no one has a view that extends much past his or her own life—or sometimes past the next election, or the next fashion season, or the next financial quarter. Our 'on to the next thing' economics and politics are eroding every slow, patient instinct. 'Civilization is revving itself into a pathetically short attention span...', one manifesto for the clock began. 'What we propose is both a mechanism and a myth.'"

Here's another way to cultivate the wisdom needed in our age: Think longer term.

Joshua tells the story of the 10,000 year clock that Jeff Bezos and others are working on to illustrate the importance of shifting our view from the next quarter to the next quarter century and quarter millennium.

From a positive perspective, we can now do more with less time. But... Shipwreck-wise: nearly everything in our current environment is squeezing patience and long-term thinking out of our consciousness. That is INSANE. We need to marry the benefits of speed with the wisdom of patience.

How can you extend your time horizon out a bit more? 5 years. 10 years. 25 years. 50 years. 100 years. 250 years. How can you align your choices today to best serve those future generations?

## REVOLUTION: TERRIFYING + WONDERFUL

*"Our aim is to help others escape from the chaos too, to improve their lives as a condition of our own happiness. This drive to make something from wildness is the point of politics, of philosophy, and of networks and art."*

~ Joshua Cooper Ramo

"Confronted with the fundamental question of a revolutionary age—*What do I do?*—we can see that the answer is *Whatever you want*. Here's what I mean: Living in a revolutionary age gives our work, no matter what we choose to do, the potential for enduring meaning. If you want to start a new political party, develop linked systems for end-of-life care, use networks to distribute foreign aid more efficiently, study ways that network economics can solve the destruction of the middle class—these and countless other problems now take on a historic aspect. What a gift that is. To be liberated from the mundane preservation of the old. To be pressed into the work of construction. To find such significance in how we spend our time on earth."

The world is changing at revolutionary speeds. It's our opportunity and obligation to play a role in the construction of a more just and beautiful world. That is, as Joshua says, both terrifying and wonderful.

Reading this book solidified my own personal commitment to use networks as a force for good. Specifically, to create a world-class set of tools that help us all connect with one another—an Oasis of virtue and wisdom in the midst of the chaos where we can deliberately plug in to the highest within ourselves while encouraging and supporting one another in doing the same.

As [Viktor Frankl](#) tells us: *"Ultimately, man should not ask what the meaning of his life is, but rather must recognize that it is he who is asked. In a word, each man is questioned by life; and he can only answer to life by answering for his own life; to life he can only respond by being responsible."*

What is the world asking of you? How will you lend a hand to the revolution?

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**Brian Johnson,**  
Chief Philosopher

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Joshua Cooper Ramo is the author of the international bestseller *The Age of the Unthinkable*. He is co-chief executive officer and vice chairman of Kissinger Associates and a member of the board of directors of FedEx and Starbucks. His first book, *No Visible Horizon*, chronicled his experiences as a competitive aerobatic pilot. Connect: [joshuacooperramo.com](http://joshuacooperramo.com).

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Brian Johnson loves helping people optimize their lives as he studies, embodies and teaches the fundamentals of optimal living—integrating ancient wisdom + modern science + common sense + virtue + mastery + fun. Learn more and optimize your life at [brianjohnson.me](http://brianjohnson.me).