

# WORTHY RIVAL

Whenever I heard his name, it made me uncomfortable. If I heard someone sing his praises, a wave of envy washed over me. I know him to be a good person and a nice guy. I respect his work a great deal and he has always been nice to me when we've met in professional settings. We do the same kind of work—write books and give talks about our views of the world. Though there are many others who do work similar to his and mine, for some reason I was obsessed with *him*. I wanted to outdo *him*. I would regularly check the online rankings to see how my books were selling and compare them to his. Not anyone else's. Just his. If mine were ranked higher, I would smile a gloaty smile and feel superior. If his were ranked higher, I would scowl and feel annoyed. He was my main competitor and I wanted to win.

Then something happened.

We were invited to share a stage at the same event. Though we had spoken at the same events before, this was the first time we would actually be on the stage at the same time. In the past I would speak on day one of a conference, for example, and he on day two. This time, however, we would be on stage at the same time, sitting side by side for a joint interview. The interviewer thought it would be “fun” if we introduced each other. I went first.

I looked at him, I looked at the audience, I looked back at him and I said, “You make me unbelievably insecure because all of your strengths are all my weaknesses. You can do so well the things that I really struggle to do.” The audience laughed. He looked at me and responded, “The

insecurity is mutual.” He went on to identify some of my strengths as areas in which he wished he could improve.

In an instant I understood the reason why I felt so competitive with him. The way I saw him had nothing to do with him. It had to do with me. When his name came up, it reminded me of the areas in which I grappled. Instead of investing my energy on improving myself—overcoming my weaknesses or building on my strengths—it was easier to focus on beating him. That’s how competition works, right? It’s a drive to win. The problem was, all the metrics of who was ahead and who was behind were arbitrary and I set the standards for comparison. Plus there was no finish line, so I was attempting to compete in an unwinnable race. I had made a classic finite-mindset blunder. The truth is, even though we do similar things, he isn’t my competitor, he is my rival. My very Worthy Rival.

To anyone who has spent time watching or playing games and sports, the notion of a finite competition where one player or one side beats the other to earn a title or prize is familiar. Indeed, to most of us, it is so ingrained in the way we think that we automatically adopt an “us” against “them” attitude whenever there are other players in the field, regardless of the nature of the game. If we are a player in an infinite game, however, we have to stop thinking of other players as competitors to be beaten and start thinking of them as Worthy Rivals who can help us become better players.

A Worthy Rival is another player in the game worthy of comparison. Worthy Rivals may be players in our industry or outside our industry. They may be our sworn enemies, our sometimes collaborators or colleagues. It doesn’t even matter whether they are playing with a finite or an infinite mindset, so long as we are playing with an infinite mindset. Regardless of who they are or where we find them, the main point is that they do something (or many things) as well as or better than us. They may make a superior product, command greater loyalty, are better leaders or act with a clearer sense of purpose than we do. We don’t need to admire everything about them, agree with them or even like them. We simply acknowledge that they have strengths and abilities from which we could learn a thing or two.

We get to choose our own Worthy Rivals and we would be wise to select them strategically. There is no value in picking other players whom we constantly outflank simply to make ourselves feel superior. That has little to no value to our own growth. They don’t have to be the biggest players or

any of the incumbents. We choose them to be our Worthy Rivals because there is something about them that reveals to us our weaknesses and pushes us to constantly improve . . . which is essential if we want to be strong enough to stay in the game.

From the mid-1970s into the 1980s, Chris Evert Lloyd and Martina Navratilova were two of the dominant players in women's tennis. Though they were competitors when they met on the court, each driven to win, it was the respect they had for each other that helped both of them become better tennis players. "I appreciate what she did for me as a rival, to lift my game," Lloyd said once, speaking fondly of Navratilova. "And I think she appreciated what I did for her." It was because of Navratilova, for example, that Evert had to change the way she played. She could no longer rely on spending time on the baseline. She had to learn to become a more aggressive player. This is what a Worthy Rival does for us. They push us in a way that few others can. Not even our coach. And in the case of Evert and Navratilova, it elevated their own games and the game of tennis.

The impact of this subtle mind shift can be profound in how we make decisions and prioritize resources. Traditional competition forces us to take on an attitude of winning. A Worthy Rival inspires us to take on an attitude of improvement. The former focuses our attention on the outcome, the latter focuses our attention on process. That simple shift in perspective immediately changes how we see our own businesses. It is the focus on process and constant improvement that helps reveal new skills and boosts resilience. An excessive focus on beating our competition not only gets exhausting over time, it can actually stifle innovation.

Another reason to adjust our perspective toward seeing strong players in our field as Worthy Rivals is it helps keep us honest. It's like a runner who is so obsessed with winning, they forget the rules, ethics or why they started running in the first place. They may spend time and energy to undermine someone who is running faster than they are and resort to tripping their competitor. Or perhaps they will take performance-enhancing drugs to give them a secret edge. Both tactics will absolutely increase the chances they will win the race, but such strategies will leave them ill equipped for success beyond those races. And eventually those strategies run dry and they are still left a slow runner. When we view the other players as Worthy Rivals it removes the pressure of being in a win-at-any-cost struggle and so by default we feel less need to act unethically or illegally. Upholding the

values by which we operate becomes more important than the score, which actually motivates us to be more honest (organizations or politicians who choose to do the right thing rather than what helps them get ahead are good examples).

As for my Worthy Rival, when I thought of Adam Grant as a competitor, it didn't help me. Rather, it fed my finite mindset. I was more concerned with comparing arbitrary ratings than I was with advancing my own Cause. I devoted too much time and energy to worrying about what he was doing rather than focusing that energy on how I could be better at what I do.

Since that day when I learned to shift my mindset, I no longer compare my book rankings to Adam's (or anyone else's, for that matter). My mindset has shifted away from channeling my feelings of insecurity against him to partnering with him to advance our common cause. We have become dear friends (he kindly gave this book a proofread and helped make it better) and I feel genuine happiness when I hear his name or see that he is doing well. I want his ideas to spread. In fact, everyone reading this book should also read *Give and Take* and *Originals*; they are both essential reading in and out of the business world. (Fun fact: In an infinite game, we can both succeed. Turns out people can actually buy more than one book.) An infinite mindset embraces abundance whereas a finite mindset operates with a scarcity mentality. In the Infinite Game we accept that "being the best" is a fool's errand and that multiple players can do well at the same time.

## **Worthy Rivals Can Help Us Get Better at *What We Do***

When Alan Mulally left the airplane manufacturer Boeing Commercial to become the CEO of the ailing Ford Motor Company in 2006, it would be the start of a journey that would result in one of the greatest turnarounds in automotive history. After the formal press conference to announce his new job at Ford, Mulally fielded some questions. One reporter asked what kind of car he drove. "A Lexus," Mulally replied. "It's the finest car in the world." The new CEO of Ford just admitted that the car made by Toyota that he drove was better than anything Ford made! To some it was sacrilege.

But to Mulally, a man who prefers the truth, even when it's uncomfortable, it was an honest assessment.

In the 15 years before Mulally took over, Ford had lost 25 percent market share. Now it was headed toward bankruptcy. Indeed, Mulally needed a turnaround strategy, but first he wanted to learn as much as he could about the company. He wanted to understand Ford's health beyond the balance sheet. One of the things he learned was that consumers were disenchanted with the brand. Ford cars (at least in the United States) had a reputation for being unexciting, unreliable gas guzzlers. Perhaps *this* was part of the reason people weren't buying Fords like they used to.

Historically, Detroit's car companies, including Ford, were obsessed with market share as a primary metric for comparison. However, Mulally knew that some of the most profitable car companies in the world were also some of the smallest. He understood quickly that it wasn't in Ford's long-term interest to just grow market share—something that could be accomplished with sales promotions and cost cutting (which was exactly the turnaround plan Ford presented to Mulally when he arrived). That strategy would only work for a few years. "We're not going to chase market share," he said. "We're not going to put out vehicles where demand is not there and then discount and make it even worse." If Ford was to stay in the game, they would have to change the way they played the game. And that meant it had to relearn to make cars that people actually wanted to drive.

One of the first things Mulally did after joining the company was to start driving home in a different model Ford every night. After trying every single car the company made, he asked to drive home a Toyota Camry. The only problem was Ford didn't have one for him to drive. It was common practice for Ford to buy the cars of other manufacturers so that their engineers could take the car to pieces to see how they are made, but there were none available for anyone to actually drive. Think about that for a second. The senior executives of a major car company that was struggling to sell cars had little idea what anyone else's cars were actually like to drive. If car buyers test-drive their options, shouldn't Ford's executives know what they are trying? Mulally had the company buy a whole fleet of cars made by other companies and instructed his senior managers to drive them.

When he called the Lexus the finest car in the world, Mulally wasn't trying to make the people at Ford feel bad. He was offering them a Worthy

Rival. He was convinced that in order to save Ford, they would need to be frank about the state of their own products and processes and respectful students of the other players in their industry. Toyota was a company that, as Mulally describes it, “[makes] products that people want . . . with less resources and less time than anybody in the world.” They were a benchmark against which Ford could push themselves to improve the quality of their own cars and how they made them. And if they could pull that off, the profits would follow. For Mulally, the reason to study the other car manufacturers wasn’t simply to copy them or outsell them, but to learn from them. “I was never trying to beat GM or Chrysler,” Mulally says. “We were always focused on the Just Cause and we used our benchmarking against our competition as data insights on where we could continuously improve our operation.” Continuously improving their process would help them make better product, which would help them be more effective at advancing Henry Ford’s original Just Cause: to provide safe and efficient transportation for everyone, to open the highways to all mankind. Henry Ford’s Cause also served as a filter for other decisions. Mulally sold off brands like Jaguar, Land Rover and Volvo, for example. Ford originally bought them so they could compete in as many automotive categories as possible—something Mulally believed distracted Ford from why the company was founded in the first place.

Then came the 2008 stock market crash, which was particularly devastating for the U.S. car industry. Without a government bailout, GM and Chrysler would go bankrupt. Thanks to a nearly \$24 billion loan that Mulally had taken out in 2006 to help Ford reinvent itself, combined with the steady improvements the company was making in its operations and products, Ford would be able to weather the downturn without any government assistance. So when Mulally showed up to testify in front of Congress before the bailouts were given, he could have insisted that the government not give money to GM or Chrysler. A CEO who sees the other players as their competitors would have relished watching them go bankrupt, leaving Ford as the only major U.S. car manufacturer to survive. Surely that’s winning?

Because Mulally saw the other makers as Worthy Rivals, he actually endorsed the bailout. He knew that keeping those companies around would only serve to help make Ford a better company. He also knew that Ford’s rivals were part of a larger ecosystem. If they went bankrupt, so would

many of the suppliers. Which could also destroy Ford. So Mulally put together plans to also help many of the auto suppliers weather the downturn. Unfortunately, the leaders of the troubled GM and Chrysler, still operating with a finite mindset, rejected Ford's request to work together for the good of the industry. In contrast, Honda, Toyota and Nissan did work with Ford to help keep major suppliers, on which they also relied, in business. The infinite-minded players understood that the best option for their own survival, and indeed the ultimate goal of an infinite leader, is to keep the game in play.

## **Worthy Rivals Can Help Us Get Clearer on Why We Do It**

By the early 1980s, the computer revolution was in full swing. And for Apple, one of the companies that was leading the computer revolution, the true value of their rival had little to do with product improvement. It was bigger than that. Their Worthy Rival helped them better clarify their Cause and rally their people. The mere existence of their Rival reminded everyone inside and outside the company what they stood for—the reason they went into business in the first place. “They were the navy. We were the pirates.”

During the 1970s, IBM had the lion's share of the market in mainframe computers—huge, room-filling machines that offered companies massive computing power. But IBM resisted developing their own “microcomputers,” as they used to be called, believing them to have insufficient computing power to meet a business's needs. Personal computers, IBM believed, had no place in the office.

That all changed in 1981. Seeing how well the pioneers of personal computing—Commodore, Tandy and Apple—were doing in getting their products to businesses, IBM changed its tune. Flush with cash, IBM was able to invest massive amounts of money to develop their own personal computer. They paid exorbitant salaries to steal some of the best and brightest engineers in the business from other companies, including Apple. And in just twelve months, IBM introduced its “PC” to the world.

Apple had the biggest market share in personal computers before IBM showed up. Which meant that they had the most to lose when IBM entered

the market. Whereas a finite-minded player would likely panic at such news, an infinite-minded player, like Apple, did the exact opposite. In August 1981, in the same month IBM's PC first went on sale, Apple ran a full-page ad in *The Wall Street Journal* with the headline: "Welcome, IBM. Seriously." The rest of the ad tells us everything we need to know about how Apple viewed this new player—not as a competitor, but as a Worthy Rival.

"Welcome to the most exciting and important marketplace since the computer revolution began 35 years ago," read the opening sentence of Apple's ad. "Putting real computer power in the hands of the individual is already improving the way people work, think, learn, communicate and spend their leisure hours," the ad continued. "Over the next decade, the growth of the personal computer will continue in logarithmic leaps. We look forward to responsible competition in the massive effort to distribute this American technology to the world. And we appreciate the magnitude of your commitment. Because what we are doing is increasing social capital by enhancing individual productivity." Apple signed the letter to their new Rival with the words: "Welcome to the task." Apple was trying to advance a Just Cause, and IBM was going to help them.

IBM accepted the challenge. And because of their dominance in the business world, IBM was able to leverage those relationships to sell their new personal computers into large companies. This made Big Blue, as IBM was affectionately called, the safe and obvious choice for any procurement manager who was responsible for buying PCs for their company. "No one ever got fired for buying IBM," the saying went. To further grow their business, IBM allowed other computer makers to "clone" or use their operating system in their products. Apple refused to follow suit. If someone wanted Apple's operating system, they had to buy an Apple. Unable to clone Apple's OS and because it was expensive to develop another operating system for the mass market, most other computer makers licensed IBM's operating system to produce IBM-compatible products. And with that, the PC became the industry standard in the business world and beyond.

IBM helped Apple turn the personal computer into a necessity on every desk and a basic household appliance in every home. But IBM did much more than that for Apple. Apple used IBM as a foil to help tell the story of what they stood for in a way that was clearer and more compelling. Just Causes exist in our imaginations, but companies and products are real. And



for a person or a company with a clear sense of Cause, that individual or organization itself can become the tangible symbol of their intangible vision. It's easier for us to follow a real company or a leader than an abstract idea. And it's easier to form a compelling narrative for our Just Cause when we can point to a tangible representation of the alternative.

"They were the navy, predictable, sold to corporations," is how John Couch, one of Apple's early employees, described IBM. "We wanted to be the pirates that empowered individuals to be creative." Like Republicans and Democrats, like the Soviet Union and the United States, IBM and Apple stood as symbols of alternative ideologies looking for followers. IBM represented business, stability and consistency. Apple stood for individuality, creativity and thinking differently. By playing up the contrasts to the public, Apple moved from being a leader in the personal computing revolution to being a leader of like-minded revolutionaries.

Based on the standard metrics against which we measure the quality of a computer—price, speed and memory, for example—PCs and Apples were basically equal. In fact, the IBM clones were often quite a bit cheaper. Where competitors almost always only compare the features and benefits of their products, Apple chose to engage with IBM on a level higher than that. Competitors compete for customers. Rivals look for followers. To Apple's followers, IBM was the past and Apple was the future. And to IBM devotees, Apple was a toy for creative types and IBMs were for serious people doing serious work. This was bigger than products and features. This was now a game of religion.

The manner in which Apple responded to IBM entering the PC market was the total opposite of what normally happens. When a new company joins an industry with such force, it often spooks the incumbents. They frequently lose sight of their vision and start focusing on competing with the new player based on product comparisons and other standard metrics. Which means, if they weren't already playing with a finite mindset before, the choice to view the new entrant as a competitor rather than a Worthy Rival will drag them into the finite quagmire before too long. This is exactly what happened to the Canadian cell phone maker BlackBerry.

Over a quarter of a century after IBM stormed into Apple's market, Apple did the same thing to BlackBerry. Except unlike Apple's choice to view IBM as a Worthy Rival that could help them better clarify what they

stood for, BlackBerry chose to see Apple as a competitor to be beaten. And they paid a hefty price for that finite-minded decision.

Before the iPhone, BlackBerry was the second largest cell phone operating system in the world. Their high performing, highly durable and very reliable products made them the must-have option in government and in many companies. They owned the business market. Even after Apple introduced their iPhone in 2007, BlackBerry's momentum continued to carry them to a record high 20 percent share of cell phone sales in 2009. As iPhones became more and more popular, however, BlackBerry panicked. BlackBerry's leaders could have chosen to draw a contrast between their philosophies and Apple's, as Apple had done with IBM decades before. They could have used Apple as a foil to highlight their own vision of the world, one that revolved around the security and reliability needs of business and government. But they didn't. Instead, BlackBerry responded to the iPhone's rising popularity by trying to copy it. First, they started offering apps and games for their existing devices, which dramatically slowed their products' performance. Then they abandoned their iconic, full QWERTY keyboards and introduced touch screen options. They never really worked as well as iPhones and were much less durable than their other models.

Sadly, this is a common scenario. Disruption, remember, is often a symptom of a finite mindset. Leaders playing with a finite mindset often miss the opportunity to use a disruptive event in their industry to clarify their Cause. Instead, they double down on the finite game and simply start copying what the other players are doing with the hope that it will work for them too. And in the case of BlackBerry, it didn't. They abandoned the chance to be leaders for a Cause and opted to become followers of a product. Obsessed with trying to beat Apple, they actually lost sight of their own vision. They forgot why they went into business in the first place. And in short order, BlackBerry went into a steep and steady decline. By 2013 the company had less than 1 percent market share, a nearly 99 percent drop in just four years. Where once they dominated, today BlackBerry is an insignificant player and no company's Worthy Rival.

IBM served as Apple's Worthy Rival for many years. Eventually, as computers became ubiquitous and the market changed, IBM dropped out of the PC game. The loss of their Rival did not mean Apple won, however. They quickly found a new symbol of safe, stable, corporate-mindedness in

Microsoft (“I’m a Mac, I’m a PC,” for those who remember). Like IBM, as Microsoft’s own Cause became fuzzier, it no longer offered the clear ideological contrast to Apple that it once did. So who is Apple’s Worthy Rival now?

Perhaps Apple’s new Worthy Rivals are Google and Facebook. Google and Facebook now represent the Big Brother of the internet; always watching us, tracking our every move in order to sell our data to companies who want to target their advertising to us (which helps Google and Facebook make more money). This has become an “industry standard.” Apple still seems to be fighting for the rights of individuals and challenging the status quo. The company has become an outspoken advocate for individual privacy. Unlike their Rivals, Apple has decided not to sell the data they collect as a means of driving revenue. They have also stood up against the government and denied them access to our private text messages. Even though the world around them has changed, for over 40 years Apple has found Worthy Rivals to help keep them focused on the very cause upon which the company was founded.

## **Cause Blindness**

I have a friend who is so focused on her Cause, it is as if she has forgotten that there are other points of view in the world besides her own. My friend, sadly, has labeled anyone who has a different opinion as wrong, stupid or morally corrupt. My friend suffers from Cause Blindness.

Cause Blindness is when we become so wrapped up in our Cause or so wrapped up in the “wrongness” of the other player’s Cause, that we fail to recognize their strengths or our weaknesses. We falsely believe that they are unworthy of comparison simply because we disagree with them, don’t like them or find them morally repugnant. We are unable to see where they are in fact effective or better than we are at what we do and that we can actually learn from them.

Cause Blindness blunts humility and exaggerates arrogance, which in turn stunts innovation and reduces the flexibility we need to play the long game. Less able to engage in any kind of honest or productive practice of constant improvement, we end up repeating mistakes or continue to do

many things poorly. Plus, hubris increases the chance that any weaknesses our organization may have are left open to exploitation by other players. All of which contributes to the draining of will and resources we need to stay in the game. Whenever I try to show my friend that those players she finds despicable are really good at certain things and she should respect them for that, she mocks me and thinks me a turncoat because I dare pay her competitor a compliment.

As hard as it may be to recognize a player as one of our Worthy Rivals, especially if we find them disagreeable, to do so is the best way to become better players ourselves. “The more I questioned these guys, the more I came to understand that the successful criminals were good profilers,” explained John Douglas, retired FBI unit chief and pioneer of criminal profiling. Douglas understood that, as unconscionable as we all find serial killers, for example, the best way to catch one was to acknowledge that they were very good at the exact same thing that the FBI does . . . which meant the FBI had to be better. Having Worthy Rivals—criminals adept at evading the FBI—pushes the FBI to constantly improve their techniques.

Having a rival worthy of comparison does not mean that their cause is moral, ethical or serves the greater good. It just means they excel at certain things and reveal to us where we can make improvements. The very manner in which they play the game can challenge us, inspire us or force us to improve. Who we choose to be our Worthy Rivals is entirely up to us. And it is in the best interest of the Infinite Game to keep our options open.

## **Don’t Confuse Losing Your Worthy Rival with Winning the Game**

It was soon after the fall of the Berlin Wall that the United States committed what may have been one of the greatest foreign policy blunders of the 20th century. America declared that it had “won” the Cold War. Except it hadn’t. By this point in the book, we all know the mantra: in the Infinite Game, there is no such thing as winning. This is true in business or in global politics. America didn’t win the Cold War. The Soviet Union, drained of will and resources, dropped out of the game.

The Cold War met all the standards of an Infinite Game. Unlike finite warfare, where there are agreed-upon conventions for play, easily identifiable sides and a clear definition of when the war will end (e.g., a land grab or some other easily measurable, finite objective). In stark contrast, the Cold War was often played out with proxy players, there were no ground rules and there was certainly no clearly defined objective that would signal to all sides that the war will end. As much as the United States and the West talked about “defeating” the Soviet Union and “winning” the Cold War, short of an all-out nuclear war—which was something neither side wanted—few could imagine or predict exactly what winning looked like. And there was no treaty that ended the Cold War. Instead, both sides kept playing, always trying to improve the manner in which they played, with an unknown sense of where it was all going. So when the Berlin Wall came down in 1989, it was not something either predicted would happen.

Like in business, times change and so do the players. And, like in business, if a big company goes bankrupt, it doesn’t mean the game is over or that any company is the winner. The players left standing know that other companies will rise up and new ones will join the industry. When our most important Worthy Rival, the one who pushes us more than any other, drops out of the game, it does not mean that there are others on the bench waiting to immediately rush in to play either. It can take years for a new or different Rival or Rivals to replace them. The advanced player in the Infinite Game understands this and works to remain humble at the loss of a major Rival. Cautious not to let hubris or a finite mindset take hold, they play knowing that it is just a matter of time before new players emerge. Patience is a virtue in infinite play. This was not how America acted.

After the Soviet Union left the game, America suffered a sort of Cause Blindness and believed itself to be unrivaled. And so, it acted accordingly. It acted like a victor. Even if well intentioned, it started to impose its will on the world, unchecked, for about 11 years. It anointed itself the world’s police force, sending troops to the former Yugoslavia, for example, and imposing no-fly zones over sovereign nations. Things that would have been much harder, if not impossible, to do if the Soviet Union were still around. Without identifying our Worthy Rivals, strong players start to falsely believe they can control the direction of the game or the other players. But that’s impossible. The Infinite Game is like a stock market; companies list and delist but no one can control the market.

Highly successful players with lots of money and many strengths can get away with ignoring their weaknesses for a while. But not forever. Fast-growing companies with strong products, marketing and balance sheets, for example, often neglect to give time and attention to leadership training or to actively nurturing their culture. Things that can come back to haunt them later. Groupon is just one example. Hailed by the business press for their product innovation and rate of growth, the leaders neglected their people. Which, when the growth slowed and other companies matched their product, became their Achilles' heel. Uber is another example. They may have pioneered ridesharing technology, but the company has suffered more because of a neglected culture than any product failing. When Dara Khosrowshahi replaced Travis Kalanick as CEO in 2017, it was done with the express purpose of fixing the company culture.

America would have been well served to look for new Worthy Rivals that may have helped the nation prepare for the next chapter of the Cold War. The nation's leaders could have looked beyond strengths like military and economic might to focus on some of the weaknesses they had been neglecting for so many years. But that's not what happened. Relying on the manner of play it had developed and perfected during the years of Cold War 1.0, America was unable to see the rise of new Rivals that aimed to check its actions and ambitions.

## **Cold War 2.0**

There are three tensions that govern the Cold War—nuclear, ideological and economic. (Not coincidentally, these things overlap with Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness as stated in the Declaration of Independence. For America and all nations, these things are existential. They are the things worth bearing any burden or paying any price to defend). During Cold War 1.0, all three of those tensions were conveniently colocated in a single Rival—the Soviet Union. The two nations each possessed more nuclear weapons by an order of magnitude greater than all other nuclear-armed nations combined. Both nations were ideological exporters looking for customers and allies. America was spreading the gospel of democracy and capitalism and the Soviets were proselytizers of communism. And their economies

were the two largest economies in the world from the end of World War II until the fall of the Berlin Wall—the entire length of Cold War 1.0.

Having one primary Worthy Rival has huge advantages. It provides for a single point of focus for strategies to be developed, resources to be allocated and the attentions of internal factions to be pointed. Much was written after the events of September 11, 2001, about the lack of cooperation among America's intelligence services, for example. This wasn't a new development. Those agencies were always territorial and competitive with each other. The difference was, when America knew who its Worthy Rival was, when push came to shove, all the agencies could put aside their internal gripes to come together to face the common threat. Absent the identification of any new Worthy Rivals, the internal fighting among so many of America's institutions continued unchecked. Even Republicans and Democrats used to be able to agree that the Soviet Union represented a greater threat to the United States than each other and could always come together in a clear common cause. That is no longer the case. Absent an identified external Worthy Rival, the two parties now see each other as the existential threat to the nation. All the while, the real threats to America grow ever stronger.

So while America was focusing its energies against itself, it failed to see that the Cold War was still alive and well. Except, unlike during Cold War 1.0, in Cold War 2.0, there is not one Worthy Rival, but many. The nuclear threat posed by the Soviet Union has been replaced by North Korea and others. The Soviet economic rivalry has been replaced by China (which is on course to surpass America's economy). The ideological rivalry that the Soviet Union represented has been replaced by extremists acting under the guise of religion. Plus Russia still continues to test and check America's resolve when possible across all three tensions too.

Like in business, the emergence of new players necessarily changes the way the game must be played. Blockbuster—the sole superpower in the movie rental business—failed to appreciate that a small company like Netflix and an emerging technology like the internet required them to reexamine their entire business model. Big publishers doubled down on old models when Amazon showed up instead of asking how they could update and upgrade their models in the face of a new digital age. And instead of asking themselves, “What do we need to do to change with the times,” taxi companies chose to sue the ridesharing companies to protect their business

models instead of learning how to adapt and provide a better taxi service. Sears got so big and so rich from sending out paper catalogues for so many decades that they were too slow to adapt to the rise of big-box stores like Walmart and ecommerce. And believing itself without Rival, the behemoth that was Myspace didn't even see Facebook coming. What got us here won't get us there, and knowing who our Worthy Rivals are is the best way to help us improve and adapt before it's too late.

Without a Worthy Rival we risk losing our humility and our agility. Failure to have a Worthy Rival increases the risk that a once-mighty infinite player, with a strong sense of Cause, will gently slide into becoming just another finite player looking to rack up wins. Where once the organization fought primarily for the good of others, for the good of the Cause, without that Worthy Rival, they are more likely to fight primarily for the good of themselves. And when that happens, when the hubris sets in, the organization will quickly find its weaknesses exposed and too rigid for the kind of flexibility they need to stay in the game.