
Reinventing the Future

In the fall of 1977, Charles Vollmer appeared to have it all—a highly decorated fighter pilot, awarded six Distinguished Flying Crosses and eleven Air Medals during his 175 combat missions in the Vietnam War, and married to his high school sweetheart, a beautiful and loving woman. Other men on the base looked up to him, and the General considered him one of the best. But all was not well. “I was just hollow,” Chuck says today. “Something was missing. I was recognized but not fulfilled.”

One night that fall, walking alone and depressed down a dank street in Yokota, Japan, Chuck looked up and challenged God. “If you’re up there, prove you exist,” he muttered indignantly. The next day, he reported for duty as usual, but something was very different. The General, typically friendly and on Chuck’s side, had bad news. Rather than heading for a cockpit position, Chuck was told to go to the command post. “Command post duty was a demotion,” Chuck explains. “I was outraged. How could this be? It was a job that anyone could do—a job beneath me.” With that, despite being something of a star on the base, Chuck was sent to cool his heels for a year in a highly-secured basement facility.

Down in the command post, Chuck encountered a seasoned Master Sergeant who sat quietly reading a Bible. “You actually believe that crap?” Chuck scoffed. “That got me a harrumph,” he recalls. “He thought I was a jerk, and he wasn’t wrong.” Day after day, the 12-hour shift passed in silence. Finally, bored out of his mind, Chuck accepted his own copy of a Bible as a gift from the sergeant’s wife, and began to read it.

Two months went by with Chuck challenging virtually every passage of Scripture that pricked his heart. Then one night in his apartment, Chuck was jolted awake at two in the

morning by an apparition. “Christ appeared to me,” he says, of that transformative moment. “He told me I had been granted two months of instruction, answered questions, and a few minor miracles. Now, it was time to choose or reject Him.” Chagrined, Chuck asked this divine interloper, “If I accept Your offer, do I have to become a Holy Roller?”—a roll that he was reticent to take. To his surprise, Jesus chuckled and said, “I want you just as you are.”

From that moment on, as the fighter pilot who became one of His squadron’s black sheep, Chuck developed a deep but unconventional relationship with God. “I tend to be an anti-establishment kind of guy, and I’m not very religious,” he explains. “But I tried to understand Jesus and what made him tick. Why was the Firstborn of creation born in the flesh in a lowly barn? Why did he choose a path of suffering, sacrifice and servitude? Why did he hang out with the marginalized? And, why did He speak truth to power in such a way that led to ridicule and His execution? Through these and many other questions, I slowly yielded to His way and allowed Him to orchestrate a future that He designed specifically for me.”

Over the ensuing years, Chuck pursued a deepening and often turbulent relationship with his Mentor, maintaining an authenticity that others often sacrifice for religious conformity. He still carries that same Bible, dog-eared and falling apart. And, by grounding himself in his faith, Chuck’s life took on a new purpose. “The world’s rewards are prestige, passion, power and wealth, which are adornments to the outside of the cup but never filling,” he says. “In the four decades since that night in Japan, I’ve learned that God’s rewards are love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, gentleness, faithfulness and self-control—all things that didn’t come naturally to



me—and if I allowed His transformation, I could make an impact by tending to the needs of others.”

Though Chuck had, in a sense, found his way home, his path was anything but straight. Over the decades, his professional path took him from fighter pilot; to test pilot; to aerospace engineer, designer and marketer; to corporate executive; to international consultant; to serial entrepreneur; to author, as well as a half-dozen side trips to miscellaneous misadventures. Eventually, after thirteen different careers, he set his sights on his ultimate legacy: mass-producing small businesses and millions of new jobs at the base of America’s socio-economic pyramid. That’s the mission—as crucial as it is ambitious—of Jobenomics, the concept Chuck has dedicated his personal and professional legacy to realizing. “Essentially, Jobenomics is a platform with a research library on the economic, community, business, and workforce development challenges facing America,” Chuck explains. “While we support big business and government job creation, Jobenomics’ top priority is serving the small and self-employed business community that employs 80 percent of all Americans and produced almost 80 percent of all new jobs this decade. We can help startup businesses succeed and restore the American Dream by focusing on the demographics most in need, and with the highest potential—women, minorities, new workforce entrants, veterans and the financially-distressed who want a job or to start a business.”

Jobenomics started as a book project in 2007. At the time, Chuck was an advisor to the McCain presidential campaign team. Charged with identifying national security concerns, he drafted a report about the unstable and unsustainable nature of America’s economic model. His thesis stated that the poor economic security would prove to be an important national security issue, but the campaign ignored him. “They threw it all in the trash,” Chuck recalls. “Disheartened and dejected, I was ready to switch sides and vote for Obama!”

Concerned by the research he had done, Chuck took his findings to Wall Street and began to lecture about sustainable economies and labor force growth. Over the next two years, he researched and wrote what would become the first of many Jobenomics books, reports, articles and blogs that attracted the attention of tens of millions of people. “Before I wrote the first book, I unwittingly predicted many of the structural flaws

that precipitated the Great Recession, including the exorbitant use of exotic financial instruments, called derivatives, which played a pivotal role in the sub-prime mortgage crisis,” Chuck remembers. “I didn’t know the mortgage crisis was going to happen, but I knew the environment, and I see the same risk factors persisting today. Due to sclerotic GDP growth, the dearth of business startups and the hollowing out of the American middle class, the U.S. economy is not sustainable with more citizens departing the labor force than entering. In addition, the U.S. labor force is transitioning from a standard full-time workforce to a contingent workforce replete with part-time, task-oriented, and automated (smart machines and algorithms) workers. Today, contingent workers represent 40 percent of the U.S. workforce and will soon be the dominant form of labor due to rapidly advancing digital and network technologies, adverse and arcane business and job creation practices, and the ethnological or cultural differences of next generation workers. Moreover, our welfare system is becoming an increasingly attractive alternative to workfare in 21st Century America.”

Driven by his vision of a stable, safe economy, Chuck continued to produce research and recommendations for highly-scalable business and job creation. He met with over a thousand government, business, and community leaders, incorporating their very best ideas into the Jobenomics body of work. Today, the Jobenomics platform consists of nine books, all authored by Chuck and regularly updated to feature the most current economic and labor force issues, trends, and solutions. It also features special reports on cutting edge issues like international competition, the emerging digital economy, and numerous articles on how the Trump Administration can effectively realize their bold economic vision of 4 percent GDP growth and 25 million new jobs over the next decade.

Over the last decade, over 20 million people have been reached by Jobenomics, and the platform has garnished widespread support for its economic, community, business, and workforce development programs. The Jobenomics.com website receives an average of 30,000 page views each month, with the majority of viewers spending a half hour or more online, not including the amount of time spent reviewing volumes of downloaded material. Jobenomics is advancing four national initiatives, including Energy

Technology Revolution, Network Technology Revolution, Urban Mining, and Urban Agriculture. These initiatives aim to assist with modernization of the national economy at a time when too many experts are looking to the past for employment solutions. "You hear a lot of optimistic rhetoric about trying to revitalize manufacturing jobs that will likely be automated or outsourced to the contingent workforce," Chuck points out. "By contrast, Jobenomics has its eyes on the future. Its four focus initiatives have the potential to create tens of millions of new jobs as the digital economy continues to grow, and as our energy and agricultural ecosystems transform."

To date, over a dozen local leaders have launched Jobenomics programs in their own communities to empower women, minorities, youth, veterans, and other disadvantaged populations with tremendous untapped potential. Urban Renewal Jobenomics initiatives are now being considered in impoverished communities in New York City, Baltimore, Phoenix, Charlotte, and Erie. Chuck and his team are also working with national organizations to implement Jobenomics Community-Based Business Generators, which are designed to mass-produce startup businesses and provide skills-based training and certification programs. For instance, its strategic partnership with The Hope Collection will allow Jobenomics to offer over 9,000 online technical training and certification programs. eCyclingUSA, a company where Chuck serves as CEO, is working to recycle waste from used electronics and appliances to generate a revenue streams to pay for skills-based training and microbusiness loans. And his partnership with ACTS Freedom Farms is intended to foster 25,000 veteran-owned micro-farms to create over 100,000 new jobs in the next five years. "The idea is to create jobs within months and careers within a year," Chuck explains. "And we do all this with our sights set on building the sustainable, resilient economy of tomorrow, partnering with organizations like EmeraldPlanet to disseminate best green business practices and deploying green technologies."

Through Jobenomics, Chuck's vision boldly goes where few have gone before—the product of a defiantly independent and contrarian mindset that developed at an early age. He was born on a U.S. air base in Germany, where his father—also a pilot who flew in the Berlin Airlift—was stationed with the post-WWII occupation

forces. Five years later, the family moved to Falls Church, Virginia, and relocated again to Lincoln, Nebraska. Chuck was ten when his father passed away of a brain tumor. His mother took the loss extremely hard. "She wasn't ready to be a widow with three kids, with the oldest (me) being particularly hard to handle," Chuck says. "The last words that my father said to me were, 'You are now the man of the house.'"

After Chuck's father died, his mother moved the family to be closer to her relatives in Lewisburg, Pennsylvania. The family struggled to adjust to their new normal. As an adolescent, Chuck knew he needed to become financially independent as soon as possible, so he got a job as a checkout boy at Weis Markets, the local grocery store. The supermarket helped him get a scholarship to Bucknell University, the local college, and Chuck dreamed of one day becoming a manager at one of their local grocery stores. Then fate intervened.

One summer day in 1964, Chuck was bored, hanging out with friends from high school, when a recruitment ad for the military played over the radio. Service Academy try-outs were being held in Harrisburg, a mere 60 miles away, and it was a paid weekend. "I said to my friends, let's go volunteer for this," Chuck remembers. "We'll drink some beer in Harrisburg and have a good time, and it gives us a reason to get out of town." The trip was intended more as a lark than anything, but at the last minute, Chuck's friends bailed. He decided to go on his own, and because he didn't have any distractions, he focused on the battery of tests before him.

Day one was academic testing, and day two was athletics. At the end of the weekend, the attendees were asked to declare. Of all the boys there, he was the only one who didn't have a clue what was going on. "I raised my hand and asked, declare what?" he recalls. "The Sergeant says, 'Well you've got the Army, Navy, Air Force, and Coast Guard.' He talked about Annapolis and West Point. I'd never even heard of them! I knew about the Air Force because of my dad, so that's what I picked. Then they told me I needed to pick a sponsor to get admitted." Chuck again raised his hand and asked, "What is a 'sponsor?'" The now exasperated Sergeant replied, "A Congressman, Senator, the Vice President, or the President. Son, why don't you select them all and maybe you'll get lucky?" With that, he shook his head and left.

Months later, in April of 1965, Chuck got a call from his Congressman. He and his mother went to meet him, but were told that Chuck hadn't been accepted. The Congressman brusquely congratulated him, told him to try again next year, and abruptly ushered the Vollmers out of the room. Two months later, unexpectedly, Chuck received a certified letter, this time from President Lyndon Johnson. Much to his surprise, it was a Presidential appointment only weeks before he was expected to report for duty.

By that time, Chuck was dating Trish, his high school sweetheart and future wife. They had met as square dancing partners in sixth grade, but had only recently begun dating. He called Trish and told her he was going to Colorado, to the Air Force Academy. "I hadn't even seen a picture of the Academy," he remembers. "I knew it was Colorado, but I didn't know where. I just got on the airplane! There wasn't any internet then, so I couldn't just Google it. I was thrilled—not because I wanted to be in the military, but because I was curious, excited for an adventure and for relief of the burden of being a failed man-of-the-house."

Chuck, independent-minded, rebellious, and entrepreneurial, never had a true military mindset. After his first year, he thought about quitting. But Trish moved out to Colorado that summer, giving him renewed stamina to knuckle down and see it through. He never made the Dean's List, but he found a more natural fit for his temperament and skills after the academy, when he entered pilot training and found he had a natural knack for flying. What he lacked in subservience, he more than made up for in talent, graduating first in his class. "It was two-thirds flying and one-third academic," he remembers. "I was in the bottom third of my class in academics because I never studied, but I still graduated first."

At the end of flight school training, it was time to fill out what was called a "Dream Sheet" and pick an airplane of his choice due to his class standing. "Trish wanted me to be a 9-to-5 flight training instructor in a place like Phoenix, Arizona," he says. "She thought we could have a nice little life there, so I put that first. Then I put the F-105 Thunderchief second, and the F-4 Phantom as my third choice, both of which were fighter aircraft used in high-threat areas in Vietnam. Seeing a look of consternation on my face, one of my flight school buddies said, 'I know what you're thinking. Don't do it!' He knew that a

quiet life wouldn't suit me. So I scratched out Trish's choice of assignments, and I was on my way to South East Asia at the height of the anti-Vietnam War movement."

Shortly thereafter, Chuck began training in the Thunderchief in Wichita, Kansas, but his class was cancelled since most of the F105s in Vietnam had been lost in combat. The Air Force notified him that he was being transferred to bombers. Chuck said no and threatened to relinquish his pilot's wings if they reneged on their fighter pilot promise. The Air Force countered with serious disciplinary action but recanted after higher headquarters decided they needed more Vietnam volunteers, not less, and sent him to an F-4 crash-course pipelined straight to Vietnam.

Six months later, stationed at Korat AFB in Thailand, Chuck was suiting up for his first combat mission. But his squadron commander informed him he'd be riding along in the backseat. Again, Chuck said no and was immediately grounded for insubordination. He had volunteered during a time that few did, trained hard, and insisted on flying in as the pilot in command, the position for which he trained. After two weeks and an unrepentant pilot, the squadron commander gave in. "He said, 'I'll tell you what, I'll let you sit in the front. If you don't screw up, and if you earn their respect, you can stay. But if you screw up, you have to sit in the back.'" Chuck agreed. Had his commander known that he had never flown in overcast conditions and didn't know how to use the aircraft's air-to-air missiles due his crash course in Arizona, he would have changed his mind. Notwithstanding, Chuck adopted a fake-it-till-you-make-it policy and soon distinguished himself as a competent combat pilot, completing 175 combat missions over some of the most highly-defended areas on the planet like Hanoi, which had more anti-aircraft guns than all of Germany in WWII.

After Vietnam, Chuck was sent to be an F-4 instructor in Phoenix, which pleased Trish, who had moved to Bangkok to be near him for most of his tour. After four years in sunny Phoenix, Chuck and Trish moved to a headquarters staff position in Japan and his eventual conversation with God.

After leaving Japan and the Air Force, Chuck considered two vastly different job offers. One was flying 727s for United Airlines, while the other was working as a test pilot at McDonnell Douglas. Drawn to adventure, he decided against piloting commercial jetliners. Over the course of

six years at McDonnell Douglas, he transitioned into engineering and ended up on the initial design teams of the F-15E and stealth fighter aircraft. Chuck then managed the marketing team for the F-15E, ultimately helping the company close a \$32 billion deal with the U.S. Air Force.

Shortly thereafter, General Dynamics, a competing firm, recruited Chuck. He was hired as the Head of Operations Analysis with eleven divisions under him, and charged with Strategic Planning for the entire firm, which was then the largest aerospace corporation in the world. He then founded and headed up the Defense Initiatives Organization (DIO) at General Dynamics, which focused on emerging advanced technology programs.

Then, in 1991, when Chuck was at the top of his game, General Dynamics was sold. The company restructured, and Chuck's advanced technology organization was shuttered. Soon thereafter, Booz Allen, a leading Washington consulting firm, offered Chuck a partner position. In this capacity, he organized a massive industry consortium that was an integral part of history's largest program to privatize 70 percent of former Soviet Union industries. He also formed and led the Community Learning and Information Network program, a forerunner to today's online educational network. Using this experience, he decided to strike out on his own and start his own consulting business.

With that, in 1996, Chuck founded VII Inc., a strategic planning, systems engineering, and investment capital firm serving major government agencies and corporations, both domestically and internationally. Over the decade that followed, he developed his expertise in many directions as a serial entrepreneur. In 1999, he was retained by the U.S. Central Command to be an "Arab coach," helping to build coalitions in the war on terrorism. Initially reluctant because of his past work with Israel, Chuck ended up accepting the job, immersing himself in counter-terrorism work while learning more about Arab culture and the Middle East. "In addition to conducting dozens of

military coalition-building conferences, I started trying to understand their religious and cultural views by studying the Koran and Hadith," he says. "I began to give lectures on Islam in the U.S. to the pleasant surprise of my Arab clients that included Generals, Ministers, Crown Princes and Kings. When 9/11 hit, I was one of the few people in Washington who knew anything about Islam in the Arab world."

It was his lifelong commitment to defense and national security that ultimately put him on the road to Jobenomics. When Washington didn't listen, Chuck spread his message as a sort of "Jobenomics Johnny Appleseed" that grew into a national grassroots movement. Deeply committed to the mission, he has not taken a paycheck in over ten years, and prefers to lead by silent example rather than by authoritative instruction. "If you like what I write, just download it from Jobenomics.com and use it," he says. "I don't like to tell people what to do any more than I like being told what to do."

In advising young people entering the working world today, Chuck reflects on the value of dead-ends. "Looking back, the biggest lessons learned were the things that didn't work out," he says. "I could have shot for a four-star general or CEO position, but as it turns out, hitting road blocks in my careers was the best thing that could have happened to me. It kept me striving, and striving got me here, to what my real ministry and mission was meant to be: helping to bring hope to distressed people and beleaguered communities."

In many ways, he's a triple oxymoron—a combat-hardened fighter pilot, serial entrepreneur, and dedicated Christ follower. Only by drawing on these competing internal traits was he able to conceive of a solution powerful enough to make a difference. And only by straying from the beaten path to follow an ever-changing internal compass was he able to see the needs of others and respond.

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