

**Using the Patterns We Create**  
**By**  
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This is more of an essay than a research paper. More about a meaningful discovery of mine than a clarification of a political or social issue. A useful and incredibly helpful tool or bundle of tools for me over the past 20 years.

This paper is about two books and their authors and a series of associated meetings and projects. Actually there were three books, but I was always loaning books from my library, trusting they would be returned. One never made it. Quite a shame, since it has long been out of print. That 1973 book got me started - Grow or Die, The Unifying Principle of Transformation by George T. Locke Land printed in 1973. I met George Land in 1972 at a symposium sponsored by the Creative Education Foundation in Buffalo, New York. I have a copy of the paper I heard in 1972. I was attracted to this man's ideas from the very start. Tonight, I have a copy of the revision of Grow or Die, published in 1986 by George Ainsworth Land. Permit me to depart, because his name alone, deserves some explanation. George took his wife's maiden name as his middle name and it has changed.

Break Point and Beyond, by George Land and Beth Jarman is his latest book. I have many other references on this topic, but this should be sufficient for tonight. Part of the stack is right here.

I hadn't seen George for over 15 years, although I have kept track of him and his work. A friend and colleague knew of my interest in George Land's work and when he was in town for a consulting session with Herman Miller invited him to my house last October. We retraced a lot of years and copied and exchanged articles we each had written over the years. That's the day, I decided this would be the topic of my talk to the Professional Club.

As a bit of interest, in the early years of our acquaintance, I and sometimes Jane, attended the Creative Problem Solving Institute in Buffalo. I always attended one or more of George's sessions. I even taught at the Institute a couple of years. One year, George invited me to attend the Systems Group. This group of creative thinkers were not fastened down to Mother Earth. It was an uncomfortable experience. During one of the warm up sessions, one of the participants ask me how many states of consciousness I had experienced. Not knowing how to respond, I quickly thought sleeping, awake, dreaming. Not having had any out of the body experiences or anything else I could think of, I lied and added one more, saying --four. To which the person replied, only four!!

Speeches before this Club while I have been a member are rather true to a familiar format. Man writes paper and stands behind podium. Many questions are raised from the floor and this continues until they get too tough. Then the secretary reports on the paper, elevating it several degrees in style and content. Special permission was requested to use either overheads or a flip chart. No one said I could or could not, but may I ??

I will highlight some thoughts about Grow or Die. It will give you some insight and intrigue about the books and let me move quickly into the heart of the topic. In 1973, Grow or Die was met with acclaim and controversy. Today, his "theory of transformation" has become a cornerstone in strategic planning and has resulted in organizational transformation of major corporations. At the root of the principle of transformation lies a single concept: growth---the most basic and universal drives through which all biological, physical, and cultural processes are intrinsically equivalent. Grow or Die gives all of us--industrial, psychologist, behavioral scientist, managers, and curiosity seekers-- a way of understanding change-- a way of dealing with it rather than fighting it.

"Simplicity beyond complexity" is the essence of General theory. Matter-of-fact, Max DePree uses this quote often. Although George Land has been the most convincing teacher and practitioner using "general theory", he has not been alone. He has taken it further in depth and rigor than most and in a form much more usable than most. We have all studied similar concepts by, Jung, Malthus, Freud, , Mead and others.

The growth curve is used in dialogue everyday. From the cover of Forbes, An executive of Motorola says, "We have to have the ability to move out along the curve of Innovation". What does he mean? Consider the following statements:

1. European countries led in the industrial revolution. Europe faded and United States became the undisputed strongest industrial power in the world. Where is United States today? Where does Asia or the Pacific Rim fit?
2. Only three percent of the companies now on the New York Stock Exchange were in existence 50 years ago. Just over two generations. Everyone here can remember when!
3. IBM and GM can and will improve, but can they ever be undisputed leaders again?
4. Career changes will be a regular happening in our children's life.
5. You hear , over and over again, how cycles are getting shorter.

What are the "thumb Rules" or handles we use to describe or get a fix on complex problems? Can we draw models, that help us see change patterns? The financial profession has made it easy. They use a short cut that works every time. Try pretending you're a financial type the next time you are on a plane. Use four accepted ratios and the conversation is off and running. They don't even have to exchange cards to have a common bound.

The simple and familiar "growth curve" is not so simple. As an economist, my students had to understand this simple response curve in it's detail. Questions like: where on the total curve does average product reach maximum, in relation where does marginal product curve reach maximum and then go to zero, what are the rational and irrational stages of the cycle, how is price used as a choice indicator? All of us cut our teeth on simple calculus problems using the simple growth curve. Do you remember where the first derivative equaled the inverse of the price ratio? And could you model it successfully on the growth curve. I still proclaim it's useful stuff, I hope they remembered. My daughters all skipped, as lightly as possible, through the topics of economics-- what a disappointment. My wife however, liked economics. She never read the tables and charts so it was so fast for her to finish assignments. Students learned quickly, when stuck on an economic question, simply say, " Push resources use to the point where marginal cost equals marginal returns. " The old  $MC=MR$  works often, but what does it mean?

### The Taxonomy of the Growth Curve

Let me see if I can get you through the essence of the three books by George Land in four or five minutes. First, think about how we label the axis. The horizontal axis is **TIME** and the vertical axis growth or **ENERGY**. Using the term "energy" is critical to understanding the dynamics of the growth curve. You can use other words for energy and get the same feeling and perception-- growth, output, product, but energy is more dynamic. The curve can be dissected for easier interpretation: *See Figure 1*

#### **1. Stage 1-- Getting the Basics**

During this time period, choice indicators are fickle or non existent. This is a period of trial and error. Things get better for the innovator, but little or no evidence is evident from the outside. In economic terms, this is an irrational stage of operation. It is necessary to trudge through the "mud bath" of this stage, if you proclaim to an innovator and like to start things. Ideas age like good wine. We inspect the process until we say, "We've got it". This a necessary part of the growth curve. It's not pretty and it's not fun, but it's real. Tom Peter's says, in "Search of Excellence", " the mess is in the message. George writes that much of the messiness in American life is not mere inefficiency, it is yeastiness. It's the creativity in fermentation. The curve starts with a dip.. Don't draw it wrong.

**2. Stage 2 -- The Grasp**

The idea is convincing to me and now ready for democracy to attack it free will. Discussion and the water cooler are no longer uncomfortable. It has sufficient substance to withstand the critic and the cynic.

**3. Stage 3 -- Putting the idea into Practice**

*Notice the phenomenal surge of energy.*

**4. Stage 4 -- Mastery**

A very dangerous state. Happiness is out of control, vision is marred and there is a universal belief held by implementers that it will last forever. Only those on the outside know the truth.; or only those that study systems theory or the persons that develop long range growth curves, You are exhilarated with your past success. You may even feel you were the cause. You get rewarded for success. People give you plaques, architects get works on the front of Architectural record, and professors write books

**5. Stage 5 -- Maturity**

Happiness lingers, but to the outsider, there's definitely a loss of energy.

**6 Stage 6 -- Crisis**

**7. Stage 7 -- A regeneration. We start over.**

That's the taxonomy of the growth curve. This is probably a quite different explanation than normally presented. We need to push a bit further in our understanding before we can start to use or apply the theory.

**Determining the Geometry of Success**

Growth does not have very many significant options-- at least for this talk. It can either be:

- An energetic, rapid, short cycle experience
- A more moderate, "normal" experience
- A slow, lazy, "Post Office like" experience

You can ask; What pattern am I following? or What am I observing in other individuals or organizations? *See Figure 2*

**Different Patterns of Experiencing the Growth Curve**

Under normal happenings, "good" will slip into complacency and eventual crisis and the only way to turn it around is a new "start over" experience. The most common reaction, once maturity is reached, is to bolster the organization so it will not slip into crisis. But energy will wane very precipitously. *See Figure 3.*

### **What to do after you get the Plaque**

When you get the plaque and you are riding home in the car, the plaque still shines as you pass under the street lights. Only a few decision makers know what to do at this point. Most persons in this setting believe they were the reason it happened in the first place and they can sustain the success. Those few that realize quickly, "this won't last very long", start immediately on their next assault. *See Figure 4.*

### **The Dreaded Plateau**

Once you reach maturity, no one, individual or organization wants to so much time with no growth. Resource expenditures during this time is completely out of proportion to marginal gains received. *See Figure 3.*

### **Understanding the concept of "launch energy".**

If an organization passes through the maturity stage in a "low" energy mode, the organization has missed an opportunity to launch an idea. Regardless of how good an idea is, it can not be launched in this low energy state. You can not jump the high bar from a stand still position. You may get some improvement, but you will not get a launch". The post office could not launch a Federal Express. GM is void of launch energy. So is IBM. This is a corporation's real dilemma in modern day innovation. Often, the visionary leader must create a crisis in order to get the opportunity to innovate. Iacocca and Chrysler is a good example. Add RJR and others. *See Figure 4.*

### **Pleasure/Pain Test**

This may not be a very important point, but what percentage of the time is the growth cycle producing pleasure versus pain. Regardless of the curve geometry, happiness doesn't fair very well. *See Figure 3.*

### **Positive and Negative Disorder**

The propensity of middle management and most corporate employees is to strive for orderliness. In a time of flattened organizations and self-directed work teams, will disorderliness be tolerated? Look at disorder two ways: (1) positive disorder, promoted and implemented by the visionary leader: and (2) negative disorder, promoted by the "problem fixer" trying to avoid an even worse fate-- The Crisis. *See Figure 5.* To the uninitiated all disorder feels the same. In the "Grow or Die" realm, there's a world of difference. We must not confuse business goals. In England, for instance, a successful business is one that survives and serves it's employees well. This same business may not be profitable. Profitability goals to the English are difficult to understand. One business wants to accumulate capital and one wants survival. Same kind of analogy.

I have used this tool many, many times. Let me share a couple of experiences:

### **The Council on Agriculture, part of the National Academy Of Science**

I was retained to do a three day workshop on prioritizing the research needs in the Academy. The discussion quickly focused on the United States Department of Agriculture, with a variety of questions:

1. Was it doing the job?
2. Had Congress lost faith in the USDA?
3. Could USDA funding be lost forever?

I was on the faculty of the pioneer Land Grant College for 12 years, the last eight years as the Academic Dean of Agriculture and Natural resources. But, many questions come to mind as we close in on the year 2000:

1. Does every state need a Land Grant College?
2. Does every state need an Agricultural Experiment Station and a Cooperative Extension Service?
3. Does every county need a fair grounds?
4. Does every county need an Cooperative Extension office?
5. You could keep this going, I'm sure.

If the answer is, yes, have these institutions regenerated themselves into leading edge organizations?

I drew the growth curves on the big white board and asked every member to chart where the USDA was in the growth cycle. The positioning of the USDA on the chart was virtually unanimous--- heading for crisis. One or two thought it had already arrived.

Several years ago, I approached the Chairman and President of the W.K. Kellogg Foundation to form a professional Task Force, with staff and buildings, for the express purpose to rewrite the Land Grant Act . WKKF agreed with the mission, but did not believe it could muster a sufficient support group to sell the idea. If the agricultural resource is to be preserved, the Land Grant idea needs to be refreshed.

The Academy agreed to accept the "rewrite " challenge, only time will tell the story.

### **Establishing a National Academy of Science in Brazil**

In the mid seventies, I and three others had an opportunity to assist the government of Brazil in establishing a National Academy of Science. The university and college system were going, but resources did not seem to be generating the desired result. With limited time, huge geography, a language barrier, a mix of accredited and unaccredited institutions, a classic set of disciplines, how could I find out for myself where the action was? I could then concentrate on a few targeted case studies.

*See Figure 6.*

Using sets of unlabeled curves, I would explain the curves and asked them to mark the position on the curve for a variety of questions:

- Evaluate your own University and respond to a list of other universities I had prepared.
- Similar procedures were used for individuals
- I even had names of known and acclaimed professors. These we charted against there own faculty leaders, etc.

The Brazilians were amazed that an outsider could get an analytical and evaluative handle on such a big subject so quickly.

Here's a list of some conclusions:

1. The book has the right title, " Grow or Die".
2. Ecology is a natural phenomena and it's sometimes cruel.
3. It's not natural to do it right and achieve sustained growth.
4. We don't practice what we preach.
5. Vision and creativity are required to negotiate the stages.

Personally, I have traversed through three dramatic career changes. Most, but not all were voluntary. All of them have produced unusual opportunities. They all had the pleasure/pain characteristics. Like it or not we do pass through a series of growth curves that have pattern of predictability. These books are not road maps. They are excellent tools and give one an enriched philosophy about change. I believe what I am saying.

Use the idea yourself. Remember, there are basically only three curves in the initial stages:

1. The fast, sparky, rapidly rising growth curve.
2. The normal, well paced growth curve, and
3. The slow roller or the lazy growth curve

Think of a person, city, a region, or a organization. It may be more helpful, if you picked the Holland Professional Club, which curve best describes the Club? How has the Club played itself out, is also important. For instance is the Club:

1. Traversing a new beginning
2. Sustaining itself with no positive or negative energy
3. Or heading into crisis
4. Pulling out of a crisis and starting over?

Pick the curve and mark the spot. If you draw the growth curve, maybe it will take on a little more richness after tonight.

Thank you having me as a member and the opportunity for engaging in a favorite topic.

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THE TAXONOMY

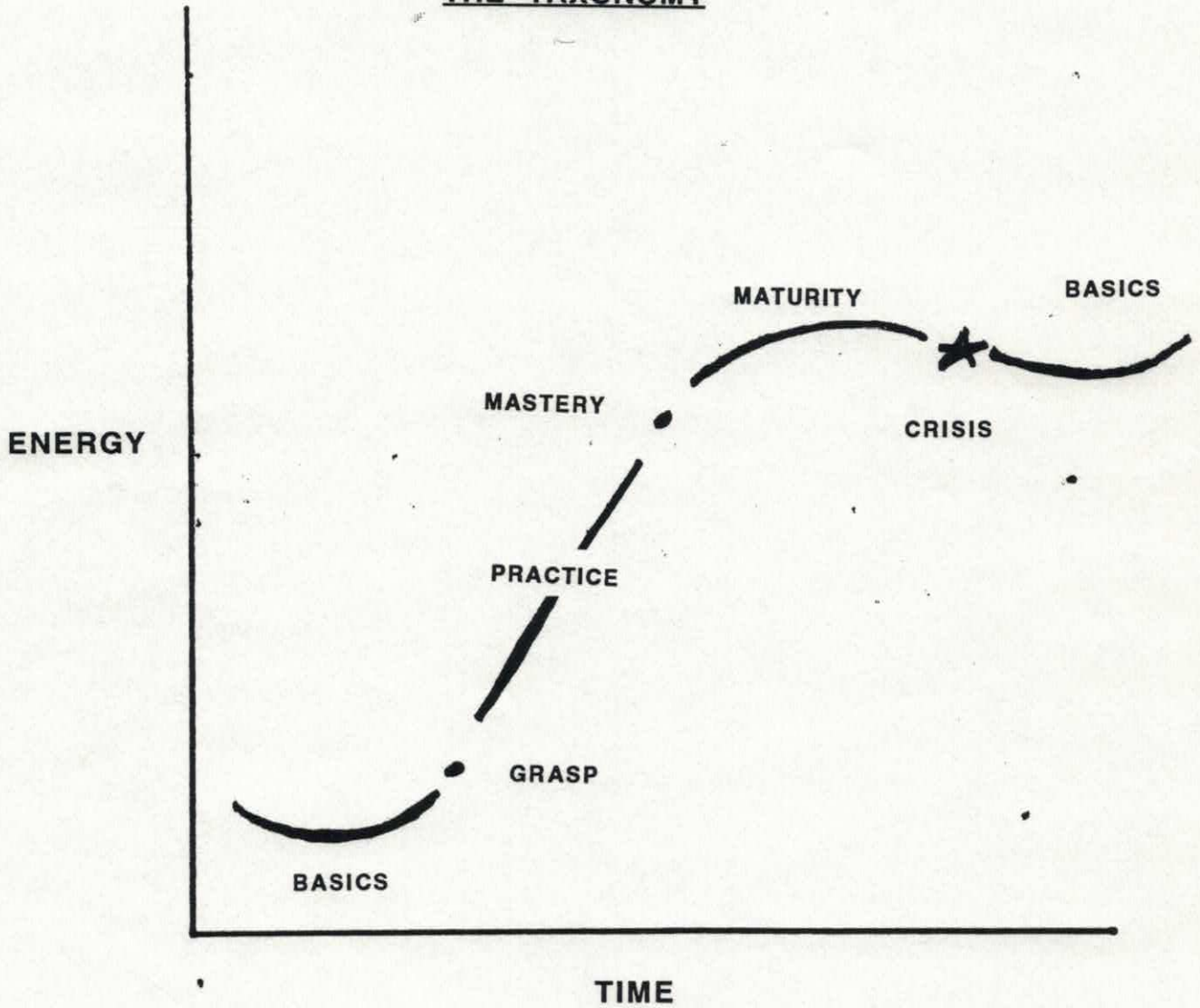


FIGURE 1

THE GEOMETRY OF SUCCESS

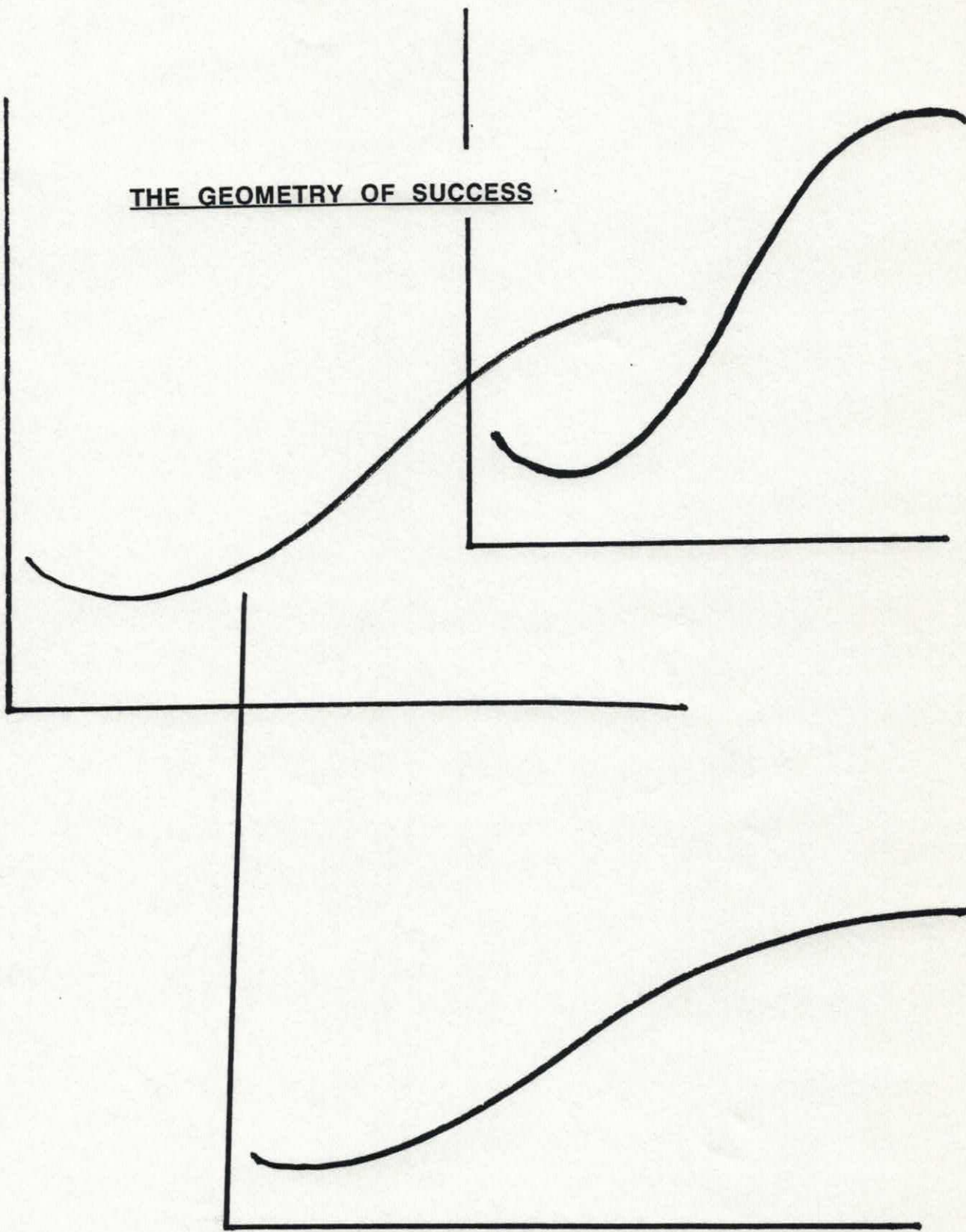


FIGURE 2

CHOICES ON HOW WE NEGOTIATE THE FUTURE

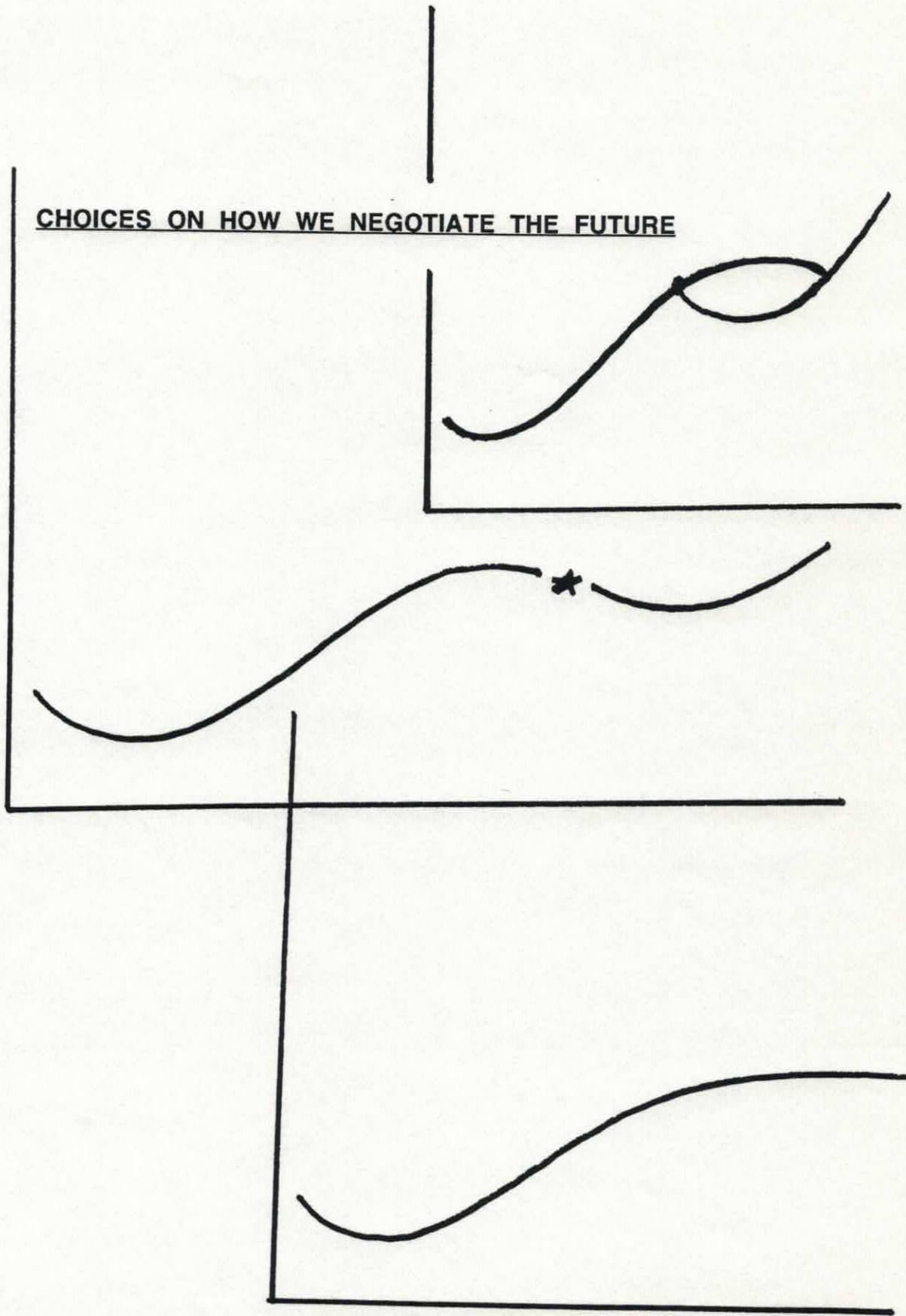


FIGURE 3

AVOID THE CRISIS--THE RIGHT WAY

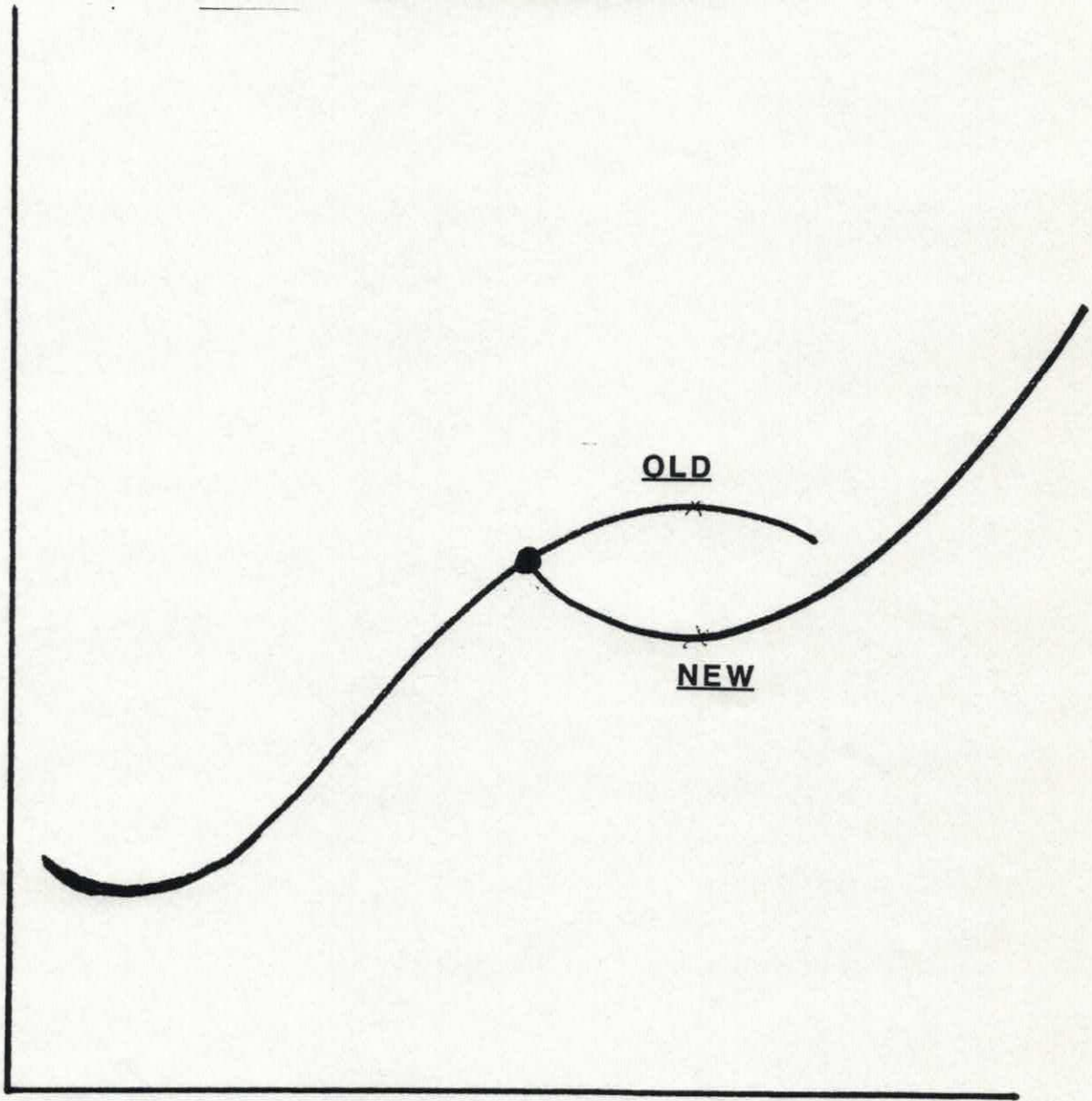


FIGURE 4

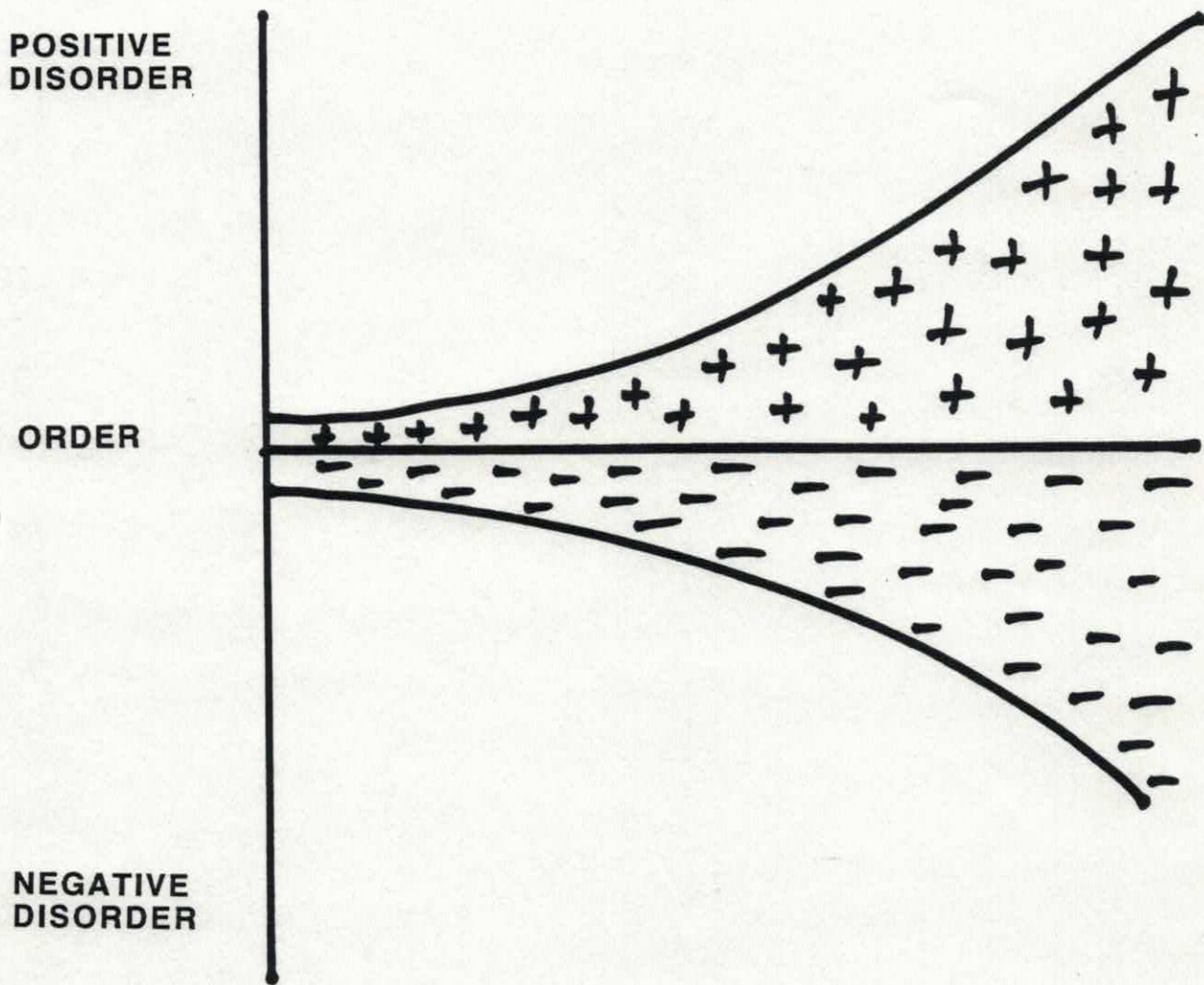


FIGURE 5

AGREE ON WHERE WE ARE

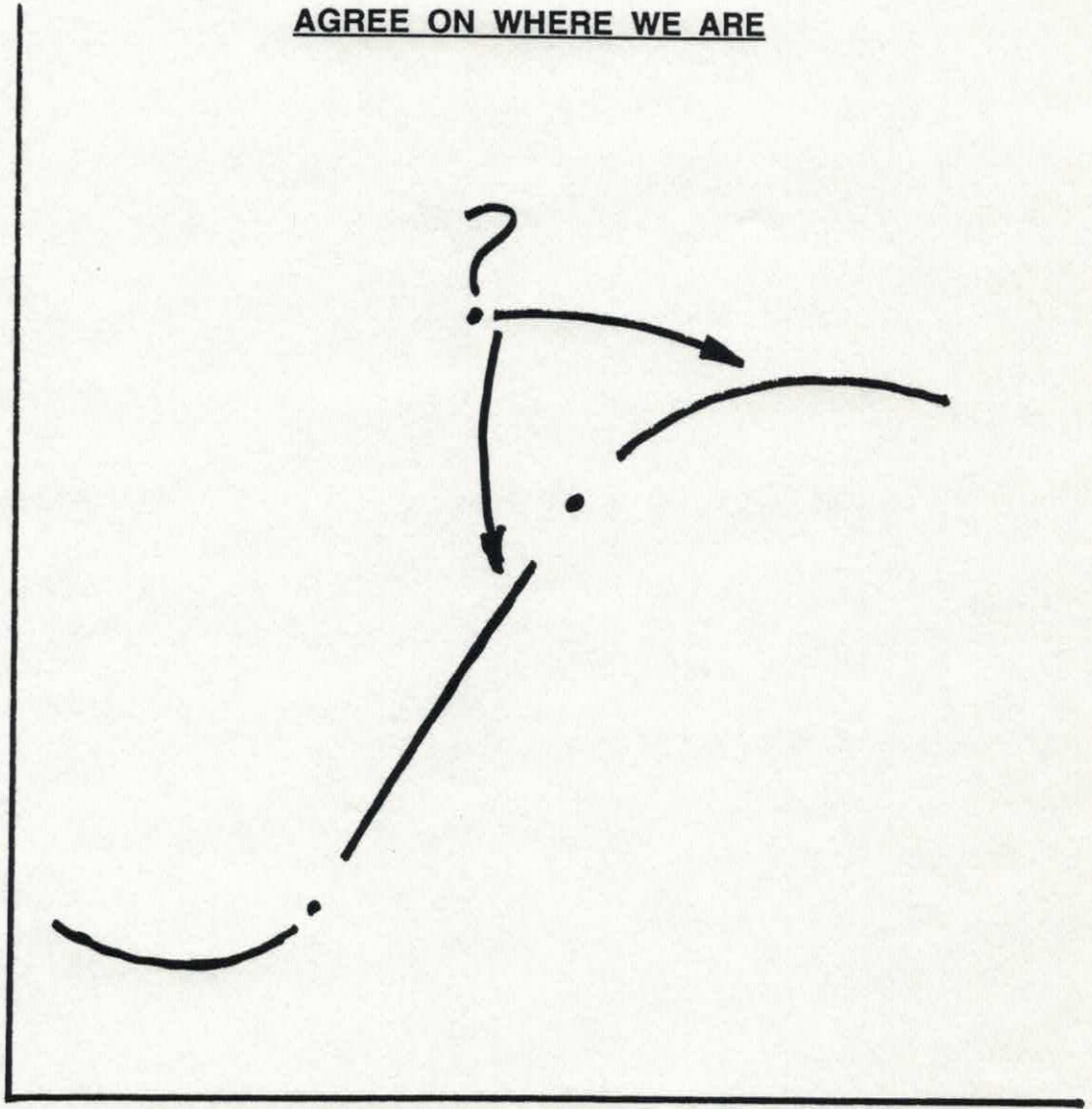


FIGURE 6