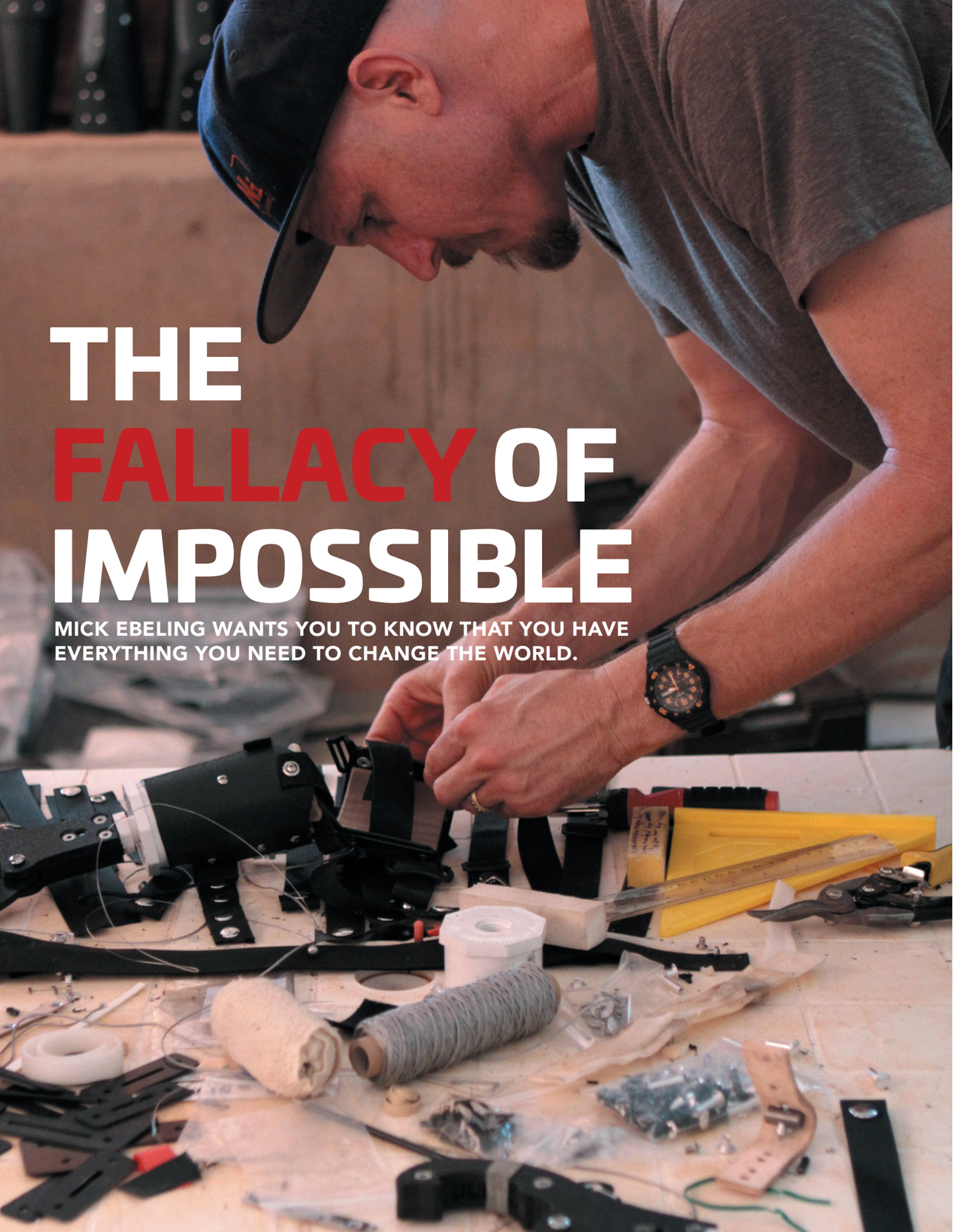

THE FALLACY OF IMPOSSIBLE

MICK EBELING WANTS YOU TO KNOW THAT YOU HAVE EVERYTHING YOU NEED TO CHANGE THE WORLD.

Children who have lost their arms should be given new ones. People who have lost their voices should be able to speak. And artists immobilized by a devastating disease should be free to express themselves.

That's what Mick Ebeling thinks. He's the chief innovation instigator and founder of Not Impossible Labs, an award-winning content and technology solution creator based in Los Angeles. The Not Impossible team improves the lives of individuals in need by developing low-cost, tech-based solutions, and then shares their powerful stories to teach and inspire others to do the same. "We call it technology for the sake of humanity," says Ebeling. Their motto is "help one, help many."

Making the impossible possible is what Ebeling and his growing band of volunteer hackers, designers, and dreamers have been doing since 2008, when they committed themselves to helping world-renowned graffiti artist Tony "Tempt1" Quan to draw again after ALS, a neuromuscular disease, had left him completely paralyzed. Their invention, the EyeWriter, has enabled Tempt1 to make art by controlling a laser with his eyes. The EyeWriter won several awards, including being named one of Time magazine's "top 50 inventions of 2010." Rather than profit from the device, Ebeling's team published DIY instructions for free on the Internet so anyone could build their own EyeWriter for about $100 in parts.

"Anyone can be an innovator," says Ebeling. "Whether it's to improve your business, your career, or the lives of millions, you have everything you need right this minute to make a lasting, impactful difference."

All you need to do is find the absurd situation that needs fixing, and follow the philosophy that continues to serve the good people at Not Impossible and the thousands of innovators who have joined their revolution.

FIND THE ABSURDITY AND REVOLT AGAINST IT

Before you can innovate, you first must identify what needs changing. Ebeling recommends looking for the absurdities around you. "An artist that can't move? That has no canvas on which to express himself? That's absurd," says Ebeling. "A boy in war-torn Sudan gets his arms blown off and wishes he were dead so he won't be a burden to his family? That's not right. These things shouldn't be."
This can apply to your work, too. Look for the absurd around you. Is that biweekly meeting with 17 director-level people really moving the needle? Whatever it is, you'll know it, because you'll feel the passion burn in your belly. "If you can't stop thinking about it, then you have the passion to do something about it," says Ebeling. "Don't ignore that feeling. Act."

COMMIT, THEN FIGURE IT OUT

People often wait for permission to act. They may feel that they're not qualified, that they don't have the necessary title, credentials, or training to step up. When Ebeling committed to helping Tempt1 to draw again, he was a television and video producer. "I knew nothing about ocular recognition technology. My plan was to write a check," recalls Ebeling of the fundraiser where he first met the artist and his family. Instead, he found himself signing a promise to help Tempt1 communicate and make art again. "At the time, I had no idea how I was going to fulfill that promise."

Ebeling is quick to remind people that if his ragtag group can do what it does, anyone can. "That's the whole point of the impossible movement," says Ebeling. "You don't need to wait for government or your boss to make a difference. It doesn't matter how many letters you have behind your name."

RADICAL COLLABORATION

To succeed, you need to operate from a place that Ebeling describes as "egoless innovation" and surround yourself with people who are smarter than you. "You have to be OK with asking for help or being the dumbest guy in the room. After all, this isn't about you. It's about the cause," says Ebeling. "People naturally want to align around projects where there is great purpose."

There's no big secret to rallying people to your cause. It's about passion. "Passion is contagious," says Ebeling. "Especially when you are out to right a wrong. When you operate from the heart, others of like mind can sense it. It's visceral, and there's no stronger power than when all these like minds and hearts come together to solve problems worth solving."

IT'S OK TO BE CLUELESS; IN FACT, IT'S MANDATORY

According to Ebeling, a little ignorance and a lot of naïveté are mandatory. "When we started, we had no idea how hard this was going to be," says Ebeling. "If we knew what we were up against, we may never have started." That's why purpose, passion, and committed action are so critical to success.

Every new project provides another opportunity to show you just how much you don't know. In Don's Voice, the film Ebeling produced about an ALS patient who hadn't been able to speak in 15 years, Ebeling's team figured they had this one. "Tempt also suffered from ALS, so we were confident we had the answer. We brought all this cool software and sophisticated equipment, and it was totally useless." Don lost his ability to move in 1999, before the Internet brought technology to the masses. "He had never even touched a computer before."

MORSELS OF PERMISSION

You don't need the answers to start your search for a solution. "You keep your ears open for things that may be tangential to your problem," says Ebeling, "and you put all these bits and pieces in a pile that I call morsels of permission."

When he committed to helping Daniel, the Sudanese boy who had lost his arms when his village was bombed, Ebeling had no idea how to make a prosthetic arm. "I remembered reading about this guy that made a prosthetic finger with a 3-D printer, so I looked him up," recalls Ebeling.

Innovation rarely bursts from thin air. New solutions are more often found in a mashup of discovery, by combining and adapting existing technologies to do something they were not originally intended to do. Ebeling recalls how shortly after hearing about Tempt1's story, he met a group called Graffiti Research Lab (GRL). They were using laser light to draw on the sides of buildings. "My wife and I were eating dinner, and it occurred to us, if there's technology that exists where you can use your eyes to control things, why not combine that with the tech from GRL, so Tempt could draw by controlling lasers with his eyes?"

DON'T SEE FAILURE AND IGNORE THE "NOS"

You can't focus on constraints or listen to the skeptical voices, especially the ones inside your own head. "You have to learn to ignore all the 'nos,' because there will be a lot of them," says Ebeling. "Setbacks will happen, but you have to look at each failure as a ramp, not a roadblock." Ebeling's team has an "always in beta" philosophy that keeps them iterating despite the inevitable soul-crushing defeats. While developing their prosthetic arm for Daniel, they printed a prototype for a friend who was missing her right arm. They had printed a left one.

"It's a funny thing, because you're on this crazy timeline. But the faster you acknowledge what isn't working, the faster you will find what will." In this case, since quitting wasn't an option, Ebeling found himself on a plane to Sudan to build an arm for Daniel, and to teach the people there how to do something he himself had yet to do successfully. "Everything that could go wrong did, and every day, Daniel showed up with a smile." Four days later, it was Ebeling who was smiling, when Daniel fed himself for the first time in two years. In the time it took the exhausted but elated Ebeling to fly home, the team in Sudan that he had trained and equipped had printed two more prosthetic arms for villagers in need.

IF NOT ME, WHO? IF NOT NOW, WHEN?

Mick Ebeling doesn't think there's anything unique or special that enables him to do the things he does. That's why he's convinced that you—yes, you, reading these words—have the same ability to solve problems and change lives. You just have to do what he did one day: wake up, look at the absurdity around you, and think, "If not me, who? If not now, when?"

HELP ONE, HELP MANY: Daniel with his $100 prosthetic arm (traditional prosthetic arms can cost up to $15,000). The equipment Ebeling left behind became the world's first 3D printed prosthetic laboratory.

TECHNOLOGY FOR THE SAKE OF HUMANITY

Not Impossible Labs continues to engineer, hack, and crowd-solve issues of inability and inaccessibility to help the most vulnerable on our planet. They share their stories to incite more people to act, innovate and solve previously insurmountable issues of health, happiness, and humanity.

To learn how you can get involved, visit WWW.NOTIMPOSSIBLE.COM