

Peter Metzinger, «Mr. Campaigning»

# «Impossible is just another word for change.»

Peter Metzinger, often referred to as «Mr. Campaigning» in Switzerland since 1998, is a leading authority when it comes to campaigns that require difficult persuasion work. For decades, he has shaped election and referendum campaigns as well as internal transformation processes within organizations. Though he is an engaging storyteller, he knows one thing for sure: true success comes only to those who listen deeply and for a long time – before they go public with their message.

**M**r. Metzinger. When «Mr. Campaigning» shows up in an AC/DC shirt, it's no accident – it's a statement. But what kind?

Yes, in fact. I'm currently involved in a startup that's collaborating with AC/DC on a fashion line – including Hawaiian shirts and other apparel and accessories.

We're on a tight schedule. The band will be playing in Europe in just six weeks – everything needs to be ready by then. Starting in 2026, more iconic brands will join the journey. What we're building is 'Loud Fan Art Fashion'.

*I first saw AC/DC in 1980.*

Really? Me too. In Saarbrücken. The night before, John Lennon was shot. I was 16 years old. December 9th – a date that has stayed with me ever since. Since then, I've seen AC/DC around 50 times.

**«Campaigning is about dialogue: listen actively first, speak second.»**

*You've done a lot over the years. You once led a team of ten as a campaigner. Now you're back on your own. So – what are you today? A consultant?*

I'm an activist, a campaigner.

When I became self-employed in 1998, it was more out of necessity. I'm a physicist by training and spent 13 years with Greenpeace.

I realized that what I learned in campaigning is useful in virtually every field. Because ultimately, it's about changing people's understanding, attitudes, or behavior – so they help you achieve a goal that you can't simply command.

*What is the most essential thing?*

Campaigning is about dialogue: listen actively first, speak second. Ultimately, it always comes down to having more influence over people and organizations.



*That's where the pioneer comes in – it's their goal and their task.*

Exactly. During my time as an entrepreneur, I realized that the campaigning approach allows you to achieve marketing and communication goals with fewer resources – because you analyze much more thoroughly and therefore gain a better understanding of how your target groups actually function and what truly drives them. Once I know that, I also know which means will get me to my goal the fastest.

**«Many people would probably call me crazy because I take risks.»**

*What defines a pioneer in terms of character?*

You need a visionary goal. One that, first, clearly differs from the current state – and second, carries a value strong enough to truly move people. As Saint-Exupéry put it: «If you want to build a ship, don't drum up people to collect wood and don't assign them tasks and work, but rather teach them to long for the vast and endless sea.»

*The vision as the driving force.*

Exactly. And that is the role of the pioneer. Like Steve Jobs in the «Here's to the crazy ones» video. He explains: it's the misfits who change the world.

*How crazy are you, then?*

Totally crazy. (laughs)

*That's easy to say. But a healthy kind of craziness has to be earned. How does it show in your case?*

Many people would probably call me crazy because I take risks. I've been in the jungle, fighting to protect the rainforest, and nearly walked into an ambush by loggers who wanted to shoot us.

I helped build a Collaborative Innovation Network for Power-to-X, with members ranging from the army to SBB, Swiss, and Zurich Airport – essentially everyone working with synthetic fuels and hydrogen.



I'm currently leading a feasibility study for building a demonstration plant for synthetic kerosene in the Canton of Aargau. I also play in the rock band «300 Rock», which recently released a single – and I jump around on stage in a Spartan costume.

I'm a municipal councillor, mingle with people from the AC/DC fan scene, walk in and out of the Federal Palace – and get along well with everyone.

***If you could make something happen instantly – like magic, Harry Potter-style – what would it be?***

That humanity experiences an Enlightenment 2.0 – where the values of liberty, equality, and fraternity are complemented by science.

That politics is guided by facts, with full respect for human dignity – and in freedom. That would be my greatest wish.

***But right now, the tide is turning in a very different direction.***

Yes. That's exactly why I wish for it so deeply. But honestly, I've always wished for it.

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**«Fear can also be a good thing. Because it sharpens the senses.»**

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***Is this disruptive time more of a threat or an opportunity for you?***

Both – as in every crisis. The Chinese character for crisis is composed of the symbols for danger and opportunity. Those who see only the danger miss the opportunity. But the opportunities are always there. One is that Europe might return to its core values and rediscover itself. Another is that people may finally realize how devastating the developments of recent years have been – with all the polarization, fake news, and deliberate disinformation, some of which has been orchestrated by Russia. I've been deeply involved with this topic for the past five years.

***Where do you see additional opportunities?***

We already have solutions for the major problems we face – but they're being blocked by ideological blinders. And this is just as true on the political left. Take, for example, the fight against combustion engines in favor of purely electric mobility. Of course, electric mobility is desirable where renewable electricity is available. But it's also a fact that a combustion engine running on synthetic fuels can be just as climate-friendly as an electric vehicle.

***You said you're crazy and willing to take risks. Have there been moments in your life as a pioneer where you had to overcome fear?***

As a pioneer, you venture into uncharted territory. You don't know what to expect. Naturally, that triggers fear. When I became self-employed, I had sleepless nights if I wasn't fully booked at least six months in advance.

Fear can also be a good thing. Fear sharpens the senses. And when your senses are sharp, you pay close attention to all the signals – as long as you don't let yourself become paralyzed.

***How are you when it comes to patience?***

Both. As a pioneer, you tend to think in terms of «both/and» rather than «either/or». There are situations where I'm extremely impatient – and others where I embody patience itself. It really depends on the context.

***Do you have any examples?***

Synthetic fuels. I've been advocating for them for twelve years now. On the one hand, I have the patience to keep going, even though politics moves painfully slowly. On the other hand, I'm impatient because climate change is galloping ahead of us.

When it came to staff, I was often too impatient.

***Why?***

As a pioneer, you dive deeply into a subject. Then you fall victim to the curse of knowledge. You become an expert and can no longer put yourself in the shoes of those who aren't as familiar with the topic. You think, «I've explained it – why don't they get it?» – and suddenly, I lack understanding for mistakes.

You need much, much, much, much more patience than I have.

***Do you have any role models?***

Sure: Angus Young on the guitar.

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**«As a pioneer, you fall victim to the curse of knowledge.»**

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Then also Albert Einstein and Steve Jobs.

***With Angus, it's obvious. But Einstein and Jobs?***

Einstein – for his science and critical thinking. As a physicist, having Albert Einstein as a role model is almost a given.

Steve Jobs – for his focus and ability to reduce everything to the max. I see the same with AC/DC: radically reduced, to the point, and instantly recognizable.

I find that fascinating, because in campaigning, you also need that same level of clear identity. In the end, the vision is a brand. And that brand has to be anchored in people's hearts, guts, and minds – with absolute clarity.

***Can you give some examples?***

Campaigning is dialogue. If I don't fully understand the target group, I run workshops with them and let them develop the campaign themselves. The first time we did this was in 2003, for the NuvaRing – a contraceptive for women.

The marketing strategy for the film «Mein Name ist Eugen» was also developed by the target audience themselves.

***Also 20 years ago already – but still a surprisingly good film.***

I think so too. We showed a rough cut of the film in four workshops to people aged 6 to 84. Then we let them freely associate and share what came to mind.

***Your key slogan is: «Impossible is just another word for change». How should I understand that?***

The ancient Greeks long believed that the Earth rested on a turtle, and they wondered what the turtle itself rested on — since everything, as we know, falls downward. The problem was finally resolved by Anaximander, who rephrased the same observation: «Everything falls toward the Earth». Problem solved. And it's often the same with seemingly unsolvable problems. Often, it's enough to change the way we describe something—and with it, the perspective — to discover a solution. If you want to change something, you must also be willing to change how you see it.

***Thank you very much. That seems to clear everything up – for the moment.***

*Interview: thk.*