

Finding the Serial Entrepreneur to Lead a Global Gas-Guzzler Conversion Industry

GETTING THERE ASAP: CalCars 2.0 aims to convert tens of millions of gas-guzzler vehicles now on the road to run partly or entirely on electricity. What will it take to reach that goal? How can we turn a game-changing idea and a few prototypes into a scalable global solution? If we replicate our CalCars 1.0 strategies, it may take seven years. If instead we mesh our advocacy and partnerships with an effective, profitable business enterprise, we can start this extraordinary transformation in two or three years. That's our plan. Below we outline how to get there, how a new company will pair its efforts with the nonprofit CalCars, and how we define success. We wind up with ways you can help us identify and inspire an extraordinary leader and business team to jump into this opportunity ASAP.

YES, WE'VE WON STAGE ONE... These days, we and our partners are feeling gratified and optimistic. PHEVs and EVs will go on sale in the U.S. late this year, and we're witnessing a global stampede toward plug-in cars. Last October, we joyfully declared victory for our goal of mass-produced PHEVs -- see <http://www.calcars.org/calcars-news/1078.html> . (Of course, much remains to do to ensure their successful commercialization.) Now we aim to build on that victory. Our "Big Fix" Campaign for volume retrofits can advance transportation electrification's benefits by a decade.

HERE'S WHY WE NEED TO DO MORE: We simply can't wait around to see improved energy security and CO2 reductions as new vehicles trickle into the marketplace. New plug-ins, both as a percentage of the 250 million U.S. and 900 million global vehicles, and in terms of their fossil fuel reductions, will be a drop in the bucket for over 15 years. That prompted us to come up with the fast-track conversion strategy. At <http://www.calcars.org/ice-conversions.html> we analyze the problem, link to news, and profile small companies that show what's possible.

SHAI AGASSI AS ROLE MODEL: You've watched the rapid rise of Shai Agassi, Founder of Better Place. He walked away from the co-CEO job at a global software company to make a difference. By his sheer audacity and ability to enlist governments, investors, and employees to his vision, he has turned an imaginative concept into promising projects in several countries. (Better Place's business models are somewhat controversial. We happen to believe PHEVs will predominate for a decade or longer for a range of reasons, but that's another story.) We're rooting for Shai -- if he wins, we'll get more plug-ins sooner!

WHAT'S THE LINK? Why talk about Shai and Better Place? He's an effective serial entrepreneur with valued attributes, style, skills, network, and drive. We want to identify someone like him. While Shai focuses on new EVs, this serial entrepreneur -- call him or her SEER -- will put together the pieces that become a profitable global conversions company for existing internal combustion engine vehicles.

THE CHALLENGE: SEER will start and fund a company, building the alliances, supply chain and private and public support that enables it to grow rapidly. SEER will build a big business, while winning over skeptics or going around them.

QUALIFICATIONS: SEER needs the personal assets or access to others who, because of SEER's track record, will provide seed funding. SEER needs the savvy to develop the business plan, plus the connections to bring in large investors quickly. Ideally, SEER has business experience in, or at least familiarity with, the auto industry and related technologies, though we're open to all capable candidates. The SEER can be based anywhere if willing to travel as needed. (What if more than one great candidate steps forward? That's a problem we would love to have -- and work to ensure that everyone wins!)

JOB VISION: SEER will bring together a consortium (or a "rollup") of the small companies working on distinct conversion designs, plus larger integrators and component suppliers. SEER will focus on the "low-hanging fruit" -- vehicle types that sell in the millions, run for decades, have room for batteries, and are found in fleets. Former Intel CEO Andy Grove calls them "PSVs" -- pickups, SUVs, RVs, vans -- to which we add big and small buses, military vehicles, other people-movers, and large sedans.

SEER WILL BUILD A TEAM THAT WILL:

- * rapidly design and build proofs-of-concept to demonstrate multiple technical solutions;
- * deliver test vehicles to national labs, utilities, and others for analysis;
- * protect patents and trade secrets, and eventually license design solutions;
- * develop scalable production designs;
- * develop channels to supply custom components globally;
- * partner with an energy services company for financing to reduce or eliminate high first costs.

PARTNERING WITH NON-PROFIT CALCARS WILL LEVERAGE OUR NETWORKS TO:

- * showcase these early prototypes to build awareness and support;
- * gain government approvals for safety, drivability and other requirements;
- * secure regulatory changes to facilitate the scaling of the business;
- * promote public incentives for conversions, CO2, and black carbon credits;
- * identify first fleet and early-adopter customers.

INITIAL SUCCESS WILL COME when the team succeeds in negotiating deals with one of the world's automakers. That company will cooperate technically with these efforts and then "bless" them. It will sign on to partnerships and payment structures that will bring it and its dealers revenues and kudos for rounding up the cars to be fixed. And as happened for PHEVs in 2006, ICE conversions will be broadly recognized as a central way to electrify transportation.

OTHER FARSIGHTED CARMAKERS WILL FALL IN LINE: The global opportunity and the "end of business as usual" imperatives can impel them to see how fixing their vehicles will bring benefits that surpass negative impacts on new car sales. They can begin to realign their businesses, evolving from selling (and saying goodbye to) cars to providing "mobility services" -- while receiving public appreciation and incentives for doing so. Their businesses can expand to include upgradeable products, access to car-sharing, and partnerships in making homes, workplaces, and public areas friendly to more effective ways of transporting people and goods.

HELP SPREAD THE WORD: TO HELP IDENTIFY A SERIAL ENTREPRENEUR, PLEASE FORWARD THIS MESSAGE TO YOUR NETWORK OR POINT YOUR CONTACTS TO <http://www.calcars.org/calcars-news/1093.html> or send them the readable 2-page flyer at <http://www.calcars.org/calcars-seer.pdf> . Send this to people you know in automotive and technology industries, cleantech, venture capital, executive search firms, business schools, media, in penthouses and on yachts and mountain slopes around the world.

IF YOU MIGHT BE THE SEER: Please send us a cover letter with your vision and your take on CalCars' strategy. Write to jobs@calcars.org. Paste your background info into the email or point to a URL. To keep things simple and avoid viruses, we don't open email attachments.

-- Felix Kramer, Founder & Ron Gremban, Technology Lead