

A CRISIS IS A TERRIBLE THING TO WASTE

This article/column is my way of trying to contribute to the dialogue about how we can improve the business environment here in Aurora. My plan is to offer thoughts and ideas on business, profile some of the more interesting or innovative members of the Chamber, and generally facilitate different types of discussions. I have a small organization development consultancy here in Aurora and have a real passion for helping leaders blossom, whether they are individuals or organizations.

I borrowed the title for this article from Dr. Hazel Henderson, an internationally recognized economist who is actively challenging many of the fundamentals of the global finance and banking system. While her audience is perhaps organizations much larger than the average Chamber of Commerce member here in Aurora, the concepts are equally valid. Dr. Henderson is a vocal advocate for a “green economy” and sees that the roots of both our environmental issues and economic challenges have the same roots: globalization without accountability. Here are three ideas that I have culled from my various readings that I am actively trying to apply to my business. Perhaps they might be useful for yours.

Embrace “Living Lightly”

This idea is based on the *Living Lightly Project*, an international movement that embraces sustainability at a very personal level. “*Living Lightly* means seeking a personally fulfilling and enriching way of life that makes a positive impact on our environment, our community and society, and inspires others to want to join us. There is no single definition of *Living Lightly*, nor is there a roadmap or a set of commandments that will apply to every person in every society.

Living Lightly is a pursuit, a philosophy or maybe even a quest. It is a social movement with a very individual approach, and as such can be very public and communal, or very private and personal. *Living Lightly* is a lifestyle that is at the same time ethical, practical, economical and spiritual.

Living Lightly is not about guilt, sacrifice or preaching to others. *Living Lightly* is about choosing to embrace a way of life that is exciting, challenging, rewarding, humbling, and as full of mistakes and dilemmas as it is full of achievements and certainty.” (From www.livinglightly.ca).

We have looked at several ways that we can be more “light” in our own business that include:

Do much more over the phone, rather than jumping into our cars to meet with people. For example, my partner, Marion Howell, who is a corporate coach, does all her coaching over the phone – with excellent results.

Posting all our materials to our web site; our only “brochures” are our business cards. Everything else is on the web, including materials that I use in the leadership courses I teach.

Shopping locally; we purchase virtually everything we need, both personally and professionally right here in Aurora. This includes all of our technology support and printing supplies. I love to cook and I am amazed at the excellent quality of the local merchants. It has made it very easy to embrace the concept of cooking with foodstuffs that are within 100 miles of home.

Stop Planning

As the world becomes more and more uncertain, there is less and less value in investing time, energy and often money in developing complex plans for a world that simply refuses to be predictable.

I used to charge for strategy planning by the pound because clients always thought that the bigger and more detailed the plan, the better it was. In reality those kinds of plans made better doorstops than working documents. In a complex, ever changing world, one that Peter Vaill aptly describes as “permanent white water”,

I am convinced that the most effective and agile organizations (and individuals) create a “container” or boundary around their activities that is framed by a clearly articulated mission, or defining purpose, core values, vision, and a few broad strategic priorities. They then focus on developing the resilience and flexibility to seize any change that comes along. The Chinese have a brilliant term for the word “crisis”, *Wi jai*, which translates into “danger-opportunity”.

If, in the face of a crisis, we focus on the danger it becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy. Typically, it is because that crisis is seen as something that will throw us off course from our careful plan. If we view the crisis as opportunity, our minds quickly go to how, within the framework of our mission, values, and vision, we can use the crisis to propel us forward in one or more of our strategic priorities.

Get Relational

Hundreds of books have been written on the importance of relationships, but it is never truer than in an economic downturn. We work with a range of corporate and individual clients in the private, public, and social sector and they all seem to have common issues but unique interests. We have made a commitment to avoid becoming part of the communication log jam that occurs

through mass e-mail or mailing pieces that are so generic in nature they often serve little purpose. Instead, we have taken a different approach over the years, in good times and bad.

We regularly update our information on clients and contacts and we are constantly scanning articles for ideas that we think might be of specific interest or use to a client. For example, one client has moved on from his role as a senior executive to sit on several boards of directors. I came across a well-researched article with some fascinating information on board performance, which I e-mailed to him. I had no expectation of anything specific happening but in this case it did lead to lunch (he paid!) and a referral to a new client. As business professionals, we need to constantly keep our clients first - not just as a marketing slogan but also in everything we do and think about. If it is right for the client and in their best interest, it will be in our best interest over the long term.

These are just some thoughts on a blustery day. Next month, I would like the opportunity to share some thoughts from other Chamber members who are doing innovative or even quirky things in these times of uncertainty. If you have an interesting story you would like to share with the business community, please let me know and we can set up some time for an interview. I can be contacted at (905) 466-6341 or at peter@theirisgrouponline.com.

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