Creative or Reactive?

I was able to spend Friday morning last week in conference with a number of leaders in industry, education and business at the South Western Economic Conference. Our government convened speakers from a number of sectors to give their opinions on the state of the economy in our region and beyond. We had the good fortune to hear from Carol Stephenson at the Ivy School of Business and from Jim Balsilli of RIM among others. I can't think of two people more in touch with the state of business right now. And yet, the themes, and styles of their presentations were quite different.

The Ivy School primarily recommended a path of caution and fiscal responsibility while capitalizing on some possible bargains in the labour market or opportunities in your core strength areas. Good, sound, conservative, and dare I say Canadian advice, wonderful if all that is required is weathering the storm so we can return to a familiar shore.

Balsilli though, thinks this is more than a storm. In his casual, metaphor strewn chat via videoconference from his office, RIM's Co-CEO warned us all that no one right now really knows what to do or how it will all end up. But, he said, one thing seems clear to him, the world will look very different when we do come out of this economic downturn than it ever has in the past. He didn't offer us much in the way of advice but he did suggest locking our best and brightest minds in a room until they come up with a clear, workable new direction. While the process he was proposing was, I hope, another metaphor, the message was clear. And it has been proposed over and over again as a model of good leadership. The best way to predict the future is to invent it. It was a timely reminder of the importance of strong leaders and an entreaty to the assembled communities to put on their thinking caps and create a compelling vision of what we want to create starting now.

What better time for change, renewal and reinvention than when so many of our tried and true structures are crumbling under their own weight. Indeed when the video link ended our MP asked us to do just that, have a conversation about what we wanted the future to look like. Three or four voices echoed the call to create a vision of the future we could begin building toward and then the creative voices were drowned out by a familiar refrain. "What will the government do to protect us?" Reactive proposals for solutions to existing problems took the balance of the discussion time. We didn't return to any imagining, dreaming, envisioning or even to a conversation about what we valued and wanted more of.

It's hard work Leading. I know everyone in the room was well intentioned but it's hard to stand against the tide of reacting voices. Hard sometimes to even remember to stand against the tide of voices. And it is especially difficult to speak up for a process of creation when no one is sure what will be created, and everyone is sure things need fixing right now. Hard yes, impossible no. Perhaps you see a similar trend on a micro scale at your place of work? If you do, disengage for a while and get back to first principles. *What do you stand for, what do you value and what do you want?* For yourself, your family, your community, and the world.

To paraphrase Jim Balsille, "If we don't get first principles right we may head down a path perfectly, and discover we were perfectly wrong about where we end up."

Spend some time thinking creatively this week instead of reacting to what is. Get some support for this. *Call if I can help!*

I'd love it if you could help...

Like most professional practices, my business grows through referrals, if you've enjoyed working with me in the past or if you like what you see and read here please pass on my information to friends and colleagues. It would be my honour and pleasure to take care of any leadership and team development needs they might have.

Warmly,
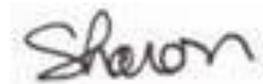
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