

Survival is a Lousy Goal

Remember the children's story about Chicken Little? He was sitting under a tree when an acorn fell and hit him on the head. Not knowing what had happened, Chicken Little assumed the worst and thought the sky was falling. In a panic, he set out to tell the King. (Even then, we wanted someone else to fix our problems.) On his journey, he met Turkey Lurky, Henny Penny, Piggly Wiggly and other friends. Chicken Little was well respected in the animal community, so when he explained his fears, he wasn't questioned. He suggested that the others join him and they did...without question. As the group grew larger, it gained credibility. Their message was doom and gloom; their concern survival.

During the journey, they met Foxy Loxy. Foxy saw their anxiety and took advantage of the situation. Their vision may have been survival; but, his was "lunch!" He advised them of a "short-cut" through a cave. Because they were searching for a quick solution, they took his advice, became the victims of his vision and were never seen again. The sky is still up there.

"...don't over-react; watch who you hang around with; and be wary of short-term solutions."

by Linda Tarrant



We can learn a lot from this fable: don't over-react; watch who you hang around with; and be wary of short-term solutions. Let's consider these cautions in our own uncertain and sometimes scary world.

Don't over react. Chicken Little was the victim of tunnel vision. He assumed that his perspective was the only truth. Had he just looked around, he would have noticed that the sky wasn't falling anywhere else. Fear can cause us to panic and leap to the wrong conclusions. Before we act, let's look at the big picture by gathering information and assessing what's going on beyond our personal and organizational boundaries.

Watch who you hang around with. It could be dangerous to listen only to people who agree with you. You certainly won't get the whole picture. Don't assume that other people's perspectives are wrong. They may just be standing in a different place and the world (or sky) may look different from there. Sometimes enemies look like friends and vice-versa. Look who's joining

forces today. Historical competitors in business, industry and health care are now creating strategic alliances. They realize that working together is the only way to thrive in this new environment. At least once a week, have lunch with someone you disagree with; you may learn something. For sure, it will broaden your perspective.

Be wary of short-term solutions. Quick fixes and short-cuts may cause long-term problems. Wholesale lay-offs and simple tinkering with the system have had disastrous effects on both people and organizations. Organizational bean counters, who are only concerned about the next quarter, and politicians, who are only concerned about being re-elected, often do what is expedient for today without assessing the long-term implications. These people - whom I call "survivalists" - think in the short-term. In this environment, we need people with long-term vision.

There have always been visionaries. Marilyn Ferguson in *The Aquarian Conspiracy* identified scores of people who, throughout the ages, have seen differently and thought differently. These visionaries were usually considered "odd balls." They always challenged the status quo. They were more concerned with transformation than survival.

So how do we get that transforming

vision? I think we start by changing how we plan. Most of us currently use what I call the "rear-view mirror" approach to planning. We examine what we're good at, where we've been successful, what's worked for us in the past, and then we plan to do more of that in the future. Now, that's not a bad way to plan - if you're in a stable environment. But think how difficult it would be to drive down the road with your windshield covered, looking only in your rear-view mirror. It would help if the road were extremely straight, if there were no traffic, and if you went very slowly. But given our current organizational reality, none of those criteria apply. Even worse, we don't have a map that tells us which direction to go or how far we are from our destination.

Why then do we keep looking to our past to direct us into the future? I believe it's because we're afraid that if we accept the challenge of transformation, we won't be the same any more. Even if we aren't that crazy about the way things are now, at least they're familiar. The fear of the unknown may be our worst enemy.

“We need a transforming vision and a belief in ourselves and our ability to thrive in new circumstances.”

But what if we let go of our fears and accept the challenge of personal and corporate transformation? If we do, we must learn how to "future-focus" - being able to see ourselves in the future as being different than we are today. We must believe that the future can be better than the past and that the unknown can be as good as, if not better than, the known. We will be pioneers of the future: inventors, not responders; visionaries, not victims. To do all this, we'll need to be "psychologically hardy" - able to maintain our mental and physical health in times of transition. We can enhance this state of hardiness by developing a sense of commitment versus alienation, control versus powerlessness and by seeing change as a challenge versus a threat. I'll explore these concepts in more depth in the future.

We can learn a lot from Chicken Little. To succeed, we need to stay calm, value many perspectives, have a long-term vision and take advantage of every opportunity. Striving only to survive can limit our vision and prevent us from making the radical changes that are necessary for us to thrive. Survival solutions don't lead to transformation. That's why survival is a lousy goal.

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