

FlowRATE Newsletter – Vision Critical
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A Pessimist is Only an Optimist with Experience

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Every once in a while I enjoy a morsel of dark chocolate from a bowl we keep in the office and that comes nestled in a neat foil wrapper. Although I truly enjoy that treat, I also look forward to the message that is captured on the inside of the packet. Today the message read;

“A pessimist is only an optimist with experience”

Since this is also the day that I planned to prepare my *Vision Critical* column, I decided to contemplate on this statement to see how it might inspire me to deliver this month’s message.

Now that it is March and we are into a new season, I am painfully aware of how the clock relentlessly drags me forward as my shoe heels plow deep into the pathway behind me. We all like to complain about *Time*, but time also delivers something that we cannot get without it – experience. This is not to say that everyone with experience becomes a pessimist. In fact, that message probably gives more credibility to optimism. My feeling is that our experience allows us to foresee the many challenges and barriers that can impede our progress as we attempt to accomplish tasks and achieve our goals. We’ve all been there; everything takes longer and costs more than we predicted when we started our project.

There’s a great quote that says; *“Experience is a terrible teacher. She gives you the test before she gives you the lesson”*

And so it is with *change* and with changing an organization. It takes longer, costs more, there are many tough lessons and experience turns optimism into realism.

At SVF, our mandate for change has become an invigorating and exciting mission. We are learning to change and we are continuously improving our ability to change and to affect change within each other, each and every day.

I once wrote a paper on change and developed what I call the *Formula for Change*. The premise is that everyone has the ability to change but too often there are unforeseen barriers that prevent it (or certainly, slow it down). It is the job of managers to remove the barriers. To do so, of course, we need to identify the barriers that inhibit change.

The formula reads:

$$A - B = C$$

Ability – Barriers = Change

This simple formula intends to capture the fact that we all have the ability (A) to change (C) but there are barriers (B) that prevent us from succeeding at change.

Many *Barriers of Change* are difficult to see, but with a little experience –and devoted effort- it becomes clear that each person has at least a few barriers that need to be exorcised. Knowledge, discipline, self-esteem, self-confidence, impatience, routine, laziness, ego, communication, fear, perfection, trust – need I go on?

As managers of our companies and of our future, we need to add to our roles that of professional agents of change, leaders, counselors, teachers and, sometimes, priests. The question is how long do we allow Time to be the Barrier?

There is a George Carlin standup that I love. In his comedic routine, he did a few moments around this theme of TIME. And, one thing he did was particularly funny. It was about the concept of “NOW”. He pointed out to the audience that, “NOW is never HERE... If you ever mention it... it’s GONE... NOW... is GONE... there it goes again. NOW... There it goes again!!”

The pessimist says, “It is going to be difficult”

The optimist says, “I have experience”



“What do you need today?”™