

Monday Morning Motivation 7/11/2011



THE POSITIVE PLACE. SALES MOTIVATION AND PERSONAL GROWTH

Chaos surfing

A famous book and audio program from some years ago was by famed management guru Tom Peters. His book, "Thriving on Chaos" was about embracing change and managing the change process.

But this week, I'm going to suggest that Chaos is something that needs to be embraced, expected, and then put to your use, just the same as a surfer rides the chaos that is a huge ocean wave.

A wave, organized though it might appear, is largely water that's been blown out of control. In its passive state, water will sit passively, but with a bit of agitation, the once docile water turns into a massive force of nature, able to carve canyons, devastate villages, overturn great ocean liners, erode beaches. In its agitated state, water is chaotic -- certainly weather forecasters will attempt to predict it, ship captains learn how to sail on it -- but those great waves are still able to do great damage and escape our control, no matter how much time and effort we put into attempting to understand them. And yet, surfers climb on a surfboard and harness that energy, even though they are aware that at some time, they'll likely be dumped into the drink.

Why would this matter to us non-surfers? Why should this be of interest to people whose main link to the surfing culture is a set of Beach Boys albums (incidentally, the Beach Boys were not surfers)? It's because as our world around us gets more chaotic, the future will belong to those people who learn to surf the chaos -- using the chaos around them to get ahead and achieve great things.

Let's take a look at those who surf chaos.

The latest thing in libraries is a chaos-based circulation system. Forget the massive shelves with neatly-stacked books; books put into circulation are just assigned a slot somewhere in the warehouse. When a patron goes to check out a book, the book is retrieved by a computer-operated robot, which plucks the book, scans a barcode, and delivers the book to be picked up by the human.

Huge companies such as Amazon.com use a similar arrangement. Incoming inventory, except for those few items that are high-demand, high volume, are merely checked in and put under the watchful eye of a computer. The computer keeps track of where the item goes -- it doesn't matter where. A book on flower arranging might be located adjacent to one on auto mechanics. When an order matches up, the computer directs that the item be matched up with an order and shipped. The order might be pulled by a person, or by a robot -- but where it is depends on where the computer put it, not by what kind of item it is. By doing this, companies (and libraries) use their space wisely, and learn not to think about where something "should be," only where it actually is.

As human beings, most of us prefer order. We put our socks in the correct drawer, straighten our desks, comb our hair. And yet life isn't orderly -- life by its very nature is chaotic. How we learn to deal with that chaos is one of the signs of a developing maturity. We learn to accept what we can't change, change what we're able to. We learn to live amongst the chaos, with the understanding that things are never going to be exactly what we think they should be -- they're too chaotic.

A lot of people never truly learn to deal with chaos. They expect life to adjust to fit them. They complain about people who drive in the wrong lane, or about the "right" way for carrots to be cooked. They have a neat, orderly little world in mind -- but the world is rarely orderly, and usually not very neat.

To some extent, the way we attain some level of happiness in the world is how we adjust to the chaos and still manage to grow, develop, and learn. The plans you laid out when you were in high school probably aren't going to come fully to pass -- but greater plans can still be attained, even amidst the chaos that is life.

I chose the imagery of "surfing chaos" intentionally -- it shows someone who is immersed in a chaotic environment (such as life) and still learns to love it. Let's learn to love it.

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