

Renewal

Those hardy Cypress trees, bending in the wind like an elderly couple crossing a windswept plaza, protect isolated nearby farm buildings at the far reaches of remote and beautiful Point Reyes preserve in California. The trees were planted a century ago for the benefit of future generations. Reaching the end of their lives, they are being replaced by new trees, to renew protection for future generations. This reminds me of members of an English university, finding trees planted by their predecessors more than one hundred years earlier. Those predecessors anticipated the need for massive wooden replacement beams as part of roof renewal (*Affiliation in the Workplace*, referencing Max DePree). “We do not inherit the land from our forefathers, we borrow it from our children,” is how Antoine de Saint-Exupery expressed it (*Affiliation in the Workplace* from Gary Hamel). In the examples of the Cypress trees and the wooden replacement beams, we see physical renewal benefitting our lives and communities. In this article, we explore renewal in other ways: for ourselves, for our organizations, and for our communities, from times past to times to come.

Let us look first at personal renewal, acknowledging that this involves change and transition, which is both rewarding and challenging. Here is a figure from *How to Build a Nontraditional Career Path* that shows how renewal has looked in my nontraditional career path:



This path began in the world of technology and business in conventional organizations, and evolved to the world of career and workforce development in private practice. Volunteering is important throughout; the latest aspect being delivering volunteer career services in a prison (https://www.ncda.org/aws/NCDA/pt/sd/news_article/117365/_self/layout_details/false). Building self-awareness along this path helped with this transformation (as in coaching (Dotlich

and Cairo)). I could not, at the beginning, anticipate how the path would unfold. It has been rewarding and fulfilling, made possible by the support and kindness of many people along the way, for which I am most grateful. Here is some learning about personal renewal that emerges:

- Self-awareness is a key foundation for moving forward
- Honor serendipity for it is at least as important as planning
- Transitions accompanying changes involve a roller-coaster of emotions during endings, neutral zones, and new beginnings (Bill Bridges)
- Expect unexpected supporters and barriers
- Give back to others navigating their paths
- Outcomes range from slight adjustments to major transformation, at different life stages

Now let us look at organizational renewal. The football (round ball) team, Newcastle United, from my home town in England, like other football teams in England, is in a constant state of flux. New players are added, others leave as their short careers peak. Managers and owners change, the stadium is renovated. New young supporters emerge as others are no longer there. Only a few things stay the same, the club name, the tradition and legacy (going back more than a century), the location, and the support of the local community. Renewal is integral to the continued success and survival of the football club, and that is true for most organizations.

Indeed, success is predicated on moving from one cycle of initiation/growth/maturity/transition to another, to avoid decline (*Affiliation in the Workplace*). This requires clarity of vision, integrity of values, and effective leadership to build a capable and flexible workforce (*Building Workforce Strength*). It requires skill in the process of guiding organizational change from creating a climate for change, through engaging and enabling the organization, to implementing and sustaining (as outlined in *Building Workforce Strength* citing Dan Cohen). Organizational renewal today takes place in the context of a long arc moving from a relationship of worker servility that existed in the early years of the twentieth century, to patriarchy that was more typical of the mid-twentieth century, to interdependence today and in the future. Hopefully, we are moving from liberated companies to liberated people, not just for those in high demand skill areas, but for all.

Which brings us to community and what kind of society we are striving to create. In the 1930s and 1940s, led initially by Franklin Delano Roosevelt, the United States endured and then emerged from a debilitating depression, a cataclysmic world war, with a clarity of vision for a fair and just society as exemplified by a second bill of rights (*Business Behaving Well*). Much progress was made on societal renewal in the first eighty years of the twentieth century, building on Roosevelt's legacy. It is one of our great national tragedies that this second bill of rights was not fully realized and it is an even greater tragedy that these values have been under assault for much of the time since the early 1980s.

Today the concepts of truth, justice and fairness are missing from a Washington administration that is focused on grabbing more for the wealthy, while short changing many in our society. This is not sustainable. We are faced with an urgent need to equitably balance individual and community needs for all in our society. To create that same sense of renewal that was clear with Roosevelt, that saw needed further expression through the Civil Rights and Voting Rights acts of

the 1960s, and that propelled the United States to a position of leadership. Today growing economic inequities in our society have led to reduced circumstances and constrained life choices for many. It is incumbent on all of us to embrace principles of social justice with courage and conviction. In so doing, we will experience personal, organizational, and community renewal, so that we can then say, “Compassionate at last, we are compassionate at last.” Personal, organizational, and community renewal, then become interwoven in a beautiful tapestry of life.

Parts of this article are extracted from, or based on concepts from: *How to Build a Nontraditional Career Path* (Praeger, 2014), *Business Behaving Well* (Potomac Books, Inc., 2013), *Building Workforce Strength* (Praeger, 2010), and *Affiliation in the Workplace* (Praeger, 2003).