



talking about...

August 2008

... designing better relationships for better outcomes

A Consistent Message

"If you're proactive, you don't have to wait for circumstances or other people to create perspective expanding experiences. You can consciously create your own."

... Stephen R. Covey (1932 -) consultant and author

Recently there was a show on TV here in Australia called "The Gruen Transfer" that took a light-hearted yet interesting look at the world of advertising. Watching this show got me thinking about the relationship between advertising and leadership.

At first glance it may not appear that the two subjects have a lot in common, yet when seen in the light of the ideas that we shared recently about spatial leadership it becomes clearer. In many ways, advertising is not aimed at a one-off message rather it is designed, at least in part, to create a context through ongoing exposure. We are not expected to go out and buy a particular brand of car simply because we see an advertisement once. With repeated exposure to a certain line of advertising we start to associate certain purchases with aspects of our life that are important to us. The advertising agencies who create these ads are seeking to generate certain stories about their clients and trigger certain emotional responses in those people they think will buy their products. They are looking to create certain meaning for the person watching. Clearly this works as billions of dollars are spent each year in advertising in this country and around the world.

In many ways, the idea of spatial leadership presents leaders with a similar challenge. Leaders are seeking to create meaning for people in a way that compels them to action. Not a purchase as in the case of most advertising rather cooperative action towards certain goals. Yet how often do you get the sense that the leaders of your organisation are presenting a clear and consistent message to build such a context and create meaning. My guess would be that not many people would see their leaders doing this. Rather, most tend to have occasional events or communications such as newsletters aimed at creating a sense of leadership. Although these efforts have some value they do not really serve the purpose of generating a clear and consistent meaning within which people can work.

The opportunity here is for leaders to be clear about what simple meaning they are trying to create within their organisation and to use every situation to develop that. For example, say a leader feels their team is too reactive in the way they operate and they want to create a more proactive attitude. To do this they can add to the explicit messages of being proactive by using certain key messages during as many conversations as possible. Amongst other things they can listen for reactive or "moving away" responses and pepper their language with words such as "proactive", "create" and "initiate" to generate a sense of creating rather than responding. Over time a new context can be created for people within that group regarding how they operate. The key is simplicity and repetition.

Were you aware that the average American adult is exposed to over 3000 ads per day? No doubt these figures would be the same in most first world countries and it leads to the question of the role that advertising unwittingly plays in the life of each one of us.

"The power of imagination created the illusion that my vision went much farther than the naked eye could actually see."

... Nelson Mandela (1918 -) South African president, lawyer, nationalist

A Dam Problem

This is an actual letter sent to a man named Ryan DeVries regarding a pond on his property. It was sent by the Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Quality,

State of Pennsylvania . This guy's response is hilarious, but read State's letter before you get to the response letter.

SUBJECT: DEQ File No.97-59-0023; T11N; R10W, Sec. 20; Lycoming County

Dear Mr. DeVries:

It has come to the attention of the Department of Environmental Quality that there has been recent unauthorized activity on the above referenced parcel of property. You have been certified as the legal landowner and/or contractor who did the following unauthorized activity:

Construction and maintenance of two wood debris dams across the outlet stream of Spring Pond.

A permit must be issued prior to the start of this type of activity. A review of the Department's files shows that no permits have been issued. Therefore, the Department has determined that this activity is in violation of Part 301, Inland Lakes and Streams, of the Natural Resource and Environmental Protection Act, Act 451 of the Public Acts of 1994, being sections 324.30101 to 324.30113 of the Pennsylvania Compiled Laws, annotated.

The Department has been informed that one or both of the dams partially failed during a recent rain event, causing debris and flooding at downstream locations. We find that dams of this nature are inherently hazardous and cannot be permitted. The Department therefore orders you to cease and desist all activities at this location, and to restore the stream to a free-flow condition by removing all wood and brush forming the dams from the stream channel. All restoration work shall be completed no later than January 31, 2008.

Please notify this office when the restoration has been completed so that a follow-up site inspection may be scheduled by our staff. Failure to comply with this

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request or any further unauthorized activity on the site may result in this case being referred for elevated enforcement action.

We anticipate and would appreciate your full cooperation in this matter. Please feel free to contact me at this office if you have any questions.

Sincerely,

David L. Price
District Representative and Water Management Division.

Here is the response sent back by Mr. DeVries:

Re: DEQ File No. 97-59-0023; T11N; R10W, Sec. 20; Lycoming County

Dear Mr. Price,

Your certified letter dated 7/17/07 has been handed to me to respond to. I am the legal landowner but not the Contractor at 2088 Dagget Lane, Trout Run, Pennsylvania .

A couple of beavers are in the (State unauthorized) process of constructing and maintaining two wood 'debris' dams across the outlet stream of my Spring Pond. While I did not pay for, authorize, nor supervise their dam project, I think they would be highly offended that you call their skillful use of natures building materials 'debris.'

I would like to challenge your department to attempt to emulate their dam project any time and/or any place you choose. I believe I can safely state there is no way you could ever match their dam skills, their dam resourcefulness, their dam ingenuity, their dam persistence, their dam determination and/or their dam work ethic.

These are the beavers/contractors you are seeking. As to your request, I do not think the beavers are aware that they must first fill out a dam permit prior to the start of this type of dam activity.

My first dam question to you is:

- (1) Are you trying to discriminate against my Spring Pond Beavers, or
- (2) do you require all beavers throughout this State to conform to said dam request?

If you are not discriminating against these particular beavers, through the Freedom of Information Act, I request completed copies of all those other applicable beaver dam permits that have been issued.

(Perhaps we will see if there really is a dam violation of Part 301, Inland Lakes and Streams, of the Natural Resource and Environmental Protection Act, Act 451 of the Public Acts of 1994, being sections 324.30101 to 324.30113 of the Pennsylvania Compiled Laws, annotated.)

I have several concerns. My first concern is, aren't the beavers entitled to legal representation? The Spring Pond Beavers are financially destitute and are unable to pay for said representation -- so the State will have to provide them with a dam lawyer. The Department's dam concern that either one or both of the dams failed during a recent rain event, causing flooding, is proof that this is a natural occurrence, which the Department is required to protect. In other words, we should leave the Spring Pond Beavers alone rather than harassing them and calling them dam names.

If you want the stream 'restored' to a dam free-flow condition please contact the beavers -- but if you are going to arrest them, they obviously did not pay any attention to your dam letter, they being unable to read English.

In my humble opinion, the Spring Pond Beavers have a right to build their unauthorized dams as long as the sky is blue, the grass is green and water flows downstream. They have more dam rights than I do to live and enjoy Spring Pond. If the Department of Natural Resources and Environmental Protection lives up to its name, it should protect the natural resources (Beavers) and the environment (Beavers' Dams).

So, as far as the beavers and I are concerned, this dam case can be referred for more elevated enforcement action right now. Why wait until 1/31/2008? The Spring

Pond Beavers may be under the dam ice then and there will be no way for you or your dam staff to contact/harass them.

In conclusion, I would like to bring to your attention to a real environmental quality, health, problem in the area. It is the bears! Bears are actually defecating in our woods. I definitely believe you should be persecuting the defecating bears and leave the beavers alone. If you are going to investigate the beaver dam, watch your step! The bears are not careful where they dump!

Being unable to comply with your dam request, and being unable to contact you on your dam answering machine, I am sending this response to your dam office.

THANK YOU,

RYAN DEVRIES & THE DAM BEAVERS

"Mystery creates wonder and wonder is the basis of man's desire to understand."

... Neil Armstrong (1930 -) US astronaut

ON YouTube

Julio Olalla is one of the key thinkers and proponents of ontological coaching. Here he speaks about the ideas behind transformational learning and the role coaching plays in that -- you may find it enlightening.

Go to <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IOS0MThKz1c>

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