

Seeking Clarity in Uncertain Times

By David Brewster

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'Clarity' is one of those rare words in the English language that is so basic, so fundamental, it virtually defines itself. We know when we have it but it can be very elusive. Most importantly, it is something we need - in our lives and our businesses - if we wish to move forward.

Clarity is essential to progress on a number of levels:

- We need enough clarity of 'now' in order to afford ourselves the luxury of looking forward. Not understanding where we are is like remaining in idle while we try to work out what the rattle is under the bonnet.
- We need enough clarity of 'where' in order to move confidently in the right direction. 'Where' doesn't need to be a sharply defined beacon, clearly visible down the road, but it does need to be bright enough to distinguish itself in a fog.
- We need enough clarity of 'how' to be able to judge which side-routes will take us forward and which won't. We will be tempted by numerous attractive detours along the way; we need to make sure that those we take also move us forward.

There is a nice paradox about clarity. On the one hand, crystal-clear clarity has a habit of replacing long-standing angst, puzzlement or confusion instantly and without warning. Remember trying to get your head around some maths or science concept at school, when suddenly the penny drops and you wonder how you ever missed the point in the first place!

On the other hand, clarity about 'real world' situations is seldom absolute. The world is too complex. It is all humanity mixed with systems mixed with uncertainty. Just when we think the picture is becoming clear, someone moves the antenna and we find ourselves snowed in again.

Despite this, there are many things you can do to improve your level of clarity (see <http://www.businesssimplification.com.au/actions/clarity.htm>). But none of these will work unless you are prepared to do two things:

- First, you need to be prepared to be honest with yourself. It can be very convenient to kid yourself that you have clarity - that you have all the answers - when really you are simply tired of trying.

The histories of science and business are littered with examples of evidence being selectively

gathered - and ignored - to support a preconceived notion, rather than to truly understand. Take the various large business collapses of recent times as cases in point. 'Experts' do it all the time.

- Secondly, remember that we always have lived and always will live in uncertain times - and we will always be busy. I found the following in a business book recently: "Most easily is the necessity for personal stock-taking overlooked in the rush and the routine of earning a living". It was written in 1876*.

The time to take stock is now.

*James Platt, "Business", London, 1876

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