

FOREWORD

Why this Book?

The improvement of understanding is for two ends: first our own increase of knowledge; secondly, to enable us to deliver that knowledge to others.

John Locke

Overview

Many of us go through our lives completing tasks and meeting responsibilities without thinking too much about where we are going and how we are going to get there. Only occasionally when a person or an event breaks our pattern of concentration do we take the time to reflect on what we have been doing and to determine whether it is meaningful to us, or to anyone else, that we continue along the same path. When we do find time to mull over our direction, extent of commitments, and rate of progress, the thoughts that often emerge are:

- *When will I discover my true calling, and begin to live a more integrated and meaningful life?*
- *How can I become more knowledgeable and competent in a rapidly changing and stressful world?*
- *How can I manage my way through these mid-life/career disappointments, and have a second chance to succeed?*
- *How can I make my life a memorable event, and become an example for those who follow in the future?*

These questions, and others with similar heart-felt overtones, are clues to lives that lack the cognitive and emotional development that people in advanced societies have come to expect. How can we make the appropriate personal changes? How can we even think about what has happened and what is needed to be done? These are daunting challenges. These concerns and challenges mark the cornerstone of this work.

This book is an investigation into life, career, and social best practices, and a framework for integrating the resulting theories, perspectives, and practices so they may be understood, embraced, and applied for personal, organizational, and community improvement. Other authors have conducted research, analyzed their findings, and presented their perspectives—and this work attempts to give many of them the credit they deserve within the context of its social architecture. The book is a compilation of selected topics and authors whose perspectives have informed the author's own development over a lifetime of social development and career progression.

A few context setting factors that come to mind to begin this conversation are presented below, and are meant to prod you, the reader, to reflect on your own efforts to make sense out of the

sometimes incoherent patterns of human thinking and behavior we all experience. Over 250 references concerning the lives we lead are presented for our reflection, our learning, and our action. A buffet table is set and we can all browse, select, and discuss that which is mentally nourishing in our own lives and careers. We can be more efficient, effective, innovative, and compassionate in managing our way through this one life we have to lead. Welcome to the lifelong Learnership journey: Total Learning, Knowing, and Leading as a Mindful Way-of-Being.

The Quest for Integration in a Differentiated World

Our lives are lived as integrated experiences, but we are formally educated to think and work within differentiated scientific and sociological disciplines. This situation, while somewhat understandable for teaching children, limits holistic adult learning and restricts our minds from expanding to their full cognitive and emotional maturity. What is needed is greater emphasis on holistic, interdisciplinary education and skill development that encourages systems thinking, pattern recognition, situational assessment, broad-based knowledge sharing, and adaptive enterprise. Human and social system development occurs within a complex tapestry of interrelated fields of knowledge, culture, and societal structure. Differentiation and fragmentation lead to greater productivity and efficiency, but we cannot afford to sacrifice the greater human potential and effectiveness that result from lifelong learning in a holistic, system-of-systems context and environment. Fortunately there are the “get-it-all-together” and “let’s-bounce-it-off-of-others” intellects and cranks that occasionally present their views to encourage dialogue and debate. This book is an example of such an occasion, and the reader will ultimately determine this author’s contribution.

The Transition from Mindless to Mindfulness Existence

Sigmund Freud once said: “We know that the first step towards the intellectual mastery of the world in which we live is the discovery of general principles, rules and laws which bring order into chaos. By such mental operations we simplify the world of phenomena, but we cannot avoid falsifying it in doing so, especially when we are dealing with processes of development and change.” Whenever we become lazy or trapped by our simplifications and convenience-based way of thinking we are in danger of operating on the basis of *premature cognitive commitments* in which our frames of reference and preference dominate our mental processing and exclude new, more accurate, and more useful information—we begin to operate *mindlessly*. Mindlessness is perpetuated by (1) unconscious, motivated-not-knowing, (2) using restrictive categories for approved knowledge, (3) a sense of limited scope or resources, (4) a refusal to consider the influence of context, (5) the influence of pre-established values and perceptions, (6) a strong preference for linear, cause and effect thinking, (7) a lack of education, emotional development, and/or experience, and (8) excessive trust in “experts” with little real basis for their views. Upon reflection, it might be that most of humankind lives within social, ethnic, religious, cultural, political, and economic circumstances that perpetuate this mindlessness. Maybe the time has come to raise the bar of our expectations, and declare that given the hundred thousand years or so of our *homo sapiens* ancestors roaming around the earth we should have accomplished more. Maybe we can learn to become more mindful in our reasoning and behavior as we progress into our respective futures.

According to Ellen Langer in her book *Mindfulness* (1989), *mindfulness* can be distinguished by three key qualities: (1) creation of new categories, (2) openness to new information, and (3) awareness of more than one perspective. The willingness and ability to *create new categories* occurs when people pay attention to the information coming their way in terms of the *situational context* involved. A *state of mindfulness* also allows a person and/or group to *welcome new, relevant information* as a source of learning and improvement; it understands that change is continuous and as complexity grows new factors and relationships warrant consideration. And lastly, being astute to others' knowledge and experience requires that not only new information but *others' perspectives are considered* when trying to understand people and situations. Mindfulness is the result of open-minded, systems thinking and human pattern recognition. On the global scale, the world can be divided between the have and have-nots, the mindful and the mindless. We have a choice.

Context Setting: The American Experiment

The American experiment in democratic governance deserves a mixed review. A majority of Americans benefit from the security, wealth, and technological capability offered to those who through education, social connectivity, or birthright have the opportunity to participate, produce, and consume valued goods and services. For a sizeable minority, however, these opportunities may not exist; or are missed due to their lack of preparation; or social barriers are perceived to be too difficult for them to overcome. In terms of serving the interests of ALL Americans more fully, the nation is failing to live up to its Constitutional guarantee of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness for all. There is little doubt that American society, in all its aspects and domains, should be able to produce and distribute its bounty more equitably and in greater alignment with its founding principles.

While the increasing pace of life, complexity of issues, and unpredictability of events threaten to consume many in whirlpools of societal turbulence, the systems that have been designed for support often fail to respond. Chaos and rigidity co-exist to the detriment of social alignment and cohesion. Using Federal government as an example, pluralistic gridlock that even James Madison might find difficult to accept has slowed policy and budget deliberations to a crawl. Americans seem to be losing their ability to recognize and act on issues of mutual concern. Unless a crisis is imminent, little action is taken, and even then that which is done may be ill-advised. The question of whether society can proactively manage its future for positive results, or simply act as an inept caretaker of a diminishing heritage may be worth considering. One may ask: "Where is the competent reasoning, learning, and action necessary to define a desirable national vision and forge the capabilities and resources required for progress?" It appears that we, as people, are not engaging in the most important conversations that are required to make real progress.

A critique of the growth and development of modern American society in terms of the core civic and ethical values envisioned in the American founding could hardly be complimentary. The extent of our impressive economic and technological accomplishments coupled with seemingly intractable political, social, ecological, and international predicaments would surely have been difficult to anticipate and prevent, however, we might have done much better. A short

recapitulation of current societal issues and dilemmas is offered as a reminder that, notwithstanding the progress and standard of living enjoyed by most Americans, our potential is far from being achieved. As a nation we are hamstrung when any sizable segment of the population fails to exercise its rights and honor its responsibilities to itself and the community. Representative of the areas for concern are:

1. Addictions (lack of responsibility and self-control). Existence of drug and alcohol abuse, smoking and eating disorders, and sexual perversions. At issue: Cost and effectiveness of War Against Drugs, and selective medical use of marijuana, etc.
2. Education (inadequate preparation for today's jobs). Lack of knowledge, skills, and motivation for performance in the competitive global workplace. Over- and under-educated people. At issue: Educational standards and opportunity, curriculum content, knowledge of math and science, etc.
3. Social/Moral (crime, anti-social attitudes and behavior). Significant cynicism, intolerance, bias, lack of respect, self-centeredness, pastiche personalities, illegitimate births, and crimes against persons and property. At issue: abortion rights, gay rights, rights of community and obligations of citizens, etc.
4. Economic (worker productivity, lack of economic opportunity, and inequitable distribution of goods and services). Welfare, poverty, and hunger. At issue: jobs, health care, global business and trade, generational under-employment, etc.
5. Political (lack of responsible participation). Lack of respect for government and the political system, public scandals, cronyism. At issue: church/state relations, influence peddling, pluralistic gridlock, etc.
6. Ecological (overuse and destruction of environment). Overpopulation, pollution, resource depletion. At issue: destruction of rain forests, ozone depletion, global warming, etc.
7. Technological (tools and technologies). Unanticipated economic and social impacts. At issue: ethical issues of biotechnology, controls against computer pornography, etc.
8. Geographical (conflicts, wars, and human deprivation). Inequality of life and freedom. At issue: Middle East Wars, African genocide, starvation, and disease, etc.

How to approach each and all of these societal issues in ways that respect the freedoms we cherish, and reinforce the obligations we owe within the complexity and diversity of the American social experiment, weighs heavily on the minds of those concerned with human and social system development. Armed with a belief in the unbounded potential of American ingenuity and our extraordinary progress in science, medicine, government, and economics, we explain to ourselves that all problems may be solved but we have just not found all their solutions. Indeed, this aspiration helped motivate this research, the preparation of a previous doctoral dissertation, and now this book.

A Mindset for Inquiry, Commentary, and Advocacy

The writing of this book was pursued in the spirit and understanding that all societal trends and issues are open to personal interpretation. It is recognized that events have meaning in terms of the values, attitudes, and beliefs of those who witness or participate in them; our perception is our reality. In terms of this project, a need for an awareness of differing perspectives and the resulting effects on individual and group thinking and action is appreciated. The search for core values, attitudes, and beliefs is pursued to discern those for which there is wide support and compelling evidence of value as applied to societal development. As for how well American society has already progressed and the potential quality of its future, a continuum of perspectives is recognizable:

1. The Optimist's View. Optimists, at one end of a continuum, tend to expect the best possible outcomes from current trends or situations. Optimists see the positive results of the American experience and can point to trends that portend an even better future ahead. From this perspective, America's achievements have been extraordinary and have enabled the majority of its citizens to enjoy unparalleled prosperity. Internationally, America dominated the twentieth century and is positioned for leadership in this century also. The optimists trust that the positive aspects of individual, organizational, and community life will emerge and succeed in making the future better than the past—at least for themselves and those they care about. Optimists believe that society will eventually improve education, reduce crime, defeat bias, streamline bureaucracy, overcome poverty, improve life expectancy, etc. Things will definitely get better—somehow.
2. The Pessimist's View. Pessimists, at the other end of the continuum, tend to expect the worst possible outcomes from current trends or events. Their views are the opposite from those of the optimists and they argue that evidence of their views is easy to find in everyday events. The pessimist's viewpoint has probably never been stated better than by Dorothy Sayers, a commentator on Dante (Dante's Inferno) and modern society, who stated, in part: "And since we are today fairly well convinced that society is in a bad way and not necessarily evolving in the direction of perfectibility, we find it easy enough to recognize the various stages by which the deep of corruption is reached" (Sayers, 1954). In terms of this perspective, America's problems with education, crime, poverty, disease, dishonesty, corruption, etc. will not be solved, because we lack the will, the ability, or both to take action.
3. The Hopeful Realist's View. Hopeful realists, somewhere along the continuum between the optimists and the pessimists, are inclined toward rational consideration of facts and cause-and-effect relationships, and believe that resources may be summoned by informed and willing persons to achieve desired improvement. By avoiding what may be termed the optimist's wishful thinking and the pessimist's allegiance to hopelessness, the hopeful realist engages problems and opportunities with personal determination and commitment to the future. Allen Tough in Crucial Questions About

the Future (1991) says “...if in doubt, adopt a cautiously optimistic attitude...Face fully the deep-seated problems of the world, but also retain plenty of hope, energy, and enthusiasm.” (p.43)

This book has been researched and written as a hopeful realist. Almost any text with social commentary or newspaper of the day is sufficient reference to see the obvious—America is severely troubled. If stating that the nation and society are in decline is too much for some to bear, it is certainly true that the nation’s potential is not being fully realized. The challenge is to find strength in our roots, locate our common ground, learn the lessons that are being taught, strive for our higher goals, and act in the interest of ourselves and others.

The Book: An Artifact Supporting Communication and Virtual Collaboration

A major advantage of the Internet is the service it provides in connecting individuals, organizations, communities, and societies in the pursuit of their respective needs and interests. The vast majority of locally and professionally produced data, information, and knowledge across all domains and disciplines are already, or will soon be, available on the internet. Attempts to control and/or manipulate information are numerous, but also are the number of people and groups dedicated to “correcting the record.” This evolving electronic medium is at once the “wild west” all over again, and the catalyst for greater individual freedom, societal participation, and democratic activism.

A new entry into this electronic arena will be The American Learnership Forum (ALF) – a non-partisan, non-sectarian public service portal for serious communication and collaboration among all those desiring to get beyond the “shoot-from-the-hip” and “give-me-my-fifteen seconds of inanity” blogs—to a marketplace for individual, organizational, community, and societal learning and development. The work of the Forum is based on the book: Learnership 2009: The Re-Invigoration of America through Total Learning, Knowing, and Leading as a Mindful Way-of-Being which is a “social architecture for learning and collaborating on (almost) anything.” The book and Forum present a philosophy, architecture, principles, and set of practices guaranteed to make (almost) everyone healthier, more successful, and happier in the lives they are pursuing.