



Home

Mission ▾

Services ▾

Testimonials

Clients

About ▾

You Are Here: APR 2003



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Adaptive Capacity

“To the extent that any single quality determines success, that quality is adaptive capacity.” So wrote Warren Bennis and Robert Thomas in their recent book *Geeks & Geezers*. Think about that observation for a moment. We live in world of accelerating change, expanding choices, and evolving challenges. Your success, however you define it, is largely dependent upon your ability to adapt to changing circumstances.

[“There is a bright future for complexity, what with one thing always leading to another.”](#)

E. B. White, essay in *New Yorker* magazine

“Adaptive capacity” includes three key abilities:

- Ability to understand context,
- Ability to recognize and seize opportunities, and
- Ability to live well despite life’s changes and losses.

The ability to understand “context” is difficult today because of the avalanche of information with which we are confronted. Gleaning the germane from the ground clutter is necessary in business, as is grasping multiple contexts of a situation. For example, people with different perspectives may view the same event differently. Consider your organization, and ask: How does a customer, coworker, and family member view it?

[“Experience is not what happens to a man. It is what a man does with what happens to him.”](#)

Aldous Huxley, *The Perennial Philosophy*

The ability to continue learning is an essential adaptive life skill. When you stop learning, you stop growing. When you stop growing, you start dying. Learn important lessons and skills from every situation, especially failures or unpleasant events.

[“In spite of illness, in spite even of the arch-enemy, sorrow, one can remain alive long past the usual date of disintegration if one is unafraid of change, insatiable in intellectual curiosity, interested in big things, and happy in small ways.”](#)

Edith Wharton, *The Age of Innocence*

Finally, remember that attitude is the driver of all behavior.

Tom Wagner

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identify the Right Questions
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