

Business Principles from a Most Unlikely Place

A picture is worth a thousand words—or at least 500 . . .



Before you read this blog, take a look at the picture above and decide what you think the article is probably going to be about.

HINT: It's not about toilet paper. Skip to "The Point" if you just want to get to the actionable business practice—but I hope you're not in that much of a hurry.

Mindful Practice

One of my daily practices is to shift into a mindful state of curiosity to see what I can learn from something very ordinary. My intent is to discover, recover or uncover an insight or lesson I can use in my practice as a professional facilitator. Often these insights occur on my morning dog walks in an old growth forest park. In this case it was in a bathroom as I was about to brush my teeth. Glancing to one side, I spotted an all too familiar scene, pictured above. I whipped out my iPhone to take a photo, not knowing what my subsequent pondering would reveal.

The Only Fact: *The roll of toilet paper is . . . empty.*

At this point I would normally have leapt into action and been annoyed about having to do so. Instead, I decided to take a bit of time to reflect on the situation and see what transferrable principle I could extract.

I asked myself, "Self, what are some possible explanations for the abandonment of an obvious requirement for action before I came on the scene?" Having paused for a moment, it struck me there were a number of them such as:

- There was a supply shortage
- The smoke detector went off in the kitchen
- Both dogs began barking like crazy
- There was a crashing sound downstairs
- We have an entitlement problem in our house
- The "Someone Should . . ." disease had struck.

Whichever turns out to be true will lead to different action. Perhaps I would be well-advised to pause before acting. Perhaps I should deepen my understanding of what might have led up to a potential crisis (as minor and personal as that might be).

The Point?

We are in a time of incredible complexity and uncertainty. We are driven by the philosophy of time-based competition, where faster is better and is required for competitive advantage. We are also in the midst of the COVID-19 chaos. We are bombarded with changes in the economy, the environment, our home/social lives and the world in general. Standing still isn't an option. Or is it?

- Responding thoughtfully may be more effective than responding quickly.
- If there is a fire or some other immediate emergency, acting swiftly is an appropriate response.
- However, if the circumstances are less time dependent, a better response is to pause.
- Taking a reasonable amount of time to broaden and deepen one's understanding of the context will generally lead to better, wiser and more effective action.

Back to the Issue at Hand (so to speak)

In this case, there are no particularly dire consequences for misinterpreting the circumstances leading up to the empty role. As it turns out, as you can see from this picture, it was not a supply issue. I now must determine whether to begin a wide ranging inquiry as to how or why this situation came about—or let it go. Stay tuned . . .

“Learning is everywhere . . . if we choose to see it!”

About David Gouthro

David has over 40 years facilitating high energy, creative and engaging face-to-face meetings that focus on delivering client value in a manner that is focused, flexible and fun. Embracing the challenge of providing the same quality of service in an online world has been heartily embraced and he now enjoys designing and delivering high impact meetings from afar! David can be reached at david@davidgouthro.com or 604.926.6858. And he is far from being Zoomed out in case you want a more visual conversation!

DAVID GOUTHRO | 09/01/2020 | ARTICLES | 82 COMMENTS

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Jan Nicholls ⌚ September 02, 2020

Reading this takes me back to the early 80s... your style is fresh as ever! Thanks for the reminder to pause and reflect where appropriate.

Reply

David Gouthro ⌚ September 02, 2020

My pleasure. Getting a bit cheeky in the remaining 30 years of my career!

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Courage is what it takes to stand up and speak; it is also what it takes to sit down and listen. ~ Winston Churchill

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