

The Tsunami that Refreshes, Cleans, Renews, and Sustains

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This short essay is shared with some intelligent and prudent friends but it is inspired by and principally addressed to a specific group of persons upon whom I must bestow, in maximal possible kindness, the term of “persons with potential.” These individuals have done well by certain “world” standards. They have apparently been strong achievers in their professions and have been rewarded well by their various employers. Most appear to have done well with their personal management of finances as well. However, to be quite frank, it appears that when it comes to making decisions about how to act in the present, with respect to opportunities that variously may be termed investments of time, energy, or capital, some of these “persons of potential” cannot see clearly what is going on in front of their eyes or directly under their feet.

My intention is to “electroshock” a few of these people, figuratively speaking. These persons are smart, often with families and dependents, and it seems fair to say that all aspire to be happy and fulfilled doing some good works, sensible things, building up solid and sustainable lives for themselves and their families. The problem is that, like many people, they are trapped in some “old thinking” and they don’t want to make the break with what are now very non-functional old ways of thinking and behaving about labor, production, capital, wealth, business and community. In a way, my friends and I don’t need such individuals within our work, but frankly, I have strong aspirations to accomplishing a great and lasting set of works and “sooner than later.” Certainly I’d feel much better about some things taking place today and tomorrow rather than in six months or a year from now. I’m young enough and my friends are young enough to hold out for longer and to take the slower and more solitary path, but I have always felt that if you are traveling down the highway and you know with certainty what is the right path, the correct road, then it is foolish to sit there in the middle of the junction, killing time and procrastinating. It’s better to get on with work, with life, and to accomplish something, rather than to sit around waiting to have something come along and catch you by surprise.

As for these “persons with potential,” some of them take great pride in their education and/or their past laurels of employment and vocation, as measured, mostly in their terms, by accumulation of money and material possessions. This is evidently so even if indeed most of the latter does not actually belong to them or can be quickly taken away by any number of events or people. From my perspective, they are in for a huge and shocking surprise, in coming months and years, no matter what their feelings of comfort and joy over a few positive fluctuations in the stock markets or some words of assurance from politicians. Many will experience a surprise that I am certain will be comparable to that felt by some unfortunates on December 26, 2004 when with amazement and glee they walked out to explore the seafloor of a suddenly receding Indian Ocean.

However, if our “persons with potential” would simply take off their self-imposed blinders, listen attentively and without prejudice, roll up their shirtsleeves, and be willing to devote some time to a new way of pursuing wealth, a new practice of working with capital and production, I am quite certain that they would rapidly become enthusiastic and also grateful to those who offered them the opportunity to fully actualize their potentials and realize their dreams. If these individuals are

able to stop sitting on the fence and squirming around with indecision (triggered because in their deeper minds they sense the correctness of our message and the finality of their old, conventional, and dead-end ways), then they will discover valuable opportunity, stability, and sustenance, all within their reach, veritably at their fingertips. It is as valuable and as simple (but alas, as foreign and resistible because it is not coming from their accepted pundits and textbook gurus), as the act of listening to the young girl who's shouting, "Hey! Get off the beach! Forget your beach blanket and umbrella - just run with your kids as hard as you can up to the hills!"

The mathematician and philosopher Alfred North Whitehead wrote, "The tragedy of the world is that those who are imaginative have but slight experience, and those who are experienced have feeble imagination. Fools act on imagination without knowledge; pedants act on knowledge without imagination. The task ... is to weld together imagination and experience."¹ Prof. Whitehead wrote this more than eighty years ago within an essay entitled, *Universities and their Function*, regarding the integrative and balancing roles of universities. He saw the university as an institution bringing youth, highly energetic and imaginative, together with mature, experienced, and often less imaginative adult mentors and teachers. This was certainly a vision and a practice in the past within many centers of learning and not only at colleges and universities.

Today, there is an amazing phenomenon that has been sweeping across our society, especially in business and political circles, and quite evident by the words and practices of many of today's so-called pundits of the financial world, particularly those of the venture capitalist species. We find that an almost hypnotic spell has taken force over the minds of many people, an infatuation and a clear-cut prejudice in favor of the image and appearance of imagination, innovation and genius. Alas, it is an infatuation nonetheless, lacking in substance, and clearly lacking in experience and deep knowledge. It is a disease and a disability of our economy and of our whole society, threatening not merely to put brakes upon progress but to stall and even reverse our abilities of withstanding highly nonlinear and unpredictable events and sequences of events – from nature, accident, and man – that threaten even our existence as a civilization, even as a species, upon this planet.

This "grand infatuation" has mesmerized so many people in finance, business, and particularly in areas of small business including entrepreneurial ventures connected with technologies, be they in energy, telecommunications, security, medicine or other fields. This is the same kind of infatuation that has led major financial institutions into the whirlpool and cesspool of highly toxic investment malpractices of the sort that have generated our present recession-depression. Furthermore, we see evidence of our chronic infatuation with the "image and appearance of brilliance and innovation" extending into a kind of permanent disability or disfigurement as an entire government administration pursues and perpetuates an economic plan that some have likened to trying to cross over the Niagara River above the great Falls on a hastily built bridge of logs and ropes. We are looking left and right at plans, schemes, and especially investments, many made by so-called "experts" within private equity and the venture capital fields, that read like prescriptions for certain failure and loss. At the heart of these are some common trends, centermost being one of avoidance to precisely those ideas, persons, teams, companies, and endeavors that bring in squarely and soundly both imagination and experience, youth and maturity, high-energy and caution, vision and pragmatism.

Our "persons of potential" appear to be deeply under the spell of the "old guard" thinking that is determinedly pursuing courses of action with apparently little place or time for minds and

methods that do in fact synthesize creative imagination with sound, solid living experience. In my opinion, this is a recipe for disappointment and failure, on both the personal level and on that of the entire society.

I am going to quote from a book on an abstract mathematical topic, Poincare's Conjecture, because in that book are a few referential statements that really "hit the nail on the head" and drive it home.² In a chapter on the life and work of Bernhard Riemann (1826 - 1866), one of the first to clearly explore and enunciate non-euclidean geometry and to pave the way for the later progress in the field that transformed mathematics and physics (e.g., general relativity), the author writes:

"In an influential recent book, *Good to Great*,³ American management consultant Jim Collins and a team of researchers identified eight major corporations that consistently outperformed other companies. They found that all were headed by self-effacing CEOs who shared a number of personal traits that Collins dubbed level-five leadership. One of the traits was that no one, except those in the know, had ever heard of the leaders. They were not on magazine covers. They were not flashy. They lived simply and attributed their company's success to luck. They were very modest, attributed their success to others, were determined and extremely focused, and were bold. The combination of modesty with extreme daring and the courage of one's convictions sounds quite a bit like Riemann."⁴

Bernhard Riemann changed the way people think about space and geometry. His work, expressed in the manner that it was, in the time and era in which it was, triggered profound new explorations and investigations that ushered in nearly all of the developments leading in turn to modern technological achievements in electronics, aerospace, nuclear power, genetics, and computer science. Much of this was because of what Riemann catalyzed and triggered, by breaking out of old molds and patterns of doing mathematics; once begun, the revolution of imagination and innovation did not stop. "He completely changed the terms of discourse. It was as if one were nearly blind, and could suddenly see. ... Recognizably modern mathematics begins with Riemann."⁵

I would like every reader to pause and reflect upon this extended quote about the Collins book in the paragraph before last, and to do so without thinking about the identity of those eight corporations and their leading CEOs. Instead, one should please think carefully about the following topics and questions. There are no singular answers, but I believe that with careful reflection some of my deeper meaning and *Ur*-intention may be gleaned, and understood.

1. Who are the persons most visible, most published and "seen" today upon the covers of magazines, on the front pages of CNN and other news websites, on TV?
2. What are the most prominent, media-visible, talked-about, blogged-about companies today?
3. What are some of the companies that are or have been (purportedly) receiving noteworthy investments from the private equity and venture capital communities during the past few years?
4. What are the main or major activities that are associated with (conducted by, "in the news about") these prominent persons and companies?
5. How do these activities and their public words, their "expertise" – or shall we say, their imagination and their experience – support long-term steady and stable life for the company and for the society in which any company must abide?

6. How do these persons and these companies compare - in terms of imagination and experience, and ability to produce worthwhile, significant, dominant, “disruptive breakthrough” products and services for the times and economies of our present world, looking forward to five and even ten years ahead – with a company and a team such as exists within the relatively unknown partnership of TETRADYN?

Those “persons of potential” who have the courage and openness of mind to examine clearly, critically, unabashedly, what is our present and future economy and society, and what is of value and importance within personal relationships, bonds, and commitments among honorable men and women, and what is of value and importance to large numbers of fellow citizens and residents in countries that are undergoing unexpected and unpredictable changes in every aspect of life – such persons will be able to quickly understand that there are very few times in life when a remarkably brilliant opportunity comes along, an invitation, an open door, such as there has been of late with the TETRADYN team.

No amount of words can convey, nor convince, nor demonstrate something that is an essence, an intangible, an epiphenomenon, as is the organic synergy and symbiosis that has evolved, naturally more so than intentionally or by any premeditated design, into TETRADYN’s core logic, its algorithm family, its product and service line, and its business model. Fortunately, the strong and dedicated work of friends with truly brilliant understanding of business, finance, management, and communication have made it possible for visionary, revolutionary mathematics and technology to be understandable and expressible as business models, cash flow forecasts, market assessments, workflows and profitability models. It is only through the teamwork of committed partners that anything as bold, as revolutionary, as disruptive, as evolutionary as what is in TETRADYN can have come to be what it is and to have the clear potential that it does to exceed far and away the “old thinking” of today’s Silicon Valley godfathers and pundits and to become what a future Jim Collins will write about in a future variant of *Good to Great*.

It will be very interesting to see how people respond to this essay, particularly from among those “persons of potential” who have read through these pages intently and seriously. TETRADYN’s Nomad Eyes model was not installed nor even fully implemented in December, 2004, but by February of 2005 it had been demonstrated how rapidly and easily word could have reached a sufficient number of people on some beaches of Thailand and other sites around the Indian Ocean to have made a worthy and significant reduction in the numbers of deaths due to the tsunami. The data was all accessible and free. The communications links were already all in place. The social behaviors and settings were all sufficient for what could have led to a different outcome for a great many families from around the world.

We are today in a similar type of situation or class of situations with our economy and our precarious and highly nonlinear, unstable conditions of climate change, energy depletion, and rapidly escalating and volatilizing global conflicts. We are living in a world full of 1% and 0.1% catastrophic situations and where the probabilities of convergence and amplification of long-ignored “unexpected, improbably, and out of mind” disruptive events are clearly increasing. We have the recent experience of seeing in the financial markets what can and will happen when a large number of self-assured people choose to consistently and deliberately ignore the improbable and that which is unattractive, unpleasant, and a dampener for festive moods and sentiments. We cannot continue to practice ignorance as a religion.

As I said, it will be very interesting to see how people respond to this essay. Another and quite well-known author, Jared Diamond, wrote an entire book on social organizations and

“ecosystems” – Collapse: How Societies Choose to Fail or Succeed.⁶ The author’s own summary states the entire thesis very clearly:

“This book employs the comparative method to understand societal collapses to which environmental problems contribute. My previous book (*Guns, Germs, and Steel: The Fates of Human Societies*), had applied the comparative method to the opposite problem: the differing rates of buildup of human societies on different continents over the last 13,000 years. In the present book focusing on collapses rather than buildups, I compare many past and present societies that differed with respect to environmental fragility, relations with neighbors, political institutions, and other "input" variables postulated to influence a society's stability. The "output" variables that I examine are collapse or survival, and form of the collapse if collapse does occur. By relating output variables to input variables, I aim to tease out the influence of possible input variables on collapses.”⁷

While Diamond’s focus is upon social groups from communities upwards in scale to nation-states, there is much that can be abstracted and distilled from his model and from those of other researchers that can be applied to the matters of success and failure within socio-economic entities such as companies and corporations. We can all benefit from thinking about some of these same questions and issues with respect to the vocations, the jobs, the contracts, the business tasks that we as individuals and teams undertake, on behalf of companies and formal organizations, and in exchange for symbols of wealth (money and benefit packages). We will all do well to be thinking about how our old paradigms and expectations of job security, reward, incentive, compensation, and general well-being have been right or wrong in the past, right or wrong in the present, and right or wrong for the future. Certain mistakes can have disastrous consequences for our individual selves, our families, our next generations. Certain opportunities and invitations can be remarkable ways to get off a desert island or out of a dangerous, infested jungle, or off an ice floe, and into a safe, sturdy, seaworthy ship. That ship may look small, or lightweight, or even a bit shaky right now. But that may only be a matter of how one’s eyes are accustomed to seeing and perceiving other people and other situations. Furthermore, the small dinghy into which you see yourself stepping, that, my friend, is only because the larger ship, the full-scale, full-fledged ocean cruiser, storm-worthy and battle-reliant, is still yet to be completed in the shipyard that is just on the other side of yonder island a few hundred meters away. You are invited to come on board, and yes, to work as part of the crew, and to help putting the finishing touches – but very important and individually distinct and special finishing work – to our ship.

You have this invitation, this consideration, because you are seen presently as a “person of potential.” However, like the weather at sea, things can change on a moment’s notice. One day’s potential can, the next morning, be something that has already sailed off, far, far away.

¹ A. N. Whitehead, *The Aims of Education and Other Essays* (New York: Macmillan, 1967), 93.

² D. O’Shea, *The Poincare Conjecture* (New York: Walker & Company, 2007)

³ J. Collins, *Good to Great: Why Some Companies Make the Leap ... and Others Don’t* (New York: HarperCollins, 2001)

⁴ ref. 2, p. 100

⁵ ref. 2, p. 100

⁶ J. Diamond, *Collapse: How Societies Choose to Fail or Succeed* (New York: Viking Press, 2005)

⁷ ref. 6, p. 18