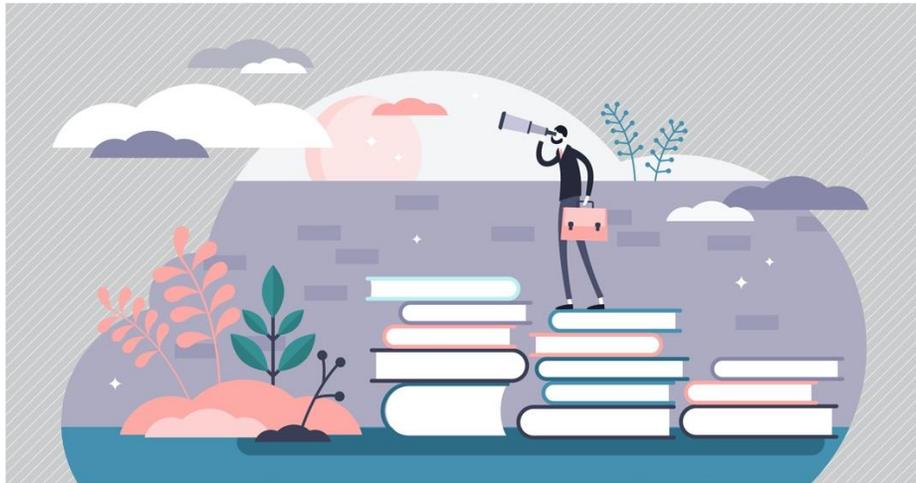


Does COVID-19 tear the poetry from our souls?

In the first of a series of special briefings, Dr. Charles Spinoso from VISION Consulting explores the dangers that pessimistic COVID-19 fantasies pose to business and offers three key steps for protecting and revitalising your organization.



How many times have you heard pundits and senior managers raise pessimistic questions about the ‘new normal’? Will diners return to restaurants? Will Americans get back on the freeway and Europeans head to the beach? Will workers return to their offices and gather once more around the water cooler?

It’s an outlook that suggests COVID-19 has cut the poetry from our souls. Do these pundits really think that people will abandon the restaurant culture we have enjoyed since the days of ancient Rome? Will Americans no longer be born to run? Will no one wish to spend springtime in Paris or yearn for the buzz of walking around the town that never sleeps? Will I spend the rest of my life in a room, gazing at a computer screen? The answer to all of these questions is an emphatic ‘no’.

COVID-19 has not infected our souls

But if the answer is no, why do we allow our hearts to feed on such pessimistic fantasies. Back in 1922, the poet W. B. Yeats told us that if we feed “the heart on fantasies” it grows “brutal from the fare.”[†] Our brutalized hearts—and they are becoming that—will damage our businesses.

If customers were to reshape their spirits as radically as the pundits and perhaps we fear, it wouldn't just affect hospitality and travel, it would threaten the future of everything from banking and utilities to consumer products and technology. But don't worry. COVID-19 has not reached into our souls. Stand with us against this brutalization of hearts.

Here are three suggestions for protecting the poetry of your organization.

1 Plan for a few futures

There will be changes, and businesses should begin planning by considering the degrees of change that may be required. Will people stop going to restaurants? No. But will they want more distance between them and the next table? Probably. (It's the same for offices.) How much distance? No one knows. So plan for a little more, more than a little more, and the full six feet.

Will most people stop commuting to work? No. But will they work virtually an extra day a week? What about two? Plan for both. Will businesses move towards hiring talented remote workers who seldom come into office? Will it be a few or more than a few? Plan for both cases. If your business has become enthusiastically adept at virtual meetings, plan for changes at the higher end.

2 Be creatively opportunistic

We say 'plan', but be creatively opportunistic too. If your employees and customers are having to maintain physical distances from each other, can you make some of the awkwardness cool? Are there gadgets you can hand out for a more supervised do-it-yourself experience when it comes to, say, working with a specialist like a lawyer or an accountant? How can you make the working-from-home experience more productive for teams? Is there a win-win opportunity for them to spend more time at home thinking and innovating?

Although some elements of the new normal will be imposed by state and healthcare officials, the design of many standards and warnings will be up to us.

3 Seek the truth and know you could be wrong

In the face of COVID-19, speaking and acting like a pundit has become even more popular. You only have to scrawl through social media. But pundits do not manage businesses. And good managers are far more creative, flexible, and morally sensitive than pundits.

Anyone who seeks to understand customers, the way the organization works, what brings the best out of employees, and what strategy will beat the competitors knows that such truths are very hard to come by and are always subject to change.

When we, as managers, seek and speak truth, we should always be open to how it is that we might be wrong. Discovering a misjudgment usually reveals a more vigorous truth. Truth seeking is not the sort of thing that yields one version. People who are seldom wrong or have only one version of the truth are simply no longer seeking truth.

However, when we *act* in business, we must act decisively and with conviction. Only conviction will ensure that those involved in executing the action will go all the way. We can only make good evaluations about decisive, full-bore actions, and we need to understand clearly both failure and success.

Pundits are totally different from managers. They speak with conviction and hedge their actions. Conservative pundit Peggy Noonan called Donald Trump “insane” in print and took no action to remove him from office other than to complain and complain and complain. That’s the opposite of the attitude you want in your virtual boardroom and management meetings. Bar punditry from your virtual boardroom and management meetings. Seek truth thoughtfully; act with conviction.

How can we help you?

At VISION, we help leaders develop the poetry of their leadership styles and their organizational cultures to enable dramatically higher levels of productivity, speed, and innovation. The insights we share today come from such work, and we have our clients and their success to thank for our contrarian approach. Let us know if we can help you.

[†]WB Yeats, A Stare’s Nest By My Window

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