

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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I heard the news the other day: “Welcome Wagon runs over newcomer. Good Humor man slays 10. Pen pal stabs pal with pen. Pediatrician dies of childhood disease. And Jacques Cousteau dies in bathtub accident, details on the half hour!”

With all apologies to George Carlin, who actually uttered those very words, it’s so similar to what we’re being exposed to these days. The news has slid into an all-out depression-fest, and the best advice is to just bypass it to avoid being paralyzed with fear and gloom.

It’s truly a fascinating lesson in group psychosis: “Consumer sales were down in the fourth quarter due to lack of confidence in the financial markets.” This, followed by, “The financial markets slid dramatically today due to poorer than expected consumer sales in the fourth quarter.” Doesn’t everyone understand how intertwined we are? Everything flows from the actions of others as Newton’s Third Law clearly predicts, and we’re all subconsciously doing our part to extend and enhance the financial malaise we’re facing. There certainly are some fundamental issues in various areas, and admittedly perhaps more in combination than normal. But the economic end-of-times discussion has gotten the better of us, and it has even affected our language. It’s fascinating how frequently people will adopt the same words or phrases and only use them in particular circumstances. These phrases spread like a virus until everyone is uttering the same words as if it’s their original thought. So I’m taking umbrage with one phrase that’s permeating our vocabulary right now and turning it around: It’s simply time to “hunker up.”

I for one am completely exhausted by the seemingly inexhaustible usage of the term “hunker down.” As part of “weathering the storm” and “playing it close to the vest,” there are just too many pronouncements of hunkering, and always in the downward direction. It’s time to hunker up!

At the most basic level, the economic agreement that we all participate in is a series of deposits and withdrawals. We rarely achieve a perfect balance, and there is ebb and flow in both directions. But if either side ceases completely, the other will wither and die. It’s the same in the IT ecosphere, and this isn’t the time to simply withdraw from everything because of the fear of the unknown.

It’s clear that if your organization is actually under severe financial duress at this time, it’s necessary to adapt and make changes to turn things in the right direction. But if your company is relatively stable, albeit careful, and there really is cash (hopefully not all in a shoebox under the bed), then stay with your vendors and partners and find reasonable ways to continue business and projects. Maybe it’s scaled back, but not eliminated. Because for every initiative you shut off downstream because of hunkering in the wrong direction, that company is affected and forced to lay off its employees, reduce its expenditures, cancel projects, etc. Repeat the cycle.

Challenging times can actually be a very good opportunity to step up your activity. My good friend, Howard Lieberman, who is chairman of the Silicon Valley Innovation Institute, recently said, “I think this should be a boom time for innovation. We have always innovated our way out of financial challenges in the past, and it is precisely the time to make careful investments to improve processes, reduce costs, and use technology to add to the bottom line.”

IT executives should understand this better than most, since we’re tasked with both business-line responsibilities directly tied to the company finances and with translating technology into value. So, before you cancel every initiative, postpone every upgrade, and stall every project that you otherwise know will add real, measurable value to your business, reconsider the opportunity lost and the part you play in the economic recovery. Your vendors and partners have never been more eager to cut deals and grant concessions with the challenges at hand.

The U.S. economic stimulus bill won’t be enough. Unless and until we all start to realize our role in this symbiotic relationship, the suffering, or at least the appearance of suffering, will continue.

And George Carlin had seven famous words to describe that situation, so let’s not go there.

That Sums it up. **ME**

Time to
Hunker
Up

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