

November 20, 2009

Listen and You'll Learn

I have always subscribed to the notion that organizational structures are organic entities and not inanimate structures with immovable parts. I recently heard a presentation that declared that "Taylor was dead." In fact, Frederick Taylor, the father of the scientific theory of management, passed away in 1915, but his management theories continue to influence the world of work.

In 1974, Peter Drucker described Frederick W. Taylor as "the first man in recorded history who deemed work deserving of systematic observation and study." On Taylor's "scientific management" rests, above all, the tremendous surge of affluence in the last seventy-five years which has lifted the working masses in the developed countries well above any level recorded before, even for the well-to-do. Taylor, though the Isaac Newton (or perhaps the Archimedes) of the science of work, laid only first foundations, however. Not much has been added to them since – even though he has been dead all of sixty years."

While Taylor served us well through most of the 20th Century, the manufacturing and mechanistic systems upon which he based his view of the world of work have now given way to an organic and, in fact, "viral" approach to organizational structures. This "organicity" of work, interestingly enough, has been fueled by technology and the increased and apparent preferred use of social media networks. Who would have "thunk it!"

In any case, while some bemoan the declaration regarding Taylor's passing, some feel that he was a man for another time. This is the context of my tale about my penchant for "personalizing" Mesa College as a living, organic entity capable of creating a climate and sending out messages that are clearly audible, if only we listen well.

Over the last couple of weeks, several messages have emerged from what I will call the Mesa primordial soup. It is a mixed message of sorts, but if one listens carefully, the overriding tone emerging is one in which everyone wants to stop, take a deep breath, realize that it is the end of November, look forward to December and—yes—even the start of the New Year, while at the same time feeling just a tinge of guilt for not continuing with our nose to the grindstone, given the ever changing budget picture.

In a recent meeting with Team Mesa (Mesa's Executive Staff), I looked around the table and everyone seemed exhausted, it was clear we needed to stop and take time to catch our second wind. We decided to put our pens, pencils, and Blackberrys down and look at one another as we drew a long deep breath and said, "I think we've done all we can for now; we're on course, we're in good shape given the circumstances, and yes, nothing earth shattering will happen during the rest of November and December. The next big marker, after all, should come after the Governor's Budget Message in January 2010...so let's "give it a rest!"

How about if we concentrate on teaching, on shoring up our "To Do" notes, getting to that project at the college or at home that we have neglected, and prepare to "Give Thanks." It is time to reaffirm how much we do have, to look at our good fortune and to measure riches in terms of

our personal relationships, the privilege of being in the business of education and being certain in the knowledge that we are surrounded by people of good will.

Here's a promise so that we may all rest easy...

We promise that no new programs, initiatives, discussions or major decisions will be made during the remainder of November and December. In fact, we really only have 18 working days left in 2009; and, if some unforeseeable event happens, President's Cabinet will be convened to ensure that any urgent decision is fully vetted with campus representatives.

Let's take a breather, let's take time to think, engage in "random acts of kindness," enjoy the hospitality that comes with the Holiday Season, and reconnect with your colleagues, friends and family.