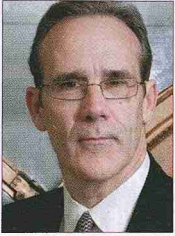




Seizing Opportunity

by *Esther Muller and Michael Williams, Ph.D.*



Opportunity stimulates change. Change can be rapid, discontinuous, and noisy. With its motion and clatter, change can distract our attention from evaluating the merits associated with an opportunity. In order to determine if an opportunity is viable, we must gauge its power and potential, understand the accompanying risks and rewards, and assess if the opportunity is uniquely aligned with our capabilities. A Chinese proverb offers “Outside noisy, inside empty.” The bustle of our lives can create *cacophonies-of-distractions*. Distractions can alter our perception of an opportunity; in turn our ability to determine its worth. Two counter-measures to distraction are focus and critical thinking. They are our allies and tools. Once enlisted and employed, we can determine if the potential results from either seizing or passing on an opportunity, will enable us to achieve desired goals.

In previous articles we’ve referenced author Darryl Connor’s orientation toward change “change provides us with the opportunity to be architects or victims of our own future.” When an opportunity is presented a decision must follow. For example, we can decide to accept or ignore; chase or seize opportunities. The potential we perceive in an opportunity influences the efficacy of our decision. Perceptions are subjective. They are influenced by emotion, bias, and limited information. Moreover, perceptions influence belief systems. Our belief systems are the final arbiter of the decisions we make concerning responding to opportunities. Organizational culture is predicated on belief systems. An organization’s mission statement can offer clues concerning its orientation toward opportunity. Identifying and evaluating these clues, may enable critical decision making relative to joining or partnering with a company.

To better understand orientations toward seizing opportunity; let’s consider the influence of belief systems and the role of culture on our decision making relative to opportunity.

Belief Systems, Carpe Diem, and Culture

Belief systems are complex and influential. What we believe about an opportunity may stimulate us to seize it. Seizing is a powerful and determined act. Seizing opportunity may represent a company’s cultural orientation toward opportunity inferring that organizational stakeholders should adopt this behavior. Seizing can be defined in many ways. One definition offers seizing can be interpreted as “taking by force” (Merriam Webster Dictionary). When seizing an opportunity, we often “take it by force.” Unfortunately, we frequently do not fully understand the ramifications of this decision as it may irrevocably alter our lives. Culturally, seizing opportunities has been portrayed as a daring endeavor; rife with passion, commitment, and purpose.

In contemporary culture, seizing opportunities in our personal and professional lives is frequently bannered in the phrase “Carpe

Diem” or “Seize The Day.” This phrase enjoyed a resurgence of attention in the 1989 film “Dead Poets Society.” In the film, English teacher John Keating exhorts his students to “Seize the day, boys. Make your lives extraordinary.” The influence of Keating exhortation is omnipresent in today’s business environment. This bravura fuels the entrepreneurial spirit enabling courageous and decisive action toward realizing business goals.

Once an opportunity is seized, it is ours to develop, expand, and manage. Connor offers that we can choose to be “architects or victims of our own future.” The role we choose is a function of choice. While a seemingly and simple decision, the ramifications of our choices can be significant and far reaching. As the time worn axiom warns “what we don’t know can’t harm us.” Frequently, at the time of our decision to “seize” an opportunity, we do not possess a full understanding of how the opportunity might impact our lives or the goals we want to achieve. However, as often happens once engaging an opportunity, the opportunity and accompanying evolutionary experience takes shape, develops character, and acquires momentum. It becomes animated, taking on a life of its own in or outside of our control.

Organizational cultures are social and situational crucibles. Fueled by psychological and sociological dynamics, culture forges together properties of opportunity and decision-making uniting them in a unique composite of cultural thought and action. Change contextualizes opportunity. Change provides an ideal growth environment for opportunity; rich in ambiguity, randomness, and chaos. Change and culture influence our decisions relative to effectively managing opportunities we engage toward goal achievement. As President Abraham Lincoln wrote concerning opportunity and change, “I will prepare and some day my chance will come.”

Increasingly, performance coaching is being recognized and recommended as a key activity in “preparing for chance.” In the rapidly changing 21st century business environment, working with a trained and seasoned coach may help you to maximize the yield from opportunities you choose to seize. Carpe Diem; seize your day!

As we write, get coached; get results! ■

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