Throughout all of history, great challenges have led to even greater advances.  The key is to be attentive, diligent and adapt through innovation.

I was coaching one of our clients this afternoon regarding a particularly difficult challenge that they were having as a result of a series of people challenges that seemed to fall one after the other.  And, although each of the issues was progressively more challenging than the previous one, they were eventually resolved in a positive manner.  The client was particularly taken by one senior executives response to a very delicate but very, very volatile condition that was discovered and resolved with the proper level of urgency and diligence.  I mentioned to the client at the end of our discussion that this was a good thing, to which they responded – how is this bad thing something that is good?  My response was as follows:  “nothing improves the state of your people challenges when everything is running well, it only improves as a result of challenges.”   As a result of the solutions that they had developed they were able to correct a previously undiscovered compliance and policy issue while immediately instituting the necessary training issues to thwart future challenges of a similar nature.  As such this particular executive was developing a new skill set, a core competency, that without the challenge, otherwise known as an opportunity, they would not be attentive, and quite possibly unable, to solve a similar situation in the future.  Their action saved their organization a significant liability that might have caused them significant cost, and most importantly, the loss of reputation for an otherwise impeccable well known organization.  These challenges made them a better executive for the future.

One of my favorite adages from my days in venture capital was this: necessity is the mother of invention.  It’s true.  Almost everything that we are surrounded by today didn’t exist a mere 100 years ago.  All of the advances in health, technology, medicine, architecture, energy, EVERYTHING is better today than it was 100 years ago.  We’ve eradicated diseases, improved transportation, changed communications, and have created thousands of solutions people 100 years ago could not have imagined.  We can be half way around the world in less than a day, and can talk to just about anyone anywhere on earth in only a few seconds. Considering that homo sapiens have been on this planet for a mere 10,000 years out of millions of years of earth’s existence, the pace of invention today is extraordinary.  And to think that your iPhone has more technology in it than the entire technology that landed on the moon a mere 50 years ago.

So it is with most things.  You can’t improve your health if you don’t change what is making you ill; you can’t improve your organization if you don’t learn from the mistakes of previous leadership; you can’t change the world by sitting in a cave hoping the conditions outside will go away.  I’ve been blessed to have had brilliant people around me, people who’ve inspired and challenged me.  One of those individuals happens to be my PCP, a brilliant internal medicine doctor.  After a rather serious medical procedure I had the unfortunate experience of witnessing an entire group of young doctors fight over whether to perform an even more serious, and very challenging medical procedure as a result of a fainting episode I had hours after the first procedure.  One brilliant young surgeon was adamant that I needed immediate open heart surgery.  The truth is that the pain I was experiencing at the site of the first procedure was so excruciating that I couldn’t tolerate it any longer and started to lose consciousness.  Fortunately before Dr. Cuthimopen could wheel me down the hall I screamed at the top of lungs for the gaggle of them to be quiet!  And once quiet, I proceeded to tell them why I nearly passed out.  A very smart and experienced nurse heard this and proceeded to give me some pain medicine.  Moments later, my personal doctor walked into my room.  This guy is brilliant, one of the best in this region.  His next comment was apropos. These kids (the new surgeons) they think that just because they got out of their residency they know everything – I’ve been doing this for more than 35 years and I’ve just scratched the surface on what our miraculous bodies can do!!!  Now there’s wisdom!

So it is, that our beloved sports franchise is experiencing the need for innovation and to  be attentive to indicators.  You see, success leaves clues.  There are 32 competitors in this space.  At one time our franchise was the model for success, and quite honestly has maintained a level of consistent high performance for four decades.  It’s a winning formula led by organizational architects that 28 other competitors would love to have mirrored.  Don’t forget we have 6 of those shiny symbols (can you say Vince Lombardi!) that demonstrate our consistent excellence.  But truth is right now there is one other that is outperforming the other 31.  They’re the new dominant model, but don’t forget, they too are one major ‘Ben’ injury away from their model being forced into their own dramatic change.  Their model we’ll learn to emulate, but innovate in a way that will allow us to maintain our consistent level of excellence, with the development of bench strength that can step in on a moment’s notice.  It takes leadership and the will to change in the face of adversity.  After all, it is only through adversity that one can adapt and create the next paradigm.  We’re in a challenging spot today, a pickle they say, but this is a resilient and smart organization.  Innovation will create new solutions, and with a little bit of faith, can result in a very positive outcome.  Look at the Philadelphia Eagles model from their championship season a couple of years ago.  Their star quarterback was knocked out for the rest of the season, their backup led them to win the Super Bowl against a vaunted opponent with that proven successful model.  Perhaps the new innovation is to always have a true second and third who do step in regularly.  After all with the rate of injury to starters isn’t that the prudent step.  And with that, the expansion of the roster to 10 more players ready to play.

Adversity leads to innovation, and innovation changes the world.  So next time you’re presented with a challenge think to yourself, this is an opportunity to be better tomorrow than I am today.  Welcome it, it’s a window of opportunity!

I wish you well,

Dave