



Fall, 2020

CEO MESSAGE: Watershed Moments, Darwin, and Hospitality

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Throughout the annals of recorded time, there have been events that have changed the course of history. Be it for a community, country or the globe, these instances are referred to as ***“Watershed Moments.”***

As a result of the events of September 11, 2001, the psyche, and behaviours of the citizens of New York were fundamentally changed, never to be the same again. 9-11 left an indelible mark on the souls of New Yorkers and there is not a single citizen of that city that was not, in some way, changed forever. This was their “Watershed Moment.”

The rise and impact of Mahatma Gandhi was a “Watershed Moment” for India. His influence and legacy have had an everlasting, enduring and profound impact on the citizens of his country. This was one of India’s “Watershed Moment”.

The Industrial Revolution set in motion a fundamental shift in how people traveled, produced goods and where people chose to live (rural population migration to cities). This was a “Watershed Moment” for the entire human race-

Covid-19 is our “Watershed Moment” and we are evolving everyday. into something completely different from the day before. In many cases, this change will be permanent. Once through this crisis, we will have witnessed tectonic shifts (and hopefully advancements) in technology, medicine, social interaction, education, civil rights, politics, business practices, travel, and tourism.

Watershed moments impact everyone, in either positive or damaging ways, rarely is it one or the other. In the case of the hospitality industry, we now face the stark and unflinching reality that evolutionist Charles Darwin was indeed right when he said, ***“It is not the strongest of the species that survives, nor the most intelligent that survives. It is the one that is the most adaptable to change.”*** Although speaking to the animal and human condition, his thoughts are as relevant today to our business world as they were to the theory of evolution in the mid 1800’s.

We are seeing this occur in real time before our very eyes. Many of those who have chosen to hunker down, waiting for the storm to pass, are being left behind. Emerging from this self-imposed hibernation, they will find the economic landscape to be vastly different. Their competitors, who have adapted (at

great hardship) their systems, structure, processes, and technologies to meet the needs of the “new” consumer, will have an overwhelming advantage.

“In the long history of humankind (and animal kind, too) those who learned to collaborate and improvise most effectively have prevailed.” – Charles Darwin

Again, in pockets, we are seeing this occur, in real time, before our very eyes. We are seeing communities come together in remarkable ways supporting each other. We have seen collaboration between competitors to save precious bottom-lines of their clients. We are watching an incredible shift in how government engages with industry to seek effective solutions to problems that seemed insurmountable. Businesses that are connecting with others seem to be winning the battle, or at least surviving.

“We will now discuss in a little more detail the Struggle for Existence.” – Charles Darwin

Tragically, for some, survival just will not be an option. Covid-19, like evolution, is cold, ruthless, and indiscriminate. Despite all the best efforts, support from others and creative adaptations, many of our colleagues and associates will not finish the race the way they had hoped.

The struggle to survive will mean more pain, tough decisions, and tenacity than it took the day before. Yet, after blistering months of hardship, there will be those that will survive. They will have adapted, mutated, and evolved into a better, stronger version of their old self.

There will be a strength, resiliency and sophistication to these survivors that will be a lesson to others on how to survive and a cautionary signal to those who wish to compete with them. There will be a kindred spirit amongst this group that will allow for collaboration and networking for decades to come. There will be bonds and connections formed that will become the very fabric of entire communities and regions.

The Saskatchewan Hotel & Hospitality Association (SHHA) know all too well the pain our members are experiencing as we too are feeling the withering effects of the pandemic. With membership in freefall and the cancellation of our conference, tradeshow, and golf tournament, we are also struggling with the prospect of not surviving the storm. We will also need to adapt, mutate, and evolve into a better, stronger version of our former selves.

We are not “hoping” for salvation because we have a plan! Our board of directors have a vision and expectations for the organization and its staff. If we are to emerge to take on our 89th year as an association, we will need to be creative, focused and more determined than ever. Which is just fine by Warren, Cynthia, and I, as this certainly seems to be in our wheelhouse.

This is what is on the horizon for all of us in hospitality. What we know of the future, we get from knowing, but refusing to live in, the past. Survival will happen, the question will be “what are we going to do next?” For those that use every fibre of their being to connect, collaborate, get educated and adapt, the future will once again, look very bright and be there for the taking.

Regardless of what may happen next, we will be your voice, continuing to help build a successful hospitality industry in Saskatchewan.