

“How to Figure it Out When You Didn’t Know it was a Problem”

Virginia in the spring is one of the most beautiful places on God’s earth.

Riding through the countryside listening to the rhythmic squeak of saddle leather worn smooth and shiny from years of use; feeling a fresh warm breeze against your face and smelling the winter wheat, honeysuckle and new clover busting out from a winters sleep; puffy white clouds playing across the light blue sky; it all makes an old battle-weary reprobate like me wax poetic. And, you can smell the freshening and see the dark clouds of a coming spring storm, replete with Thor’s own spears of charged energy, as the lightening bounces off the shield of Mother Virginia.

You know, it wasn’t too many years ago that Richmonders greeted the sound of thunder-boomers with cries of, “here comes Grant, trying to take Richmond again”.(‘Course y’all know he never did.) I guess the point of all this is that there are times when you have to stop and take a look at the world around you and smile at just how nice it can be from time to time. Marketing and advertising is sorta like that, especially at the retail level.

Because everything has to be done so quickly and so often, taking a little cease-fire can do wonders for the soul - and for the business. No, not a vacation but a time to assess what you are doing, why you are doing it, and who you are doing it to. It is a time to analyze, scrutinize, question and recapitulate.

You see, most retailers, marketers, advertisers and anyone else connected with moving any kind of product or service are in a huge rut - a rut so big it would make the trenches of Richmond’s outer defenses look like a single furrow in a fallow field. Everybody scurries around and does what has to be done and never really gives a second thought to why in the hell they’re doing it. That’s why God gave us spring. So we could play hookey, go sit on a rock in the middle of the James and figure out what we’re doing that’s right, and what we’re doing that’s wrong, and what we need to do to do it all better and, most important, what to do to WIN!

While you’re sitting on that rock, look for a leaf floating on the current and follow its path. Pretty soon that leaf, carried along by a current that it has no control over, will be sluffed off to an eddy and then a backwater where it will sit idle until it sinks under the water. Where it stays until it’s covered by sand and other leaves. Other leaves will be carried a little further but, in time, they too will sink under the water like the Monitor stove through at the waterline.

A lot of businesses, and people, are like leaves floating on the current. They are carried along by forces they can't control until they sink out of sight. But it doesn't have to be that way. You have the ability to take control over the way you go with the flow ... all it takes is planning, an understanding of the current you're riding, and what it takes to break out. In other words, clear thinking.

Clarity of thought does not come during the middle of a battle, what you THINK is clarity is really instinct, intuition and training. Clarity of thought comes when you are calm, relaxed and not under any pressure to perform. Sorta like a preacher on a Monday morning.

And it's not just a review of your financials that need to be considered, but every facet of the business: marketing, advertising, customers, vendors, product lines, location(s), services, policies, and personnel. While you're sitting on that rock let your mind wander as you listen to the sound of the water rushing by, close your eyes, lean back and let the sun soak into those winter-logged bones. Shuck off your shoes and let your toes tap dance on the water. Now start thinking about your business, one point at a time.

That, my friend, is when you'll get clarity of thought.