



The World is Changing

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We at Advanced Strategies spend a fair amount of time trying to track the future and trying to see what really constitutes a trend. I'd like to share with you some of the trends we are noticing and how they may impact us and our families--things we have to live with and respond to in life.

The news is full of accounts of companies laying off tens of thousands of managers and other employees. Yet many of these companies are simultaneously enjoying healthy profits and some expect to actually increase their net employment over time. Indeed, many companies are laying off employees, even as they are hiring others. What has happened? Job security is all but dead. Well, to be able to tell the future, you must first be able to tell the present.

I'd like to describe a series of events taking place now that are having a profound influence on our lives, on our families, and on the kind of world we will live in. These trends are symbiotic and they are evolving simultaneously. Each one feeds the other and allows the other to grow.

Globalization

The global village is here: transportation is cheaper and more accessible than ever, national boundaries do not mean what they used to mean, and free trade zones are inevitable. The arrival of a global language (English) is real and the growth of communications will simply increase the usage of the global language. The implication for you, individually, is that you are competing, individually, in a global marketplace. Your jobs are in competition with others in environments where economic conditions are different from ours. The *Atlanta Journal and Constitution* recently carried a story about a major Atlanta-based company—known for its support of the community—that was laying off people at the same time they were hiring foreign nationals to do the same, or similar, work. These foreign nationals already have the training, the advanced skills, and the technology this company needs, at a price it can afford. If our workers have obsolete skills, companies will hire foreign nationals who already have the skills rather than retrain current employees. This is happening now, and that's what we're competing with.

In order to be worth what we are getting paid, we've got to maintain skill sets that are current and find ways to increase our value to our employers, or they won't need us. The answer is not in keeping the immigrants out. That is absolutely the wrong answer because, by doing that, we would simply ship the jobs elsewhere, thereby reducing our competitive edge even more. As long as foreign nationals are coming here, we stand a reasonable chance of competing and a reasonable chance of elevating their standard of living such that it doesn't pull ours down.

The implication for our children is this: although knowledge of a foreign language is a plus, geography, history and culture are more important. It is important that our kids understand other cultures in order to compete and to operate in a global environment. I believe it is absolutely vital that they become comfortable citizens of the world because we are all in the same village now.

Democratization of Individualism

The rise of democracy and the rise of the value of self-determination are new phenomena. For the first time, the *masses*, the common folk, *believe* that they are truly entitled to the inalienable rights of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness; these no longer apply to just the rich or the elite. As much as anything, the fall of communism is attributable to that, and the re-rise of communism, should it occur, will be attributable to the failure of our society to deliver these inalienable rights to those individuals in those places. This is significant. It means that workers don't feel that they have to suffer through a job, that they have a right to something more. It means you feel you have a right to be happy and that you don't



feel a need to suffer in an unsatisfactory relationship. This changes how we deal with our spouses, our families, and our employees, as well as the kinds of opportunities we consider. Happiness and fulfillment are "in;" suffering and dissatisfaction are "out."

For our kids, it means enabling them to identify for themselves at an early age what makes them happy and helping them at an early age to make decisions for their own lives--decisions that they rise or fall by, that allow them to seek their own happiness.

Rise of the New Worker

There is a rise in the general education level of the work force. People who are educated don't like being told what to do; rather, they like to be given an assignment and then be left alone to do it. Companies like AT&T have adjusted to this by replacing managers with coaches whose role is to enable the staff by creating an environment where the worker can be productive. Their job is not to supervise the work. The educated worker is a huge change and it's the educated worker, as much as anything, that is responsible for the massive layoffs that are occurring. Management hierarchies are dead. Middle-level management has been wiped out; it is no longer necessary.

So how do things happen? They happen by network. Groups consisting of people with different expertise form in a company for a project or an effort. They are in a facilitated session, solve a problem, make a business decision, and dissipate. The key is to form the team, facilitate the action of the team, and then let them disperse. Your key skills now are the social skills...to ask the questions, form teams, and to facilitate taking action.

Our kids will be strengthened by working in teams and by building the confidence that a team that works together can succeed. Athletics that encourage teamwork will help them survive. The ability to get along with their peers, to win points by influence rather than by intimidation is the key to surviving and succeeding in that world.

Soft Business

Two significant patterns have emerged recently: first, three years ago we reached the point at which the service economy accounted for more than fifty percent of the U.S. gross national product (bypassing the manufacturing sector for the first time.) We were officially in the service age. The second and more astounding fact is that, as of November, 1994, we have officially moved into the information age. In that month, more money was spent in this country on information (collection devices, computers, processing, etc.) than on anything else. That was half of the economy. This economy, driven by intangible goods and services, is "soft business."

The rise of information as a commodity is radically changing our lives and, for many of us, our employment. In soft business, we have to learn how to use information, how to recognize information and recognize new intangible products. We have to learn how to sell those intangible products. This means, for our children, that they must learn how to be servant leaders, how to offer something of value to other people.

Hyper Business

We're seeing that the numbers of companies willing to train their employees is falling because they simply don't have the time to free employees up to attend classes. Instead, they're moving to task training or assignment training: "We need you to do an assignment, and we'll train you for that assignment." We've had numbers of students that didn't show up for otherwise full classes because they're on projects that have deadlines and they couldn't break away to attend class. That's a major change.

Hyper-business is radically changing what we're doing. It's a competitive buyer's market. There are more products and services available than ever before, and your value is going to be determined by how you help your company succeed and how you contribute to the bottom line.

It is now your responsibility to see to your own career. To remain competitive in today's business environment, you must be responsible for your own growth and professional value in the marketplace. Job security is gone; you must find career security. An advanced degree is no longer enough.

Helping your children learn to make decisions in their life will help them to be able to make decisions in business and/or in their careers. Making decisions and failing when you're young is one of the best training grounds there is. At my age, failing because I made bad decisions is a disaster. Kids must learn about decision-making by doing it when the stakes are not too high.

Information Age

We now have a tele-world--the rise in "tele-technology." We have tele-speech (the telephone), tele-sight (television), tele-documents (by way of fax), tele-correspondence (by way of email, messaging, and electronic bulletin boards). We have tele-data, tele-communications, tele-

commerce--EDI, global banking, electronic fund transfer--tele-presence, and tele-conferencing. This tele-world means that it's not necessary to be physically present to do what you need to do. That's part of the reason we're not in competition with people around Atlanta. We're in competition with people anywhere around the globe. They can be "tele-here."

For your kids, it means an unlimited access to information. My daughter, Camille, put together a report. We logged on to the Atlanta library from home, reviewed and printed an identified series of books, re-copied her bibliography, logged on to Prodigy to search the *Atlanta Journal and Constitution* newsbank for articles on the topics she wanted, logged onto the Internet through Mindspring, zipped over, looked in the CIA area handbook, pulled out a map of Angola, pulled out a series of country statistics, mapped onto a server in Angola, pulled out tourist information, logged onto a server at Harvard, pulled together materials, and pieced this information together. I went to the library and picked up the books she had identified on-line. She pulled together her report. In two hours, she had completed her report--word processed it, set up, and included an Excel graph. That would have taken her several weekends otherwise. She's twelve years old. That's a tele-world. Helping your kids learn how to work in that world comfortably will be critical to their success. Your ability to work in that world is critical to your success.

Information Explosion

We know more about everything than we have ever known before, and our knowledge base is growing at an enormous rate. The problem we have now is how do we filter it. The most important thing for us and our kids now is not what we know; rather, it is our ability to learn, to gather new information, and to turn that information into knowledge, know-how. We're in a world that requires continuous learning. And even if we're not working, continuous learning and research is critical. If we're going to optimize in this world, we all must be able to utilize the vast amount of information available to us.

Change and the Pace of Change

Change itself is causing much of the anxiety and dislocation that we're feeling. All of the statistics--crime, the economy, etc.--are better. How come we don't feel better? What's going on? Change itself creates stress, even when it's for the better. To cope with that, we need to learn to work with change and to accept it. Our kids are growing up in a world that's changing so fast that we don't have to do anything special to prepare them for change; that's just their world. They discard things just as quickly as they hold things.

We're already seeing the effect of these changes. It is like an ice age: it will leave behind those who can adapt to it, and they will thrive. All the rest will be the dinosaurs.