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Raising the Bar on Media Efforts by Using Growth Fundamentals

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One of the clichés that always seems to be attached to the New Year is the activity of making resolutions in expectation of the coming year. It's an exercise that most of us are guilty of practicing from year to year and it's closely paralleled by the guiltier practice of never remotely living up to our resolution expectations by the time the next year can be seen peeking up over the horizon.

Even though you may not be reading this at a traditional resolution time of year, why not take the opportunity to make a significant resolution anyway. But instead of resolving to lose weight or stop smoking, here is a meatier proposal for you: Resolve as a media person to really raise the bar on your media efforts in this coming year.

When resolving to raise the bar on media efforts, don't pigeon hole thinking into just the realm of quantitative aspects of media plans. The simpler things that can be done to fulfill a resolution are the ones that shave a few pennies off of a cost per thousand or tweak a day part mix to increase frequency by a significant margin.

Yet, simple things aren't the things that will reap the biggest rewards in the marketplace, with clients or on the planning team. Make a real effort to raise the bar on the qualitative aspects of the media effort. And as part of that effort, focus on the most overlooked qualitative aspects of the planning process. Aspects such as adding substance to training efforts for younger team members or building stronger relationships with others involved in the media process. Or maybe we can take a long, hard look in the mirror and make a concerted effort to make ourselves smarter.

#### Potential in resolutions

Most resolutions fail because they're much easier said than done. Despite the best of intentions, it's very hard for individuals to harness the positive energy present when the resolution is made for any significant amount of time moving forward and actually following through with action to realize what they've resolved to accomplish. That's a shame, because by establishing resolutions, individuals are in essence attempting to make a real effort toward positive change.

There is a word attached to a wealth of fundamental principles that very nicely apply to the notion of making an effort to effect positive change. That word is Growth. Growth has been a hot topic in the business world for years, but on the surface, it's not one that seems to have many implications for media planning. Further consideration suggests otherwise.

#### Fundamentals of Growth

In the Wall Street world in which we live, Growth is too often viewed by its numbers oriented definition – *an increase in numbers, size, power or intensity*. The spirit of resolutions, however, reflects a different, stronger definition of Growth - *the process of becoming larger and more mature through natural development*.

A portion of our consulting work with clients has gone beyond the realm of standard media and has dipped into the broader business question of stimulating Growth. The powerful thing about Growth fundamentals is that they apply to so many things. They are equally relevant to expanding a business proposition as they are to community decision making as they are to personal relationships. And they are just as relevant to media planning.

Resources to learn about Growth come in many shapes and sizes. Most people will dive into traditional business texts to gain understanding. But it is similarly valuable to delve into other areas; from evolution to community development to human aging and cognitive process.

The remarkable thing is that a broad immersion in the various sources will yield many consistent themes relating to the subject of Growth. We have found that there are six fundamentals which bear out Growth's definition as a process of becoming larger and more mature through natural development. These fundamental themes are time, environmental change, critical decision making, the need for others, learning and adaptation.

### Time

Americans in general and businesses specifically demonstrate a remarkable disregard for reality when it comes to their expectations of time. Time is viewed as a sequence of events happening at a quick, linear pace. Our society has become fixated on what occurs next on the calendar as opposed to achievement of long-term goals.

Unfortunately, that's not how Growth works. Organisms, individuals, businesses and markets cannot bite off more than they can chew and assimilate it immediately. The process of becoming larger and more mature through natural development cannot happen overnight. Growth takes time.

### Environmental Change

The old adage of "Only two things in life are certain, Death and Taxes" is false. There are three life certainties: Death, Taxes and Change. Change cannot be avoided in life or in the marketplace. Dismissing or ignoring change can be the equivalent of suicide. Change is a powerful force to be reckoned with and those who prepare themselves with foresight to embrace it stand a much better chance of surviving and thriving than those that do not.

### Critical decision making

When change occurs in life or in the marketplace, the most defining moment an individual or business faces is the moment that they decide how to deal with the change. It's like the old baseball fielding cliché; you can let the ball play you or you can play the ball.

Individuals tend to fall back on skill sets that have provided success for them and they use those skills to deal with the changed environment. Common business practice is to look at what's happening in the marketplace, responding to the need for Growth by turning up efficiency, pulling 'fat' out of organizations or plans as a solution. Businesses are good at this. They have 'their way' of turning over every stone to figure out how to make the business hum a little better. Deciding to fall back on skill sets or to turn up efficiency is a decision reflecting fear of change or a lack of knowledge as to how to do it. It is in effect, letting the ball play you.

The better decision is one that positions an individual to embrace the coming change. Making a real effort to 'play the ball' and not be played by it.

### The need for others

When the environment has changed, circumstances under which individuals or businesses once flourished are now different than those they had before mastered. The individual or business does not likely have the acumen necessary within itself to address the new environment. In order to appropriately 'play the ball', the only way to understand the new environment and appropriately embrace change is to go outside of one's self or the organization and learn from others who have the knowledge and experience relevant to the changed environment. For a self-confident individual or business, that's a hard thing to do.

### Learning

The fifth fundamental Growth theme is learning. In short, learning means to discover, realize or be taught. If an individual or business can find the intestinal fortitude to reach outside of itself and embrace others who have valuable knowledge, they are on the right path. Just as physical beings need food to grow, so do individuals and businesses. Information is brain food for both individuals and businesses. It provides the raw material to learn something new that can help embrace environmental change. New information helps individual or business capabilities to become larger and more mature. In short, to Grow.

### Adaptation

Adaptation is the final Growth fundamental. Growth will not occur simply as a by-product of having learned from others. Individuals or organizations must internalize new knowledge and adapt behavior to address the needs of the changed environment. When this occurs, a valuable thing happens. Individuals or organizations stop seeing the world in the way they took it for granted. They see the world as it could be, the possibilities that exist. They see the potential for Growth, not the potential for status quo.

### Bringing resolutions to fruition

In order to help you follow through on a substantive resolution or two for raising the bar on your media efforts, let's operate under a couple of assumptions. First, if the spirit of resolutions indeed goes hand in hand with the concept of Growth, it would be good to apply Growth principles to bring media resolutions to fruition.

Secondly, it would be easier to follow through on a resolution to raise the bar on media efforts if there was a resource available to provide useful information about Growth and its applications for media. To that end, the following pages endeavor to cover the six fundamental aspects of Growth and apply them to media planning.

So take some time in the following pages to dive in to each of the six Growth fundamentals. We'll apply the fundamentals to various aspects of media and media planning in an effort to provide you with information, ideas and hopefully supportive energy to fuel your endeavor to keep resolutions and raise the bar on your media efforts.

## **Growth Fundamental #1 - Time**

### Growth and Time

Think about it. Americans demonstrate a remarkable disregard for reality when it comes to expectations of Time. We're accustomed to the here and now. When needs manifest themselves, we expect needs should be met as quickly as possible. We take for granted that the marketplace will supply products and services that save time and deliver need fulfillment quickly.

The modern world's hyper-productivity has obliterated the long-term context of Time. Why drive across country for a vacation when we can hop on a plane and be elsewhere in a few short hours? Why write a letter when I can phone a loved one immediately? Why rely on land lines when I can page, instant message or e-mail to a Blackberry?

When Time context can change so dramatically, why should any American expect to wait for anything? We've gone from cooking dinners at home or dining out to dinners micro-waved in a few minutes or a bevy of drive-thru quick service restaurant choices. When it absolutely, positively has to be there over night, we've come to expect nothing less.

Our expectations are not limited to personal need fulfillment. Short-term perspective is also a powerful motivator in the business marketplace. If markets can gratify consumer needs with virtual immediacy, then corporate profit can be delivered, brands can be built and sales can be accelerated in short time frames as well. Executives, brand managers and investors alike have developed immediate profit expectations and have evolved standards and practices attempting to maximize return in the short term.

Whether it's the consumer marketplace or corporate expectations, Time has come to be viewed as a sequence of events happening at a quick, linear pace. Our fixation is on what occurs next on the calendar as opposed to long-term vision and achieving long-term goals.

Unfortunately, Growth is not a short term, immediate fulfillment proposition. Animals, people, businesses and markets cannot achieve Growth immediately just because they desire it. Growth requires cycles of assimilation and renewal in the space of linear time to help a physical being or ethereal business increase its size or presence.

With physical beings, increase in size requires resources like air, water and food. Physical beings take in resources and bodies convert resources to add mass.

Businesses, markets, or even something like experience, also requires resources. Resources like information, knowledge or assets. But resources don't catalyze Growth just by exposure. It requires learning, understanding and hard work to become educated enough to internalize information or merge assets. That education and internalization process takes Time.

For entities like businesses or markets, having correct perspective on Time for Growth is difficult. Lester C. Thurlow, an eminent professor of management and economics at MIT, wrote in a piece entitled *Economic Community and Social Investment* for The Drucker Foundation's *Community of the Future* some very telling words. "Private capitalist time horizons are simply too short to accommodate the time constants of education." This might be more simply put as "people who want fast profit have difficulty being patient enough to learn how to generate that profit".

In the audio tape of Stephen Covey's *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*, he uses the fable of the goose that laid the golden egg to demonstrate the notion of effectiveness. In that demonstration is a powerful implication about Time.

After realizing that his goose is actually producing golden eggs, the farmer quickly becomes extremely wealthy and incredibly impatient. He doesn't want to wait every day for the goose to lay a golden egg. He wants them all and he wants them now. In his greedy impatience, he lops off the head of the goose and reaches inside for the eggs only to find none.

Covey goes on to explain that the essence of effectiveness is not fully encapsulated by an overwhelming passion to secure the thing we might want, metaphorically, the golden egg. The essence of effectiveness is balancing our remarkable passion with the care and welfare of the goose. The goose needs to be nurtured and tended to produce the eggs. In order to appropriately nurture and tend, Time is a requirement. If we don't take time to nurture, we can't be effective in Growth initiatives.

There is also another perspective on the Time requirement for Growth we haven't yet considered. How about the consumer?

We marketers seem to think that once we launch a show or a campaign, consumers will just glom onto it and immediately provide ROI. When we fall into this trap, we've lost perspective. Consumers need Time to become educated about a brand, what it stands for and its benefits.

While it's true some shows are destined never to succeed, how many cases can you recall of quality shows just needing a little extra Time to 'find an audience'? How long did it take Seinfeld to find an audience? You may remember, the pilot did poorly in initial audience testing. If NBC hadn't given the show more time (even if it was only, what, 3 shows per renewal?), Seinfeld may never have become the cultural and marketing powerhouse that it did.

#### Down side of short term orientation

The major reason Growth is undercut by short term perspective is that energy which could have been used to grow individual capabilities or brand relationships gets focused on short term crises. Short term solutions do not have long term vision. They are at risk to unforeseen changes in market circumstances like competitive actions or others' immediate expectations.

Stephen Covey has some insight for that as well. It's just the trap Stephen he outlines when in discussing his 'Third Habit'. The Third Habit is the time management habit which revolves around the relationship between urgency and importance. We all tend to focus attention on matters of urgency, things requiring short term effort, whether trivial or not, instead of investing energy on things that are really important, which generally play out over a longer time frame.

#### Growth over time

Business texts or case studies on Growth tend to mention a number of best practice consistencies for Growth businesses. The two that stand out the most are 1) vision and patience to establish and follow longer term plans and 2) inclusion of many smaller initiatives within the longer term plan.

Best practice #1 is powerful because it keeps businesses focused on what's most important for the long term. It relies on the core strengths of the business. Focus on core strengths makes it difficult to be distracted by short term fires that appear to be critical, but in reality are not important over the long haul.

Best practice #2 adds great value by allowing businesses to test future areas of Growth that flow from the core strengths of the business. Those test initiatives may be new product offerings that flow logically from the core business or they may be futuristic offerings that are simply in the spirit of the current core business.

Initiatives like these provide a peek into the future, making the business overall more nimble to deal with changing market environments. If something happens, Growth-oriented businesses have ideas they can quickly roll out. Businesses fixated on the short term that have not tested other initiatives have to start from scratch.

### Applying the Growth principle of Time to media planning

When more time is spent on longer range planning, proactive perspective and innovative elements are more likely to be built into media plans. Having that proactive orientation is positive in that it helps cut down on some of the fire drills occurring in the short term. In short, a more visionary long term plan has fewer short term hiccups to deal with and generates more productivity for the brand. Productivity in the form of marketplace efficacy and in turning up innovative strategies that can provide competitive advantages in the future.

Here are some ideas to facilitate creation of long term, Growth-friendly plans.

- First, why not try to convince the brand to create a two, three or more year plan instead of one just designed for the upcoming calendar year.
- Make a special point to build in many small scale tests of innovative strategic approaches. Lower the risk of wholesale failure by limiting tests to small, local marketplaces instead of national implementation. But reap the benefits of learning that will come from the success of some of the tests. Those results may point the way to strategies that can keep the brand moving forward when marketplace circumstances change.
- Don't necessarily go for big change immediately; implement large scale change by small steps over time. Give plan elements time to come to fruition
- Build relationships with consumers by being in the same place consistently over time. Familiarity builds trust. That's important in building relationships between brands and consumers. Ray Oldenburg, in his *The Great Good Place*, talks about how strangers (or we could postulate, unfamiliar brands) become accepted. "Mainly, one keeps reappearing and tries not to be obnoxious. Of these two requirements for admission or acceptance, regularity of attendance is clearly the more important." Find a perfect show or cable network to reach your target and be there consistently from week to week.
- Manage client expectations of Time. Do a better job of establishing for them in plans the importance of allowing plan elements to do their work over time. Be steadfast in attempting to maintain elements over time even when budget cuts may threaten.

In the end, the most important thing to remember is that Growth takes Time. If you keep that in mind as you create media plans, you'll set a solid foundation for Growth.

### **Growth Fundamental #2 - Change**

#### Environmental Change

One of the most familiar quotes attributed to Benjamin Franklin is "In this world, nothing can be said to be certain, except death and taxes." If Franklin lived today, he might add a third life certainty to his pair: death, taxes and change. Change cannot be avoided in life or in the marketplace.

In the world of physics, Newton's first law of motion states that an object in a vacuum will remain at rest or in its present state of motion until acted on by an outside force. While it may sound a bit odd, people, brands and corporations also tend to operate by Newton's first law. Think about how people, brands and companies wrap themselves in comfortable habits and practices, going about life with the same approach day in and day out.

Then, something gums up the works, throwing a wrench into familiar habits and practices. Change is the outside force that disturbs the present state of motion. A good image to conjure in your mind is the introductory scene in Disney-Pixar's *A Bug's Life*. If you haven't seen it, the film opens on a line of busy ants, carrying bits of grain and fruit to a central place.

As the line moves, a leaf drifts down, casting a shadow that causes an ant to whimper, "Oh, no!" When the leaf breaks the line, he screams, "I'm lost! Where's the line!" Environmental change has impacted the ants.

Roddy McDowell's ant character calls out, "Don't panic! We are trained professionals. Stay calm. We are going *around* the leaf." To which the initial ant replies, "I don't think we can do that."

"Nonsense," replies McDowell's ant, "this is nothing compared to the twig of '93." It may sound like some silly bit of Pixar fun tailored for kids, but doesn't it really capture the essence of how changes affect us in our pursuit of corporate routine? We go about daily business, in our habitual state of motion and then when some outside event interrupts our comfortable planning routine, we're unsure of how to respond.

This little example also perfectly captures the basic human reaction to abrupt environmental changes. Stress. McDowell's ant character first calls out, "Don't panic!" Whether it was the intrusion of the cave bear into Cro-Magnon man's prehistoric domicile or the present-day manifestation of stress in the unexpected client call, both events would trigger the panic response in human physiology. Fight or flight.

We arguably live at a time when that panic response gets triggered far more often than at any time in human history. In their book *The Deviant's Advantage*, Watts Wacker and Ryan Mathews describe our present time using the placeholder phrase the Post-Information Age. This is a new age in which 'the culture is characterized by constant, relentless and all-encompassing change.' They postulate that the scope of change will accelerate over time and never stabilize. With constant and accelerating change, we also endure constant and intensifying stress.

The last thing we think we can do in a situation like this is to try something new. We are much more comfortable with habits and practices that have become second nature to us. In effect, we run away from the changing situation instead of adapting our behavior, standing and fighting.

### The business world and change

Businesses shouldn't underestimate the profound impact of change in the marketplace. Yet, every day, they do. The reason why is loss of perspective. After fighting tough battles to carve out a viable position in the marketplace, a business will believe it has figured out how to win in its category. Entrenchment with old habits becomes the rule. In media planning, we craft plans that work in the marketplace and continue to implement them again and again, thinking we have the winning formula for our brand.

These types of behavior in the face of change will lead to two unequivocal truths.

First, continuing on with old habits and practices is in effect, ignoring change, the equivalent of sticking one's head in the sand. And it is a poor strategy for success. Why? Truth number two: there is no guarantee changes a business will face in the marketplace can be addressed, by definition, with old solutions. Yet, ego clouds judgment, application of old solutions continues and we unwittingly give competitors the opportunity to flank us.

Wacker and Mathews comment on this opportunity in *Deviant's Advantage*. "Everything around us, from the most fundamental instincts to the most esoteric expressions of our aspirations has changed, and those changes represent market opportunity."

Smart competitors are very aware of the powerful opportunity that environmental change represents. In *Every Business Is A Growth Business*, there is a quote from Gary Wendt of GE Capital that captures this nicely, "You always look where there's change. Change is what creates opportunity."

There are really two opportunities provided by environmental change circumstances. The second opportunity is the most obvious one. Change creates a vacuum of uncertainty in the marketplace. Those that can see the uncertainty as an opportunity for competitive gain will attack the circumstance with proactive measures, opening up ground between themselves and competitors.

The first opportunity is much less obvious, but lies at the core of understanding why environmental change is important as a Growth principle. This is the opportunity to change ourselves. As Covey says in his *7 Habits of Highly Effective People*, "the physical creation follows the mental creation." In change situations, a translation would be that marketplace implementation to capture opportunity follows the action of changing ourselves, our perspective, to embrace environmental change.

No one finds it easy to admit they may not have the skills necessary to deal with particular situations. Yet when change occurs, it's quite likely this is exactly what will happen. If the environment has changed, it's different. The things that make it different may be things a person has absolutely no experience whatsoever in dealing with.

It's easy to just continue using the same skills that worked in the past more intensely, thinking that we can be successful through just plain old hard work, but it's really just fear in action. The more courageous course of action is to acknowledge that new skills are needed to embrace the changed environment accordingly and to orient ones self toward acquiring those skills.

### Change and media

If you are a media planner trying to keep up with the explosion of media choices available to consumers, you very likely understand and agree with Wacker's and Mathew's assessment of constant and relentless change. As planners, we must realize that this stream of environmental change is inevitable and we may never be able to completely wrap our hands and minds around every facet of it.

We just need to take the simple bit of advice offered by McDowell's ant. Don't panic. As changes impact comfortable skills, habits and practices, they will create stress that triggers the human panic response. Our challenge is to harness the energy provided by our response and take time to acknowledge changes for what they are. In effect, we use environmental change as a trigger to change our own perspective and our own skill set.

So what do you do if you're a planner in this situation? A good first step might be to step back and take an inventory of best practices, skills and information you are currently using. Do an honest assessment of those areas and look for places where what you have in your toolbox is inadequate for the current situation. Then draw up a game plan for obtaining or learning the skills and information you need to take your game to the next level.

If planners can do this, they are by definition on a path to Growth. As Frederic Hudson says in his *The Adult Years, Mastering the Art of Self-Renewal*, "Without change there would be no Growth or development, no creative breakthroughs or discoveries, no becoming."

The most vital part of media planning is creative problem solving. Most planners would agree that uncovering new solutions and crafting creative planning options is one of the most fulfilling aspects of their jobs. We need to appreciate that any time change impacts the current standard and routine of media planning it is a tremendous opportunity to dive back in to the most fulfilling part of what we do.

Planners need to recognize that change is a powerful force to be reckoned with and those planners who prepare themselves with foresight to embrace it stand a much better chance of surviving and thriving than those that do not. As Franklin also said, “By failing to prepare, you are preparing to fail”. So the next time you sense that change is shaking up the environment in which your media plan dwells, take a step back and start looking for the opportunities.

### **Growth Fundamental #3 - Critical Decision-Making**

As has been noted, environmental change begets opportunities of which we can take advantage. But in order to take advantage, there are two critical decisions that need to be made. Those decisions channel the energy of change in directions that maximize positive outcomes.

#### Critical decision #1 – committing to change

It is hard for people to admit they don't know how to deal with new environmental situations or that they need help. You can't teach old dog new tricks. Right? Does that old adage come from the fact that the dog can't learn new tricks or that the dog just isn't disposed to try?

American society is slowly beginning to realize the importance of committing to change. There has been an unquestioned decline in participation over the past twenty-five years or so in most of the vibrant, social capital building organizations and activities that were at their peak in the '50's and '60's. In recent years, a few relatively new types of organizations are thriving against the trend. One newcomer is noteworthy in that its purpose is to help members change to meet challenging life circumstances. That noteworthy newcomer is the self-help group.

Whether it's Alcoholics Anonymous, Weight Watchers or an AIDS support group, the general principles are similar. Roughly following the pattern of the twelve step program, the critical first step is for an individual to acknowledge to the group a desire to change. Beyond the galvanizing energy of social commitment, an individual then has access to the energy of the group to help turn social commitment to action.

The importance of making this acknowledgement is that it shifts the individual's perspective from reactive to proactive. The individual is deciding that no longer will they allow the environment to act upon them; the individual is deciding to act on the environment. Energy shifts from defense to offense. Playing the ball instead of letting it play you. When efforts (and media plans) shift from defense to offense, odds of success, in life or in the marketplace, increase greatly.

It may seem small, but this is an important distinction as it relates to Growth. Think about it from a football perspective. On defense, a team is trying hard not to lose ground to the competition. On offense, a team is attempting to gain ground. When ground is gained, Growth occurs. In business and in media planning, it is much more beneficial to have a mindset of gaining ground than of not giving up ground.

## Critical decision #2 - seeing opportunities not problems

Once energy has been shifted in the right direction, the next critical decision will dictate what type of energy it will be. When action is taken, will change be addressed as a problem to be tackled or an opportunity to be seized? The decision here makes a world of difference, because a problem orientation will almost certainly lead to negative energy while an opportunity orientation will almost certainly lead to positive energy.

Beyond negative and positive energy distinctions, there is also a distinction of present and future. Tackling problems suggests the focus of energy is on cleaning up current messes. There is a willingness to adapt to be able to deal with circumstances, but the individual is still rooted in the present as the environment evolves around them. What does one do after the mess is cleaned up? Wait for the next environmental change to create a new one?

Seizing opportunity suggests a different, Growth-oriented focus. Opportunities are about what is over the next horizon; new territory to be visited. Gaining that new territory is consistent with Growth. Mindsets consider what can be done next, a positive, more proactive orientation in which individuals act on environments rather than waiting for environments to act on them.

### An example

Here is a brief case study which demonstrates how making correct critical decisions can help raise the bar on media planning efforts. In this situation, marketplace circumstance and available data suggested the need for a new approach, but dynamics within the agency team pressured the media team to take the same old approach.

In preplanning work for a super-premium, niche beer brand, the media team became increasingly convinced that the users of the brand had a deep love of music and that radio played a primary role in the target's media consumption behavior. A recommendation was made to the account team to pursue a spot radio campaign in key metropolitan markets with the limited funding afforded by the brand budget.

Reaction from the account director was strong and pointed. We were directed to build a television plan because the creative team's strength was in crafting outstanding television spots. The exchange with the account director went back and forth quietly before the media team was ordered to stop pushing and finish a television plan.

The first critical decision is fairly straightforward. Does the media team bow to pressure from the account director or does it make a stand and evolve the plan to a new direction? We believed the data was so compelling we needed to make a stand and strive to evolve the plan direction.

The second decision is the tougher one. Where are the opportunities in the situation? It's easy to see the counter-productive account director problem, but what were we missing? The answer was that we failed to include the rest of the agency team in the discussion. Our opportunity was two-fold.

First, our odds of raising the bar would increase if we could engage everyone on the team in the process and share out our learning beyond just the media and account teams. Secondly, there was potential opportunity in challenging the creative team to translate their 'A' game from television to radio.

In response to the final ultimatum from the account director, we issued a team-wide response memo, filled with back-up support data that essentially said, 'if we cannot do strong radio creative, that is one thing, but if we're just too scared to try, that's entirely different.' The account director was furious and the creative team was pumped. In the end, the lead creative on the team wrote spots which ended up winning

awards (as a side bar, the lead creative later became a satellite office's creative director), we ran a plan that covered more markets than we could have with television and the data was correct. Consumers responded extremely well, resulting in significant marketplace impact for the brand.

### Critical decision making and media

How do we apply critical decision-making to our media planning efforts? The answer is largely based in knowing when and how to make critical decisions.

The key for critical decision #1, committing to change, is to know when change is called for in a situation. Changing the direction of a media plan isn't needed every time the planning process renews itself. But as media planners, we all have a good sense of when we are 'settling' in the creation of a media plan.

It's at those times that a little voice is in the back of your head saying, 'But what if?' At those times, there is probably a legitimate need to make critical decision #1 and commit to change. The path likely won't be easy, but it will be more fulfilling than 'settling'.

Making critical decision #2 is more a matter of how than when. It's not easy to take a step back and identify opportunities in a situation. When the problem dominates your viewpoint, how can you see the opportunities? The answer is actually fairly simple. Take a giant step backwards and get a new perspective on the situation.

If something is right in front of you, it dominates your perception. When you back up, it becomes a smaller portion of what you can see. Not only is it less intimidating, but you can see more.

For example, in a budget cut situation, the thought that dominates a planner's mind is 'what do I cut?' The finished plan is what's staring you right in the face. It's natural to choose which components to cut to make up the budget difference.

But if you take a step backwards, what do you see? If you've stepped back far enough, you can see the whole plan process. What would happen if you slotted in the revised budget in place of the original budget? The opportunity may be to create an entirely new plan as opposed to dismantling the old one.

Making the correct critical decisions during times of environmental change helps put us on a path leading to Growth. But that path is long and arduous. Successfully traversing the length of the path generally requires some help along the way.

### **Growth Fundamental #4 - The Need for Others**

Even if perspective can be maintained in the face of changing environments to make tough critical decisions, we run smack dab into the face of a formidable foe standing in the way of real Growth. We become our own worst enemy.

At the point we know we need to do something about a situation and we want to take action, we are disposed to roll up our sleeves and do something about it. In a changed environment, proactive orientation can become a dangerous blind spot.

Our confidence, knowledge and skills give us the illusion we do not need to look outside of ourselves to address changing circumstances. The inherent problem is that the marketplace has changed.

Circumstances under which we had previously flourished are now different than those we had mastered and we do not likely have the acumen necessary within ourselves to address the new environment. While it is difficult, we must with humility and maturity realize we are dealing with circumstances beyond our experience and bravely reach out to others for a helping hand.

### The Maturity Continuum

One of the powerful insights Stephen Covey shares in his *7 Habits of Highly Effective People* is the construct of the maturity continuum. The maturity continuum has three basic phases, from dependence to independence to interdependence.

As infants, human beings are entirely dependent on others for their needs and survival. As we age, we learn, grow and become more independent, gaining skills and capabilities required to obtain things we need or want for ourselves. But at some point, we gain the maturity to realize that higher levels of success cannot be achieved unless we develop relationships with and work with others.

From a business or career perspective, changing market environments are exactly a situation calling for us to step up and work interdependently with others. Acknowledging the need for help from another individual or organization is a courageous step for anyone, but it is one that must be taken in order to truly grow. Interdependent effort combines skills generating more than was there before. This action stands up to the definition of what Growth really is.

In *Every Business is a Growth Business*, Charan and Tichy describe Dell as an organization that has demonstrated the fundamental of reaching out to others in order to facilitate Growth. In the early '90's, Dell experienced a critical point in the company's development. Pursuit of Growth by managing profit was becoming institutionalized. Wall Street was beginning to question Dell's ability to generate true Growth at a time when the category was booming.

Dell changed executive level perspective by infusing management with senior talent from the likes of Motorola, HP and Apple. The new managers brought outside perspective to the organization and helped Dell leadership see the world differently. What Dell learned from mining their new resource enabled them to adapt to marketplace changes in a positive way. Dell's market results followed accordingly.

### Benefits of working with others

Working with others is imperative in facilitating Growth because it opens the door to advantages we as individuals cannot obtain through our own efforts.

- New perspective
- New tools; like information, skills and contacts
- Division of labor

### New perspective

Perhaps the most important advantage gained in working with others is the benefit of new perspective. When we become ingrained with habits and practices, plying a successful approach, we see every problem in the same light. Over time, we unwittingly constrain our perspective into the limited fishbowl of our experience.

Working with others, we gain the benefit of the perspective they have from outside of our fishbowl. If we are open to listening and understanding, we allow ourselves to see situations from a completely different point of view. We get a better sense of the forest, not just the trees in front of us.

New perspective is valuable for two reasons. First, problems faced by changing environments are viewed more completely, which means we come to better understand what we are facing. Secondly, we gain a better sense of what is possible given the situation. Being better informed in these two ways helps generate positive energy that can be used for Growth.

#### New information, skills, contacts

If one doesn't have acumen necessary to address the new environment, acumen must be obtained from an outside source in order to successfully adapt to the environment. When we work with others, they become the source of new information, skills and even contacts we need to Grow. We don't have problems in other facets of our lives going to doctors, lawyers, accountants or mechanics for needed help. We shouldn't feel shy about reaching out to specialists in other facets of media, advertising or marketing when we face unfamiliar situations in plying our trade.

It's also important to note that working with others is not a one way street. People with specialties in other areas than ours will also benefit from their interactions with us. That reciprocity is the essence of interdependence at the pinnacle of the maturity continuum and a key to advancing through the Growth process.

#### Division of labor

Having more hands available to bear the burden lightens the load. The stress of having to complete a task alone can be significant. When multiple parties pitch in on tasks, not only can work be done more quickly, alleviating time pressures, but participatory camaraderie also boosts morale.

#### Applying working with others to media planning

How can media people do a better job of reaching out and bring others into the planning process to find help we may need? As the critical decision-making discussion suggested, once we commit to a change orientation and begin to see opportunities open before us; the first thing to do is to reach out for assistance. In media planning, there are a number of occasions ripe for partnership.

*Brainstorming sessions* are a wonderful opportunity to include others with diverse experience areas unfamiliar to us. Beyond including planners from other brand groups, there's also the wealth of people from the broader account team, clients, the rep community or even consumers that can bring valuable perspectives and insight.

*Working closely with* account planning and creative people is a must. It's also fair to say the earlier planners can open up a dialogue with their counterparts, the more productive the relationship can be. Timely interaction better informs the team earlier in the planning and creative process, increasing the chances of truly outstanding ideas being created.

*Hiring people* with unique backgrounds can pay big dividends later on. During the interview process, there may not be an obvious need for new skills or perspective, but there will come a time when a person with a somewhat eclectic background has tremendous value because they see the world differently. Proactive hiring can lead to serendipity later.

*Bringing reps closer* into the planning process is something many planners mistakenly shy away from. Planners tend to ask for specific information or demand rigid adherence to RFPs. In doing so, it creates a blind spot. It assumes the planning team has asked all appropriate questions and provided all information the reps need to supply worthwhile packages.

In reality, planners can't possibly know as much about properties or possibilities as reps do. And not every rep is out simply for the largest percentage of the buy they can get. A deeper, informative conversation with reps more often than not results in unexpected ideas or solutions in using properties that planners may not have realized were possible.

Another idea is to submit requests to properties that seem odd for the plan and engage those reps in conversation. Because their perspective is so different, surprising insights can come from those conversations.

*Buying or partnering* with other organizations may not be a responsibility of most planners, but more senior media people may have a call in facilitating these types of higher order relationships. There are many times when senior people are faced with challenging projects or workloads and are unsure of how to meet the challenge with the current staff.

Buying a small organization with needed skills and assets or partnering with someone for the short term may be exactly the solution for the situation. If practical, it will certainly yield results by exposing the planning team to others with different skills and perspective.

Growth, however, does not occur simply because we work with or are exposed to skills, knowledge and perspective of others. In order to truly Grow, we must learn and understand those skills, knowledge and perspective. Sometimes, that's a more difficult proposition than we realize.

### **Growth Fundamental #5 - Learning**

Taking the step to seek help from other individuals and organizations as a courageous step for Growth does not ensure Growth in and of itself. When we reach out to others, we can't simply accept help and move on. We must make a whole-hearted effort to learn from others as well. And it doesn't just mean learning skills and information. It also means putting ourselves in their shoes learning as much as we can from the vantage point of their perspective.

If you haven't yet realized that My Name Is Earl is a helluva show, here's another reason to add it to your must see list. Earl routinely, demonstrates how important it is to learn. In his on-going quest to honor Karma and fix past misdeeds, Earl consistently reaches out to other people for help and learns in the process.

In the episode 'Dad's Car', Earl dives into a quest to recover his father's classic Mustang, which he lost in a bet behind his dad's back. When he reclaims the Mustang and returns it to his father, he sees the situation from his dad's perspective and learns something unexpected.

The Mustang was intended as a gift to Earl and what really upset his dad was losing time he had expected to spend with his son rehabbing the car. Not only does Earl learn the truth of the situation, he also learns how to rehab the Mustang and understand his father at a deeper level.

### Learning is a fundamental Growth theme

Growth in the natural world is synonymous with adding on mass; increasing in size. Living things need resources like food, air and water to physically Grow. Resources are consumed; organisms metabolize them and take on more size in the physical world.

Individuals and businesses need resources to Grow as well. But since Growth for individuals exists more in the realm of intellectual property than physical space, the resources and processes involved take different forms. Physical Growth translates to increased capability and maturity.

Information, skills, assets and perspective serve as the organic resources individuals and businesses need to Grow. But with individuals and businesses, there is no physical metabolism present. A cognition process of understanding new information, skills and perspective takes the place of metabolism. Another word for that cognition process is learning.

In short, to learn means to discover, to realize or be taught. Learning can also be defined as a relatively permanent change in, or acquisition of, knowledge, understanding or behavior. When we can take raw material like information, skills and perspective to learn something, we gain capability to embrace environmental change.

### Learning isn't easy

'You can't teach an old dog new tricks' is a cliché for a reason. People have a remarkable ability to forget how important it is to learn. The reality is we never stop being students. Life always has something to teach, especially at times of environmental change.

When we reach beyond ourselves to others, an individual or organization, we must become sponges if we are to successfully address change. We must make a deep and honest effort to understand from those that understand the world in a way we do not. We need to pay close attention to what it is others have to convey, trying to see the world through their eyes. If we can do this, we will have capabilities and know how in our toolbox that can help address changing marketplace environments.

While learning isn't easy, there are some things we can do to ensure we learn as much as we possibly can.

### Basic ways of learning

Back in a college consumer behavior class, I remember the professor describing three situations in which people learn. He felt people learned via personal experience, by being self-taught or taught by others, or by example. In personal experience learning, an individual learns from doing. When taught, information is internalized and the individual cognitively gathers conclusions. The professor had a great example for learning by example.

Arriving home from work to repeatedly discover his kids playing in the street against his orders, the professor finally decided to take demonstrative action one Halloween season. He calmly parked his station wagon, retrieved a pumpkin from the front porch and invited his kids to join him at the curb. After backing his station wagon over the pumpkin to demonstrate what could happen to a child's head in a car confrontation, he proudly reported his kids never played in the street again. Apparently, the pumpkin example was a powerful learning experience.

### Ask questions

No matter what the nature of the learning situation, one of the most important actions an individual can take in the process is to ask as many questions as come to mind. When asking questions, the questioner reveals to the teacher not only what they might feel is important to learn, but they also give the teacher a solid idea of where the questioner has gaps in understanding that need to be filled in order for learning to be complete.

From the questioner's perspective, it's always important to ask questions that cover a complete spectrum. The questions that we are most inclined to ask are of the 'How do I...?' or the 'What happens when...?' nature. But it is also important to learn what *not* to do. We forget that we can sometimes learn more not from people who have succeeded, but from people that failed. Asking questions about what may have led to failure can provide insights that help avoid mistakes in the future.

### Listen

When you're lucky enough to have a resource at hand to learn from, remember to pay close attention. As we interact with others new to us who can help us learn, it is easy to get caught up in conversation for the sake of relationship building or in mentally preparing for the next question we want to ask. In doing so, we forget to listen.

In a learning situation, it is important to be prepared with questions before hand in order to devote appropriate attention and concentration while listening to the answers. Take notes about the implications of the answers and make sure to keep a running list of other questions that may pop to mind during interactions. Don't allow them to stay in your head during the interaction. They get in the way of attentive listening.

### Internalize

When information is obtained, it shouldn't just be filed away in memory. Everything learned should be considered carefully and assessed. What about the new learning is contrary to prior understanding? Does it generate positive feelings and energy, or does it stick in your craw? If it does, what is there about the new learning that generates discomfort? Don't consider any new information or skills as truly learned until their strengths and weaknesses are well understood; until you understand why the person you learned it from felt it was important.

### Practice

Whatever is learned is just really knowledge until it is put into practice. Processes must be put into action. Skills must be physically attempted and mastered. Think about how many clichés you know that attack just this point. 'Practice makes perfect' and the like.

I remember hearing a great quote attributed to Gary Player that's relevant. Playing a friendly round with one of his buddies, Player dropped an iron shot into a bunker, much to his friend's delight. With his next shot, Player bore down in workman like fashion and holed out the shot from the bunker. His friend commented that it was the luckiest shot he had ever seen. Player simply stated, 'The more I practice, the luckier I get.' Practicing newly learned skills and applying new information will help the internalization process and build a better command of what has been learned.

### Learn better when you teach

Demonstrate what you've learned to those who work for or with you. Doing this is important for a few reasons.

First, it will convey how important you believe the new information to be. If a leader is promoting and teaching the new knowledge, it must be worthwhile. Secondly, demonstrating and communicating new knowledge or skills serves to cement what you've learned into your own repertoire. Finally, there is a social commitment aspect to teaching others. You must practice what you preach. Not only does practice benefit you, but others become more convinced as you walk the talk.

To this point, our Growth discussion has covered most the heavy lifting needed to make ourselves better at addressing challenges in the marketplace. We understand that raising the bar on our media efforts will take time and acknowledged the powerful opportunity in change. We know which critical decisions to make to seize opportunities. We know we can't succeed alone. We must learn from others. Which brings us to the last principle of Growth: in order to be effective we must convert our understanding into consistent action and change our behavior. We must adapt.

## **Growth Fundamental #6 - Adaptation**

### The components of Adaptation

Growth will not occur simply as a by-product of having oriented toward the initial principles and then learned from others. People, media planners or organizations cannot successfully adapt to a changed environment unless two important steps are taken. These two steps are the embracing of new perspective and determined action.

### New perspective

Embracing new perspective means enough understanding has been gained in reflection through the Growth process that the person or company actively begins to appreciate ongoing situations and environments from the perspectives of the consumers that create and are influenced by them.

Embracing of new perspective in an active way is important because it keeps sensitivity high for how consumers see the world. Given that consumers are critical drivers of change, being in tune with their perspective means the ability to sense opportunity arising from change is heightened. Not only that, but the consistent exercise of understanding the consumer's perspective makes it less likely that individuals or organizations will fall into the trap of becoming pigeon-holed by how they themselves see the world.

The networks are showing evidence of understanding and acting on this portion of the adaptation principle.

First, note how little time was invested by the networks during the upfront presentations promoting that they were #1. Further, much time was invested in recapping how they were going to work hard to deliver content to consumers in the myriad of new platforms consumers are embracing. To cap it off, everyone conveyed that their rationale for connecting with viewers in these new ways was to service the needs of their consumers, advertisers.

And the development that ABC and the other networks were willing to move on the currency issue and negotiate buys on live only ratings, suggest the networks are indeed trying to see changing marketplace situations from the perspective of their consumers and adapt.

### Determined action

Changed perspective is a beginning, but determined action is required to completely adapt and realize a vision for Growth. That's not just philosophical conjecture. It appears to be a fundamental of survival in living beings. Consider this passage from the acclaimed book 'Descartes' Error', by Antonio Damasio, a M.W. Van Allen Distinguished Professor of neurology and neuroscience.

“Perceiving the environment, then, is not just a matter of having the brain receive direct signals from a given stimulus, let alone receiving direct pictures. The organism actively modifies itself so that the interfacing can take place as well as possible. The body proper is not passive. Perhaps no less important, the reason why most of the interactions with the environment ever take place is that the organism requires their occurrence in order to maintain homeostasis, the state of functional balance. The organism continuously *acts* on the environment (actions and exploration did come first), so that it can propitiate the interactions necessary for survival. But if it is to succeed in avoiding danger and be efficient in finding food, sex and shelter, it must *sense* the environment (smell, taste, touch, hear, see), so that appropriate actions can be taken in response to what is sensed. Perceiving is as much about acting on the environment as it is about receiving signals from it.”

In short, learning isn't worth very much and potential for success in endeavors is unlikely unless you actually put that learning into action.

From an organization's perspective, determined action might translate to the creation of environments where there freedom to ideate, supplying of resources to bring new solutions to market and commitment to follow thru to execution in the face of market pressures. Innovations that flow from adapted behaviors must make it from the drawing board to the marketplace in order for them to generate intended impact as the fruits of the Growth process.

### Planner action points

Here are a number of determined actions planners can take to facilitate adaptation. First off, practice practice, practice. How many clichés can you spout off that get exactly to this point? They are clichés for a reason. Once you have learned a new skill or information, one sure way to cement it into your skill set is to practice it repeatedly until it's mastered. What is the old adage about learning new words? Spell and recite them a number of times and you know them. Use them in sentences and you own them.

A second action planners can take is embodied in Nike's tag line; Just Do It. Diving into a planning process or sharing commentary in a critical meeting that requires a planner to use new learning is easier said than done. If one hasn't had the occasion, it takes some courage to step out into that new territory. But you need to remember, if that new info or skill was learned from an expert in that area, the larger risk is to keep it to yourself and leave a potential contribution on the table.

Planners also need to actively pursue opportunities to use new knowledge or skills. In every legacy planning process, there will be an opportunity to reassess it to see if there are ways it can be improved using newly learned tactics. The same can be said of brand new projects that come down the line. If new projects start from square one, what a perfect opportunity to employ new approaches.

A final action media planners can take to facilitate adaptation is to teach what they have learned. Stephen Covey mentions this in his 'The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People'. The contention is that we learn better when we teach. Intuitively, that seems right on target. When you consider that any teaching of new learning requires on-going mastery of the new learning and actual practice in the conveyance or demonstration of what has been learned, teaching should serve to strongly hone skills.

On a deeper level, teaching is also a highly reinforcing activity. Why? Once you've gone public as a teacher of something new, you become socially committed. You are not only an advocate, a true believer of that information, but those around you will expect you to practice what you preach. By having engaged in the action of teaching, you have then, in effect helped your working unit to Grow.

Ernst Mayr, considered to be the 20<sup>th</sup> century's Charles Darwin, offers some words on evolution which are a corollary to the notion of teaching being a catalyst for Growth. In 'What Evolution Is', Mayr contends that evolution theory holds natural selection is a phenomenon that affects a population group. It is not simply 'survival of the fittest'; it is 'survival of the fittest *population (social group)*'. A small segment of the population adopts a trait that enables it to evolve in a new environment. Then, by interaction with the rest of the population, the adapted population segment spreads the trait throughout the entire population.

The difficulty of adaptation as the last step in the Growth process should not be understated. It takes belief in one's self, one's organization and courage to take real action even after powerful decisions have been made and valuable knowledge has been learned. But we must take that step in order to Grow.

A final story. A desperate, but courageous man was driven by need to climb a mountain to reach a pass beyond in order to come down on the other side and ultimately secure aid for his village. After an arduous trek, he reached the pass to discover it had deteriorated into a chasm spanned by a slender rope. He fell down with his back to the mountain disheartened and beaten.

Shortly, a clown pushing a wheel barrow came up from behind him, smiled and proceeded to cross over the gap on the rope bridge, easily pushing the wheel barrow. On the other side, he smiled back to the man and returned back over the rope.

The man exclaimed it was the most amazing thing he had ever seen. The clown replied that it was no big deal. He had learned how to do it as a child and could walk the span backwards and forwards. "I believe it!", replied the man. "Do you need to get to the other side?" queried the clown. The man replied that he did, to which the clown said, "Get in and I'll take you across."

Embarking on a path to real Growth isn't easy and as we've seen over the last months, it takes a lot of work. But perhaps the most difficult obstacle we will face along the way is having enough faith in ourselves to take that first step.