SAMPLE INTERVIEW- Roberta Bondar

Q&A

Roberta Bondar's views on changing environments in business.

Q: What have you learned from spaceflight that applies to business performance?

A: Space is a constantly changing environment that doesn't play by Earth rules. Similarly, businesses facing continuing change also operate in previously unknown environments where new ways of thinking and working must be established.

Q: Are there people such as business leaders who act like this?

A: A lot of leaders and the rest of us find ourselves disoriented to our surroundings in our personal and professional worlds by the abrupt impact of some previously unknown factor.

Q: Can you describe what this environment is like?
A: We are in uncharted territory. We are trying to adapt to new things in a place that doesn't recognize the rules we've set up and thrived in before this unknown factor changed the rules.

Q: Are there models that will help?

A: The static models that we have been using do not work in a dynamic world which requires new dynamic models. There is a disconnect between what has worked and what will move us to the next level.

Q: Then, how can we navigate in uncharted territory?

A: We must be prepared to deal with being disoriented, to minimize the time that will be spent unprofitably. We need the tools to navigate so that we don't lose our focus and can more quickly make adaptive decisions.

Other space applications

Q: What can we learn from human space travel apart from the adventure?

A: By sending normal and very fit people into this new environment without gravity, we can investigate the ability of the body to change as it adapts.

Q: But how does this help the rest of us Earth-bound people?

A: When we come back from space, we have symptoms similar to some of those found in diseases such as stroke, multiple sclerosis and osteoporosis. We can examine how the various systems in our body coordinate our recovery and try to see where this fails in different diseases as we become normal and ill patients do not.

Q: What are the problems that we'll face going beyond Earth, back to the Moon and on to Mars?

A: Some of the problems will relate to floating without gravity and how that harms our body over time. Others deal with being suspended in an environment rich in radiation.

Q: But we can simulate this, right?

A: Actually, we cannot reproduce the affects of long term space flight here on Earth. One static model is bed rest, but space is a dynamic environment in which there are many unknowns. We need a dynamic equivalent because the body is still working in space, except that it does not work against gravity.

Q: What about the psychological issues of being away from our planet?

A: Again, there is no Earth equivalent to being isolated in a place that is detached from viewing or experiencing something characteristic about Earth. Even submariners or Antarctic researchers are still on the planet.

Roberta's view from above, below and around

Q: What did you do to prepare yourself for seeing the Earth from space?

A: In our training as astronauts, we reviewed many photographs of the Earth, especially those that are in the same season as our flight. I must admit, that I spent many years before my flight looking at as many photographs as I could so that I would be able to recognize things from different angles.

Q: Were you given suggestions on what to photograph?

A: There are several places on Earth that have been photographed consistently over the years in the space program. For example, photographs of the Aral Sea have given us a good record of the changes that can happen when man-made projects disturb the natural environment.

Q: Did anything surprise you that you were not expecting?

A: The impact of the reality of being in the environment of space while looking out at the planet was the most memorable. It was surprising how much being in the moment really meant especially when the moment could be savored every time I was at the window. Although intellectually I understood it, seeing the Earth before me as a planet made a great impact. The reality of the blackness of space with the contrasting beautiful blue sphere of Earth underscores the singular resources that we have contained on our planet for our survival.

Q: Did this change your own photography?

A: Yes. Now, I seek the wider horizon especially with a panoramic camera. In my true landscape photography, I consciously try to capture things as an astronaut exploring a planet, so I do not include humans or human-derived objects.

Q: What types of landscapes intrigue you the most?

A: Although I am fascinated by the diversity that we have on Earth, I gravitate to the grand deserts of the world such as the Arctic and Sahara because this is where I see the dynamic aspects of the planet unfolding

within my humble lifetime. When I need to experience where my short life fits in the scheme of the continuing evolution of the Earth, I like the granite rocky shores of Lake Superior, and the oceans and mountains.