

Driving Through Chaos

A business is like a vehicle traveling along a road. Curves and hills are expected, but who can predict when it will be thrust into the uncharted territory of sudden change and chaos? How many times have we trusted a map only to find that the shortcut was meant for four wheel drive vehicles with a clearance of at least two feet? Or the GPS unit that insists the store you are trying to find hasn't been built yet? But what if the pavement were to suddenly end in a washout from a flash flood, or from an avalanche of snow or rock or mud? Ever thought of that?

Interesting similarities are raised in the business/driving metaphor. As technology improves (and with it, better techy toys) the adventure of driving to someplace becomes focused on the inside of the car while we are oblivious to the outside world clicking by on a scrolling screen. Most often it is the driving experience within the vehicle that gets us through long distances. How many of us don't even remember driving a segment or two, our minds having slipped into automatic? If we are not pushing buttons on a GPS, it is likely that our restless fingers alternate between a cell phone and the radio, CD player or IPOD. We drive blissfully along, trusting that the charted territory of a paved highway knows where it is going and will safely take us with it. We have slipped into a level of comfort because everything is predictable according to the GPS or map.

The same is true of a business that runs along the road of technology. We become so focused internally on getting to where we want to go that we can distance ourselves from interacting with the outside world. We are navigating known or charted territory in the true sense as we believe in and trust technology as a roadmap to help us cope with any changes. Is this a problem? We could miss a warning of an impending accident or other chaotic event that will thrust us into uncharted territory both inside and outside our vehicle and business.

In times of sudden chaos, even our ability to cope becomes uncharted territory. Do we trust the skill set of our fellow travelers to contribute and help? Do they trust ours? Is there a trained or natural integration of ideas? It is no longer sufficient for each traveler just to have basic skills for survival. To advance through chaos, we must innovate with tools that we rarely use for that purpose. Sudden or unexpected change that throws things into disarray gives us the stimulus to try something novel. How well we navigate uncharted territory with whom and with what we have available will define our business dynamic.