



Dear Reader,

Don't you feel like taking a sabbatical from listening to the news, without reading a newspaper or the headlines on your phone app? With so much going on, it is easy to feel overwhelmed. But think about this: What if we would focus on creating what we want, instead of on avoiding what we don't like?

This is the clue to invite you to read this month's article.

Enjoy the sabbatical.

Stop and Reflect

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Business as an Agent of World Benefit

By Isabel Rimanoczy

If this statement sounds a bit odd to you, let me share with you the theme of the conference that took place last week in Cleveland, Ohio, entitled "[Flourish and Prosper](#)". Organized by the Weatherhead School of Management at Case Western Reserve University, this was the third global forum of this kind.

Over 600 participants from academia, business, consulting practices and students gathered for three days of inspiring stories, interactive workshops and – as always is the case – very exciting interactions during coffee breaks, lunches and dinners.

Business as an agent of world benefit (BAWB) is a brainchild of Prof. David Cooperrider, author of the [Appreciative Inquiry](#) (AI) methodology that has provided help and hope to groups and organizations around the world as they seek to improve their organizational effectiveness. Appreciative Inquiry is based on the belief that we can make more progress to improve effectiveness if we focus on what is going well, on the strengths and assets of

an individual and the group, rather than concentrating solely on analyzing the problems and challenges we face.

AI was initially conceived as an OD intervention, then evolved to a whole systems change methodology, became fully systemic by incorporating the ecosystem, and has now integrated the ultimate lever of change energy – the human spirit.

A positive twist

With a world providing daily reminders of what is not working, the concept behind “Business as an agent of world benefit” is suggesting we should shift our attention to what *IS* working, what *IS* good and valuable, and to build on those positive elements, behaviors and procedures. This approach is very similar to the Positive Psychology movement, which was championed by [Martin Seligman](#) as he became the president of the American Psychological Association, in 1998. Why have we concentrated on researching and teaching pathologies of the human behavior? What if we would start studying happy individuals, healthy relationships, joyful lives? Without neglecting the importance of researching pathologies, we should equally learn from what is working well and perhaps we could replicate and improve it.

Certainly the idea of steering our attention to what we want, instead of focusing on what we want to avoid or get rid of, is not new. Buddhism teachings indicate that “on what you focus, grows”. And we have all heard the warning of watching our thoughts because “they become words; words become actions, actions become habits, and habits become our destiny.” Many reflective practices, which bring great calmness to an increasing number of stressed employees and executives, invite us to be mindful of our thoughts.

If we can create our destiny by focusing on what we want – as Martin Luther King suggested with his famous “I have a dream” speech-- why not try it out to shape the world we would like to live in, the businesses we would like to work for, the cities we would love to live in, and within communities that helped us thrive? “Awe is what moves us forward”, says anthropologist Joseph Campbell.

Flourishing

Nothing may be more urgent and important in our times than what is happening to our environment, the threats or current manifestations of climate change, and the depletion of natural resources. Or should I say, nothing is more important than the pollution of our water, soil and air. Or perhaps, the health challenges, or the violence, or lack of access to education, or the gender gap or.... Certainly, we have many more challenges than ever. But it was in this connection that this conference offered a radically different perspective. For all the challenges we meet, there are thousands, millions of worthy initiatives that are bringing care, support, innovation, better products and services to the world. What if we focused on the individual strengths, inspired by these stories, and created more of what we want to see?

Barbara Snyder, President of Case Western University opened the event with these words: “From an idea, to an imperative. Dream of what can be, and take the steps to make it happen.” Columbia economist and founder of the Earth Institute Jeffrey Sachs

was quoted: “Business is a way for peace. We can be the generation to end world poverty.” Coca Cola’s CEO words were also quoted: Stand up, set up, and step up” Arianna Huffington encouraged us not to wait for a leader: “Stare at the leader in the mirror”, she suggested.

[Naveen Jain](#), a business executive and entrepreneur signaled that every single challenge presents an opportunity to innovate, and reminded us of the power of the younger generation sharing ideas and building collaboratively to fashion the new reality. The problems, it seems, awaken in us a deep sense of caring, “a desire that is in all of us, and we have just to set the stage for it”, observed Bart Houlahan, co-founder of the [B-Corporation](#), a certifying organism that creates a new framework to do good and do good business.

The voice of educators was present too. The [Peruvian Business School Centrum](#) shared how their research is focused on best practices from other countries; Think Tanks are run with outsiders who bring fresh input and play a main role in their communication with media (social media included), while they aim at influencing public policy. [Mark Moody-Stuart](#), former CEO of Shell, underlined it in these words: Business schools have an obligation to educate policy makers and businesses too.

Weatherhead Dean Robert Widing agreed, stating that schools have the opportunity to develop leaders who innovate and create business sustainable value. Author and management guru [Richard Boyatzis](#) questioned our outdated learning methodologies. “We need to refocus management education from subjects to issues”, and [UN PRME](#) (United Nations Principles for Responsible Management Education) Director Jonas Haertle wondered what if all management education would be centered on the sustainable development goals, the new version of the [Millenium Development Goals](#) that will be released in 2015. [Katrin Muff](#), Dean of the Lausanne Business School, noted the challenge that leaders have to transform themselves first, together with the organization, and spoke about her pioneering experiences developing the “being” aspects of the participants in their business education programs. Uwe Steinwender, from Daimler AG, presented a template that asks provocative questions to participants: What world do I want to live in? What organization? What did I do so far toward realizing this goal?

Prospering means acting

While the intellectual exchanges and the stories were profound and inspiring, the unique aspect of this forum was the process that led the whole audience from ideas into action. Using a step by step approach, and professionally guided by expert facilitators, the conference provided all participants the opportunity to select and participate in their areas of greatest passion and interest, from a variety of topics: Cities we want to live in, Regenerative Agriculture, Workplaces that employees love, 100% Clean energy, US Grand Strategy, and a “More than Nobel Prize” that would engage, honor, connect, scale and reward those initiatives that build the world we desire. Each subgroup brainstormed dreams, organized inputs, created a prototype solution and made a final podium presentation of concrete action steps that participants engaged in.

If you wonder if anything will happen, stay tuned. The last Global BAWB Forum in 2006 was the genesis of UN PRME, which has to date 565 member institutions incorporating principles that are changing business education. For a better world.

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