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This quarterly newsletter features topics related to managing change and improving our work environments. If there are topics you would like to see covered or feedback you have about this newsletter, please submit your ideas and feedback to the following link: <http://www.anneoffner.com/contact.htm>



I was reading an interesting book yesterday. I pick it up from time to time because it's got a good perspective. The book is Daniel Pink's "A Whole New Mind: Why Right-Brainers Will Rule the Future."ⁱ

Pink states that our parents wanted us to become "Lawyers. Accountants. Computer Programmers." These are the well-paid professionals who use their "left brain", logical, analytical and objective.

Pink posits that this left-brain era propelled us into the Information Age, which dominates the dawn of the 21st century. The industrial age has migrated to second place. Pink argues that in the Information Age, the "right-brain brain," predominates. Right-brain thinking is intuitive, subjective, abstract and random.

The right-brain communicates through story. Pink goes on to say that we tend to

remember things better when they are in story versus facts.

This is not a new idea. The Talmud, Koran, and Bible tell stories. Parents read stories to their children. Employees in organizations share "water cooler" stories.

Stories are a way of shaping and passing along information.

An organizational consultant, Noel Tichey, uses story to teach employees. In an article written with Eli Cohenⁱⁱ, both researchers contend that in order for companies to grow and flourish they must develop their leaders. In their view, leaders are developed by leaders who have a teachable point of view, which is "a leader's opinion on what it takes to lead other people." Tichy has taught CEOs to talk in story to develop leaders and guide employees.



The best thing about stories is the observers who tell them. Several people can witness an event or series of events simultaneously, but each of their stories will be slightly different from the others. This is because the observer filters her or his observations through personal

beliefs, experiences and earlier stories that they uniquely remember.

Stories communicate the *observer's view* of the world. Listeners decide how to interpret it through their own filters.

Journalists and historians distill these stories to tell us "what really happened" as they see it through their filters. However, journalists and historians are often relating "hearsay." Their accounts are once removed from the observations of witnesses who were there.

As each of us is immersed in the story of our early 21st century economy, we might recognize the journalistic and historical versions as filtered through our personal beliefs, experiences and earlier stories.

The same is true for the stories we hear around the water cooler or recall from our upbringing. Try comparing your version of a family story to one of your sibling's version – the versions will not be the same.

Stories are powerful.



So, how can we best interpret the stories we hear? Metaphor is often an important part of story.

Otto von Bismarck, [Minister-President of Prussia](#) from 1862 to 1890, said, "Laws are like sausages, it is better not to see them being made."

Sometimes a simple comparison is all that's needed.

Winston Churchill said, "'Democracy is the worst form of government, except for all

those other forms that have been tried from time to time."

US corporations began as a democratic way to do business. Pundits excoriate corporate greed while others remind us that our nation has prospered because of the success of corporations.

Congressman Barney Franks (D-Mass.) has his own story. He points out that during the earlier "Gilded Age" (1898-1899) – which some today compare to our era – the "Trusts," led by J. P. Morgan's United States Steel and John D. Rockefeller's Standard Oil, worked their way around federal laws. Thus, they came to dominate business and finance and gave rise to the "Wall Street" we know today.

Compare this story to that of Joseph Schumpeter, an economist and Harvard professor in the 1920s to the 1940s. Schumpeter believed that "innovation and entrepreneurs are the driving force of economic vitality and growth" in the US. This type of innovation and entrepreneurship was responsible for the huge growth of new businesses in California after WWII (the Golden Age of Capitalism). "People such as Microsoft's Bill Gates, a Harvard dropout, and Apple's Steve Jobs, a Reed College dropout, became billionaires along the way, and American society gained an inestimable benefit."ⁱⁱⁱ

George M. Taber, former business editor of Time magazine, has this story to tell: "For all its obvious blemishes and needed reforms, capitalism alone holds out the most creative and dynamic force that any civilization has ever discovered: the power of the free, ambitious individual."^{iv}

US corporations have been around a long time. Perhaps the first modern corporation, and certainly one of the very earliest, was

Sears, Roebuck and Co., founded in Chicago in 1893, smack in the middle of the Gilded Age. This corporation catered not to the Robber Barons, who had built the Trusts, but to the Middle Class. Sears' torch was picked in 1950 by Sam Walton, who bought a dime store in Bentonville, Ark., and turned it into Wal*Mart – today, the world's largest retailer.

In our Information Age, the Internet allows us to watch the sausage being made. This is a good thing.

What else do we see during The Information Age? A few pecks at our laptops tell us that the U.S. economy remains the world's largest, that California's economy is bigger than France's or Canada's or Mexico's, and that Tennessee's is bigger than Saudi Arabia's.

We can thank our international corporations.

We're Americans. We've faced a crisis or two during our 200-plus years. To get out of them, we work our tails off.

Where are we going?

Be patient.

We'll find out together.

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This newsletter is edited by Larry Offner of West Palm Beach, Florida.

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ⁱ Daniel Pink (2006), *A Whole New Mind: Why Right-Brainers Will Rule the World*, NY: Penguin Group.

ⁱⁱ Noel Tichy and Eli Cohen (1997), American Society for Training and Development (ASTD); <http://www.noeltichy.com/HowLeadersDevelopLeaders.pdf>

ⁱⁱⁱ <http://knowledge.wharton.upenn.edu/article.cfm?articleid=2172>; A Question Revisited: Is Capitalism Working?

^{iv} <http://knowledge.wharton.upenn.edu/article.cfm?articleid=2172>; A Question Revisited: Is Capitalism Working?