

From **ROO** to You



April, 2011

Potholes, Distractions and Detours

Ah, the sounds of spring. Robins chirping, water flowing and the inevitable back up horns of construction equipment. Yes, spring has arrived with all of its promise and potholes. Last week I was waiting, somewhat patiently, to cross University Avenue in St. Paul. There was a construction worker who looked quite miserable trying to direct the traffic. She was doing her best to provide clear direction but some people were running late, were simply distracted or did not recognize her “authority” for ensuring the safe passage of traffic through the intersection. In one instance, a car almost hit her. Patience is not our strong point as a nation, but sometimes the detours can be worthwhile.

The following day, as my car bounced along Springbrook Drive in Coon Rapids (which must win the award for the greatest number of potholes per square foot of roadway in Minnesota) I thought about the potholes we encounter in our daily lives. I have stepped in a few, complained about several, and wondered why “somebody” doesn’t do something about them. As I enjoy driving down the now nearly stoplight-free Highway 169 I am reminded of the longer-term benefits that make the occasional detour worthwhile.

We hope this month’s newsletter provides an opportunity to become aware of the potholes in your life, and to appreciate the occasional detour. As always, we welcome your comments.



For You:

Avoid the Potholes, Enjoy the Detour

The occasional pothole is inevitable. Everything will be running smoothly when all of a sudden, “BAM”- you hit a major pothole and your suspension (ego, confidence, etc.) feels damaged. Will your car(eer) ever run as well as it used to? With perseverance and tolerance for the occasional pothole and detour it can.

Avoid the Potholes

Common potholes you can look for include technology changes, business shifts, demographic changes, family obligations and job / career changes. While there are many potholes we may not be able to predict (job loss, health crisis, etc.), we can take proactive

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steps to prepare ourselves for the occasional pothole.

- Keep your skills current; pursue certification or an advanced degree in your field
- Build a strong network, and nurture that network
- Participate in industry or professional associations
- Pay it forward. Lend some expert advice or a helping hand to another professional

Enjoy the Detour

Most of us have experienced a detour or two during the past two years. We have seen many qualified people unemployed or underemployed. We have been pulled in multiple directions with family responsibilities. We have vacillated between working harder to keep our jobs and looking for an employer that will appreciate our talents. These detours derail us for a time, but they often result in a better route in the future.

As I think of the paths my colleagues have taken during the past few years, the detours have often been long, confusing and circuitous. But in the end, each has prospered either intellectually, financially, personally and in a few, fabulous cases, all three areas. Of three people I know of that were detoured out of high pressure, low gratification jobs, one is thriving as a Creative Director with a major retailer, one displaced business development professional has launched her own business, while another has found a unique niche developing middle managers in organizations – her true passion. While they are in varying stages of professional and personal success, each saw beyond the pothole (with a good deal of support from family and friends), enjoyed the detour, and discovered a new destination.



**For Your Organization:
Pothole Divers and Spectators**

Does this photo seem comical or is it too realistic to be funny? Undoubtedly there are a few potholes your organization has encountered during the past couple of years. Perhaps you

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have lost a major account, experienced a reduction in workforce, or a key supplier has gone out of business. Or, like in this photo, perhaps a member of your team has fallen face-first into a major pothole. This happens to everyone on occasion; it is how we dig out of the hole and more intentionally scan our environment going forward that matters.

Pothole Divers

Are there a few “pothole divers” who repeatedly and fully dive into professional potholes in your workplace? You know who I’m talking about. Maybe they miss important details, fail to follow through on commitments or can’t play nice with others. How much time do you spend digging them out of the same holes, time and time again? You fill the hole, and before you know it, they have found another one. Take action today. Set expectations, make sure you have provided the tools for them to be successful, and be ready to release them if they continue to dive.

Spectators

How many of your staff see a pothole, but do little to address the potential pitfall? When someone “steps in it” at work, which of your staff members step in to help them out, and which ones simply sit back enjoy watching the story unfold? How many aren’t willing to take a risk by taking a step?

I recently watched the film “Extract”, which painted a painfully funny and accurate picture of a manufacturing company. “If they’re not going to do their job, I’m not going to do mine. I’m just going to sit here.” You can see the trailer on YouTube: <http://youtu.be/K0cbA5qTvBY>

*A note of caution for the HR folks – there is some mature content in the trailer. You better just watch the first 15 seconds. It may even violate one of your policies; maybe you shouldn’t watch it at work.

Create a culture of accountability and initiative in your organization. Weave it into your hiring practices, performance management and recognition programs. The spectators will start filling holes or watch their role disappear.

Leaders

While we can’t always see the potholes that are forming, how we choose to respond to them is within our control. As leaders, we can:

- Fill the pothole and wait for the next one to pop up – don’t forget to yell at the guy who brings the next pothole to your attention
- Ignore the pothole – we don’t have the budget or the resources to fix it
- Create lasting solutions to address the pothole epidemic

Your staff will follow your lead. Will you fill, ignore or commit to the hard work of creating sustainable solutions?

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