

Openings: If Father Time hands off his mantle to the Baby New Year, why does Old Man Winter continue to hang on? Just another disparity between our calendar and Mother Earth's natural cycle.

Spotlight: Seasonal sales fluctuations are natural for many businesses. With products tied to the cycles of nature, school calendars, or the fiscal calendars of other enterprises, these businesses develop a rhythm to accommodate the peaks and valleys in their activities. Being able to explain business cycles in relationship to an outside force allows these businesses to accept and settle into their own cycle. For businesses where there is no apparent outside force driving the ups and downs experienced through the year, accepting these deviations from the norm is much more challenging.

Our obsession with cause and effect can lead us to take credit for any improvement in our business fortunes and to blame ourselves for any declines. In the absence of any clear cause, blame or credit must be assigned to the most likely source. This leads to a neurosis that in turn fuels a miriade of improvement projects. Systems must be refined, costs trimmed, and employee efficiency increased. None of these exercises are detrimental to the business as long as it is acceptable to conclude that all systems are fully refined, costs are optimal, and employee efficiency acceptable.

Unfortunately, many enterprises are driven by two interlocking paradigms: continual grow and continual change. Any sign of stasis is treated as a problem requiring some form of intervention. The only natural thing we know that continually grows and changes is cancer and it may be that our current business environment is to a great extent, cancerous. Many people become ill through their jobs and many businesses partake in activities analogous to disease pathology. Accepting the possibility that growth and change are not indicators of an enterprise's health is also a challenge.

Your business ebbs and flows according to its own cycle. While it does continually experiment with new derivations of utilising its resources, these experiments do not necessarily reveal new efficiencies or greater effectiveness. The size and configuration that your business currently holds may be a full expression of its potential. These are facts that no wishful thinking can change. Either you accept the reality of how the universe works or you live in the illusion of being in control. Your decision may not affect any outcomes and it will certainly affect how you experience the day-to-day activities of your enterprise.

Quote: Maya Angelou shares some of her wisdom with us:

*"I've learned that...
people will forget what you said,
people will forget what you did,
but people will never forget how you made them feel."*

Musings: With the Christmas tree down, the decorations put away, and the diet restriction instituted to counteract a bulging waistline, January can feel quite bland in comparison to the recent holiday season. Add to this the prospect of faltering on one's New Year's resolutions, perpetually grey skies, and a lack of daylight hours. It is easy for the month to take on a less than cheery outlook.

On the other hand, one can marvel at the slowly lengthening days, the cool, crisp, star filled nights, and the enveloping silence of a snow covered landscape. The start of a new year wipes clean the slate leaving everything possible over the next twelve months. In our calendar-based society, January is the definitely the time to celebrate the unbounded options that lay before us.

Without changing one fact, we can change our perspective on most anything, even January. It is simply a choice we make regarding how we want to feel about our days and nights.

Facts & Figures: Historically, the dead of winter signified the three days after the solstice when the Sun appeared to stand still, transiting neither north nor south along its trajectory. Today, the term signifies the midpoint of the winter season when as much of the season is behind you as in front of you. In balmy Victoria, because of the moderating effect of the Pacific Ocean, the dead of winter occurs in the first week of January. Within a few weeks blossoms will start to appear while the rest of the country is still slogging through snow and ice.

Just For Fun: The Afghan government is to promote Osama bin Laden's Tora Bora mountain hideout as a "must-see" tourist destination. Battlegrounds from many other conflicts are successful venues so there is no reason to expect this one to be any different.