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Graduation to First Grade

Moms cry on the first and the last day of kindergarten. It always has been and always will be. It is part of their job description.

They grieve the baby and toddler who has suddenly become a child before their eyes as they enter kindergarten. Then they grieve the kindergartener who has graduated to “the grades.” They spring forward in their minds to high school and college graduations to come. Then weddings. Then the day this child will bring his or her own child to kindergarten. “How quickly they grow up.”

It is a circle that rolls from generation to generation back to the distant past. It is something all of us have lived and observed.

Tears celebrate every major life change: births, graduations, weddings, having our own children, and deaths. They signal the “veering off points” of our lives...when one life situation ends and another begins, such as when we went from not having children to having children. Tears of joy. Tears of fear. Tears are a symbol of change.

At the end of kindergarten we had a large party in our classroom. There were cookies, cupcakes, and punch. Mothers swarmed over us with pride and loving care. They laughed and smiled and hugged each other. You would have thought they were graduating! My mom cried. Tears came easily to my mother and I thank God she passed that on to me.

There were only two times a year when the gate between the big kids’ playground and the kindergarteners’ playground was left open: Halloween and graduation day. For the kindergarteners, graduation day was great fun. There are two things we most looked forward to on that day: visiting the classrooms we would be in

the following year and, our final ceremony, the last recess-- when we played on the big kids' playground for the first time.

When the school day was drawing to a close we stood at the gate, fidgeting and waiting for our principal, Mr. Wright, to release us for recess on the big kids' playground. He stood looking at us, smiled, and swung the gate open. But we stood there in silence for a long time. Until he simply said, "What are you waiting for?"

We have neither tears nor diplomas to mark our readiness to take eBusiness seriously. We don't recognize the "veering off point" that should be occurring. So we need to muster the strength and determination to start out on our own. We have to tell ourselves that now is the time.

Too often I observe companies just "tinkering" when it comes to B2B. While we talk, we consult, we prototype, and we pilot, we are merely standing and watching the gate that has swung open.

We do "activities" that get in the way of real progress. We "think" we know where we are going, but we don't demonstrate either the belief or confidence that we do.

It is as if we collectively fear to step out in a bold way.

Change is something all of us experience and all of us resist. In the eBusiness world over the last years we have seen titanic changes taking place around us. Some of the changes have been exciting and others have been frightening.

With B2B we have seen startling changes-- on a level never experienced before in business. Ever.

People who saw the dot.com meltdown as the end of eBusiness were looking at one very, very, very small battle in a much larger war. They bring a warped sense of reality and totally miss the opportunity that is still before us. The risks and battles have only begun. There will be more meltdowns on the road to success. But there will be success.

We have observed new tools and methods of communication that have changed our lives-- sometimes for the better and sometimes not. I am nearly overwhelmed with the number of emails I receive every day. Twenty years ago, when it was more novelty than tool, it was quite interesting to get an email. In recent years it has become a ubiquitous business tool. How did we ever do without it?

When we first started using emails they were more like a replacement for letters. One-to-one or one-to-few communications. Then tools came along that made some emails more like newspapers. That stage was nearly perfect in my eyes-- lots of "personalized" emails with a sprinkling of selected news.

More recently tools have come along to blast emails at us. One-to-many. Misdirected. Largely pointless. Inconvenient. The originators of these emails are killing off the milk cow and don't know it. They have anesthetized us to their own message. Many emails are easier to trash than read.

With those tools have come other tools—filters to fend off the noise. A good change, followed by a bad change, followed by another change that seems like it shouldn't even be necessary. Change again and again in a never-ending stream of change.

Change before us can freeze us from action. Change barrages us with messages: "Not yet!" "Wait for the next change!" "First, see where things are headed!" When, in fact, we need to be wading in.

In our day-to-day eBusiness lives we live where the tides of change ebb and flow. We don't work in the safe harbors. We work where the waves crash to shore, where its power is always awesome and sometimes overwhelming.

Some forces move us to change and others forces cause us to resist. We are faced with a choice. Like a pier that takes the beating of the waves for long stretches of time we can ultimately succumb.

If we are not careful, it is easy for us to stand on the shoreline and watch, thinking, "It will not hit me." Or we can have the courage to wade in.

A law of physics can be applied to B2B. Newton's First Law of physics states: "If a body is at rest, it will continue at rest unless acted upon by a net external force."

So it is with B2B.

We stand at rest behind the gate. We stand where we think it is safe. We busy ourselves with prototypes and pilots. We hire consultants, we study, we evaluate. We wait for the optimal software or perfect business conditions before we will act. There is a time and place for each of those activities, but "enough is enough."

We need to time box those distractions and put ourselves in motion. If we don't, someone else will. When they do we may not be successful in reacting to these external threats.

We need to ask ourselves, “What are we waiting for?” Has the time come for you to take eBusiness seriously?

Is it time to venture onto the big kids' playground?

Sure-- we are going to get scraped. Expect a few bandages.

Sure-- we are going to fall down. Maybe we will break an ankle.

The large-scale swing set looks dangerous and forbidding—but we'll grow into it.

But look at all the new things to master. Does life get any better than facing all these new challenges? What are we waiting for?

“What are you waiting for?” – Dr. Robert Wright, Principal, Mulberry Elementary School, Whittier, California



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