

## **Embrace the Uncertainty**

### ***A Reflection from Clemens Ast***

Today's family business leaders are faced with enormous challenges. As things become more uncertain, fear and anxiety increase, and we look to individuals to rescue us. We become vulnerable to promises from leaders who cannot reasonably fulfill them. We often give up our freedom by abdicating our responsibilities of contributing to the mess in which we find ourselves. All of us must embrace the confusion and chaos, and trust that together, we will find our way through to the other side. Finding security and opportunity comes by looking within. All we need to survive and thrive in uncertain times lies within ourselves, our families, our businesses and our communities. One of the constants in life is change. Since the beginning of time events beyond our control have prompted change. As William Bridges notes in his book, *Managing Transitions*, change happens and there is nothing we can do to stop it. He goes on to state that change is not the problem. The problem lies in our inability to make the transition.

We are currently faced with enormous change in our environment, economy, families, and businesses. How will we respond? Will we respond by looking to someone or something to bail us out? Or, will we embrace the uncertainty and go deeper into ourselves to explore our innate resources of thought and reflection and then trust in our ability and self reliance to find our way through. Will we truly listen to each other and observe the patterns and trends emerging that define the road marks for discovery, new opportunities, and possibilities? Or, will we stay stuck in patterns of blaming and pointing fingers at others for creating our problems.

Transitions are difficult because we often refuse to let go of the old and reach for the new. An example comes to mind of a family business that was moving from the first generation to the second. Two founding brothers reached the stage where it became necessary to invite the next generation to take responsibility and active positions within the leadership and management of the company. One brother had a son who was very capable and competent. The other had a son and a daughter who were quite capable. The one brother took the necessary steps to let go of the key responsibilities and delegate to the next generation; the second brother was unwilling to let go of many of his day-to-day activities and felt threatened by the apparent competence of the next generation. Much of the fear and anxiety was related to the fact that he had no idea what he would do if he was not continuing to do what he had always done. As a result, he became more demanding and controlling and in fact effectively drove his son and daughter out of the business. Transitions are difficult if one does not re-imagine a new role and purpose beyond the one that exists. Uncertainty and chaos can cause rigidity and resistance as a result of fear. In order to successfully deal with change we must have a great amount of faith and humility to advance and perpetuate the work we do. We must acknowledge and believe that we have more to offer and have the courage to discover what it is.

The uncertain times are scary and dangerous. On the other hand, just like the explorers of old, they can be filled with excitement and opportunity. Another example is of a client company that was owned by two brother-in-laws. The one brother-in-law was the founder of the business. He



also was the inventor of the proprietary products and the key salesman. The other brother-in-law handled the administration and finance and was brought into the business about 10 years after it was started. The business grew to be extremely successful. As it became more successful the founding brother-in-law became more troubled and unhappy. The culture and structure of the company changed. He fought bouts of depression and suffered from chronic anxiety. In working closely with him, we were able to re-imagine an exciting new future whereby he became re-engaged with his passion for invention. The other brother-in-law expressed a strong desire to become majority owner and president of the existing business. Both re-imagined future possibilities for themselves individually and collectively. They both pursued their dreams and have become re-invigorated and energized.

Those times of uncertainty and turmoil will test our souls. For those who are fighting to hang on to the old, they will likely experience significant heartburn, distress, and failure. For those who embrace the uncertainty and chaos they are likely to discover new possibilities and opportunities by utilizing the tremendous God-given gifts of creativity and imagination for creating an exciting future.

Family businesses thrive on uncertainty. In the turmoil and disruption they often turn to other family members, employees, and customers and together they find their way through. There is tremendous power in connection and communicating with each other in times of crisis. Now is such a time.

