



## Finding Your Inner Entrepreneur

Please take this article very personally, it may be great for your business!

Recently, I was asked what I thought was needed to get the Travel Industry back on track. Where are we going as an Industry and what did I see? I paused, thought about several segments of the Industry and a few groups came to mind.

There are CVBs still holding their breath waiting for the return of Business Travelers and the International market. There are hotels selling three nights and giving one away for free. And Travel agents complaining that there are not enough customers walking through their doors. What is wrong with this picture?

All of these groups are desperately holding on to old assumptions about their businesses and the marketplace. It takes very little creativity to give away your products and services. The airline Industry provided this model years ago; just look at where they are today.... The CVBs waiting and hoping need to embrace the leisure market and realize that



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**BUSINESS  
INFORMATION AND  
TOOLS TO NAVIGATE  
THE EVER-CHANGING  
MARKETPLACE**

VOLUME 3, NO. 3



### SEPTEMBER:

Savannah, GA  
Pinehurst, NC  
Atlanta, GA  
Missoula, MT  
White Fish, MT

### OCTOBER:

Philadelphia, PA  
Omaha, NE  
Baltimore, MD  
Austin, TX  
Missoula, MT

### November:

Seattle, WA  
Juneau, AK  
Fairbanks, AK  
Pawtucket, RI  
Charlotte, NC



Dear Colleagues & Friends:

During the past month people have been asking questions. They have included questions about the state of the Tourism Industry. The response to the questions prompted the lead article in this newsletter. I was also asked to provide

some assistance to a speaker colleague, who has been struggling the past three years with business.

I immediately wrote down four questions for her to ask herself regarding her business. What changes did you make to your business within 60 days of September 11, 2001? How did the needs and challenges of your clients' industries change post 9/11? Identify five companies or entrepreneurs who have been successful over the past two years and ask them why. And finally, how well do you deal with change? Some of you may decide to stop reading at this point; I hope not.

The questions and your answers to them will reveal your response or reaction to fundamental shifts that have occurred over the past several years. The economic downturn, September 11th and changes in the marketplace have been greater than anyone might have imagined during the summer of 2001.

A number of people and companies are trying to grapple with their business models in a changed world. Leo Mullin, CEO of Delta Air Lines; Howard Dean, Democratic presidential hopeful; and you as a professional in the Tourism Industry all have something in common. All are

looking for a formula. In Leo Mullin's case he realizes that consumers and business travelers will not pay a premium to fly Delta when there are low-cost options available.

Howard Dean is also looking for a formula. He's certainly found the Internet formula for raising grassroots money and not having to collect frequent flyer miles. The bigger formula for Dean is how do you turn grassroots fundraising into a Democratic presidential nomination and a serious run for the White House.

And finally there is the Tourism Industry. A year ago I spent a half-hour in the office of a senior VP of a first tier West Coast destination. As we began to discuss the challenges and thousands of empty hotel rooms in the city there was silence. Then the response, "We need business travelers and the international market to come back." My response, " They are not going to be back for the foreseeable future, so you need a different formula for your city."

Look back at your reaction or response to the past few years. Have you acquired the skills to thrive or just survive? It comes down to a willingness to find a formula to meet the ever-changing shifts of the marketplace and your customers' needs.

In case of failure, uncertainty or even success, keep your white coat handy and keep on testing your formula!

*Joe Veneto*

Joe Veneto  
The Opportunity Guy



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until the other markets return, you play on the strings you have at your disposal. Finally, travel agents and consortium groups with agents still hugging their computer terminals might start hugging the keys on the telephone or past customer files to look for new opportunities.

The bigger question for me is why? Why are so many segments of the

Industry in such limbo? It's not just an issue of economics, although it is certainly having a big impact. The answer is

that operating assumptions and paradigms of the Industry have completely changed.

My response to the question about what is needed in the Industry was "more entrepreneurs and people at every level of organizations that think like business owners."

This is not an easy task and one I learned several years ago.

In 1994, after a very successful 15-year career at a small tour operator that became a major Industry wholesaler, I left. I worked in a very structured environment where the culture was very hierarchical and directed by a micro-managing entrepreneur. This meant everything was reviewed, checked and approved before making a move. Then, on occasion additional members of the executive team or family depending on the wind or the political battles of the week second and third-guessed it.

The company was successful and as long as the troops were in formation, you were safe.

However, creativity, new ideas and the ability to influence were controlled. Searching for greener

pastures; I jumped to a larger organization where they were into personal growth and hanging from ropes. I will never forget my third round of interviews with an Executive VP. I asked him about his advice for accepting the position. He said, "You will be just fine as long as you are comfortable with being uncomfortable."

I thought, why not, I am already pretty uncomfortable where I am, it can't be any worse. Little did I know what I was in for, nor how ill-prepared I was for what I thought would be culture shift. Instead it was culture shock!

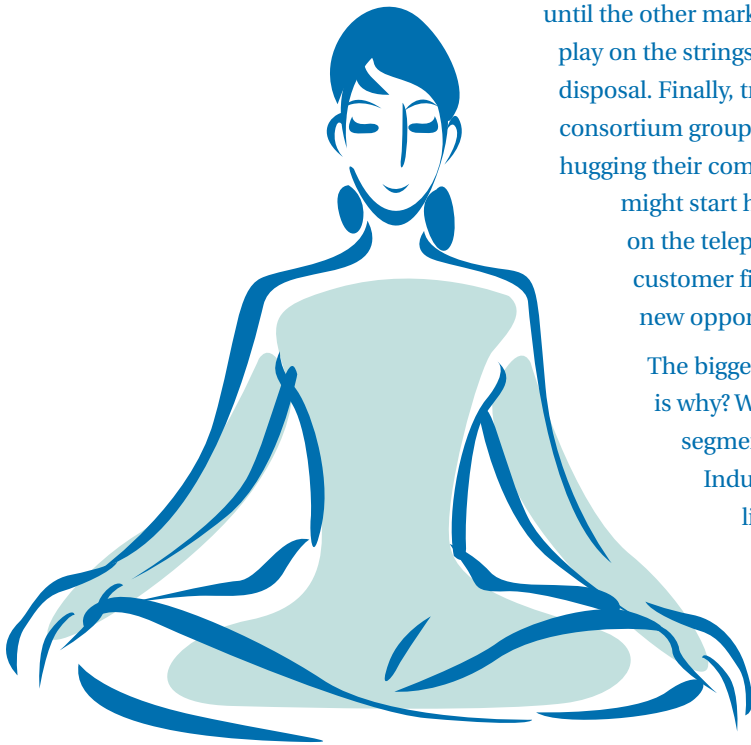
The mantra in the new culture was, "Thriving on Chaos" and there was plenty of it. It was an entrepreneurial environment where you were encouraged to take risks, allowed to fail and always stay out of your comfort zone.

Here I was introduced to the concepts of product testing. New products were tested with slices of past loyal customers before publishing a perfect four-color brochure! It was a direct market company that to this day remains a major force in the Industry.

While I still had my tourism skill set, I was a fish out of water. Following a three-week honeymoon, my boss gave me a blank sheet of paper. She said that since I was heading up a new start-up area of the company, she wanted me to do a plan on my revenue goal of \$10 million. I asked, "How do you want me to lay it out?" She replied, "That's why we hired you, go figure it out." I now understood the real meaning of being comfortable with being uncomfortable. I wasn't uncomfortable; I was sick!

I completed my task literally throwing things on paper. I tried to lay it all out perfectly based on my experience and overlaying my last company's culture. I had no frame of reference for working free fall. I was thriving in chaos, but it was my own.

A year into the chaos with a company reorganization, I wasn't uncomfortable; I was unemployed. However, unbeknown to me at the time, I had changed. The culture and chaos had



## FIVE ENTREPRENEURIAL SUCCESS IDEAS

- Be comfortable with being uncomfortable.
- Done is better than perfect.
- Identify essential entrepreneurial qualities.
- Add to your entrepreneurial skill set.
- Operate in "four to go!"

seeped into my thoughts and actions. I was operating differently and I was better prepared than ever for creating my new business that would follow.

As an Industry, we have been grappling with chaos and incredible change for the past two years. Whether CVB, travel supplier or agency groups, every organization in travel is in a new business. People still talk about pre 9/11 and when things will return to normal. I say they are normal, a very new normal and the Industry needs to adapt.

Organizations having the most success have already embraced the paradigm.

Those that have not are still floundering. The model we need to embrace is that of a laboratory. We need to put on a white coat and try to figure out the new formula for success with customers' changing needs and wants.

Here are five entrepreneurial success ideas from my list of top ten:

1. Be comfortable with being uncomfortable (not easy). Most people are already uncomfortable and are not using their energy to motivate them to figure out a formula or test new products and services.
2. Done is better than perfect. Throw some new ideas and offerings out to your market to see what might work. You will be amazed at what you will learn from your customers' needs. Forget the four-color brochures and fancy marketing; get things out the door or on your Web site.
3. Think about the qualities needed to start a business or operate in an entrepreneurial environment. Make a list and honestly ask yourself what you need to do to operate differently? Challenge your business assumptions and beliefs. The marketplace certainly has changed if you have not noticed.
4. Add to your skill set. There may be skills or experiences that you are missing, so go get them. It is not a crime to ask for help or enlist a trusted advisor, mentors or experts to achieve your goals.
5. Operate in four to go! The old childhood verse, one for the money, two for the show, three to get ready, three to get ready, three to get ready....Too many organizations are waiting for things to change before they operate in four to go.

The experience of living in chaos taught me much and continues to resonate as I look at how I add value in the marketplace with customers. Most people are already uncomfortable, so why not harness the energy and add some focus to operate in four to go.... You will find your inner entrepreneur.

## Prize Package

### *GO Boston!*

Believe it or not, I was home in Boston long enough to notice a new and innovative package product appear on the horizon in my own hometown. The Go Boston Card™ is Boston's only all inclusive visitor pass. It is a visitor card that comes in 2-, 3- or 5-day increments and uses a smart chip and card reader at participating attractions. Purchasing the card includes a 132-page full color guidebook with maps, information on each attraction, fun facts and heaps of history.

Among the 25+ attractions are cruises, museums, trolley passes and historic sites.

You also enjoy exclusive savings in over 30 area shops and restaurants during your visit. It allows today's discerning travelers choice, freedom, flexibility and savings all in one price.

This card is not just a great deal for consumers, but an excellent opportunity for local attractions to create leverage through partnerships in the local Boston market. For further information go to [www.gobostoncard.com](http://www.gobostoncard.com) or call Cecilia Dahl at 617-848-5900. GO Boston (and the Red Sox too we hope!).



## KEEPING YOUR NOSE CLEAN

My grandmother always advocated keeping your nose clean, and over the past year we have seen lots of professionals in the DMO world get into hot and in some cases boiling water. During a conversation with Cole Carley of the Fargo-Moorhead CVB at Pow Wow in St. Louis, I heard about Cole's rules of politics and wanted to share them with you.

1. If they want something bad enough, including your butt, they will find a way to get it (They could be the board, city, gov't, other stakeholders, etc.).
2. Friends come and friends go but enemies accumulate.
3. Anything worth doing and worth doing well is going to piss somebody off.
4. It's not your money!!!

Cole says most people get fired because of #4 but they are all important!

When in doubt reread the list.

## ROMANTIQUE

This summer while reading the Arts section of the Boston Globe, I noticed an article for a play called "Romantique." The play, set in Nohant, France is an evening at the country house of author George Sand between 1839-1845 during the heyday of French Romanticism. The evening also includes friends Frederick Chopin and artist Eugene Delacroix.

The premise of the play is to show the realms of art and life colliding into their works of art. In preparing the actors for their roles, the playwright and director decided to take the cast to Nohant, France. The goal was to recreate the events of the evening and allow the actors to be *dans le bain*. This was imaginative, and I thought would prepare the characters and the audience for an evening of total immersion.

When I called the box office for tickets, the show had already opened. I was excited and

interested as to the reviews and feedback. I asked the clerk a few questions to which he replied, "Oh, we haven't see the show yet." I said, "What do you mean, they sent the actors to France, the box office staff can't go down the hall?" He said, "We hope we will get chance to see the show before it closes."

It is amazing to me that the true sales people of the play are the people on the front line every day. The theater and the writers are too close to realize this. This is the realm where sales and life collide in 21st Century America! What about your true sales people; when was the last time they experienced the products they are selling to your customers?

## TOURISM FOR BREAKFAST

One morning while opening the top of a Colombo yogurt container I noticed a promotion on the lid of the container. Between July-September 30th 2003 Colombo yogurt will donate 20 cents up to \$100,000 to the Adams National Historic Park. Since I live in Quincy, Massachusetts, the City of Presidents, I was very interested. So I started my yogurt top collection to help the cause.

Money raised from Colombo's "preserve our Heritage" campaign will help preserve the John Quincy Adams commissioned proof copy of the Declaration of Independence. In 1823, John Quincy Adams identified that the original document was deteriorating, so he commissioned duplicates to be made for preservation for future generations.

Last year a similar campaign raised \$50,000 for the Paul Revere House in Boston.

This is an excellent example of an out-of-the-box partnership with corporate America and tourism. It just happened to catch my eye at breakfast. What can you and your organization do to be tourism stewards or create an innovative win-win partnership in an environment of funding challenges?

## How can The Opportunity Guy assist your organization in achieving its goals?

Please have "The Opportunity Guy" contact me:

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Title: \_\_\_\_\_

Company: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_ City/State/Zip: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone: \_\_\_\_\_ Fax: \_\_\_\_\_

E-mail: \_\_\_\_\_ Web: \_\_\_\_\_

Yes, Please have The Opportunity Guy contact me to discuss opportunities for my organization.

Yes, I am interested in a Destination or Product assessment for my organization to develop new and innovative package products.

Yes, I am interested in educational programs or project consulting for my organization on the following topics:

The Drive Market

Travel Packaging

Off Season

Sales Development

Experiential Products

Customer Service

Yes, I am aware of another organization that would benefit from the services and educational programs of "The Opportunity Guy".

Organization: \_\_\_\_\_ Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

Contact Name: \_\_\_\_\_ E-Mail: \_\_\_\_\_

Additional Thoughts or Comments: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**Please fax back to: (617) 786-1081**

Thanks, Joe Veneto, *The Opportunity Guy*



**“The Opportunity Guy”  
Joe Veneto**

1-800-840-4919  
Fax: (617) 786-1081  
joe@opportunityguy.com  
www.opportunityguy.com

P.O. Box 69-2359  
Quincy, MA 02269

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**NEW SESSION TO ASSIST IN FINDING YOUR INNER ENTREPRENEUR**

**STRATEGIC BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT:**

The ever-changing dynamics of the marketplace require different skills for travel organizations to stay competitive. Employees and business unit managers must become entrepreneurial to create new business models for success. This session focuses on key strategies to thrive in the marketplace. They are: developing an entrepreneurial mindset and activi-

ties, uncovering your business drivers to build a strategic plan and understanding your client needs, customer types and their business cycles. You also explore strategic partnerships to leverage business opportunities through new products, promotional activities and access to new customer groups. Once incorporated, these new competencies will position your organization to thrive in the marketplace of the future.

**FEEDBACK FROM A RECENT SESSION:**

“I would have to say the session exceeded our expectations. The comments we have received have been extremely positive. The exercises you selected were perfect, relevant and eye opening. I am thrilled that our business unit managers now all look at their businesses quite differently, one of our main objectives achieved.”

Francine Dailey, *VP Marketing, AAA Northway*

Past Issues of *Passport to Opportunity* may be downloaded from [www.opportunityguy.com](http://www.opportunityguy.com).