

Preston D. Cameron: “Seeing Light at the End of the Tunnel; 5 Reasons To Be Hopeful During this Corona Crisis”



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Life happens and we can deal with it” means we may need to make some adjustments, we may need to make some refinements, or we may need to make some dramatic changes, BUT we can do it.

As *a part of my series about the things we can do to remain hopeful and support each other during anxious times, I had the pleasure of interviewing Preston D. Cameron.*

Preston is a world-recognized international advisor to organizations of all shapes and sizes. He is focused on transforming an organizational vision into a measurable reality. Having circled the globe more than a dozen times working with a variety of organizations, he has been recognized for expertise and thought leadership in a variety of disciplines and he frequently serves as a keynote speaker and presenter for numerous conferences and expositions on these and related topics. He is a member of the Harvard Business Review Advisory Council, an opt-in research community of business professionals and an adjunct faculty member in the Strategic Leadership Program at Northern Arizona University when his schedule allows.

Thank you so much for doing this with us! Our readers would love to “get to know you” a bit better. Can you share with us the backstory about what brought you to your specific career path?

Thank you so much for this opportunity. I started my career with a finance degree focused on performing systems analysis and financial planning for the #1 tourist attraction in Hawaii. My career is probably less of a smooth winding road and much more similar to the tilt-a-whirl at your local amusement park! I learned quickly that organizations were anxious to

have me assist them with complex transitions and complicating business process renovations as I moved from the Tourism to the Aerospace / Defense then Automotive industries, and then back and forth again. While serving as CFO for an automotive aftermarket manufacturer, I had the opportunity to change industries again and join one of the Big 4 accounting & advisory firms. And then the ultimate change happened, 9–11 and the Enron debacle. Thankfully for me, it provided the impetus to take my knowledge on the road and form my own organization.

Today, my organization continues to ride the “tilt-a-whirl” of industries working with state governments, educational institutions, entrepreneurial tech startups, manufacturing and distribution firms, and a host of service organizations. It is safe to say that once I finish one ride, I can’t wait to get my ticket punched and go again.

Is there a particular book that made a significant impact on you? Can you share a story or explain why it resonated with you so much?

As a person who enjoys reading, this may be a challenging question for me. I read 40+ books a year. I don’t know if there is just one, but there are definitely three books that come to mind.

The first is the iconic “In Search of Excellence” by Tom Peters and Bob Waterman. It resonated with me early in my career as an example of how excellence and positivity in organizational performance were dictated by the difference between leadership and management. Considered groundbreaking at the time, it strongly influenced my curiosity into examining successful organizations and the role and characteristics of true leadership.

The second is the benchmark title “The Innovator’s Dilemma” by Clayton Christensen. While it demonstrates how successful and outstanding companies can do everything “right” and still lose success and market share, it reinforced a management principle that success is the result of adaptability, using multiple attempts and many iterations. It has been a handy reminder that failures do occur, but success can be achieved and must be thoughtfully managed and exquisitely monitored.

The third may sound simplistic, but it is “Business at the Speed of Thought” by Bill Gates. I saw it as an intriguing glimpse into the mind of one of the top innovators of my generation and a fascinating perspective on where business processes, technology, and leadership may be headed in the age of the internet.

All three books intertwined to resonate with me and create a conceptual roadmap that has guided my thinking, expertise, and experiences. Leadership is about understanding organizational success and failure, awareness of the factors that can disrupt an organization from their intended road map, and maintaining a focus on an ever-increasingly digital world and life. While nothing is guaranteed, individual and organizational awareness is essential to maintaining positive and constructive progression. Successful organizations are made up of individuals who can work together to achieve excellence, innovation, and use technology appropriately.

Ok, thank you for all that. Now let's move to the main focus of our interview. Many people have become anxious from the dramatic jolts of the news cycle. The fears related to the coronavirus pandemic have heightened a sense of uncertainty, fear, and loneliness. From your perspective can you help our readers to see the "Light at the End of the Tunnel"? Can you share your "5 Reasons To Be Hopeful During this Corona Crisis"? If you can, please share a story or example for each.

Without a doubt, we live in interesting times. The cyclical nature of our world's ups and downs can easily seem overwhelming. From the 1982 recession, the 1987 Black Monday market crash, Gulf Wars I and II, the Y2K run, the dot-com boom / bust, the 9-11 attacks, the ever-increasing category 5 hurricanes, the 2008 mortgage crisis, and now the Covid-19

pandemic, I would like to think I've just about seen it all. Unfortunately (or fortunately), I suspect that there will be more exciting challenges and opportunities ahead. Looking back, it may feel like we've been stuck on a bumper car ride and never really had the opportunity to get going and enjoy the ride. Don't worry, we'll be able to join the ride again only next time we'll be better prepared. Each of these events has reinforced my personal belief and need to be flexible, adaptable, and accepting of the change.

My personal 5 Reasons to Be Hopeful include:

1 — The Big Picture

Much like the run-up to the Y2K, concerns over two digits in a database caused some people to stress in ways they had not anticipated. The world spent a considerable amount (by some estimates nearly \$400 billion in the U.S. alone) in preparing for the impacts of an advancing calendar.

Organizations that chose to repair systems took a shorter-term perspective than other organizations that chose to replace systems and prepare for an internet-enabled environment. The ingenuity and intelligence of our enterprises are much more connected today than they might have been 20 years ago. As a result, globally we're in a better position to share and see the bigger picture of how to respond to a pandemic like this.

2 — This Too Shall Pass

The great part about life is the constantly changing nature of it. Every human being is made up of a combination of cells and such, and old ones die or are destroyed, and new ones are created and grow. I find solace in the fact that change is just part of the bigger picture. This virus is just part of that change. Developing a personal sense of immunity is focusing on the long-term by nurturing the short term through preparedness and vigilance. If the dot com boom / bust taught me anything, it was that cells (organizations) will grow and die and they will spawn new and different entities with greater immunity and preparedness.

3 — The Tools At Our Disposal

I remember the incredible visuals of US Forces storming across the western deserts of Iraq in the Gulf War 1. At the time I was managing accounting and finance operations for a large defense contractor with a significant product presence and interest in the success of our equipment. We watched with interest as the mapping and planning became executable activities with incomparable success. As I follow the efforts of the healthcare professionals in managing Covid-19, I can't help but be amazed at the tools available to us for decision making. From data modeling to fast-tracking scientific achievements based upon a mapped human genome, to medical

trials and testing, to early detection and responsiveness, we have so many tools at our disposal for responding to this unknown. I find it heartening that the collective spirit of unity in the human condition encourages us to use tools available to us and share the findings.

4 — You're Not Alone

Often society has a tendency to compartmentalize events into individual impact statements. Just like the market crashes of 1982, 1987, 2002, and 2008, no one experienced the downturns independent of the rest of the members of society. Everybody was affected and some more than others. Everybody has or will be impacted by the current situation. Individual experiences and preparedness become societal experiences and preparedness. When the Ferris Wheel grinds to a halt and you find that you're stuck at the top, don't panic! Everyone else on the ride is stuck as well, so lean back and try to enjoy the view. You may feel uncomfortable because you're up so high but you're not alone.

5 — The Sun Will Come Up ...

The entertainment industry might dramatize the end of the world scenario, but even in movies like Independence Day, after the epic battle with the aliens the new day dawned, and life goes on. I was in NYC speaking at a

conference at the Javitz Center on September 6th and 7th in 2001. Four days later I was at a client's site sitting with a Governor and his team watching the towers collapse on the television in his office. We all knew that the world had changed, but no one could predict exactly how or what might be different. What we did realize is that every member of our team was far from home, and we would really rather be there than where we were. So, we agreed to reconvene in two weeks and began to make preparations and plans for getting home. We took that Tuesday to absorb the events, and Wednesday morning the sun came up. We planned logistics and navigated our separate ways back home. Sometimes the amusement park gets closed for no fault of your own, and you have to plan to return at a later date. Be assured that the sun will rise on the park tomorrow and you can enjoy that return visit with greater preparation and anticipation.

From your experience or research what are five steps that each of us can take to effectively offer support to those around us who are feeling anxious? Can you explain?

1 — Prepare For What You Can, Don't Worry About What You Can't

Understand your own limitations and do what you can. Realize that everybody has a skill and can contribute something for their own personal benefit. I'll never develop the next vaccine or therapeutic, but I can follow

the suggestions of healthcare experts and prepare myself to protect myself from being a casualty of the pandemic. Most of us would never hop on a roller coaster without buckling up or strapping in, so take the necessary precautions and buckle up. Like any good roller coaster, this ride will end before you know it.

2 — Build Your Team

Pick your team and engage them. Everybody can identify that one person in their organization that the rest of the team looks to when the fires get hot. Today's technology and our personal networks are much more expansive than the tools and teams we had available to us in previous challenges. Take time to reach out to those key members of your team and engage them in positive conversations. Team members like to know that they are valued and the therapeutic benefits of being that person on the team that genuinely is concerned for others is inoculating. At the same time, you may have the opportunity to purge your network of any toxic elements that may be contaminating your success.

3 — Expand Your Skills

I have not met anyone who can say with complete confidence they have viewed every YouTube video that is available. Pick your one weakness or

the one thing you wish you knew how to do but don't and give it a shot. There are instructional aids for almost anything you can imagine. Even with all my global travels for clients, the one thing I wished I could be is more proficient in a second language. Keeping your mind active and challenging your personal creativity can be therapeutic and bring skills and preparation you will find useful in the future.

4 — Take Time to ...

Breathe, relax, exercise, in short, be healthy. Physical and mental health are critically important but so is emotional health as well. One of the best ways to ensure your emotional health stays strong is to find something to do for someone else out of the ordinary. Just as US patriotism changed overnight with Gulf War I or the 9-11 attack, a charitable act of kindness can have a vaccinating effect on your individual emotional health and the person we are serving. Making sure my neighbor's garbage is put out isn't a big deal for me, but it feels good and I know that at 85+ years old she sincerely appreciates the kindness.

5 — Be the Sunlight

Remember that as human beings we are living organisms just like plants. That lesson we learned in that 4th or 5th-grade science class is just as

applicable now as it was back then. Plants will grow toward sunlight based on something known as the heliotropic principle. They avoid the dark and seek out the positive sunlight to grow and develop. Likewise, we lean toward those we find as positive role models and whom we believe can help us grow. It's much more fulfilling in our relationships with others to be the sunlight rather than it is to hide in the darkness.

What are the best resources you would suggest to a person who is feeling anxious?

“How Will You Measure Your Life” by Clayton Christensen is an excellent tool to help put disruption in an individual perspective and focus on what is most important in your life.

Can you please give us your favorite “Life Lesson Quote”? Do you have a story about how that was relevant in your life?

I started my career as the financial planning and systems analysis guru for a tourist attraction in Hawaii. After a few short months, I found myself making a presentation to the Board of Directors which included the Chairman of the Marriott Corporation and also the Chairman of the Howard Hughes Medical Institute. I was a little more than intimidated, to say the least! About 10 minutes into my presentation, the board begin to

divert the discussion to focus on two of the scenarios I had included in my information. The discussions centered on evaluating two key attributes of the scenarios, including projecting visitor traffic to the islands and the resulting traffic to our attraction. Concerns were expressed that economic variables may have a negative impact on travel. The projections for a worst-case scenario received a lot of attention. It was then that one of the Board members said, “Listen, we can’t operate in fear. Life happens and we can deal with it”. That phrase has become a personal motto for myself and many of my teams. “Life happens and we can deal with it” means we may need to make some adjustments, we may need to make some refinements, or we may need to make some dramatic changes, but we can do it.

You are a person of great influence. If you could start a movement that would bring the most amount of good to the most amount of people, what would that be? You never know what your idea can trigger. :-)

The “Go For It” Movement. Excellence is a much better teacher than mediocrity and it is only achieved when groups, teams, and leaders are willing to lean to the sunlight, to seek the heliotropic power of taking risks and recognizing small wins. Failure is an excellent teacher and should be rewarded not punished. The perfect answer doesn’t exist, so try what you can and go with what you know.

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