

January 2017

2017 - WHERE ARE WE GOING?

## Where are you going?

*If we don't change direction, we will end up where we are going.  
(Old Chinese saying)*

Some people find that they are frequently presented with opportunities for change. I think that this can be disturbing and mentally draining. The solution that I can offer to counteract this predicament is that one needs to identify some overarching aim that you can set yourself, perhaps your highest future possibility, such as an Olympic gold medal, like Jessica Ennis-Hill. Any changes that you take up should be aligned or fitted onto a thread that helps lead you forward. Many temptations to change can then be ignored if they do not seem to be allowing you to advance along your thread and this can make life a little simpler. In my mind having a thread is as important as having an aim. This aim can be interpreted as ambition but this may be taking too narrow a view of what life is all about.

Identifying never mind achieving your 'highest future possibility' as Otto Scharmer calls it is not available to most of us unless our eyes and thinking are turned in a particular direction. I feel that changing direction is only possible if we happen to experience some emotional imperative. I know from my personal experience, it is emotion that provides the necessary drive. Actually making the change is the third and vital part in the trilogy that revolves around identifying an aim, being involved emotionally and then taking precipitate action, actually getting on with things.

As chairman and managing director of RML I have set out for my colleagues what I would accept as our aim as well as our highest future possibility.

## Where is RML going?

I just want us to focus our efforts on making the world a better place to live in, and our highest future possibility is to continue in this work.

## What is RML doing?

At RML we are constantly learning new skills in the 'science, art and practice' of conservation as are my fellow Liverymen in the Worshipful Company of Water Conservators from whom I have borrowed the quotation.

In setting up RML in 1984 I said to my wife Marj that I wanted to sell Ivor Richards. What I had for sale was the conviction that with Marj I could 'make the world a better place'; not all of the world, but parts where over time and as civil engineers we could influence people and places by respecting and working with nature. In the 1960s civil engineering was a profession which I was enjoying immensely. The disaster at Aberfan in 1966 was where Marj and I experienced at first-hand how communities could become degraded by indifference to the quality of life that was enjoyed or experienced on a daily basis. That was quite some emotional impact. But it was only in 1972 that I was presented with the chance to change. I was asked to start improving local environments in the aftermath of the disaster and this change highlighted a thread that I could use. I saw that civil

engineering could be a means of changing things by transmuting 'construction' into 'the conscious creation of our environment'.

So where are we going? By being aware of the environments which we create RML will continue to make the world a better place.

Kind regards

**Ivor**

Managing Director  
Richards, Moorehead & Laing Ltd.

## BUSINESS PLANS.

### A plan for the next 200 years?

What kind of plan for the future did my livery company require when one of our founding members said that if need be we could have 200 years to think about it?

In 1994 I was invited to join the Guild of Water Conservators in the City of London. In 2013 I was installed as the Master of the Worshipful Company of Water Conservators, the successor to the Guild. Livery companies, even the most modern ones, can take advantage of long traditions of how they should conduct themselves. One striking feature is that the Master really is '**THE MASTER**' and within the Company takes precedence even in the presence of the Lord Mayor.

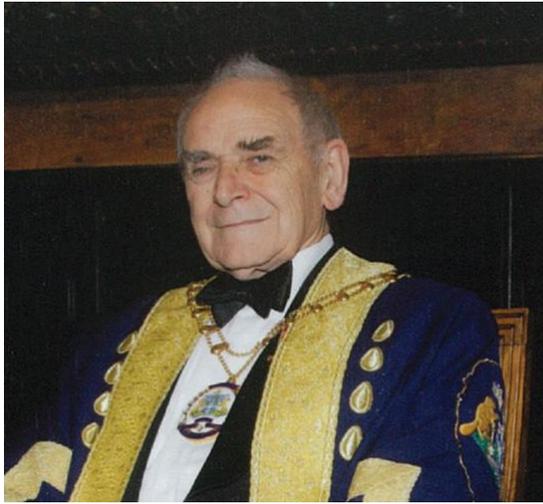
It is the Master who sets the tone for his/her year. I suggested that the Water Conservators should become globally useful since our aim is 'to promote the science, art and practice of water and environmental management'.

1994 was significant for me in another respect. Gary Hamel and C K Prahalad produced their visionary book 'Competing for the future'. I liked what they were advocating in respect of 'core competencies'.

These two experts saw competing for the future as part of life and suggested strategies by which one could 'Seize control of your industry and create the markets of tomorrow'. They saw in industry a race to build competencies that might be looking 10 or 50 years ahead, to create a Global Impact. Hamel and Prahalad asked the question 'How was it possible to imagine markets that hadn't yet come into being?' They saw that the creation of these opportunities demanded people with rare skills, blessed with foresight, fortitude, an element of good luck and demanding the confidence of others.

But I saw the future in a totally different light. Forecasting has recently acquired a bad reputation and is a complication that in many circumstances we can do without. I saw my livery company as one such case.

In my early days as an engineer I found myself reacting to events and then leading and learning as opportunities presented themselves. I discussed this last week. In the 1970s I introduced the idea that civil engineers should consider working with nature. This kind of leadership is about our inner selves identifying possibilities that are seeking to emerge and not desperately searching ahead nor relying on how we have done things in the past. My problem with fellow engineers was that they failed to interpret and react to events and changing circumstances.



At my installation as Master I challenged my fellow Water Conservators to think about how we could be 'Leading from an emerging future', a phrase coined by Otto Scharmer in 2007. Leading in this way is a more passive activity than that which searches ahead and emphasises the attraction to us Water Conservators of a situation in which we can be comfortable with a 200 year perspective. 'Leading from an emerging future' works well for us. What we need are not visionaries but open minds that can exploit the wide range of talents that exist in the Company. In my view we had no need of a 10 year plan with forecasts of deliverables and key dates, these would be

strictures leading to frustration and disappointment. We have identified things that need attention today and we are attending to them. Simply taking one step now immediately releases and brings forward the next one out of the future, it brings discovery and excitement with it. These are steps that will lead us forward to having Global Impact at some time in the future. Now that's style and confidence in management for you.

Learning and leading from an emerging future applies in the world outside the Livery. We have a strategy at RML that provides us with overall guidance. We pride ourselves on being open minded and the clients keep presenting us with known unknowns and unknown unknowns. I discussed this topic and emerging futures in November newsletters last year. Our strength in this regard derives from our aim to make the world a better place. I discussed this last week in '2017 – where are we going'.

For information about the Worshipful Company see <http://www.waterconservators.org>

Kind regards

**Ivor**

Managing Director  
Richards, Moorehead & Laing Ltd.

#### THE SPECIALIST.

Winning work is easy when what you are offering is unique, if you are offering a better version of a mousetrap let's say, or perhaps you are a specialist. Specialists come in a wide variety of shapes, colours and sizes, like the slopes that I mentioned a while back.

Well, as specialists go, Lem Putt was the specialist's specialist. In his book about Lem, Charles Sale describes a man 'who was so rich in odd and likeable traits..... as to make a most lasting impression on my memory', not a bad epitaph.

Charles' book entitled The Specialist has been described as one of the funniest books ever published, that may be so, but it holds a simple and direct message to those who would like to sell their wares or ideas. The book is small but so funny and such a delight that it should be on every businessman's reading list.

We all need a laugh and this little book is something that we should share.



I am more than pleased to recommend The Specialist by Charles Sale, which was originally published in 1930. The edition that I have was published in 1994 by Souvenir Press Ltd, ISBN 0 285 63226 4. I have checked and the book is available at Amazon under 'The specialist: Charles Sale, William Kermodé'.

Competition for commissions to win design work have always existed, as Len found out, but in recent years the nature of the competition has obviously changed with the introduction of 'value for money' as a principal benchmark. The fact that this concept was introduced by politicians who seemingly had no concept of how 'value' should be measured in our industry has meant that we have experienced a long and painful process in which value based on lowest price has given way to more sophisticated assessments.

We are pleased to stress our 'specialisms' at RML and find great merit in Lem's approach of understanding just

what the client wanted, making recommendations based on experience and providing long term support.

Kind regards

**Ivor**

Managing Director  
Richards, Moorehead & Laing Ltd.

55 WELL STREET, RUTHIN, DENBIGHSHIRE LL15 1AF

Tel +44(0)1824 704366, Fax +44(0)1824 705450

email: [rml@rmlconsult.com](mailto:rml@rmlconsult.com) web: [www.rmlconsult.com](http://www.rmlconsult.com)

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