

June 2019

MEASURING UP

In his book entitled 'Good Money' [Jonathan Self](#) encourages one to publish ideas, become an ethical entrepreneur and feel better for it.

The book makes very interesting reading and I have recommended it to many friends. Jonathan says that his business which supplies 'quality artisan dog food', his words not mine, is successful on various counts including 'turnover, employee numbers, profitability, publicity and influence', again his words not mine.

"How do we measure up at RML?" I ask myself and "Has the construction industry changed for the better?" Oh yes the construction industry has – think health and safety as just one area where significant changes have occurred to everyone's benefit. Thinking and acting with reference to sustainability and wellbeing have become important for all of us in the industry too.

It is a long time since the Aberfan disaster and I can remember George Thomas, in a meeting in Merthyr that same evening, saying "Never again, this must never happen again". We can be pleased that no such disaster involving coal tips and the like has happened since then in the UK. So I would say that things have improved significantly but winning and processing minerals stills seems to be fraught with many dangers as we have seen so very recently with the collapse of a tailings dam in Brazil – and there was that runaway train in Australia!!

When asked to get on with 'land reclamation' I have mentioned before how we soon realised that derelict land could be an asset if degraded communities could be given some sort of a lift by way of improvements in the local environment. My view was that civil engineering had in a way been presented with an opportunity to become 'relevant' to the general public. The derelict areas manifested the need for change and created the room for change. What was needed was a technique that met this need at a low cost. Many communities have seen their overall outlook improved as a result of the work that sprang out of Mr Thomas' instruction. We hoped that new lives would indeed be helped by providing new landscapes as well as improved safety or reduced heavy metal pollution. Our emotion, our hwyl in Wales, drove the programme of land reclamation and our love pity and pride were also involved in creating and implementing change. Such was its impact that [Charles Quant](#) once said that the children at Aberfan might not have died in vain.

I feel that I was given the chance to be an entrepreneur. 40 years ago I brought landscape architects and other environmental specialists into my engineering team. These were new ideas and opened the door to the company where I was involved as a director becoming a bigger and more profitable business. Not only that, it seemed to be the right thing to do from a technical standpoint and we reported widely on our activities. We talked about the need to understand in some depth the qualities and potential of many types of soil and vegetation how these were linked with the rehabilitation derelict or disturbed land. This led to me and my team being asked to work on pipelines across England and Wales where basic rules about handling soil and vegetation had been ignored by the engineers on previous projects with disastrous consequences. Our pipeline projects were extremely profitable for all concerned.

I have been told on several occasions that I have made some parts of the world, well parts of Wales anyway, a better looking place. Do I feel better for it Jonathan? Yes I suppose I do.

Publishing ones thoughts in print or digitally is so easy these days and we have printed and bound some of our newsletter as hard copy. I also happen to believe that the day of the printed page is returning. Some our work which has been published by other organisations such as the Welsh Development Agency, CIRIA, Elsevier and HMSO has been well-received and well-reviewed by other people.

Writing the newsletters is fun, even Idris gets a kick out of putting a few words together when we allow him time and space.

Ivor

DO YOU EVER FEEL LEFT OUT?

Innovation is positive, experience can be negative.

Analysis of practice and experience in the UK shows us that excessive law leads to overbearing control which smothers freedom, ask any journalist worth his or her salt.

Ask anyone in the position of a leader and you will be told that excessive control restricts freedom to think and act constructively. This freedom is vitally important if progress is to be made in any field. Experience can hold people back. 'But we have always done it this way' is one form of response to the introduction of a new way of doing things, another is that the regulations do not allow it.

Ask anyone with a novel idea that seems to be worth taking to market, the naysayers will be all around. "It's not too difficult to think of new ideas, it is getting rid of the old ones is the problem", now, who said that? It was someone quite famous.

In terms of environmental controls we argue at RML that we can achieve much through better practice by taking advantage of research and new areas of understanding about nature. This is our approach to problem solving and surely this is better than relying on existing knowledge and convictions that may be misguided or even based on prejudice. I have said so often that experience can frequently limit freedom to act or freedom to think your way around problems. But there seems to be a reluctance on the part of regulators to adopt our favoured approach of searching out new ways of doing things. My impression of environmental regulators is that they set their faces against new practices that would have an overall beneficial impact but will involve them in re-thinking some aspects of a particular problem. I may be a bit hard on them but that is how I see things. Ivor had moan about how our endeavours to solve a serious problem with Japanese Knotweed and enlarge our business has been frustrated by the regulators and their regulations.

'Process, process, process is the scourge of our time' was a comment made by Mathew Parris in The Times recently. He is so right about this.

Idris.

55 WELL STREET, RUTHIN, DENBIGHSHIRE LL15 1AF

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

email: rml@rmlconsult.com web: www.rmlconsult.com

Registered in England No. 1848683 VAT Reg. No. 401 4243 13

