

Title:

Graceful Chaos

Word Count:

985

Summary:

On any given day, each of us must adapt to life and pass through it gracefully. Occasionally things are going well, then out of the blue a big truck bears down on us, forcing us to stop or change directions. How we deal with such routine chaos determines whether we prosper or fail.

Keywords:

entrepreneurial, starting a business

Article Body:

I was recently stuck on a curb in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam (everyone there still calls it Saigon). My objective, a restaurant where my husband and my lunch awaited me, stood on the opposite side of the street. I could see the food, smell it and, if you know me, you'll realize I had built up quite an appetite.

Stranded in the Chaos

The only barrier between me and my lunch was crossing the street. Now, this sounds like a simple task, but at noon in Saigon my objective might as well have been the far side of the moon. The road was crammed with motor scooters (called "motos"), bicycles, motorcycles, cyclos (pedaled rickshaws), cars, trucks and buses. The fewer wheels a contraption had, the more passengers it seemed to carry. I saw a family of 5 riding a Honda scooter – sans helmets, of course.

Even the center lines contributed to the confusion. Rather than dividing the traffic into two lanes, each moving in opposite directions, in Saigon the yellow markers apparently serve only to indicate that you are on a paved road. People passed, stopped, turned around and crisscrossed the center lines with utter abandon.

Traffic flowed both ways in the same lane, more traffic merged from the side streets, and people pushed their motos off the curbs into the flow at odd angles. At any given moment traffic bore down on me from as many as 6-8 directions, front, back, sides and all angles – everywhere, it seemed, except from above. To me it was a scene of incredible chaos with no order.

The traffic lights compounded my problem. In Saigon they serve only an advisory purpose. Even when the light turned red, traffic continued to flow, as drivers blatantly ignored the red light! The lanes of traffic impatiently waiting at the green light would edge forward into the traffic that was ignoring the red light. At some point traffic trying to move with the green light would build up enough

momentum (and vehicles) to stop the traffic running the red light. Traffic would then flow correctly until the light changed, and the whole process started again.

Dancing through the Chaos

Under this onslaught the flashing green "walk" sign over the crosswalk taunted me from the far side of the street. I was ready to look for something to eat (and a place to sit) on my side of the street when an older Vietnamese gentleman took my arm.

In English he kindly said, "Crossing the street is not a problem, but a dance." With that we stepped off the curb and entered the maelstrom together.

My heart pounded as we walked slowly across the street. Instead of greeting us with blaring horns, irate shouts and screeching brakes, the drivers saw us and adjusted to us. As long as we made no sudden movements (like diving for the curb or running screaming from the street), we were fine. I felt like we were swimming through a school of fish. The tempest flowed smoothly around us, and before I knew it we were across.

I thanked my benefactor and went on to lunch. Later that day I taught the same technique to my husband and friends – at one point crossing a busy boulevard with an entourage of 8 people strung out like a Broadway chorus line.

Later I thought about how the traffic in Saigon is a metaphor for business. There is a sort of graceful chaos, everyone going in their own direction, some traveling with traffic, some across it and some against it. Buses and trucks barrel through the streets, stopping for no one. Certainly collisions and accidents happen – but for the most part the system works. People reach their destinations and life goes on. And the best way to survive is not to struggle against the flow, but to approach it like a dance.

Invitation to the Dance

Do you dance through your own life, career and business and the surrounding chaos? Or do you struggle against it, exhausting yourself, causing collisions with others and keeping yourself from reaching your chosen destination?

On any given day, each of us must adapt to life and pass through it gracefully. Occasionally things are going well, then out of the blue a big truck bears down on us, forcing us to stop or change directions. How we deal with such routine chaos determines whether we prosper or fail.

In my own office I have 17 employees, each traveling in different directions but all basically headed for the same destination. I cannot interfere with their travels but must move gracefully through them. In my business, students, vendors, other businesses, obstacles and competitors often appear in the road in front of me. I have many choices: collide with them head on, turn down a side street, take a detour, avoid them altogether or simply flow with them. How well I adjust my dance to this chaos controls my future success.

In the turmoil of your own business each choice you make affects your outcome. You can adjust to the chaos and deal with it gracefully, or you can allow it to stop you or force you into costly detours. The choices are yours.

In Saigon I chose to cross the street thanks to my new-found guide and enjoyed the reward of a wonderful lunch. Then I plunged back into the chaos, now wise enough to guide others on the journey. Every day in my

business I face the traffic, dance with it to the best of my ability and hope to enjoy continued success. You can do the same thing if you cultivate the grace to flow with chaos.

