

The key to prosperity

by James F. Bracher

The horrors now befalling Enron, Arthur Andersen, Global Crossing and numerous other companies and institutions may seem like punishment of the whole economy for the excesses of a few in the 1990s. Yet when businesses fail in their values, they rot from the inside. No one is doing this to Enron or Arthur Andersen. They brought it upon themselves.



We have created a world where the prevailing structures promote the politics of convenience over the commitment of leadership. During the Internet bubble, values came to be viewed as expensive and conservative relics of the old economy. The “relentless relativism of the new” saw values as limiting, fixed and unyielding.

In the race to sell the greatest possible product or service, the false promises of hollow values spoke too frequently to what we would not or could not do. But the angel of values rode into the whirlwind of the NASDAQ craze and directed the storm to descend darkly across many of our largest companies and institutions. We had come to expect immediate gratification in the form of instant wealth and overnight success.

However, it all starts – and ends – with values. In setting a direction, leaders, like sailors, do not let storms decide for them the direction they will go. Well grounded leadership knows storms cause course corrections, but the goals do not change because they never do. Storms provide opportunities for us to recommit. Our leaders must be secure in the knowledge that their values have prepared them to guide us through turbulent times.

Twenty-three years ago my professional obligations moved from Christian ministry to leadership consulting so that supportive counsel could be more effectively integrated with challenges toward excellence in both the personal and professional lives of those with whom I came in contact. It became necessary to find new avenues to assist those in positions of responsibility because the mission of my previous work as a pastor was to comfort the afflicted and afflict the comfortable. However, that position was overly focused on only half the job: comforting the afflicted. Now, perhaps like never before, there is the need to afflict the truly comfortable by holding up a mirror to those who are in the worst position to see themselves, namely those in power, whether economic, political, social or religious. A mirror is essential.

Leadership is required for every group or organization. Though many are chosen, few are called. Values such as commitment, perseverance and integrity are too often “averaged down” in a misguided search for “consensus.” Current circumstances demand a rethinking. We must reject our “comfort with drifting” and seek the satisfaction of setting direction, reaching destination, and fulfilling our destiny. In those moments we will have found the keys to prosperity: values in all aspects of living, both personally and professionally.