

## **SAMPLE CHAPTER**

### **INTRODUCTION: FRET OR FOCUS FORWARD**

***'Despite the increase in the cost of living, the demand for it continues.'*** F Pegg

Concern about the economy is at the core of countless conversations in the world today. There is widespread worry from London to Los Angeles, Toronto to Tokyo, Durban to Dubai, Mumbai to Munich, Shanghai to Sydney. The latter is my home but during discussions with clients in those other cities, there seems a heightened sense of disquiet among small, medium and large organisations, alike.

In this increasingly global economy, none of us are immune from fluctuations in international financial markets. That was clearly evident during the Global Financial Crisis that gained momentum after September 29, 2008.

Expert opinions still vary on whether that is now behind us-or could ever occur again? It was-and maybe still is-is all too easy to throw up our hands in despair with cries of:

'But, what can we do?'

The ubiquitous 'they' should do something.

And, regardless of our political persuasion, of course the government should 'fix' things.

All seem sound enough arguments in one aspect but totally worthless in another.

Crikey! All this negativity. I was admittedly sometimes swamped by it, myself. What could I do to alter the economic climate? Frankly, not a damn thing! But, what I *could* indeed do was to critically re-visit my own business practices, consult with others and pen some pertinent points to help individuals and organisations feel more empowered; not to simply slash and burn budgets but to take positive steps about what they actually *can* do with finite resources. Rather than simply feel trapped in a hopeless situation, there might be gold in that dirt.

Fret or focus forward? This is always a choice we have-in good or bad times.

After decades of growth, the developed world had not witnessed such an economic slide since the Great Depression. From Wall Street to Main Street, times are still troubled and many adults remain nervous about personal finances and job security. What, if anything, *can* be done by the average man or woman in the workforce?

I believe it was, then, President Roosevelt who said:

'We can not protect the value of the dollar by passing the buck.'

The good news is that tough times offer a greater incentive to re-think our standard modus operandi.

I'm no fiscal guru but believe this simple to read book can indeed provide a basic blueprint to help move out of the red. It doesn't pretend to be a panacea for profitability but contains practical suggestions about what can be done to add value-not simply cost-to everyday operations.

I trust it will serve as a catalyst to prompt every employee to be more economically responsible and prudent (possibly through necessity in tough times) in order to gain both immediate-and much longer term-benefits for their organisation.

My working class parents lived through the Great Depression and frequently reminded me that we weren't wealthy.

'Money doesn't grow on trees, dear.'

As a youngster, I never did quite understand why it was called the 'great' depression. And, frankly, nor did I appreciate the other clichés that they espoused to justify why we couldn't afford some luxury. (which of course, I always thought was a necessity!)

You probably heard the same sort of things from your parents or grandparents...

'Look after the pennies and the pounds take care of themselves.'

'A penny saved is a penny earned.'

These days, a penny saved is...shrapnel! (unless you happen to be a rare coin collector!) But, even with no pennies in our currency system, it's still possible to save the equivalent of a cent to make a dollar.

'*Paper Clips Don't Grow in Trees*' contains practical examples of ways to cut costs, without sacrificing quality. It suggests some positive, viable options to consider. Even if just one *small* idea is implemented, it could make a *big* difference to any bottom line.

You'll see in Chapter X how the title evolved from a previous generational comment that money doesn't grow on trees.

It's important to point out that there is a real difference between being cost conscious and waste aware-or simply a cheapskate! Save where and when you can-so you have more to spend when and where you need to. Another age old adage of 'waste not-want not' is also consistent with today's growing environmental concerns.

I'm neither an environmentalist nor an economist-but a person who worked as an executive with IBM globally for a decade, a state government for nearly as long and briefly as CEO of not for profit organisation.

Now a small business owner for over 18 years, many assume the company name, CDV Management Pty Ltd, derived from my own initials. This is partially so but those three little letters, prompted by my time at IBM represent-not just Catherine DeVrye-but Clients Deserve Value.

That's what I've strove to deliver-implementing lessons learned in larger ones, lessons learned through my own mistakes (the most costly!) and also those gleaned as a teacher, tour guide, waitress, dishwasher and cook.

As an author who has spoken at conferences of leading organisations on five continents, I've also had the opportunity and privilege to gain first hand insight into what business practices contribute to their success.

The concept for this book arose when a television station approached me for an interview to shed some light on the GFC. I initially declined and told the producer that I had absolutely no idea what was happening and was as nervous as the next person. However she persuaded me that they weren't looking for an economist but wanted to discuss some principles contained in one of my earlier books titled, *Hot Lemon and Honey Reflections for Success in Times of Change*. These were indeed times of unprecedented change! So, I rather reluctantly did the interview. Below is a synopsis:

Q: What should businesses do in this credit crisis?

A: I'm not an economist and can't prescribe what businesses 'should' or 'shouldn't' do as every situation is unique. However, I do believe that **every obstacle always presents some opportunity**. Now may be an opportunity (in disguise) to assess the strengths and weaknesses of your overall business and the individual operational aspects within it.

Running a business is tough in the best of times but when things go well, it's easy to be complacent. Now is an opportunity to look at what you're doing well in terms of adding value to your customers, clients and stakeholders and keep focused on that! Get rid of anything else.

Q: In an earlier book, you wrote that the seven most expensive words in any organisation were:

'We have always done it that way.' Is that still the case today?

A: That was written nearly ten years ago but remains at least as true today-maybe, even more so. Just like we floss our teeth, we need brain floss to remove the build up of intellectual plaque over the years.

Q: Does that mean that organisations need to adopt a radical new business model?

A: 'Of course not! It's important not to throw out the baby with bath water but to objectively assess what is-or is not working. It's important to balance a 'stick with your knitting' strategy along with innovation.

But, it's equally important to be *brutally* honest with what you need to do differently-or stop doing altogether.

Q: So, should we be making across the board budget cuts?

A: That's too much of a knee jerk reaction to implement across the board cuts. It's far better to take a more targeted approach; and there's not better time to take a good hard look at where money is wasted and how all your resources-capital and human-might be better employed.

We get bogged down in old patterns of behaviour when we're comfortable-and usually don't worry about paradigm shifts, until forced to do so by some external force.

Q: Are you saying this GFC could be a good thing?

A: I've never seen anything quite like it in my lifetime and am not saying it's good at all .It's fuelled fears (not unjustifiable) of losing one's job, home or savings. But maybe-just maybe-there are opportunities that we can't imagine.

British philosopher, William Hazlitt, once wrote:

'Prosperity is a great teacher-adversity a greater one.'

That was over 300 years ago-but remains a timely reminder. I don't wish to sound like Pollyanna because I am indeed personally extremely concerned. But, I'm not going to waste energy on what I can't control-and instead, stay focused on what I *can*.'

Q: 'You make it sound so easy?'

A: 'It's not easy at all. I'm as concerned as anyone because conference budgets are being cut, interest rates are uncertain; my bank has been taken over; and exchange rates seem to fluctuate like yo-yos when I commit to speak at an overseas conference.

At times like these, I remind myself that things work out best for the people who make the best of the way things work out. I then approach every 'challenge' more calmly-because as I said and it's worth emphasising- there is little point expending precious energy worrying about what we can't change-and all need to use our finite energy to focus on what we *can* do in any given situation.

The interview ended and I left the studio, well aware that it was easier to talk about than do!

But, something had to be done so I dedicated the next morning to look at potential cost savings in my own business; and then sent an email to my client base, containing the transcript of the interview. Many asked if they could reproduce it in their newsletters. A few suggested that the essence of the interview become the basis of a book; which would be timely to be released at the height of the GFC.

I'd actually already started to collect a thick file of information long before, as waste in organisations has been a pet peeve for many years. I thought I could quickly get a book to market to capitalize on the media and public interest. However, it seemed more responsible to pause and more carefully consider the format so that, hopefully, this information will stand the test of time.

I have no doubt that small and medium sized business will quickly identify ideas that can be readily implemented. It should also be of benefit to larger organisations in both the private and public sectors.

If only, I could conceive a formula to encourage every employee in a big organisation to think like a small business owner, I'd make a fortune bottling it! And, organisations would save a fortune implementing it! Sadly, there is no such elixir, magic wand or silver bullet. But, every cloud does indeed have a silver lining and tough financial times can assist in re-thinking old strategies for a new paradigm of whether individuals and organisations are adding value-or simply cost-to each process.

*'Paperclips Don't Grow on Trees'* has no quick fixes. It does not attempt to prescribe what individuals and individual businesses should or shouldn't do-because each situation is unique. It is not an economic essay, management manifesto or text book. It's more descriptive than prescriptive.

It is intended to be an easily digestible book containing real life examples along with simple, timely and timeless tips to help individuals help themselves and their organisation-not just survive during troubled financial times but to thrive over the much longer term.

Pages contain a stand alone idea, paragraph or mini essay to act as a thought starter. I don't expect that you'll agree with every thought as circumstances vary from industry to industry, region to region, case by case. Some examples may even appear somewhat contradictory. Not every concept will work for you but we guarantee that you'll get at least one cost saving idea that will more than recover your small investment in this book.

Read each chapter-preferably with a pen in hand to write down your *own* ideas specific to your organisation. As you do so, start to form a habit; to routinely and repeatedly ask one simple question. Ask this question with every purchase, with every hiring decision, with every allocation of time or resource...

Does this add value or cost? Value or cost- to my business? Value or cost-to my life? Value or cost-to the life of another?

Let us get started. Or, lettuce get started.....

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