

Hey, what's the profile of your people sources for laying the groundwork for taking action effectively—those go-to people for research and wisdom as you architect, test, forge, and comprehensively enhance your own skill set? Well, there can be a whole lot of approaches for that. But, as a stewardship junkie always focused on trying to make the comprehensive landscape work well in the complex era we live in, I have a couple of strong biases about how to go about approaching and even structuring that.

To begin, I like connecting with people, and a main reason why is because that gives me the opportunity to learn a little bit of something from virtually every person I meet and engage with. That's key...and it's an important attitude and worldview. Count on it—each and every person, no matter how low their station in life is perceived to be, has an experience or an insight or two that can add to your arsenal of knowledge of how the world works—and often how the world should work!

But I'm going to be blunt here. Sad to say, many middle managers and executives are typically embedded in a high-rise location far removed from the gritty ground-floor action, and some of these folks often don't know what's *really* going on where the action takes place in their organization...you know, the action with ordinary customers and service delivery. Accordingly, these types of leaders can be pretty unreliable when you're trying to identify what's actually going right *and* what's needing to be fixed in an organization.

So, as we've talked about previously, our opportunity is to “stop, look, listen” to the people on the ground floor of the store or factory or office. These workers can verbalize or demonstrate exactly what *is* working and what is *not* working. Oftentimes, they have implemented effective “workarounds” to solve issues that management doesn't even know exist. So listen to what these people say. More importantly, watch what they do! Here's the principle: ground-level workers are often far savvier than their self-congratulatory managers give them credit for. *So be a populist*: you can glean at least one valuable insight from virtually every person you connect with, no matter the perceived value of work their role does for the enterprise.

Hey, I shop at a specific store a couple times every week. And two people always stand out as exemplary. A guy named Nacho is one of the best greeters ever—engaging, cheerful, impactful! And that's important when the greeter is often the only person many people ever see in a self-scan retail experience. The other is Emily, the best checkout person of modern times: very aware, engaging, and an expert in the lost art of sacking groceries such that the bread is never squished and the bags aren't overstuffed and fall apart when you're loading them in the car. Emily is naturally graceful and quiet about it, but she knows she's way ahead of the game—I know that because I have brought my awareness of her skillful checkouts to her attention. Nacho and Emily exhibit the attributes of greatness, delivered every day, on the button, over and over again. *So be a populist*—benchmark to the savviest people on the front lines who are delivering real value and then work like mad in your organization to instill those traits, those practices!

Next, let's go to the very top and find the Galileos, the very few who really deserve our attention as those who really understand the big-picture ecosystem *as it actually is* and *its possibilities*. You've likely heard of Galileo, the Italian physicist, engineer, astronomer, and inventor. Galileo championed the Earth revolving around the sun and rotating daily and, of course, ran deeply afoul of the Catholic church of the time. You want to talk ecosystem thinking? No less a legend than Albert Einstein called Galileo the “father of modern science!”

But we don't have to—and shouldn't have to—go back that far. There are people who understand and very positively steward their portion of evolving, big-picture ecosystems in times of technological and societal change, navigating the radical morphing of culture well. They drive widespread opportunities and betterment for scads of people—and doing this by actually stewarding well, not coercing people by fiat.

Take Winston Churchill, the eminent 20<sup>th</sup> century politician from Great Britain. A risk-taking, thrill-seeking young journalist. A writer who likely published more words than any other person of his era, words that were actually read by millions. An orator who actually re-defined how powerful modern oratory could be.

A forward-thinking politician and top office holder for decades. A pioneering adopter of modern military technology. But then his most important moment: Churchill perceived, prepared, and acted upon the threat of Hitler when many Britons had buried their heads in the sand. Much can and should be learned from this great steward—how he thought, integrated, and acted decisively and comprehensively!

How about the remarkable George Washington Carver? Born a slave in Missouri near the end of the Civil War, he became an agricultural scientist of world renown, pioneering the uses of peanuts and sweet potatoes, instituting crop rotation, breaking numerous color barriers in peace-fostering ways, ultimately working extensively with the equally-powerful Booker T. Washington at his Tuskegee Institute. Carver innovated in hugely major ways, was a sought-after visitor to U.S. Presidents, and testified before Congress. Now that's big-picture ecosystem impact. And that's inspiring!

Poland-born Marie Curie challenged and overturned long-standing ideas in science and chemistry. During World War I, Curie invented portable X-ray mobile vans to help very quickly operate on soldiers wounded on the front lines. She intentionally did *not* patent her radium-isolation process in order to foster further research by other scientists. She was the first woman to win a Nobel Prize. She was the first person, man or woman, to win two Nobel Prizes. And she is the only person to win the Nobel in multiple sciences. She worked collaboratively at the highest levels in the international scientific community. Of course, along the way, Curie broke many cultural barriers. We can glean a whole lot from her navigation of ecosystems.

More recently, we have the likes of Martin Luther King, Jr. and Steve Jobs and Bill Gates, people who could “see around the corner” in important ways that have bettered everyday life for millions. These are people who astutely discerned how large ecosystems work—then they innovated, invented, or impacted for widespread betterment. It's this ecosystem thinking and context—the tying together of multiple spheres into voluntary, meaningful betterment—that we must seek to understand, adopt, and then improve!

Of course, we know Jesus is the ultimate change-agent for betterment...doing so uniquely for billions...completely changing destinies now *and* for eternity. Yes, the ecosystem of the whole universe was literally changed at the Cross! And we must acknowledge the Apostle Paul, the one who God changed so much by His Spirit for the benefit of billions to follow. Paul widely proclaimed that God's full intention of the Jews' experience in Christ is that His unparalleled gift of grace is also extended to Gentiles. That was a huge ecosystem shift: the grafting in of the whole world of willing whosoever to God's salvific grace! And what about Martin Luther...and Roger Williams, the pioneering planter of religious freedom...and Billy Graham?

It's those types of ecosystem savviness embodied by these action-takers that we must study and cultivate to address our own circumstances for the wide betterment of others. We must seek opportunities of dramatic betterment that are ripe right now! And, to be blunt, only a few great souls openly demonstrate this in thinking and in action. So...us? Just like connecting with the Nachos and the Emilys, we must seek after those few Galileos, past and present, who help forge our understanding of ecosystem betterment and our vital part to play in *our* time. Viva Churchill! Viva Carver! Viva Curie! Viva Paul! And viva Jesus!

And then there's everyone in-between. Not the greeter...and not Galileo! Still, these people are vitally important—they populate our lives in niches very valuable to us, say, in information technology, Bible understanding, and emerging techniques to reach and touch the world for betterment—through the gospel of the Kingdom of God and in other ways too! Fruit, you ask? Yes, from so many! Indeed, we must cultivate the Spirit-taught discernment to glean from the whole gamut of contributors—from Jesus and Paul, to Gates and Jobs, to Nacho and Emily, to those key in-betweeners who make very significant contributions that are all too easy to overlook. Maybe today is a good day for us to thank a couple of 'em!

So, from Galileo to the greeter to key folks in-between, our research-wisdom-and-action plan is to glean and harvest, trusting the Holy Spirit to deeply inform our understanding of the great ecosystems we are appointed to. We can and should precipitate the betterment that God has designed for *our* lives. Now *go!*

## *A&A: Application & Action*

1. Are you a “learning populist,” constantly gleaning from the earned wisdom that can uniquely come from troops with boots on the ground? Give two examples.
2. Besides Jesus, who are the “ecosystems thinkers” who have most informed you to great benefit in your spiritual life? Your workplace life? Be specific.
3. We live in a time of massive cultural and technological change. What used to be pretty much considered stable ecosystems sometimes seem to be crumbling. But the Kingdom of God is unshakeable (Hebrews 12). How does the unshakeable Kingdom of God inform you in practical ways in this era of startling shakeability? Be specific.