

Insights from the Ocean



Jupiter Beach, FL. A beautiful stretch of beach located north of West Palm Beach, a place where the giant sea turtles come to nest and where I like to stay when working in the area. It had been another tough day and I found myself drawn to the ocean for an evening run as a way to change gears and decompress. After the run, exhausted, I stood where the waves meet the shore and the words came to me, “It will come.” What? A great shell? Maybe an insight. So I waited and the waves moved around my legs and my feet sank deeper with each wave. Then the insight came...”If you stay here much longer, stupid, you will get stuck!” Laughing at myself I had to work to extract my tired legs from the sand. And another insight came. “To stay on top of the sand I must keep moving; I must stay active; I cannot stop.” The settling begins the minute I stop and it takes effort to get moving again.

How much like in business? We work so hard just getting everything to operate the way we want it. No variation, no surprises. The process is stabilized, people are trained, and results meet everyone’s expectations. We finally get to go home at a decent hour. It is a well deserved stop after the run; a time just to catch our breath. But the Ocean tells us that in stopping our feet get stuck.

So, I have to keep moving after the run. Walking is fine; even a slow walk. I just need to stay active to stay on top of the sand. This means I must keep reading and growing my thoughts. The people need to stay engaged and challenged. We put energy into moving forward.



Equipped with this new perspective I begin walking and the Ocean shares its second insight. There are treasures to be found on the shore if I just look. On this particular day the beach is uniquely different from all the other times. Piles of shells line the beach and a local person offers “maybe the recent storm brought them all up.” Piles. Two inches deep, twenty feet long, eight feet wide stretching all along the shore just below the high tide mark. It was not uncommon to see a person sitting in the middle of a pile just combing through all the shells. The Ocean encourages me to slow down and look. So, bending over I get closer and begin



seeing perfectly flat, cookie-sized rocks with holes in them. Great for wind chime clackers! The selection begins. But then I see the oyster shells. Can I find a matched set? How about small conch shells? Here is a great shell worn through as a ring. Sea glass. Brown, green, clear. The Ocean reminds me that there is beauty in the diversity. The twilight is quickly slipping into dusk as I get lost in all the shells looking now for matched sets of clam shells. The Ocean knows that its expanse fills my sight but for the moment it permits my focus to get lost in the beauty of the details. One more perfect little shell. Our minds can get so lost in the expanse of the business. What lies over the horizon?



So many big issues to occupy my mind. It is easy to stay focused on the horizon and miss the magic right below my feet. The Ocean reminds me that the details are worthy of my attention also. The details. You know; the Pareto of information focusing my mind. The “clean corners” in every task completed. 100% accuracy of the data in my files. People who fully understand the implications of their daily decisions. Smiling at the customer when they walk in. Saying “thank you.” Picking up that piece of trash. It’s that one measurement on one attribute helping me see an issue clearly. I can lose my way in the expanse but the details keep me honest and on course.





Walking on the edge between the water and shore the Ocean asks me to consider the waves and their work. They are always in motion. Sometimes aggressive and many times just a calm lapping. It is along this edge that the shells get turned over and new ones exposed. From moment to moment the display of shells changes and the beach is anew. They are underwater and then in open air. But always being turned by the waves. These changes go unnoticed as I walk because my focus is the beach.



Unless I slow down and closely observe, the possibilities of the details get lost. The imagery of a stained-glass window is created through the assembly of a myriad of small pieces of glass. And each piece of glass is only possible because of the technology and process that allows the glass to be made. It is the same with a mosaic. Only through the small tiles is the image complete, and each tile is the resultant of a complex process. My experience

walking along the beach is defined by the collection of each individual shell and rock assembled and each shell and rock is the resultant of a unique process. The mosaic of my business is crafted through the assembled thinking of the people and the thinking moves and evolves with each passing wave of activity. Opinions get turned over, new thoughts exposed, other thoughts buried. The external environment washes against my business relentlessly. Sometimes aggressively and many times just a calm lapping. But it is always impacting the thinking of the people. The ocean encourages me to slow down once in awhile and shift my gaze from the big picture of the beach to the details of each shell being turned over.

As the shells are examined differences in age become apparent. There is beauty and uniqueness in age and wear. A prize among beach comers is sea glass. Broken pieces of bottles ground smooth through the working of sand and waves;

green, brown and clear glass with a frosted finish. New glass gets thrown back for seasoning, but the aged and worn glass is sought out. The Ocean asks if I seek out aged and worn people. People with wisdom. People who know the consequences of decisions and appreciate the intricacies of life. The Ocean shows me shells that have been worn totally smooth. They have a beauty unto themselves and shapes not possible without the workings of the ocean. A conch shell is now an open spiral, or maybe just a ring. Much more fragile than when it was new. Appreciated for what it has become not its original functionality for which it can no longer serve. Am I open to seeing the maturity in people for what they have become, not for what they were? As I get older, will I accept the new purpose being crafted for me by time and age? The Ocean tells me that to do anything other than embrace the aging is futile. Sea glass with sharp edges gets thrown back no matter how old it is. Sad indeed to become old, out lasting younger purposes and now showing none of the beauty which could have come through the workings of life, self reflection and learning.



There are three roles played by shells along the shore. The high-water-line shells, the shells being turned along the edge of wave and beach and those shells hiding just below the water out of waves' reach. The high-water-line shells rode the waves, had a great ride and now are reminders of what once was. "Use to be." Ever hear yourself say this? "Use to be a time when this was the number one business." "Use to be when I enjoyed coming to work." "Use to be." Memories of the past making today seem less interesting. These shells will stay out of the action until caught by a new wave, higher than what use to be. Once caught, the shell will become part of the edge once again, worked upon by the waves. Joining those shells riding

the edge. Getting turned over every day, aged, worn and in the place of maximum opportunity.

And then there are the hiding shells. Never had a great ride, not in the daily game, not growing much. Hidden and unseen. These shells are safely stuck. It would take effort to draw them out. Treasures there might be, but too deep to be seen. I could wade in up to my waist and reach down in an attempt to draw them out, but why would I when the edge is so active. Maybe the Ocean is telling me that it is OK to let them be hidden. It is not their time and it is not my responsibility to draw them out. Focus your attention on the shells which have made themselves visible.

Other people are walking the beach and finding treasures. "This experience is here for all to enjoy," the Ocean says. The process is universal, the experience incredibly personal. My motivation for walking the beach is unique to me and my definition of treasures is relevant only to me; and this will stay hidden unless we choose to share. Once shared, though, a new thought may be triggered or I might be inspired by your purpose. I might even choose to keep an eye out for the treasures you seek and help you. Our results vary with effort and timing and if we help each other we can improve our chances of finding what each desires.



So why do all these people come to work and for what do they look? Their motivations are as varied as the number of people. To get everyone actively engaged in the walk it would be great if I knew what drove them and what they wanted. Could I use my position and power to help them? The Ocean tells me I can. All I have to do is talk with them and ask. The process of having the conversation is simple but only possible if I care.



On the two previous days the beach was my inspiration. Today I go out with camera to capture the scenes. EVERYTHING has changed. The ocean is flat, no wind, no action and NO shells. Virtually everything was gone along the entire beach. It was as if it had been swept clean. The Ocean does not appreciate my disappointment and reminds me that it does not respond to my

desires. Nothing can be taken for granted. "But this is not what I expected!" "And your point," replies the Ocean. "I am not here to address your expectations."

I am just being Ocean. You had two days to enjoy and now you have something different. Not better or worse, just different.” Sometimes my markets are hot and sometimes they are not. There are large forces within which I fit. This means I must be ready to take full advantage of the good times and realize that they are transient. Were there still treasures on the beach? Yes. But now they are fewer and require more work to find. Are my business processes capable of succeeding in a wide range of market conditions? The Ocean tells me they must be.



I run along the edge one last time and the Ocean reminds me the edge is where all the action is. But there is one last insight.



The Edge occupies an intriguing space between Now and Future. A space just beyond the reach of Now, but always vulnerable with each next wave. In business I need people who know how to navigate the Now. People who can attend to all the daily details. But the Now is quickly overtaken by another Now and in this quick conversion it is easy to miss what is ahead. I need people

who can walk just above the Now. People capable of seeing what is next. People who can reconcile Future with Now and define activities for tomorrow so that we are not totally defined by the waves. The Ocean told us that change is inevitable. Edge walkers keep me ahead of the change. Edge walkers help me see the next Now. As I left the beach, Ocean encouraged me to find the Edge in my life and create an exciting future by living just beyond the grasp of Now.

