



CASWELL CORPORATE COACHING COMPANY

February 1, 2020 VOLUME 20, ISSUE 2



WILLIAM E. CASWELL

Tremors of Social Media

Social media has not only grown from a simple idea to a phenomenon that has rocked the entire world, but it has also greatly increased the speed with which human outrage spreads, creating social distortions. Are businesses aware of coping solutions for these distortions?

When I was young, I tried smoking cigarettes and pot. I discovered that I did not enjoy them, so I never took either up.

In the 1990's, I tried using a cell phone. I found that I lost my private time, so I quit. (After a particularly annoying call while jogging in 2003, I tossed my cell phone into the Rideau Canal, right there and then.) Ten years later the airport in Zurich made a cell phone mandatory for email connections, so I re-enlisted.

Later in in life, I tried social media. It was not for me, so I never continued.

The point is that despite enormous social pressure to join the ranks, for some reason I had a constitution that could choose to ignore the enormous social pressure to conform, in all these cases. This being a social world, most people are not so fortunate as to be able, or do not feel the desire, to buck highly popular trends. Fortunately for Facebook et al., the trend to share experiences with friends over Internet is a winner.

The Atlantic magazine¹ imagined that if gravity suddenly doubled, its rapid increase would mean that we would all have difficulty standing up, some buildings would collapse, and many birds would fall from the sky. And, if a technology suddenly appeared (such as social media) that greatly increased the speed with which human outrage could spread, we would have to quickly manage the new distortions. Long ago, U.S. President, James Madison, opined that the vastness of the U.S. offered protection from the ravages of factionalism because it would be difficult for anyone to spread outrage over such a large distance. As well, the U.S. constitution included mechanisms to slow things down, let passions cool, and encourage reflections and deliberations (the same process that CCCC attempts to instill in its client organizations). Two dramatic changes have occurred to make James Madison's musings no longer valid: The onset of social media and continuous tweaking of the U.S. constitution in favor of increased presidential power.

¹ *The Atlantic*, December 2019, "Why it feels like everything is going Haywire"

Bill Caswell is an experienced coach of CEOs and senior executives around the globe. He is the author of 26 books, written, by a CEO for CEOs.

CCCC Events

15 February 2020

Planning

Ottawa ON, Canada

20 February 2020

Best Kept Management
Secrets seminar

Best Western Hotel
Ottawa ON, Canada

22-23 April 2020

Planning

Benson Centre
Cornwall ON, Canada

21-27 May 2020

Practical MBA

The Business Inn
Ottawa ON, Canada

3-4 August 2020

Planning

Holiday Inn, Estampida
Guadalajara, Jal., Mexico

For more information,
write us at:

bill@caswellccc.com

CCCC Events, continued

5 August 2020

*Best Kept Management
Secrets seminar*

Fiesta Americana Hotel
Minerva Glorieta
Guadalajara Jal., Mexico

6-10 August 2020

Planning
Alamo Industrial Parque
Guadalajara, Jal., Mexico

Online political discourses are experienced as angrier and less civil than those in real life. Disinformation campaigns flourish. Violent ideologies lure recruits like never before. The problem is that social media has turned communications into public performances, as opposed to intimate exchanges where friends make reciprocal disclosures and take turns laughing at each other's jokes. Now an audience of strangers is looking in, forming judgement and offering comment. Social media with its displays of likes, friends, followers and retweets, has pulled our mental judgement gage out for all to see.

If you constantly express anger in your private conversations, your friends will find you tiresome but when there's an audience, the payoff is different: each emotional word used in a tweet increases its virality by 20%; and, posts exhibiting indignant disagreement, receive nearly twice as much engagement on Facebook. Thus, people use moral talk to enhance their prestige in a public forum. The showoffs tend to build up moral charges, pile on public shaming, and announce that anyone who disagrees with them is obviously wrong. The original intent of the message is replaced with a focus on any word that can evoke public outrage. Time to reflect and cool off, normal forces that might stop us from joining the mob, are reduced when we can't see the person's face and when we are frequently asked to 'like' the experience. The ordinary U.S. citizen has become Madison's nightmare. Of course, it is a globe-wide agony.

Any online post could stick to the top of our feeds as long as it generated engagement – even fake news, which now flourishes. A personal blog post in this environment is given the same look and feel as a story from *The New York Times*. A single click can pass someone else's tweet onto all your followers. In such an environment, Russia's Internet Research Agency has mobilized its fake accounts across every relevant social media platform in order to advance Russian goals.

The problem is the degree to which conflicts of the present moment dominate and replace older ideas and displace the lessons of the past, especially for younger people who only know the present – through a facility that massively is increasing the consumption of new information (while correspondingly reducing the share of older information).

Being untethered from tradition and knowledge, has resulted in young people becoming willing to give Nazism a try, embracing Communism with enthusiasm, showing a willingness to accept untested ideas, and losing faith in democracy.

Social media is not bad; however, where it is right now, hostile to democracy's success, means that reforms may be necessary. Proposed reforms relate to some control on who has what to say and the quality of what is being said – all actions judged to be possible by social media experts.

As for the businessperson's stake in this newsletter's message, awareness of what is going on around us, says that you have taken your first important step.

Bill