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RE: "Looking Ahead: Implications of the Present Age" by Drucker, Dyson, Handy, Saffo and Senge

C. William Pollard

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Pollard, C. William, "RE: "Looking Ahead: Implications of the Present Age" by Drucker, Dyson, Handy, Saffo and Senge" (1998). C. William Pollard Papers. 232.
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January 8, 1998

Ms. Nan Stone, Editor
Harvard Business Review
60 Harvard Way
Boston MA 02163

**RE: *Looking Ahead: Implications of the Present*
Drucker, Dyson, Handy, Saffo and Senge**

Dear Ms. Stone:

As one looks ahead, what will be the business of business. The dawn of a new century, a new millennium if you will, provides an added intensity to that spotlight of curiosity about what is going on around us and what does it mean for the future. As Drucker reminds us, the events or forces of the future are already present. Can we identify and understand them? And if we can, how must we then change and adapt? How shall we then lead?

In all of this discussion of future and change, there is a constant. Our businesses have been and will continue to be dependent upon people. People who need to be trained, motivated and productive. People who have the potential to innovate and improve. People who are individuals, yet are able to contribute to a group result. As leaders, the challenge will be to understand and respond to how people are reacting, working and thinking as the fast currents of change swirl around them. It will require the business firm to be much more than a profit center. It also must excel in becoming a social and moral community for the development of human character and behavior.

Some of the present forces of the future that we at ServiceMaster are seeking to understand have been mentioned in the article and are summarized by us as follows:



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1. Economies that are more global than national with the nation state becoming less relevant, and at the same time people becoming more tribal. The tensions between individual rights and privileges and group benefits seem to be intensifying.
2. Lines between work and education that are becoming increasingly blurred. The explosion of knowledge and access to information combined with the rapidly changing requirements of the job reinforces the need as mentioned by Senge for continuous learning “on the job” and provides a growing opportunity for the University of Work.
3. Mobility and flexibility of access to information that has dramatically changed how we should look at how, where and when work can be accomplished and the purpose and function of the office and the production facility. As we are able to move work to where the worker is, there are new challenges for the leader in connecting, touching and managing a highly mobile and dispersed work force.
4. Technology that is turning our “homes” into “on line” centers for work, entertainment, education and purchasing. As the peace of the “workers castle” dwindles with each new onslaught of technological innovation, people will need more solitude and security from other sources - including their employer.
5. Continued improvement in the processing and analyzing of information that should improve productivity in thinking and making effective decisions provided the leader learns to use the repetitive and routine aspects of problem solving that can be best done by the computer. This artificial intelligence will result in more options and choices with a corresponding demand for improved judgment and application. To identify the forest from the growing variety of trees, the leader will need a framework for direction and decision (Handy’s



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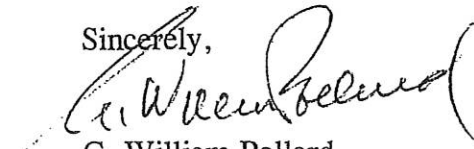
“consistent set of values”); otherwise there will be the potential for confusion and paralysis by analysis.

6. Availability of information at multiple levels by employees, customers, competitors and the public that will make the organization and its leadership increasingly transparent. As Dyson points out candor will be the best way to earn credibility. Those ugly negatives and those exciting new innovations will no longer be secrets. The leader will be an open book. Whether he or she walks the talk will be known by all.

7. Demand for more flexibility in production, distribution and service that will result in more changes in what is defined as the “job” to the extent that “jobs” and “titles” may no longer be relevant. In a post job world, the leader’s responsibility will be to provide opportunities to contribute (not jobs) and the workers’ responsibility will be to provide a variety and changing contribution to the overall mission and purpose of the firm.

As change accelerates and more information and more choices become available, the leader will be called upon to understand more about who people are and why they work, not just what they do and how they do it. The leader will need a philosophy of life and work, a heart to serve, and a willingness to be vulnerable and resilient with a passion for excellence and a penchant for productivity. The organization he or she leads must have a mission and purpose that extends beyond the bottom line while continuing to emphasize it and must care for people as the subject of work not just its object. This will all be part of the art of human and humane management.

Sincerely,


C. William Pollard
Chairman

