

## OCTOBER 2001: LESSONS FROM THE MONTH THAT WAS



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This past month, September 2001, was one that few would want repeated. The event was huge, it was monstrous, and it chilled us all. Certainly there have been worse days in American history. On one single day during the Civil War, over 22,000 young American men lost their lives in the Battle of Antietam.

But that was a long time ago. And it was soldiers.

The bombings of the World Trade Towers and the Pentagon with passengers jets as the weapon affected us all in a much more profound way. We all felt right in the cross-hairs of those weapons. It could have been any one of us on those airplanes or in those buildings. Nonstop television created indelible images in our minds that will populate our nightmares for years to come. We will all, to some degree or another, suffer posttraumatic stress syndrome from this event.

As an educator, I am inclined to look at every event from the position of what we can learn from it. And there were definitely some profound messages that relate to all of us.

1) Teams get formed in adversity. The week of September 11 was the week most of the entire world became a team. Hearing the Star Spangled Banner being played in capitols around the world brought tears to everyone's eyes. Politicians stopped bickering. (Hasn't that been wonderful!) While Americans got to see the hatred and anger that the bombings represent, we also got to see deeply-rooted support from people around the world. Sixty-three countries had nationals lost in the World Trade Towers. When America is attacked, the world's populations are attacked.

2) Creativity is present in even the most horrible of acts. This act of terrorism was not about anything high tech. All the terrorists had to do was to learn how to steer a 747. They carried no weapons but small knives and box cutters with them. They bought their tickets legally and entered secure zones within airports with no difficulty. I have been stopped so many times and asked to turn on my Macintosh laptop. When asked why, I have been told that terrorists might turn a computer into a bomb. Nothing of the sort occurred. Somebody thought way outside the box to pull off this event the way it was orchestrated.

3) Stress brings out high levels of performance. We've seen heroes in the form of fire fighters, police officers, and ordinary citizens. George W. Bush came through delivering a brilliantly assembled speech to the nation in the U.S. Congress. He discussed the

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situation we were in, the fears that were palpable. He told us what was going to happen without giving away state secrets or details of action, and he asked for our help. And most everyone listening (which was close to 99% of the American population) agreed to help. Many CEOs are in the same position. Every business executive should study that speech for its styling and format, because few business leaders will ever get through their careers without having to make such a speech at least once.

4) Stress is deep lasting and profound. During the week of September 11, I was convinced I had put on weight. Yet every time I stepped on the scales, I actually found myself lighter. Stress is heavy. It takes energy to bear. And most of us will feel the impact from this event for many months or years to come. One of the best pieces of advice I heard on television was from a psychologist who told children that it was okay to feel whatever they were feeling. That's good advice for adults as well. Anger, remorse, revenge, disbelief, sorrow, pity, guilt. Running away from feelings only makes them stronger and likely to emerge in inappropriate ways.

5. Complaints are still valid. I understand that it is not in vogue to complain about small events at the moment. You are likely to hear a colleague say, "Come on, there are bigger issues around than your complaint." Yet, complaints are still important. We'll never know how to fix things if we don't get feedback, and some big things need to be fixed. Without pointing fingers, let's just say there are a lot of people who were asleep on their jobs to allow such an event to occur, and we need to look at these situations. That's what complaints are for.

6. Life will go on. As stunning as this event was, the U.S. economy will recover. Individuals will continue with their lives. Most of us will get back on airplanes and fly again. Hopefully, we will learn from this event not only so that it isn't repeated, but also so that we are wiser, more caring, and better people as a result of the price we have paid.

## **WHAT WE'VE BEEN DOING:**

September has been a hard month to report. All the joy left the month on September 11, and it definitely wasn't a slow leak. We walked around in a daze for most of the first week, too stunned to do much else but gather around the office television set.

We're not quite sure how they did it, but the TMI program leaders who were out in the field completed their programs, at the insistence of the program participants. Flight schedules meant that they had difficulties returning to their homes, so one week planned trips became two week journeys. And this was definitely not a good time to be away from family!

Janelle Barlow couldn't make it to Seattle where she was scheduled to keynote for Windermere Real Estate. They very nicely have invited her back for next year's program. We completely understand the speech and program cancellations we faced this month. It's difficult to concentrate on very much when the world seems to be falling apart.

One of the heart warming aspects of this past month has been to personally hear from so many of our clients, assuring us that they are fine. Telephone conversations have definitely been longer, however, as everyone wants to discuss the September 11 event. We received e-mails from almost every one of our TMI partners around the world, all 38 of them, letting us know how bad they feel about what happened in the United States. Their words of sympathy, outrage, and connection definitely helped us get through this month.

To all our contacts with whom we haven't spoken these past few weeks, we wish you, your families, your communities, and your business fast recovery. As we all pull together, we can be stronger and wiser as a result of this senseless tragedy.

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