

Why won't the old solutions work this time?



When a librarian asked me this question last week, I thought I knew the answer, but then I began to think about it seriously as I walked the dog yesterday. This global recession isn't just a decline in stocks or a broken credit market. It is fundamentally a loss of faith in democracy and our commitment to creating a "city upon a hill" as the Pilgrims envisioned America. In the current economic downturn, the old solutions won't work because:

1. The economy is a set of peaks and valleys; it runs in 7-9 year cycles. However, this trough is deeper than normal. Temporary fixes will not work in this deep trough; we need to look for new long-term solutions.
2. With the explosion of technology and communication networks, we are more interdependent than ever. Every decision we make in libraryland affects everyone else. If we lay off employees, we affect not only the library, but also directly impact the whole community. Every \$25,000 job pumps \$18,000 back into the local economy. Our personal and business decisions have a much broader impact than ever before.
3. Nationally, critical decisions have been put off (i.e. fixing the mortgage and auto industries). Now, the crisis is not in one financial sector, but rather in many! This makes recovery slower and significantly more complex. However, issues are being addressed now, and we are on the road to recovery.

However, I believe the biggest change is a personal one; America is no longer all about the individual! A new personal renaissance is emerging that; all about self-restraint and self-discipline; decrying greed and excess. We are no longer tolerant of arrogant or self-serving politicians, CEO's or community leaders. Americans have been re-energized by a personal commitment to ethical behavior and personal responsibility. We are undergoing a profound personal transformation centered on self restraint, discipline and common sense. This personal renaissance will be more powerful and wide-ranging than any economic recovery or government program. This is real grass roots, personal change that will empower us and change our children!!

So now, unlike any other time, it is vital that we in the library community embrace change, not only to kick start the libraries survival, but that of the whole economy. The decisions we make will have an unparalleled ripple effect on our community and on the country. Now, is the time for bold actions and innovation not, a rehashing of old solutions. We need the personal courage to embrace personal change and develop to new ideas that will support a national recovery.