

“Excellence is an art won by training and habituation. We do not act rightly because we have virtue or excellence, but we rather have those because we have acted rightly. We are what we repeatedly do.

Excellence, then, is not an act but a habit.”

- Aristotle, Philosopher

The Maine Center for Career Preparation is a private, non-profit committed to improving the economic prospects of Maine citizens by improving the linkages between education and workforce development.

Maine Center for Career Preparation
643D Lewiston Road
Topsham, ME 04086
207-373-0488/0479 fax
working@careerprospects.com

Education Works!

M.O.A.B.F- Mother of All Boiled Frogs

By Tom Broussard

The parable of the “boiled frog” has become required reading in many management and leadership courses.

Peter Senge popularized the “boiled frog” story in his book, *The Fifth Discipline*--which describes the concept of “systems thinking.” Since then the analogy has certainly been making the rounds.

The Boiled Frog

As the story goes, if you place a frog in a pot of boiling water, it will

immediately try to jump out. But if you place the frog in a pot of room temperature water, and slowly turn up the heat, the frog won't do anything at all. He may even appear to be enjoying himself. As the temperature climbs, the frog gets sleepy and eventually he cannot hop out.

M.O.A.B

A popular acronym making the rounds is MOA... The Mother of All *this* and the Mother of All *that*. In the war in Iraq, we saw the MOAB make its appearance—the Mother of All Bombs. This moniker swamped the one given by the Defense Department—Massive Ordnance Air Blast.



I had been looking for an analogy robust enough to describe the education, workforce and economic development conundrum we are all facing and it struck me that the "boiled frog" analogy fit quite nicely.

Workforce Development is Economic Development

How many times have we heard that? The chicken and egg relationship often ascribed to training and jobs is a difficult one. What does come first? Do skilled people attract jobs or do attractive jobs create the demand for high skills?

Is there an answer to this paradox? Probably not, but the situation can be improved.

Cause and Effect

The separation of cause and effect to the degree that we face it today is cause for alarm. Systems thinking explains how cause and effect provides the feedback self-adjusting systems need to work. When causes are so far



removed from their effects the feedback loop can break down. As a result, solutions being considered could even make the problem worse.

This is not surprising since the "first cause" may still not be known or even noticed yet. Witness the difficulty NASA is having as they

try to identify the first, "first cause" in the shuttle Columbia breakup.

What is the first, "first cause" then in the workforce and economic development cycle? We return to our intrepid frog.

Draw the butter

So, why didn't the frog jump out? There was nothing between him and his freedom.

The frog didn't jump because his threat sensing ability is triggered by sudden changes not slow, gradual ones. The threat to his survival was below his ability to detect it.

In the end, it wasn't that the water was too hot but that the incremental change in the water temperature wasn't hot enough.

All in the same pot

In this case, employers and employees are all in the same pot. They are being cooked with such frequency that one can't help but wonder, "Why aren't more of them jumping out?"

Because, just like the frog, these threats are still not triggering the appropriate response. They are still below our ability to "see" or "feel" them to be serious threats requiring immediate action.

Sometimes we do think we hear the cries of "Jump, jump..." off in the distance but the water is warm...and they must be calling someone else, not us.

A recently laid off mill worker was quoted as saying they "thought

they were immune" at their mill to the events going on all around them. Immune!

This is a perfect case in point. No one responds to threats they can't see or feel...and no ever one will.

"In the end, it wasn't that the water was too hot (for the frog) but that the incremental change in the water temperature wasn't hot enough."

Learning to see

We must learn to prepare for work differently. We must learn to identify the threats to our survival earlier, while there is still time to plan rather than react. Both employers and employees face the same dynamics.

We all must learn how to lower our "threshold of change" in order to detect smaller changes in our environment as

they occur. Then the feedback loop that is so necessary for healthy systems to operate can do its job.

Employers must provide more training to their workforce. Employees must become lifelong learners.

We all need to change the way we view the need for education and training. The need is there right now...but if we don't learn to "see" it, then it might as well not be there until we do...but by then it is usually too late.

This is not an isolated phenomenon...and we are all in it together. We all have to get out, right now! We cannot afford to cook before we leap.

Is anyone else feeling warm in here or is it just me?

