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## WHAT'S IMPORTANT | Volume V, Issue 1 | February 18, 2009

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***"What's Important" is a universal concern. The phrase resonates with an infinite number of meanings. What's important is both a question and an answer, depending on the situation.***

Most people spend more time planning a two week vacation than they do planning their futures. And, others are content to leave the planning to a travel agent or spouse.

Regardless of who plans the vacation, the first question to answer is, "Where do you want to go?" The answer, along with the budget, drives all the decisions after that.

Most business planning follows the same approach, encouraging planners to "begin with the end in mind" and then "project themselves into that future."

Seems logical. Why mess with the tried and true, right?

But what if you were planning a vacation to Duluth. It's a nice place and you've got some friends there. But, unexpectedly an opportunity comes up to spend that same week in Hawaii at just a little more cost. Would you stick with the original plan?

The answer depends on your goal. Is the goal to go on vacation, or to go on vacation to Duluth? If it's the latter, Hawaii may be something you admire on a postcard sent to you by a competitor.

When planning, whether it's for a vacation, a career, a business or a life, make a little room for the unexpected. Sometimes the unanticipated scenic route is paved in gold.

A plan should offer a sense of direction, not necessarily a regulator, and definitely not a straight jacket. It should empower growth, not stifle opportunity. Even train tracks offer occasional opportunities to shift direction.

Recently companies like GM missed major opportunities because they failed to exist in the changing market around them. Their focus became too narrow to meet evolving market demand. They couldn't see beyond Duluth. Others like AIG and Bear Stearns didn't pay attention to the detour and warning signs littering their path to the City of Gold.

Jeff Bezos, founder of Amazon.com, advocates basing business strategy on things that don't change, but he also highlights the need for adaptability. In 2007, he told the Harvard Business Journal:

"I think most big errors are errors of omission rather than errors of commission. They are the ones that companies never get held to account for—the times when they were in a position to notice something and act on it, had the skills and competencies or could have acquired them, and yet failed to do so. It's the opposite of sticking to your knitting: It's when you shouldn't have stuck to your knitting but you did."

Honoring market-based service, Amazon had a plan, but it wasn't the direct route to Duluth.

***What's important is combining the good sense to chart a smart course with the courage to take the scenic route when unexpected mission-driven opportunities arise.***

Email me at [chuck@durakis.com](mailto:chuck@durakis.com) to share your thoughts.

Thanks,

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