

Doing Better Than Zero-Sum and Win/Win — Disruptive Business

March 25, 2016

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This is about me doing my sums. Not in math, sums in business and community. This is about assuming growth when others want to assume limits. And I think it's key to building a disruptive business if you want to.

Some of us live a mostly Zero-Sum life. Some of us assume that Win/Win is the only way to go. Another group of us start with the premise of growth. Of those, my choice is growth. My work is to live more in sync with that choice.

Zero-Sum

But first, what is Zero-Sum? The dictionary says it's a situation "in which whatever is gained by one side is lost by the other." The board game Monopoly is Zero-Sum. As you gain property and build hotels, everyone else loses.

Bill Cosby told a story about this: He said that he carefully divided a wedge of cake between two children so that it was equal. Immediately one burst into tears. Cosby asked if this wasn't being fair. The child sobbed "Yes, but I want more than her!"

The Zero-Sum assumption is that only so much cake or other resource is available. We win by getting more than the other person does. Look at your work. Do you live your day with this assumption?

Win/Win

But what about the Win/Win attitude? I have friends who want to share equally. They always want to divide the cake and do it evenly. It seems wrong to them if either gets an advantage. However, they see it as a limited cake.

My friend Eric sent me a cartoon of two people in a pit with a ladder that is just barely long enough to get them out. What is the Win/Win answer? They cut the ladder in half so that they could climb out side by side. You know what happened. They feel good, but they're still in the pit.

Growth

Zero-Sum is quite common in business. Win/Win is a bit less so. I'm taking a different and even less common assumption. My operating premise is that we can grow.

I want to assume two things:

1—We can grow our resource. There is no practical limit to how much cake that we can generate.

2—Therefore we don't focus on the resource. The resource isn't what is important. Our ability to generate is what matters.

The shared Zero-Sum and Win/Win assumption is that there is a limited resource or cake. My assumption is that there is the ability to find or generate more cake. (There is a lot of research done on this. A good place to start is 'Mindset' by Dr. Carol Dweck.)

My assumption completely changes how I run my business. Each client is a chance for both of us to grow. New markets can be created. Untested ideas are worth considering. In some business writing, you might call this disruptive.

And isn't all growth disruptive?

Playing A Different Game

A growth perspective is different. I focus on generating. My generating and my validation come from my internal locus. When someone works from Zero-Sum or Win/Win, they still generate but their validation seems to come from an external reference.

These are different games with dissimilar rules. Zero-Sum is about gaining as much as possible of a limited resource. Win/Win is about sharing a limited resource. I want my game to be about increasing the resource. The two assumptions start from a limited viewpoint. I want to be starting from the premise of limitlessness. Yes, this really is disruptive!

This is not really about anyone else but me. I play both games every day. I'm not better than anyone else, but having both games available to me means that I can take the best path with any transaction. What is the good news? I'll gain with just a little more growth focus each day. The even better news is that we are each the only one who needs to support this. We can govern and direct our own disruptive businesses. We can, ourselves, choose growth and we can get growth.

Will you?