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Having an AI Moment

The early career professional fearful of being disintermediated... An earnings call where the focus was not just on numbers, performance, and outcomes, but also labor supply/demand imbalances, technology shifts, and the AI readiness of global organizations... The senior executive confiding that “where this all goes—who really knows?”

These were just a few of many conversations I’ve had recently. It just feels like we are all having an AI moment.

Yet leaders don’t have the luxury of being able to wait around for all the information—or even most of it—before making a decision or taking action. It simply doesn’t work that way. As with any inflection point, however, before we take action, we can take time to briefly pause for perspective.

WE RECOGNIZE. As our firm’s research indicates, when we’re immersed in ambiguity, we need to take ourselves out of the moment. It’s like tapping Google Earth—zooming out to zoom in.

WE REALIZE. We don’t need to become visionaries. But we do need to accurately perceive today in order to predict tomorrow. It’s not a question of half full or half empty, but rather how many milliliters are actually in the glass. Then, it’s up to all of us as leaders to inspire others to more than “half full.”



WE VISUALIZE. As the old saying goes, “Rocks are hard, water is wet, and the sky is blue.” But rocks can be lava, water can be steam, and the sky can be gray. So, we visualize. Six months, a year, two years in the future—just imagine.

WE ACTUALIZE. Take a step... reassess... and take another step.

It’s an existential truth. As humans, we have always clung to our need for certainty. But the reality is, our state of being is, in fact, uncertainty—which has always been disguised and clouded by our illusions of certainty. The end point is all too often unclear, and the middle is muddled. Ambiguity knows no timeline or time limit.

As humans, we are naturally imbued with great instinctive reflexes to stay away from danger. Yet, as leaders, if we see something as a threat—it will be, well... a threat.

Curiously, this realization reminds me of a recent conversation with an executive who confided how nimble his organization had become amid so much change and uncer-

Andriy Onufriyenko, Moment, Antonloehr, Sammyvision/Getty Images

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tainty during the pandemic. But as we talked, he voiced another concern—that people were slipping back to the old ways of doing things—less risk-taking and more bureaucracy. My response: “What’s the attitude toward failure?”

Don’t get me wrong—nobody roots for things to go awry. Yet that question helped reframe the moment and shifted our conversation to the importance of embracing the new and different and taking control of something in a world of uncertainty—even if that means a higher probability of some setbacks along the way.

After all, those difficulties, delays, and even defeats aren’t impediments to progress—they mark the pathway to learning. And learning agility is the No. 1 predictor of success. It’s

a reminder—despite all of the technological innovations of the past decade, people still make businesses successful.

This really is a matter of our lens—threat or opportunity—and what we choose to believe. It’s helpful to step back, even for a moment, and contemplate the possibilities of “if only I had known.”

In this very instant—that’s when we make the shift to a mindset that does not simply deal with ambiguity, but rather embraces it.

It’s OK to have an AI moment—we just can’t stay there. ▀

Preorder the new book from Gary Burnison: *I Need a Job! Be Noticed. Land the Interview. Get Hired.* Will be available wherever books are sold.