

One of the most famous Japanese images in the world is the Great Wave by Katsushika Hokusai (1760~1849), the immortal painter and printer of the Edo Period. This wave visually engulfs Mt. Fuji with ease. This is a trick of perspective or if you will, an *act of flexible focus*. The wave more directly threatens to engulf the boats which ride upon it. Above all, it represents the threat and the opportunity of big change.

The image is so powerfully relevant today that one of Japan's major business magazines used this image on its cover to describe what is happening to the Japanese economy. Of course sensational news sells magazines (*I bought this one!*). The numbers within it are pretty persuasive and scary, that this time the recession could turn into a full scale depression.

Whether that then turns into a *mental depression* is entirely in the eyes of the beholder. It all depends on how you look at what is happening, whether you see it as a threat or as an opportunity. You could lament that the world we know is being swept away, and find plenty of statistical and experiential evidence to support your point of view. Or, you could say, *the rules are changing*, what can I do to prepare for the new paradigm? In practical terms, this is a far better question, and one more likely to lead to a survival solution.

Although you cannot deny the pain of the shift, and it hits some people and industries harder than others, there is also not much you can do to prevent its happening. It would seem that the smarter solution would be to change your perspective, and gain a *flexible focus* on what is happening to your business and your economic environment.

Rather than futile efforts to maintain the status quo, why not look for new opportunities in the changing economic environment? When you take this view, you realize that companies have good reasons for cutting costs, reducing their workforces, pulling out of unproductive projects, shifting to digital channels of communication and distribution, and seeking creative talent that can navigate well in this new environment.

Part of it is to survive, and part of it is to prepare for the new paradigm. What companies are cutting back on might affect your job, or your anticipated revenues as a subcontractor. But rather than getting relegated to the useless pile, why not make efforts to reposition, repackage, and represent yourself and your services to be more relevant and useful in the new economy that the big wave is bringing? Why not shift your perspective even further and look at the big wave, not as a destructive force, but as a *wall of money*, representing the shift in the flow of wealth and resources that is pulling away from the obviously bad investments of the recent past, and waiting for better opportunities in the newly emerging economy.

Why not be there and be ready? What new value will your talents and resources take on in the changing environment? How can you rearm yourself with adaptive tools and skills? Who can you realign yourself with as new partners, so that their business is completed or improved through your participation? Are you standing there waiting for the wave to come and pretending that it won't affect you, or are you preparing to *ride the wave of opportunity*?

The Wave Of Opportunity



Hokusai woodblock print



*Toyo Keizai used this image
on the cover of its
Nov 8, 2008 edition*

The Japanese word for crisis is
kiki (危機), meaning
dangerous opportunity.

Great wave of Hokusai rises from the ocean bed,
It looks from far, Mount Fuji it could drown;
Today the blue gives way to black or brown,
And the whole economy is at risk instead.

Danger lurks all around, it is plain to see,
Yet opportunity is carried on that crest,
For all those brave enough instead to seek the best,
Who can from these current constraints now break free.

As familiar world and customs are swept away,
Shall we then just retreat and simply lament
The ending of something we thought permanent?
Can we rise to the challenges of a new day?

The rules are changing and we must prepare,
Adapt to survive, a willow not an oak,
Flexibility to change we must invoke,
Focus on the possible if you dare.

And like all those small boats bobbing and riding high
On the surface of swirling angry pools,
We too can surf upon new skills and tools,
The wave of opportunity, the mire defy.

Verse by Hugh Purser