

Convergence and the Intellectual Revolution

by Norma Owen

If you're anything like me, you'll have noticed we are in the middle of a very interesting economic revolution — one equal and similar to the industrial revolution of the 1800s, but with very different foundations and requirements. In the *The Jobs Revolution, Changing How America Works*, it said, "We're already experiencing the most profound rotation of workers ever, in any country, at any time."

This revolution and its encompassing trends are set to intersect near the end of 2012, creating a tipping point that will lead to a massive shift in the world's economy, changing the way money is made and the way we work. For a new generation, it will be a breath of fresh air, for others, a frightening possibility. Either way, it is a change we can desperately and fruitlessly fight against... or embrace and learn the secrets of.

Where We Are Headed

To achieve success, we must first understand what is occurring. The great economic change forecast for 2012 has its roots in the dot-com boom and bust of the 1990s. It continued forward with the growth of the digital communications age and the rebirth of the Internet as a true and viable business entity. As the global expansion and use of the Internet grew, it ignited an outsourcing trend that is increasing exponentially as the baby boomer retirement equation comes more into play and the rise of China and India continues.

The brain drain from the boomer retirement will mean the overseas growth in innovation and talent will truly begin to usurp us in a serious way by 2012. As a result, outsourcing will rise significantly. It has been growing for years, but American workers, especially those over 45, only began to notice its effects around 2007. Outsourcing began as a cost-saving mechanism in early 2000, but as talent retires and a shortage of skilled labor in the United States continues, it is a way to overcome the talent shortfall and maintain the innovative edge required for survival in the global economy.

The shift of middle-class jobs overseas will reach a tipping point in 2012 and cause a new economic structure to occur. As frightening as this sounds, it is not the death of America. In fact, it will facilitate the rebirth of American ingenuity and success, and mark the beginning of the Intellectual Revolution. The old ways of thinking that currently handcuff us will be gone. The outsourcing trend will come full circle, with jobs coming back as we begin embracing an entrepreneurial mindset.

What We Need to Do

For many years, we've been ignoring our educational standards and the required training of workers for economic sustainability and success. The baby boom generation has masked the dropout rate of the entering American workforce through their sheer numbers and population. As they retire, though, the full impact of an uneducated workforce will be felt. Companies, especially small businesses, are already feeling the impact of untrained and uneducated workers, but are either in denial or don't yet recognize the external forces causing their stress.

They and we individually must begin to embrace the fluid, borderless world state being created. The power of connection through the Internet already means business and communication without borders has arrived. By 2012, a generation will enter the workforce that already lives without borders. The global popularity of Internet games such as World of Warcraft and RuneScape give an indication of the self-organizing power of the web and the way the new generation will work.

The coming change will see the death of corporations as we know it, and, with that, the death of employment as we have known it since the end of the Second World War. We are already seeing the return to a time when each individual was their own business, providing goods and services they created. It will happen again, and we will all become businesses unto ourselves — Me, Inc., or Brand Me — or, at the very least, develop a contractor mentality to maintain steady employment.

The new economy will see individuals organized into what Rick Smyre, president of the Center for Communities of the Future, calls an entrepreneurial interlocking network. Said Smyre, "It is a community of individual professionals that support one another and provide complementary services so each individual can act as a complete company drawing from the network."

It's an extension of the corporate structures some visionaries like the Dubs & Dash Group (D2G), a marketing and advertising firm in Canada, having been doing for years. Said D2G's managing director, Amitav Dash, "In 1999, we termed it the 'virtual agency.' It was about having a network of professionals who could each act under the other's umbrella, to create a large company at a moment's notice. . . . No one was sure what to make of it at first, now everyone talks about doing something similar and the economy now requires this type of dynamic ability and interactive/agile thinking."

The Skills We Need to Have

To succeed in the new economy will require a new understanding and agility, where ability is a fluid and ever-changing set of variables and qualities, defined only in their foundation, but limitless in their growth and application. This is what each of us will need, the view that I am not my job, nor a skill set, but a dynamic element that grows and reacts to change and fits in to the economy's needs.

This seamless, interconnected world economy and the fluid network of entrepreneurs will become what Smyre calls a Creative Molecular Economy (CME). Said Smyre, "One of the great potentials of CME is it provides an opportunity for people that are creative to build innovation, production and financing networks, without having to have significant amounts of money to begin a business. It will make anyone with an idea an 'instapreneur,' because companies already exist to do on-demand production and provide a wealth of a services to an individual running their own business."

This kind of agility is not limited to just individuals, companies need to have it as part of their structure and mindset as well. It is something my own company, The Avadon Group, helps both corporations and individuals put in place: the foundations of how to be agile, so they can react to opportunities and changes in a timely and efficient way.

The Change in Attitude

Developing agility requires a true self-actualization and realization of oneself. You need to know your worth and what you are capable of. You are not just your job, nor a set of skills and experiences. (Or, as a company, the business is not just a set of products or services.) You have worth and talents beyond that which allow you to adapt and survive every day. You must bring that into this new world of work.

Part of this new direction comes from the fact that the new work world will be governed by play. If work is not play for you, success will elude you. The dynamism of play, the interactivity and ability to shift knowledge and talent in different directions will allow you to take advantage of the opportunities presented. This is where true agility can be learned.

Play in work is about constantly being creative and recognizing and making use of networking opportunities. In play, we are always thinking, always doing, creating new relationships as needed to succeed and move forward.

Agility, co-operation and play will be the key aspects to success and survival in the new economy. If we can begin teaching our citizens this now, we will be able to create a foundation for the rise of a new, stronger America when 2012 shifts the entire world.

Avadon founder and CEO, Norma Owen, has a passion to help others, particularly single parents. At age 19, she successfully worked her way into the management of a family-owned wholesale distribution company. It was through helping that company grow that she developed many of the management and employee development practices on which The Avadon Group is founded. Now the mother of three and grandmother of four, she has been married for 23 years to Robert Owen. Norma is also an avid reader and futurist, and has spent many years tracking employment trends and practices.