

Toward Holistic Development

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THE FIRST LESSON for the modern commercial developer is humility. And that is not easy. After all, climate no longer controls us. Nor do geology and geography.

The modern industrialist can irrigate deserts and air-condition the Sahara. He can terrace hills with vines and build a floating city to cross the ocean, or shuttle rockets to way stations in space. Man, the developer of Mother Earth, can do almost anything—include destroy—in his hasty pursuit of comfort, convenience and profit, the paradise he inhabits.

I'm an international businessman, a hotelier with some success in the field. I'm not a fuzzy-headed visionary. But I do worry about the future. I worry men are creating deserts instead of reducing them, in the name of progress. I worry they are milling forests instead of planting them, fouling the air and the water that are the *sine qua non* of life.

But there is an alternative paradigm to the time-worn pattern of destruction and dislocation, a paradigm that comprehends stewardship of land and respect for natural order, culture and community. The new paradigm is what I term sustainable development, and the need for it is indisputable.

The concept of the delicate interconnectedness of life is nothing new—it's simply been forgotten. The ancients have much to teach us here. In culture after culture they sought the guidance of Earth spirits, energies or rhythms before they undertook any task; the concept was known as geomancy. Every pre-industrial society on earth developed its own flavor of geomancy, whose universal principles guided early humankind to determine the placement of cities and habitations. The environmentally integrated structures of the Great Pyramids in

Giza and Mexico's Chichen Itza, for example, were the result of geomantic thinking. So, too, were the pueblos and cliff houses of the U.S. Southwest, the Imperial Palace in Beijing and the Gothic cathedrals of Europe. Indeed, it was the Cherokee of North America who formalized this concept over time, looking at everything they did in terms of seven generations.

We do not bother. We do not think of the effect seven generations hence of razing the forests and spewing acid into the environment. But the environment is sending us a thousand messages—from Valdez to Chernobyl—that our way is not working.

We cannot keep turning our backs on these issues. We must think in terms of longevity, of balance with nature and the community, of sustainability. Not only will the Earth benefit, the rewards will be quite tangible.

Case in point: As founder and former CEO of Rosewood Hotels, I created a hotel organization whose properties were and are routinely ranked among the world's finest. One is a hotel and ranch at Hana, on the remote eastern slopes of the Hawaiian island of Maui. For years, the hotel and its relationship to the community had been allowed to languish. Before Rosewood took over the project in 1984, plans had been floated for a golf course slashing across the unspoiled rural landscape, and for blocks of condominiums and tennis courts. In short, this unique place was to be transformed into a typical resort in a state already overbuilt with typical resorts.

I admit that when I arrived on the scene I was certain I knew the solution. My work in upgrading choice resort properties has taken me from Hong Kong to Bali, Fiji to Scotland. But after a short time my staff and I realized the people of Hana were not happy with our view of a brave new world. They had a few things to tell us, and they did. They talked about

their ancestry—some townspeople can trace lineage to Hawaiian royalty—the trials of fishermen and contractors with too little work. We talked about health concerns and education. We began to appreciate their view and, remarkably enough, found it could be easily integrated into our plans. One key point: The people of Hana encouraged us to view the project in its entirety, as the sum of its parts, not piecemeal. In the past, the local culture had been largely ignored. But culture is a set of life ways, values and attitudes, and without the injection and interworking of the local culture, Hana would not have been Hana.

In the end, our resort hotel was greatly enhanced, financially and aesthetically, by the integration of local feedback into our business strategy. A few points of interaction:

- We instituted rural standards that outlined architectural, landscape and design standards to ensure that what was planned would fit; it did.
- Together we drafted a land-use plan calling for a minimum level of development and called in the community to announce its every detail.
- We used holistic methods to raise cattle at the ranch, exploring the effect of each change on the smallest link in the delicate island ecosystem.
- We hired locally, bought locally and contacted local elders to compile a list of legends and lore of the Hana Coast.
- In November 1987, we launched Project Kina'ole, literally translated: "zero defects." Its purpose was to perfect our services by building on the family sense already budding between guest and employee. *Kina'ole*, in the end, meant a mutual exchange and comprehension of values.

Hana is now rated one of the world's premier resort hotels. It is also a much more valuable piece of property. Recent appraisals say it is worth at least twice the purchase price. The ex-

perience, I might add, was duplicated for numerous other properties, including the Hotel Bel-Air in Los Angeles, consistently rated one of the world's top hotels and which sold for nearly four times the original investment. There is intrinsic hard-core value in environmental consciousness.

But taking the integrated approach requires commitment and totality of vision. It means the developer must expand his vision beyond the walls of a narrow specialty. Take the issues of light and air. In global urban environments today, most of us spend a majority of our time in chemically sealed buildings, with packaged light and recycled air. The light comes from artificially produced electromagnetic discharges, rather than the sun. Likewise, air comes from machines that pump the same stale product over and over. Indeed, the modern developer is called upon to strike a balance in air quality, proper lighting and environments that stimulate rather than repress emotion and mood. The careful use of color alone can create or destroy moods. Architect Christopher Alexander identifies 253 elements of color with links to what he terms "joyful experiences."

On a larger scale, sustainable development can also serve as a bridge to global peace. Intelligent, heedful development, taking into account the universal needs of people and the environment, promotes a sense of good will and oneness. Statistics reveal the tremendous potential. There are more than 400 million tourists traveling from one country to another each year; the growth rate increases by 5 to 7 percent annually. Tourist spending for both domestic and international travel amounts to nearly 12 percent of the world's gross product.

We Are One World

In a recent article in *Foreign Policy* magazine, William Davidson and

Joseph Montville define two types of international diplomacy. The first—track-one diplomacy—is the unofficial channel of government communications. Track-two diplomacy is the rich and complex unofficial channel of people-to-people relationships. Track-one diplomats must defend a nation's interests and operate under worst-case scenarios regarding the intentions of rival nations, setting in motion a chain reaction of mutual distrust, threats and hostilities that can lead to war.

Track-two diplomacy, however, is "unofficial, non-structured interaction.

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It is always open-minded, often altruistic and . . . strategically optimistic, based on the best-case analysis," write the authors. "Its underlying assumption is that the actual and potential conflict can be resolved or eased by appealing to common human capabilities of reason and goodwill."

The tourism industry involves track-two diplomacy, the kind that enhances chances for universal amity. It was tourism and tourism-related development that first broke through the barriers of Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union and contributed to the democratic movement within China. President Jimmy Carter calls international travelers "emissaries on a high-

er mission" and Pope Paul VI has called tourist development "the new name for peace."

International hotels and resorts are microcosms of the world community, communities within communities. They are living patterns of relationships, comprised of individuals, families, friends, institutions and governmental agencies—all relating to their environment. Every living thing is connected, yet, all too often, we forget those links. We take great pains to plan real estate development, financing, purchasing and the logistics of general operations, with little consideration as to how the development integrates into the community and the Earth's own sustainability.

I worry about the future. I worry men are creating deserts instead of making them flourish. We can double, triple, quintuple the pace of development, but we shatter our nerves, our sense of well-being and environmental harmony in the process. We have learned much, but we should envy our ancestors who lived lives of fullness and balance. We should work to emancipate ourselves from the old paradigms of thought. If the creator/developer/architect is fortunate, he will pass on a legacy of harmony with the environment to his children and their children. It can be an inexhaustible legacy, one that acknowledges the nourishing strength of the Earth and its finite resources. ●



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