

A Tale of Two Auxiliaries

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It was the best of times, it was the worst of times, it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness, it was the epoch of belief, it was the epoch of incredulity, it was the season of Light, it was the season of Darkness, it was the spring of hope, it was the winter of despair, we had everything before us, we had nothing before us, we were all going direct to Heaven, we were all going direct the other way--in short, the period was so far like the present period, that some of its noisiest authorities insisted on its being received, for good or for evil, in the superlative degree of comparison only.

-- Charles Dickens, Tale of Two Cities (1859)

These words describe conditions that existed during Dickens lifetime. The two cities; London and Paris. The conditions could be considered hideous by today's standards, and the protagonist seeks to improve, at least in the micro-sense, for the sake of principals.

Our story begins approximately 150 years later, in the small non-descript Auxiliary Flotilla, where the total membership hovers around 30. Statistically speaking, this is an insignificant market penetration. The local recreational boating demographics show thousands of recreational boaters and tens of thousands of recreational boaters living in and around our Auxiliary Flotilla.

It's their monthly business meeting, held on the same night, in the same place and for the most part with the same faces attending. Some of the faces in attendance tonight probably date from a time immemorial, or at least it seems that way to the casual outsider.

The Flotilla Commander, who chairs this meeting, follows the same boring script, prepared by a long forgotten functionary, from an epoch that was once ritualistic to a fault, but today is considered passé. Each item in the script is dutifully checked off, covered and examined. Those items which are void of information are still covered, because the script says they must cover each and every item, at each and every meeting.

The Flotilla Commander's role is to inform his minions, so he begins repeating second and third hand information he has received from a chain of individuals who too, tow a line, which is woefully out of step with today's reality. The information provided, because of the selective reading, innate prejudices and personal agenda's of the prior information dispenser are totally inaccurate. However, because the script calls for the Flotilla Commander to dispense information, he does just this to his faithful minions...

The Visitor

It has been known to have happened in the past. It has occurred in the very distant past, and yet it is again today occurring. This phenomenon is the arrival of a potential new member.

There is a hushed murmur from the faithful minions, for this event, caused by an appearance of a new face in the crowd, is unfamiliar. To many, it is also disturbing.

The visitor, this potential new member is being treated as an outcast, a pariah, an unknown entity. He is ignored. The timber, tempo and substance of the meeting lead this new face, this potential new life-blood to an organization on the horizon of its metamorphosis to the only possible outcome, boredom.

Disgusted by the inane ritual, repetitive arguments and arguably and identifiably inaccurate information, the new face recedes into the mist, to become part of the legend of yore, another non-entity, and another lost chance.

Ritual completed, the faithful minions leave their meeting feeling they have succeed in keeping democracy safe for another two weeks....

But on the dark side, danger lurks... *[Slowly fast forward to a time in the not so distant future].*

The faithful are slowly leaving the fold. Not by they own volition, for they are protecting democracy, but due to illness, forced relocation and ultimately death...

Sometimes, one of the minions raises the question of what ever happened to those new eager faces. What happened at those meetings that day so long ago, which prompted the new faces to drop out of site and the organization? Could it have been the faithful and their reaction to the new face? Was it a result of their meetings that the new faces attended? Their must be answer, for they just never re-appeared.

The other faithful harrumph at the question. Their feeling is that there is no need to bring new faces into the fold, and when they do, it's just to maintain the status quo. The true faithful never need to investigate why!

When queried by outsiders, the faithful side-step the issue. Why the parent organization attempts to inform them some of the reasons why growth is not happening, they just scoff! For they, the faithful are busy saving the democracy. They are the one true protectors of what is considered their stewardship.

All the while, leadership positions become impossible to fill, and the mission; to which each of the minions have pledged to uphold and is what gives meaning to their lives, their stewardship becomes impossible to fulfill.

[Pan forward a few months]

In comes another new face. This is no ordinary newcomer. There is something special about this one. But the faithful, inculcated to continue to follow their scripts, to build their boxes in which to fortify themselves, fail to notice.

This new face has been involved with similar organizations coping with similar problems. This new face, is possibly “the one¹”, or at least to the small group of discontents “a” White Knight.

The White Knight suggests that their meetings and their venues be changed. This White Knight also suggests that these meetings, after a change of venue, could be used more for fraternal fraternization.

The White Knight argues that by making this change, it would bring the members and their significant others together, and cement relationships. In addition, the business portions of the meeting could be held to under ten minutes, since other methodologies could be used to inform the members!

“Heresy!” Cries one of the faithful!

"Let's have a dinner meeting", the White Knight cries! Only to be shunned by most, and told “we've never done that before”, by the remainder.

"Think out of the box", the White Knight implores his fellow auxies, "For without innovation we are sure to suffer loss of the volunteer spirit - just look at the low participation!"

Much to the White Knights' chagrin and after much pleading and cajoling, nothing changed. The current Flotilla Commander says he's almost out of office. He couldn't possibly consider making a change. The incoming Flotilla Commander and his Vice Flotilla Commander are among the forefront of the box builders.

He and she (the Vice is a woman, which oddly enough is not new) are master box builders. Where most other leaders of other types of organizations would build support from the outside, strengthening the foundation of the box, with the help of other individuals and organizations, these two put layer upon layer of material on the inside of their box.

¹ A reference to the character of Neo, in the Matrix movie trilogy.

Our new leadership is building a better – tighter – more compact box. For they are both true organizational fundamentalists – we've always done it, so it is the way it shall be done. The script is all powerful; and time is just an imaginary concept.

Although the White Knight is discouraged at this local level, he fights on, trying to rejuvenate an organization which needs to build upon itself. To the next level of organizational structure, he decries!

The World as we know it has changed; the parent organizations role in the world has changed as well. The White Knight decries complacently, for the White Knight sees a metamorphosis on the horizon.

“Change has been stifled; participation has suffered”, the White Knight tells all who will listen. “Our mission and the goals set by gold become more and more fantasyland goals, each year, for we practice the theory of isolationism, from both our masters, as well as our servants”, but for many, the White Knight is a dreamer, but is he.....???

“The world she is a chang'n”, says the White Knight, “and so is the organization.” He knows that these changes are being executed from the outside. He knows that they who control the purse strings will only let this silliness continue for so long, and in fact they are on the cusp of major changes....

Metamorphosis is on the Horizon

"As Gregor Samsa awoke one morning from uneasy dreams he found himself transformed in his bed into a gigantic insect." -- The Metamorphosis by Franz Kafka 1912.

A new era; The world changed on September 11th, whether we want to believe it or not.

A new Commandant; ADM Thomas Collins takes the helm of an organization bereft by change.

A new Department; The Coast Guard becomes a central pillar of the Department of Homeland Security.

A new Service Secretary; Gov Ridge and his focus is quite different than the prior Transportation or even Treasury Secretaries.

A new creed; We are the e-Coast Guard. We travel over the waters of h₂O and data.

A new world; Maritime Domain Awareness, Security, Threats are part and parcel of today's world.

A new Auxiliary? We can no longer live in the past. The present decries changes for the future. Failure to move with the tide will cause the foundering of the ship, and failure to bolster the membership is a key element in the instability.

Accountability and Reliability are soon to become the watch words, similar in nature to the World War's "Loose lips sink ships". For without the former, you can't have the latter, and without the latter, the former is useless. These terms will become the under-pinning of this changed organization.

Embrace the change encouraged by the many White Knights', who are scattered at every level of the organization. For it is not an easy thing, this concept of change acceptance. Bravery has many meanings and many paths, as does change. But with change, an organization at least has the ability to meet its new challenges, and face them fully founded.

I see that child who lay upon her bosom and who bore my name, a man winning his way up in that path of life which once was mine. I see him winning it so well, that my name is made illustrious there by the light of his. I see the blots I threw upon it, faded away. I see him, foremost of just judges and honoured men, bringing a boy of my name, with a forehead that I know and golden hair, to this place--then fair to look upon, with not a trace of this day's disfigurement--and I hear him tell the child my story, with a tender and a faltering voice.

It is a far, far better thing that I do, than I have ever done; it is a far, far better rest that I go to than I have ever known.

- Charles Dickens, Tale of Two Cities (1859)