

Renewal

John Campbell, Chairman



This weekend has seen some wonderful late summer sunshine. Time to relish the garden before winter closes in and a time to pause before setting off on new challenges and beginning to think about the future. There is a lot of tidying up to do at this time of year and, if it is not done now, there is a price to pay.

Whilst in my garden I came upon a bush given to me by my parents-in-law about five years ago. At the time we lived in a different house. There was a very bare patch of wall and this bush was given to us to cover it, and cover it quickly. All I did was to plant it in a big pot and position it so that it would do what it was supposed to do. Within a year it had grown branches over two meters in length spreading along and up the wall very effectively. Then we moved. I am no gardener. I merely moved the bush to a similar position against a wall on the new house and then expected it to grow.

A year later it was obviously dying so I cut it back until I found live wood and assumed it would grow. It did not. A year later it had died back substantially. I applied the same treatment, cutting out the dead wood. No good. Eventually I was left with a pathetic stalk about twelve inches high. I decided to do something dramatic. I took it out of its big pot, moved it to a different position and planted it in the ground by the garden wall. Six months later it is growing, and I am now thinking about what I should do to reinforce its renewal.

Autumn is a good time for reflection. I think there is a good analogy with corporate behaviour here. All too often when times are not too good we cut back, cut out the dead wood and retrench. And do nothing else but expect the business to start to flourish and, when it still struggles, wonder why.

The moral of my bush story is that to prepare for renewal we need to do something fundamentally different. Cutting back is the obvious thing to do and it may be right, but it is only going to be half right. I am fond of referring Gerry Faust and I do so again with no hesitation. He would say that if you only cut back and do nothing fundamentally different, you "start with a large, crappy company and finish with a smaller, crappy company".

Renewal is about changing something fundamental as well as pruning what you have here and now. The trick is to be clear about what you are pruning, just like the good gardener, and then to identify what you need to change fundamentally and nurture.

The Asda turnaround in the early nineties is a great example of doing the pruning at the same time as doing something fundamentally different and nurturing the future. Without the twin strategies they would not have been nearly as successful.

Late summer may feel like the end of something good – it is, but it is also the moment to start thinking about renewal. Next Spring is too late – you have lost a year.

When was the last time you thought about pruning and nurturing whilst you were successful, and did not leave it till the moment had passed? Next Summer's blooms are made now not in the Spring. Renewal is a Quest. Happy Questing!



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