

# Follow-up

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MAKING A DIFFERENCE THROUGH PEOPLE

## Statistics can prove anything—or nothing

The baby boomers are getting old, there are less babies being born, people's values are changing . . .

Increasingly we are warned of the impending doom of large numbers of (us) "grumpies" — grey-haired upwardly middle-aged people — terrorising the neighborhood with our wheelchairs and funny shoes and, more seriously, causing a major demographic hiccup to the standard thinking about the way we work for a living.

The February *Executive Comment* from the Business Council of B.C., drawing on a study by Towers Perrin, emphasizes the changing values for the 21st century and the opportunities presented by those new values.

The study talks about the move away from a paternalistic, 19th-century industrial revolution way of doing things to one of more personal responsibility for our own results and an increasing balance in our working lives. (Sound familiar?)

It is normal for us to worry about the future. I believe it is as Joel Barker describes in his pig story (see inset) in the video, "Discovering the Future — the Business of Paradigms." There will be lots of people coming down the other side of the road shouting at us; if we see that as a threat, then that is

### Pig Story



A young man is driving his sports car down a quiet country road, when around the corner, careening all over the road, comes another car.

As the car passes, the woman driver winds down the window and yells, "Pig!" The young man calls out, "Cow!" He is angry — "What does she mean calling me a pig? She was on the wrong side of the road!"

So feeling very self-righteous, he drives around the corner and runs over a pig!

Joel Barker

what it will be, but if we see that as an opportunity, then that is what it will be.

So, while we can get excited by the statistics on demographics — worrying endlessly about employment equity and how demographics will have an impact on us as managers of people and as individuals — much of the rhetoric is based on the world we live in right now. Let's pay more attention to the incredible opportunities presented to us by the changing values of our society. We can change our paradigm about the employment area and be more willing to look at new ways to work.

How can we work differently? Do we all have to go to work every day? We already see many examples of "telecommuting," and as technology develops the need for all of us to be in one workplace changes. Ten years ago, I was just learning what "boot up" meant!

On a human level, we need to recognise that we have largely ignored whole groups of individuals from all walks of life — such a great waste of talent from a business and bottom line perspective. Things were not always this way. And of one thing we can be certain: in ten years, things will not be the same as they are today.