
Be a Marketer Who Asks...How Can We Help Build a Better World?

by Barry Koren, AIA, PhD



Last year I volunteered to be a judge in the Future Cities Competition. The event took place on a Saturday morning, and I never expected my impressions to be so lasting.

Teams of junior high school students competed, each presenting their vision of a City of the Future. Their presentation materials were simple, using bottle caps and painted milk cartons. One team presented their design of a future ecotourism city in the Amazon River Basin. Their earnestness and spirit left me with a renewed sense of how we're all connected – for example, professional engineers and future engineers.

The bigger issue that came up for me is this – is there a much larger need for a/e/c services than I've been thinking about in the day-in, day-out world of marketing? In the face of the Iraq war and its horrific drain on our people and resources, is there a thirst in the marketplace to find a way to build a better world? A sense that we as a country and as a people can

do better. And that we should ask some new questions.

My guess is that the junior high school kids began with big, broad issues and then followed their noses to wherever they led.

My guess is that they wondered if the world would be better if...

- Energy use was sustainable
- Food was wholesome and locally grown
- Sports and fun were everywhere
- People were friendlier
- Homelessness was a thing of the past

I suspect that they talked with team-mates, teachers, and parents. And together they then created imaginary places for living and learning, where people felt safe and trusted one another.

In the day-to-day world of marketing, how do you and I go about building that better world? Here are some ideas.

- Get the support you need so you can truly believe that you and your team can make a difference. Believe that this is a difference that will make a difference to people.
- Ask ourselves some big questions and ask our imaginations to do some exploring. How could our neighborhood or city be better? How would our children's lives be better?
- < Do some google searching. Find a group or two that seems to be taking a stand about something that you believe will help us build that better world. Go

to a meeting. Ask a friend to join you in exploring this or that.

The basic idea is to keep your eyes open, talk with people, and look for ways that people are making a difference in causes you believe in. Maybe there are new alliances to be explored and new endorsements to be made between SMPS or your firm and the 2030 Challenge. That's the organization that challenges architects and others to immediately address global warming issues by setting new benchmarks for making buildings fuel efficient. (www.architecture2030.org)

Is any of this possible? When I was a college student I asked my Soils Engineering professor why Holland rather than the US led the world in this discipline. He said, because they had to. The survival of their country depended on it. Today, we may be in a similar boat, where new needs and limited resources pose severe challenges. Can we follow the lead of junior high school kids – ask big questions, and then open our hearts, imagination, and genius to new possibilities for building a better world?

The bottom line is this: Be one of those people who doesn't give up and who sees what could be and how it could be brought about. Be one of those people who says "Yes! Imagine if we did that!" And then go do it.

And now I have a question for you. Is there room for improvement in your firm's services? Are there any actions you can take now? By commenting, please let all of us know your reactions, or if you have

any stories, news, or marketing tips that you want to share.

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