

Dear Students, Colleagues and Friends,

The new year has finally brought a bit of bluster and snow to our region. As it's part of our cycle here I feel very fortunate to be experiencing it. I'm also grateful because it grants me a little more time to read. Does it do that for those of you in the Northern Hemisphere (or my Southern Hemispheric friends on the opposite half of the year when sunlight is less and the dark hours greater)?

As a result of all this, I was reading a story to a colleague of mine this morning. It is an old story from my homeland as told by Sharon Blackie in her book, [The Enchanted Life: Unlocking the Magic of the Everyday](#). It struck me as an extremely hopeful story and, as we live in a world needing hope paired with action, I thought it would be good to pass it on to you. It would be proper to tell you a similar story is told in several cultures including the Sioux on this continent and similar tales on other continents. When parallel stories pop up in different parts of the world, it makes me want to pay even closer attention. At any rate, with gratitude to Sharon and the ancient tellers of this story, here is a shortened version.

Far away in the westernmost reaches of the Gaelic lands there is a cliff overlooking the rough and often stormy seas. High on the cliff there is a cave. In this cave dwells the Old Woman of the World. She has been there so long no one knows how or when she arrived. What we do know are the two tasks she works at day and night. She is weaving the tapestry that is the world with all of its beautiful colors, shades, textures and finishes. Every day and every night she weaves; and interlaces sea urchin spines into the fringe because as lovely as the world is there are painful sticking points that exist in concert with the beauty.

Her second task is to stir the contents of a giant black pot which simmers over a fire on the opposite side of the cave. The liquid inside is made up of all the core of all living things from all over the globe. Sometimes, when she is so consumed by her weaving, the pot starts to bubble and spit. When she crosses the cave to stir it, an omnipresent crow flaps down to her weaving – disassembling all she has wrought. The beauty, the coalescing pictures and stories soon lay in an unkempt pile.

When the old woman returns, "... she stands there, eyes moist, staring at the mess in front of her; a beautiful rich green thread catches her eye." Captivated she begins weaving again; an entirely new design just as wonderful as the one before yet entirely different.

And this is how the world is – constantly changing, becoming anew. Kingdoms are born and die. Empires are won and lost; but still the Old Woman keeps weaving. The crow keeps picking her work apart and; as she re-weaves entirely new landscapes, vistas, goals and opportunities again come into the view of which we are part of along with all other living things.

The biggest thing stories like this gift to us is hope. In fact, the more eloquent telling of the story you'll read in her book relays the fact she told this story as an example of what gives her hope.

Hope is not something we typically talk a lot about in the world of business; but I can assure you, for those companies who choose to weave a story around their intent and honest action, it is one of the things that can carry them farthest. I talk about this a little at the start of [Biomimicry and Business: How Companies are Using Nature's Strategies to Succeed](#),

“Telling stories of inspiration and illustrating pathways to success can move people toward action more than case studies and technical reports alone – although they too can help create change. While all of them are important, the best stories are written specifically in the language of the reader's everyday life instead of being fettered with an overage of jargon. Stories ignite our desires to know what happens next – especially when told in everyday language. They assist us in remembering what we read and help us integrate it into our work and world whether we are Chief Executive Officers, line workers on the factory floor, designers, or marketers of our products and services. Stories create equal access to ideas.”

We get so twisted up in our innovations and scientific technologies that we sometimes forget – a good story can be central to our business (and life) success (and well-lived).

Alright, some of you need to just simmer down. I can already see a couple of you rolling your eyes. Of COURSE there is no substitute for scientific rigor, the complexities of good modeling and engineering. Of COURSE business acumen needs to be sharing equal space in your list of “things to do” when creating a successful company. (Feeling better?) *And* the power of story is also an incredibly important tool *many companies ignore* to their own detriment. I'm going to underscore that by giving you just one more teaser to Sharon's book.

One of the studies she cites is the work of Uri Hasson from Princeton. In the world of neuroscience he has examined functional magnetic resonance imaging (fMRI) in the brain. His findings, in short, have illuminated the fact that, when told the same story, our brains begin to “align”. Even when the story is told in different languages the fMRI yields the same results. (OK, I hope you're now really curious to read her book!)

I know I've told you this before but this is *why* if you are going to embark on a journey of “sustainability” or “regeneration” at your company you should align your story not just with your R&D folks but with those throughout your company. This starts with your vision and mission *and* manifests itself as soon as new employees walk into your version of orientation. Darcy Winslow (Nike's conduit to biomimicry) and I discussed this much as I was writing; and I passed the suggestion along to each of the companies featured in the book – both for including my book for biom\*'s sake and including their own stories for good company and employee inclusion as part of said stories. In this

way, each company can synchronize staff, streamline problem-solving, and yes, even build hope among employees and those who are privy to *their* stories.

I hope all of you are well. Thanks for popping in on my by phone and email as I always love catching up with you.

Here's to stories and hope,

Margo

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