

SHIFTING PARADIGMS

If we are to move beyond wasting, there needs to be a re-evaluation of what handling waste in the future looks like. As we shift from the wasting way of handling our discards, the wasting mentality is the paradigm most communities operate in. Now the “shift” to the new paradigm must embrace a new way of operating and thinking from the bottom up.

Including all the stakeholders is the starting point. People do their best work when people do what they love. Creating a sense of purpose and opportunity for people being in their element allows them to connect with their talents. They become someone else and by not reinforcing the old model, we reconstitute a sense of self by utilizing the talents available. Utilizing and supporting local people with skill sets and passion that will help make the shift to the new paradigm is essential.

If discarding unwanted items is the way we handle waste now, the shift to Zero Waste, Resource Recovery, Redesign, Reuse and Repair may seem foreign to some who see waste management as just “making stuff go away”.

THE OLD PARADIGM:

In the digital age for example, people under 30, wearing a wrist watch might seem foreign to them. Time is on every electronic device they own. Yet, there is still a large segment of the population who find it difficult to function without putting on their wrist watch every morning. It is digital thinking versus industrial thinking. The shift has already happened and the need for wrist watches seems limited and fading to some.

If we have a solid waste management program that throws more money at a system that thrives on wasting, then this is an industrial way or old paradigm way of thinking. But if we view our discards as valuable resources, then resource recovery (not through incineration) and Zero Waste is more in line with the digital way of looking at this problem, or the “new paradigm”. Rampant urbanization is draining our earth’s resources at alarming rates. Are we “backing the wrong horse” by supporting cheap disposal?

Spending on education in America for example has increased in urban areas. Since 1980, spending has increased 73%. But class size and graduation levels have gone down. Yet illiteracy has gone up. Drop out rates have risen. The old industrialized or institutional way of how we are educating our kids does not support creative and innovative thinkers and is more in line with an era whose

time has come and gone. The current system for educating is operates in black and white and is driving out a lot of collaborators, divergent and forward thinkers.

Another example of shifting paradigms might be how we have moved away from removing everyone's tonsils a few decades ago. For kids growing up in the 50's, almost everyone who had a sore throat had their tonsils removed. Now days, it is uncommon to see anyone getting their tonsils out. The system back then was for full speed ahead to get everyone's tonsils out. What changed? Or not long ago we turned a crank on a wall mounted phone and spoke on a "party-line". Now we speak into a small hunk of plastic and electronics that fits into our pocket and can speak to anyone anywhere. What happened? What changed?

These are but a few examples of how we can become stuck in a rut, where we as a society continue to use outdated inefficient old systems, entrenched in the old paradigm, following and supporting outdated policies just out of habit. Are our institutions designed in such a way that we follow blindly like robots, regardless of new ideas and changing times? Institutionalization follows a utilitarian linear path, where conforming is desired and where standardization is king. So in the world of discard management, is it not time to look at divergent thinking, if we are to transition from wasting to Zero Waste?

THE NEW PARADIGM:

Divergent thinkers are sought after by forward thinking industries, businesses and the high tech world. Shifting paradigms can not happen without the ability to move laterally, to think creatively and produce ideas that have meaningful value that fits in with current conditions and times. To shift from the old way of managing our discards to a new way, we must stop operating in black and white and use all the colours on the pallet.

Paradigm shifts requires collaboration which is necessary. And as we move from one way of doing something to another way, we leave the old industrialized way of doing things behind and embrace a more circular or organic way of solving problems with vitality, creativity, diversity and customization as key tools.

Consumerism is changing. But disposal and how we handle discards is not. The old systems to handle waste can not keep up with the rapidly changing products and packaging and disposal challenges. If we are to transition to a more sustainable society, Zero Waste is really the only option. An integrated approach where cradle to cradle is the way we create any product. Outside the box thinking must be how we get to become a Zero Waste society.

As we look at how we move to another level, it is logical to look at what would make such a shift successful. Utilizing the available talent is critical. If the talent

is not there, then they must be brought in. The key to making any shift is picking the right people. The old way of doing things requires everyone conform. Shifting to a new way of doing things requires we support a diverse way of thinking. There are 3 types of people: Those who are Immovable...Those who are Movable...and Those who **MOVE!** The choice seems easy.

Is such a shift difficult? Sure it is. But humanity has evolved best when challenged. And waste management is no different. If the I-pod is to 8 track and solar power is to burning coal, then Resource Recovery and Zero waste is to disposal. Status quo and one size fits all does not work in the new paradigm. We must shift our beliefs to realize and react to the fact every material we use is connected to the Earth and the planet's well-being and existence is impacted by the energy we consume and the resources we plunder and misuse.

If we are to move from wasting to Zero Waste, we need divergent, innovative thinkers. In our communities, we must all get on the same page. We have to move from using waste consultants, to using Sustainability experts or ZW consultants. The era of the "good-old-boys" way of doing things is over. My generation has put us in a deep hole when it comes to the environment. And we must be the ones that create this shift that embraces all the stakeholders to get us out of the hole we dug for ourselves.

We can no longer follow a system that is based on inefficiency and that is fiscally "penny wise but pound foolish". We are left with long term pain for short term gain going cheap up front. The most reusable item ever invented that is discarded is glass. Why would we support a way of handling glass discards that supports smashing and destruction? Why would we not look at supporting programs that treats our glass discards in such a way that embraces **reuse** and **recovery**? The ultimate concern is not that "we aim to high and fail but that if we aim to low and succeed."

We have to remember that "we did not inherit the earth from our ancestors; we have been merely borrowing it from our children". And for the next generation's sake, the time has come for us to now "pay it forward!" We must stop "raiding their piggy bank to buy smokes and booze for our own selfish self interests."

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www.gibsonsrecycling.ca

Sources:

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