

# My Transformation Learning Journey

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Why do I keep transformational learning and master capacity builder skill development in “my top 5” of committed activities? I believe this is my best opportunity to make a difference in my community that will have a meaningful and purposeful result in the future, and because it makes me a better business owner.

In fall of 2000 I retired after 23+ years from the United States Air Force and the family, Kathy and our two sons (Robert 16 and Michael 14), decided to return to Norfolk, where I grew up, to continue our lives. At first I worked for a small computer firm as a computer technician, a field that had drastically changed since my computer programming education 20+ years earlier, and as a traditional “good” citizen, I became a member of the Norfolk Morning Kiwanis club and attended most meetings and participated where possible, as well as being very involved with a summer baseball program.

In 2002 we started two small businesses, one an e-commerce web site reselling watertight cases primarily protecting electronic equipment and the other a manufacturer and distributor of athletic field marking equipment which uses the internet to market our product lines. We were learning technology on the run, trying to stay ahead of competition and provide value to our customers and maintain time for family activities. We were selling to customers that represented different generations with different methods of making purchases and inquiries. Our two companies had to change, increase the number of products and service offered to stay competitive and to generate enough revenue to make it a true business enterprise. How could we connect with these customers when it wasn't face-to-face? How could we respond in a manner that would give them what they wanted? We were learning that the Internet was a tremendous incubator for ideas, developing new products, reselling products manufactured by other small businesses, and improving our niche marketing. We were operating like a bigger firm, while outsourcing some of the manufacturing needs in our local community.

I could see the community was not changing as the world around us was witnessing accelerated changes. Through my business travels, I observed many similar size communities transforming their economies and communities within their existing tax structures. I was becoming frustrated with what I saw as inaction on a measurable level in the community, education, and economic development areas.

Two years ago I became involved with the Leadership Norfolk Alumni Association. Rick Symre was spending an extra day as part of the Leadership Norfolk class helping a group of individuals better understand transformational learning, master capacity builder skills, and looking to make a difference from a grass roots level. In the early days the information seemed to be too nebulous for any practical application. And then I started to make connections, with people, ideas, and trends. I began to read more from the suggested reading list. Parallel processes now were becoming a reality as I witnessed this first hand in our business operations. I was becoming a better listener by looking for value. I was starting to ask appropriate questions and looking for information that was enabling me to make connections with people I associated with, business contacts, customer education, business marketing trends, product development and feasibilities, local educators and school curriculum.

The military had helped developed my leadership in an environment that was in most cases a well defined structure with a lot of rules. Transformational learning and master capacity builder skills are taking my understanding of leadership to the next level in a very fast changing business climate. It is also a spring board for helping the community plant the seeds for future change and survival. I recently read *The World is Flat* by Thomas L. Friedman, and could personally associate with his examples of changes, especially the discussion on outsourcing issues and educational decline of our school systems. We must change our way of thinking, as the current model of reacting to a situation after it has occurred will not serve us well in the future.