

old minds in a new world

The huge interest in Grey Skills in NZ, a practical programme of group identification and self marketing for under-employed people over 40, demonstrates the need for employment for people over 40. Grey Skills is an excellent example of practical innovative thinking creating opportunity in a local area. This is an alternative to waiting in the unemployment queue. High quality local leadership is the key to our future. Quality leadership will give me hope and provide opportunities worth the investment of my life, and supporting my dreams and aspirations.

An economist asked why the NZ economy can't employ it's workforce will say that New Zealanders have failed to save, they have borrowed to invest, and they have invested poorly. If that analysis is valid why have we done that? The answer lies in the title line, "Old Minds in a New World". Our response to the 1972 oil crisis was to "think big" and to sell our future to the money lenders. As a nation we didn't understand what was happening and we made fundamental mistakes by applying the "old rules". Today's focus on reducing government expenditure and on reducing the benefit levels and on workfare programmes is continuing to apply yesterday rules to today's problems. Government leading the way creating a bed of thorns on which the nation will be forced to lie. We can do better.

"Old world thinking" contains the assumption that people will have jobs that are stable and that incomes will come primarily in the form of salary and wages. The NZ Employment Service and Social Welfare (And our banks) still operate on the basis that such jobs exist. Many of us know that's simply not a fact. While those who are not employed and those who advise them persist with "old world thinking" the problem of unemployment and under employment cannot be solved. While the under-employed and unemployed are defined as "workers" they are bystanders to economic activity unless there is an employer. The whole system of unemployment support maintains people as bystanders "waiting" for jobs. For most people over 40 that's a dead end. More importantly unemployment is far from a one way ticket to early retirement and the good life. Mid-life redundancy is a ticket to disappointment, depression, sexual dysfunction, loss of hope and vitality, loss of physical fitness and early death. "Old world thinking" is holding back the whole economy, but on a personal level it will commit you to objectives that are not real, and as a result you can't maintain your status as a modern person, then your premature death is a certainty.

The future lies mostly in the hands of local people. The key to economic development the powerhouse of economic development is new ideas. Thousands of new innovative ideas are the secret of improving our systems and developing new productive ventures to invest in. Are we so devoid of ideas as a nation that the purchase of a better house is the most productive thing we can imagine to do with our money? If that's the case local unemployment will remain high. We will invest in productive activity when we can see that new investment will be more valuable than a better house. We need innovative and adaptable people leading the way forward and showing us by their example how to invest our money and our time and our skills in new ventures designed for the new world, and producing returns (productivity, satisfaction, life years and money) that make house buying an unattractive option.

Why isn't it happening now? First, too many of us are trapped in the habits of the remembered past, we are “old world thinkers” making inappropriate decisions, secondly the local and national political establishment restrains us in our “old world” habits , thirdly there is strong domination of local business investment markets by banks which are trapped in “old world” rules and procedures. Too many people are not aware that each member of the potential workforce has to maintain his or her inventory of updated skills and wide general knowledge. The ability to adapt lies in the combination of specialist skills with general knowledge. The people best placed to make adaptation are those over 40, they have the skills and the knowledge to do so, but too often are afraid of redefining who they are when there is no certainty of success. To take an analogy from cricket, you can't score a run if you are afraid to leave the crease. At a personal level many people who are best placed to take strong leadership roles in the community are not confident enough to do so. Trapped between the old world and the new they perceive the downside risk as too great.

In the process of economic realignment as resources are disengaged from each old task the potential for re-engagement is created. New ideas are the essential to reseeding the economy for recovery. If that reseeding does not occur recovery cannot happen. The people most inclined to adapt are those disadvantaged by the changes, and the people best able to adapt are those who have considerable life experience and general knowledge. To complete the adaptation individuals also need time, personal and public support and resources in kind plus some money. People in their mid-life are most likely to have those resources. Those who do have that much support are well placed to take a new stake in the future. It may take longer than you expect but success is possible, even likely in the long run. If you think you can become a new world thinker in six months or a year, that's “old world” still operating in your life. Instant answers and quick success were possible in the old world using old world ideas. Today you have to become a new person adapted to the niche in which you will offer your expertise. It may take you six years to get there. (Too bad if your support line is two years long; worse if you depend on the government who expect you to be independent in less than a year.)

New ideas are one of the keys to economic development. Economists in my view place far too much emphasis on money flows as signals of economic health. The first sign of economic vitality is the flow of new and worthwhile ideas in our heads, backed by our own confidence in our new plans. If our ideas are adapted to the new world our investments will succeed. On the other hand if we continue to invest in holidays, new houses, cars, lotto tickets and gambling games we are making our own misfortune. The enemy within destroys our potential when we let our “Old World” thinking dominate today's decisions.

Contributed by John Vietch
Advanced Technology Enterprises Ltd
jveitch@ate.co.nz
www.ate.co.nz