



Envisioning the Future

Dr. Lattie Coor

Chairman and CEO Center for the Future of Arizona

By: George Brooks, Jr. Ph.D.

To be a past President of Arizona State University is no small achievement. In June of 2004 when Dr. Lattie Coor stepped down as president after a successful 12 year tenure, he could have continued happily as faculty in the College of Public Affairs. However, there was

more that needed to be done. His is now the Chairman and CEO of the Center for the Future of Arizona, A “Do Tank.” According to Dr. Coor “A think tank does in depth high quality research to define an issue and make recommendation on what should be done to respond to that issue. All too often the recommendations get put on the shelf. Our ‘Do Tank’ picks issues that are ripe for action and does something with them.”

A Vision for Arizona

By 2004 it was clear that the national economic paradigm had shifted and that if Arizona was to continue to provide a high quality of life, the state had to develop a response. The Center for the Future of Arizona’s research soon revealed that thought there were numerous documents and

position papers published on the subject of Arizona’s future, there was no single, clear vision of where the state should go. “We looked at every major policy report produced over the past 15 years” said Dr. Coor. “This included documents produced by governors, town halls, universities, Goldwater & Udall institutes and many others. We boiled all of this information down to a concrete and simple vision for our future that we have gotten considerable support on. That is for Arizona to be one of the best places in the nation to live a rewarding and productive life.”

This vision rests on three interrelated goals:

1. **Opportunities for All.** This is the human element including health care, education, housing and well paying jobs.

2. **Quality of Life.** This includes the factors that insure a good quality of life for Arizonans including infrastructure, cultural resources, transportation, air quality and, etc.
3. **Knowledge-Based Economy.** A future where economic success is based on knowledge as well as capital, labor and resources. An innovation economy supported by world class institutions, entrepreneurs and investment.

The success and buy-in for this vision is best demonstrated within Arizona Governor Janet Napolitano's State Of The State address where she focused on "Education, Foundation and Innovation."

Why the Rush?

When one listens to Dr. Coor, the Governor, business people and politicians in the know, one is struck beyond all other things with the urgency in their voices. They speak as if we don't respond to this need, the hammer will fall. To quote Dr. Coor. "In my neighborhood, we used to have flower gardens. The competition from the rest of the world coupled with other forces in the economy made it ultimately unprofitable for that traditional mode business to work. So whatever business someone is in today if they don't understand the web, if they don't understand the nature of their competitive environment, and the opportunities there in, they are going to loose out. Most importantly, this critical change in society is accelerating."

"I first taught first college 50 year s ago," Said Dr. Coor.

"In that time I have seen major changes in society and the economy. But I have never seen anything approaching how what we have seen in the way of communications, knowledge based and internationally connected economies that we've seen in the last 10 to 15 years. It is unthinkable today that a business of any size doesn't understand its place in the world and national markets. Today a small business who is not aware of the changes of the going on around them is at risk of being left behind. If there is a state that has not embraced the new Knowledge Based Economy and trying to do something about it, they are going to fall out of the sky. In this moment of dynamic growth and change, if we don't plan for the future, we will not have another chance."

If we do not enable our diverse society to be economically successful we will have contemporary consequences like what we saw slavery do to this country for 300 years where African Americans were not able to be part of the economy

What You Need to Succeed

According to Dr. Coor three concepts describe what is needed to succeed in this next economy:

1. **Innovation.** Innovation is creating new ideas that have value. This can not occur with out knowledge and a focus on eduction. Every element of society, individual, industry, business, everyone who is interacting with the economy must focus on education. At one time one could live a good life without a high school diploma. Today that is not possible. Today, you must keep learning in-order to be viable. Today, if you do not have knowledge, you are at risk.
2. **Entrepreneurship.** Means you keep searching and looking and fitting yourself where you going and rethinking regularly what you do and how.
3. **Speed.** The ability to respond quickly is one of keys to the ability to respond effectively as an industry or as an individual.

How to Prepare for what is coming NxT?

One must understand the competitive environment you are in. If your competitor can make the same product as you with better quality for less money, you will go under unless you make change. Continuing to think through these conditions is what is necessary. It is not easy, but there are many associations that can help point the way.

1. Whatever business you are in, find out the best association, magazines and other sources of information for that business. Read everything that is available.
2. Use your contacts to talk to others in your field. Go to conferences and learn from who are thinking outside of the box.
3. Start using blogs! Watch the conversation. That is going to trigger new ideas in your mind.

It is critical for small businesses today to innovate and create new ways to compete. This is difficult however for small businesses to do because they do have to deal with so much. However, Dr. Coor feels opportunities today are greater than they have ever been although to access them requires a different style. "It requires the risk taking, nimble style of someone willing to start down one path and find that that's not quite working well and adjust to another path. This is a different way of working that was the case a generation ago." said Dr. Coor. through their association or publications like NxT, they can understand not only why this happening but also where the opportunities are.

Harnessing the Synergy of Diversity

We are and will be a racially and ethnically diverse society. It is a fact of life. Fifty percent of the K-12 enrollment in Phoenix and Tucson are not caucasian students. "The aspiration of these families, many of them new immigrants are the same aspirations that have always characterized this nation." said Dr. Coor. "The difference now versus one hundred years ago is that education is now more than ever, the key to achieving the American dream! Lets tie striving with equipping. We must use education as the best way to equip people to do something we can continue to grow with. If we do, then we have enabled this diverse society to be economically successful. If we don't do that, we will have contemporary consequences like what we saw slavery do to this country for 300 years where African Americans were not able to be part of the economy and we are still struggling with some of the consequences of slavery today. "

From the synergy of diversity comes the energy needed for change and innovation. The more that synergy takes place, the more there will be energy for this society and the economy without question. This includes all kinds of diversity whether its racial, ethnic or intellectual. This is the genius of America." said Dr. Coor.

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