

NewsStand - Change Equals Opportunity

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Some of us are familiar with the old adage that the Chinese word for crisis is comprised of the symbols for danger and opportunity. I'd read this in a psychology book 25 years ago and have even repeated it a few times over the years. More than once I've heard motivational speakers reference it, and a Google search will deliver a million references to it. It sounds sensible enough, and simultaneously conveys a bit of wisdom that we could carry in our back pockets to encourage friends going through a tough time. Unfortunately, I learned recently that it simply isn't true.

According to professor of Chinese language and literature Victor Mair, the equation Crisis = Danger + Opportunity stems from a misunderstanding. The Chinese symbol for Crisis is indeed comprised of two symbols *wei* and *chi* (or *ji* depending on how you anglicize it). And *wei* does mean crisis, according to Mair. But *ji* has a slightly different meaning. Suffice it to say that a linguistic explanation at this point is a bit off topic.

Even if the reference to Chinese characters must be abandoned, I still like the concept of linking danger and opportunity. It has a ring to it that resonates with something in our experience. As I see it, one of the root causes of crisis in our lives and our businesses can be attributed to the manner in which we respond to change.

Opportunities emerge as a result of change. Change, therefore, can produce opportunity. A variety of examples come to mind. The explosion of cable television channels, for example, created an opportunity for content creators. Whereas the big three networks once had a near monopoly on programming decisions, the emergence of cable and later satellite television created hundreds of new venues for unbridled expression. More recently the advent of the internet re-created the same scenario.

Why do we clench our teeth and lose sleep as things change? Change is inevitable in many respects and learning how to capitalize on change is the essence of wisdom.

Here are a few changes in the auto services industry that have created opportunities in recent years.

1. **Longer Oil Change Intervals**

For more than a decade oil change intervals have been lengthening. Many oil companies and installers used their creative energy to fight against this trend instead of seeking ways to benefit from it while serving the interests of their customers. The positives of this trend have included greater convenience for motorists and less waste oil to deal with. There are also fewer empty containers to dispose of in landfills. Quick lubes have had an opportunity to creatively embrace the change by offering synthetic motor oils with extended drain capabilities to address oil life monitoring systems and the longer change intervals recommended in owners manuals, thereby supporting both the environmental wishes of some of their customers and the yearning for convenience by others.

2. **Ethanol in Fuel**

Ethanol legislation may be good for corn growers and theoretically helps keep the planet cleaner, but there are side effects. Ethanol in fuel has a tendency to absorb water and separate from the gasoline, sinking to the bottom of the gas tank where it quickly degrades and creates gum, varnish and other insolubles. This debris can plug fuel flow passages which ultimately has a negative impact on engine performance. Also, when this ethanol/water mixture is pulled into the engine, the resulting "lean burn" increases combustion chamber temperatures and can lead to engine damage.

This problem, caused by current changes in the composition of fuel, creates an opportunity for lube shops to educate motorists and sell them a remedy: fuel additives designed to stabilize fuels for longer periods when

vehicles sit idle and to clean out the gum/varnish and other debris that collects on injectors and other components.

3. **Rising Price of Motor Oil**

When synthetic motor oils came to the market they cost 10 times more than conventional oils. For years many installers avoided them because even though many were persuaded synthetics were better, they believed the cost did not justify the performance benefits. As engines and transmissions have become more sophisticated, the requirements on motor oil have become more stringent. As a result, the cost of motor oil has been incrementally increasing to the point where some synthetic motor oils are no more than double the price of conventional oils, or sometimes even more comparable than that, a cost that is more than offset by the better performance and longer service life of premium synthetic oils.

Change does not have to be a threat. Failure to adapt is the real threat. At least the oil change industry isn't faced with change at the rate of speed as that which slammed the video rental business, for example. Without adapting properly it's easy to see that the result can be devastating.