



Peter Burgess LinkedIn Blogs

Preposterous Hypocrisy

The following text is from 'Truthout'

Unless you've been living on one of the moons of Saturn, you've heard by now of the NSA's comprehensive collection of information from millions and millions of Americans. Phone calls, email messages, and even pictures you posted on Facebook: All of it is sitting in a supercomputer in Maryland, waiting to be dealt with by our avatars of surveillance freedom in the intelligence community.

You have also, to be sure, heard of Edward Snowden, the former NSA employee turned whistleblower, who blew the lid off this whole comprehensive surveillance operation and then ran for his life. Well, it seems a Reuters editor submitted a Freedom of Information Act request, seeking the emails Snowden sent to his superiors at the NSA before he finally blew the whistle. The NSA's response to that request is summed up in a truly demented US News headline on the matter: "NSA: Releasing Snowden Emails Would Violate His Privacy."

Paging Mr. Kafka, your table is ready.

In my view, Truthout is a media entity that deserves support, and I encourage everyone to help fund their work.

In their follow up to the above, Truthout described the NSA's surveillance and the Snowden situation as a case of 'preposterous hypocrisy'. I could not agree more.

But this preposterous hypocrisy is not unusual. From my perspective it is almost everywhere ... and indeed throughout the mainstream media, in much of corporate leadership, in banking and finance, in government at all levels and in all sorts of major institutions.

Why have we got into this pickle? I argue that in large part it is leadership and decision making that is out of touch with the issues that are really important.

It is a crisis and something that needs to be addressed. The model for success needs to be one that takes into account all the actors rather than just the 'me' dimension.

When I was younger 50 years ago the world had its problems, but they were different from the ones we are having to address today. A lot of changes were happening in the 1960s and the 1970s but there was an air of optimism in the middle of the turmoil.

50 years later there is a lot of change in progress, but I do not sense the same air of optimism. But I would argue that there are the building blocks for change that would really be progress if only we had a way for leadership to get behind pushing this change (or in front pulling it). We have (1) technology that is amazing and (2) we have a population of young people around the

world who are better educated and prepared for a productive life than at any time in history. These two facts should be the foundation for a future that is amazing ... but somehow we are wallowing in a funk of historic proportions.

A big part of this is that society and the global economic system do not seem to be dysfunctional, or, put another way, only seem to work well for those with considerable wealth ... and the way things are measured means that those with wealth use their economic resources in ways that tend to make things worse rather than to make things better.

A simple example is that a company's stock price is likely to go up when a company's payroll goes down ... but the company's payroll is what funds the employee's quality of life and standard of living, and that of the family, and in turn through the local multiplier, the state of the community. As productivity gets better, the whole future of work becomes an issue ... and in turn the future of everything.

There are similar value chains in almost everything that a company does as it operates to earn profit. None of the 'externalities' are accounted for in conventional money profit accounting, but they could be and should be in the sort of accounting that we really need for the 21st century. Impact reporting is being developed, but the present state of this is that it is only linked rather weakly to the very powerful money profit accounting infrastructure. This has to change ... and in fact is changing, but slowly.

I argue for metrics that measure everything of importance, not just those things that are expressed in money terms and are easy to value. Getting back to the NSA and their preposterous hypocrisy ... there is a huge value in national security, and there is a huge value in freedom and privacy. Separately there is cost effectiveness in delivering desired outcomes. Government has to struggle with questions of balance between issues like national security and freedom, but the question of cost effectiveness should not be an issue. Bottom line, however, is that almost everything that is done by government costs way more than is reasonable ... and government seems to have no interest in addressing this huge multi-trillion dollar dysfunction.

Nearly everything that is wrong with the world would be improved if there were better metrics about everything that matters ... and the good news is that this is going to be possible as 'big data' gets deployed in ways that are more important than the trivia that now dominates the technology.

Exciting times ... with many important choices to be made.

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