

## “The Question”

“The death of every innocent person turns me into a question mark.” This comment was made by Elie Wiesel, Nobel Peace Prize winner and survivor of the Nazi Death Camp, in an article he wrote for Parade Magazine as he reflected on the events of September 11<sup>th</sup>. And I have found myself feeling the same....a question mark having many questions.

One question was, since 911 we were told we would never go back to “normal” (of course, I’m not always sure what normal is in today’s world anyway). That there would be a new normal, but we can’t go back to the “old” normal....it would be gone forever. It has been almost 3 months and I was wondering if that was true. So I asked how people were feeling themselves and what they were seeing in their organizations.

My feedback came from a number of industries and people; an engineer working in a software company in California to a physical therapist working in a health care system in the Detroit area. I felt good about many of the things that I heard were happening, not dramatic shifts, but baby steps toward connecting with people. Subtle things, as one person commented, “doing things that make them a better person.” They noticed more people making eye contact, nodding hello or even stopping for conversation. In another situation a broker was at a conference and more people were attending the sessions and had more resolve to just enjoy the day and the people. In another organization a group was participating in the Ramadan celebration. They had attended an open house at a mosque, had lunch together and brought a dish to pass that represented their heritage and discussed their background and religion.

Yet, there was also caution. One person felt that if there wasn’t another terrorist attack any time soon that quickly people would be as though nothing did happen. There was a sense though that we wouldn’t be able to operate as we have in the past....increased security in the workplace, increased scrutiny in hiring practices, increased fear of those that are from a different culture.

Something did happen to each and every one of us on September 11, 2001. For many this event shattered our sense of ourselves, our priorities and our work. For the families of the victims it has shattered the dreams of what they thought their future was going to be. Thanksgiving wasn’t the same, the upcoming holidays will not be the same, life will not be the same. And our lives will not be the same.

Philosopher and consultant, Peter Koestenbaum, says in an article for Fast Company (October 4, 2001) that the shock of death exists to teach us that our first decision—and there is no other—is to commit ourselves to the creation of an ethical world, a civilized existence, a moral order. He has the next question mark... “Am I an ethical person, first and foremost, always and with no exceptions?”

So, it has been almost 3 months since the 911 tragedy. How are you feeling? How has it impacted you? What are you seeing in your organization and your community? How do you want to be impacted?