BUILDERS AND DESTROYERS

In reviewing the financial crisis this past week, and in thinking about my own career and life, I come back more and more to this belief and its importance in the business world.

Organizations surrounding themselves with positive employees - and that even make this attitude a requirement - typically have higher success than those who do not. In the law firm merger space, for example, I have noticed that firms that do not merge, and instead raise and maintain their own positive culture, tend to do much better in the long run (and survive), as compared to law firms that do not do the same. The social culture of law firms, and all organizations, tends to be much healthier, and conducive to success when the organization surrounds itself with positive people.

When organizations grow too quickly and unnaturally, they often end up absorbing at least a few negative people. The forces inside the organization that would have traditionally kept these people out cease to function as they should. On Wall Street, with the advent of mortgages being sold in bulk, a similar lack of accountability has entered the system. The contact bankers used to have with borrowers, and the subsequent understanding of their particular family and work history, is gone. Also, it seems some employers do not care who people are as long as they appear to contribute to the bottom line. People who cannot contribute to the overall system effectively or for a sustained period of time are also allowed in for one reason or another.

It benefits everything, be it a system, organization, or individual, to avoid those who do not contribute positively along the path to success and growth. For example, we have all come across people who continually find fault in the world and in the people around them. We know how draining people like this can be. When organizations bring in these types of individuals, it affects the whole. Staff can become unmotivated and unsure of themselves and their organization. Personally, when I spend time with negative people I tend to get a little depressed. I also notice avoiding them makes me feel better.

While my career advice may be an overly simplistic solution, I do believe that many problems can be solved by having more personal accountability, and by surrounding ourselves with positive, forward-thinking people, those who want and are able to work toward a common goal. As simple as it may seem, I have experienced how big a difference this can make.