



turning managers into leaders

Merge's Monthly Mega Minute – August 2003

Welcome to **Merge's Monthly Mega-Minute** - a bite-sized, yet substantial and practical, nugget of information that you can use immediately to enhance your professional and personal success.

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Merge Gupta-Sunderji helps turn managers into leaders. Through engaging keynotes and facilitated workshops, she gives people specific and practical tools to achieve leadership and communication success. Contact her at www.mergespeaks.com or 403-605-4756

Something special happened on July 30

I had this month's Mega-Minute written and ready to go out on August 1, but then something happened that illustrated to me, once again, the strength and tenacity of the human spirit. What happened is that on July 30, 2003, I attended a rock concert! Not just any rock concert, but one that attracted almost half a million people to a 260 hectare park, lasted almost 12 hours, and featured 15 bands including names no less than the Rolling Stones, AC/DC, Rush, the Guess Who, and Justin Timberlake. And exactly how did a rock concert demonstrate the power of the human spirit? Well, first some history.

In March 2003, a 78-year old woman who had traveled to Hong Kong died of SARS (severe acute respiratory syndrome) in a Toronto hospital. That fatality touched off an outbreak, which while contained within the hospital environments, required those potentially exposed to the virus to enter into quarantine. When all was said and done, 42 people had died of SARS including two heroic health-care workers. But the negative economic impact had only just started. Despite the fact that the SARS risk was localized to specific medical facilities, the World Health Organization, in its infinite wisdom, put Toronto on its Travel Advisory list, and in the process, turned the city into an international pariah. People stopped visiting, and Toronto's once-booming tourism and hospitality industry took a beating, a whipping, and a few punches in the face! As just an example, hotels that once boasted 85% occupancy were now running at less than 20%. As the negative spiral continued, it made its presence felt in virtually every sector of the economy, and thousands of people lost their jobs. Those lucky enough to not lose their jobs still felt the impact in fewer working hours, less business, and a general slow-down in the local economy. By July of that year, the SARS-scare was estimated to have cost Toronto \$2 billion in lost tourism revenue, and that didn't include all the spin-off effects.

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So back to why a rock concert would illustrate the strength of the human spirit? Because of what I observed when I was there, on a scale that I have never seen before. SARS-stock (as it was dubbed by some) was organized to show the world that Toronto was open for business. In less than one month, organizers put together an event the size of which it takes some venues years to organize. I saw people turn out in the hundreds of thousands to show that even though they might have been knocked down, they weren't out for the count. I saw our American cousins to the south show up in the tens of thousands to hold out their hands of support. I saw members of Toronto's health care professions turn out in the thousands to show that even though they had lost two of their own, they were still a force to be reckoned with. And I saw some of the world's best rock acts stand on a 40,000 square-foot stage and speak their truth. What I saw, on the largest scale that I have ever seen, is people saying "We may be down, but we're not out!"

That is what makes us human - our ability to take the worst that life can throw at us, stand up, and still move forward. Truly, when it seems that the fates are against you and everything that could possibly go wrong does, it's your outlook - your inner strength - that will give you the power to get through and triumph. Something special happened on July 30, and it makes me proud to be an optimist! Something special happened on July 30, and it gives me hope to know that each of you has the strength to be an optimist!