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MOTD

by Rob Kolstad

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What's Really Hard

Like all of us, I've been pondering a lot of thoughts lately in the sort of "global" scheme of things. Books like *Guns, Germs, and Steel* and *The Wealth and Poverty of Nations* advance various assertions as to why certain parts of our world have economic and other types of success while others seem always to fall behind. But what's the really hard problem?

I think I've discovered a little bit about what's really hard. I know many things are extraordinarily challenging: being the 2001 home run champion (or all-time home run champion!), basketball MVP, president of the world's biggest company, author of the world's best networking book (or any book, for that matter), programmer of the world's best window system, earner of \$100,000 in one year, parent of a child until the child can live on his or her own, and a host of other accomplishments, both private and public.

I think, though, that the really hard challenges are not in doing something once (which is "hard") but in sustaining the performance: five-time basketball MVP, two-term country president, creator of both a revolutionary programming language and an operating system, winning back-to-back Super Bowl championships, earning enough to survive and creating financial security for retirement, paying off the house's 30-year loan, sustaining your operating system through its second batch of thousands of customers, writing a second best-seller, etc.

What does this have to do with all of us? Because we, as a country, have been successful at so very many things: personal liberties (I know there are quibbles, but we do OK), economic success, freedom from fear, plenty of food, plenty of housing, and, best of all, plenty of opportunity. We are by no means the only part of the world to have these things, but we are one part that does. No small part of this success derives from sustaining these values, and that's hard.

That's where all of us come in. As a nation, we must perform the most difficult act in these turbulent times: continuing to sustain the greatness that we, as a country, have built over the last few decades. That means we have to continue to work, grow, build, nest, play, and nurture all the things that have built our society (including dissent and agreement, conflict and harmony, and so on).

Of course, we aren't the only great place – there's plenty of greatness and success to go around the globe – but we need to continue to focus on the work that is required to sustain what we have and grow. Without that focus, I fear we will fall back and lose some of the things that have gone so well in the past.

Sustaining is hard, very hard. Upon reflection, it's the way things have to be. I hope we can all carry on together; it's important.

PS to our foreign readers: I know this is USA-centric; we have a bit of a national crisis right now. Thanks for your patience, and I hope you'll forgive me for this column.