

The laws of jogging, the conversation of energy, and business

Darren Woolley | August 14, 2020



As I was walking around the Bay Run near my home, enjoying the warm Winter sun, I became aware of the various joggers passing me in both directions. There was something about the various running styles that had me pondering the "The law of conservation of energy". It is also known as the first law of thermodynamics and states that the energy of a closed system must remain constant—it can neither increase nor decrease without interference from outside. It got me thinking about the way we think of business and particularly business transformation.

But first, back to the runners. Being a perfect Winter's day with blue skies and warm sun, there were more than the usual number of joggers out. As they approached, I became aware of the sound of their feet on the concrete surface. The one I would hear first are, what I call, The Plodders. They fall flat-footed onto the concrete. Each step sounds like a punch into the ground as they hammer the pavement. You hear them coming and going.

The next are the Tippy Toer's. They run up on their feet. Some look a little like ballet dancers. Others like Meerkats. Depending on their stance. They make a little skipping sound as their toes scuff the ground.

They are followed by the Hoppers. The Hoppers do not hop like a kangaroo. But they do appear to bounce along. Not a loud as the Plodders, you know they are coming as their feet hit the path.

Finally, the Steam Rollers. They roll along, heel and toe. Almost silent. They can sneak up on you and all you hear is the faint land of the heel followed by the whoosh as they spring of their toes. They stride out. Steam rolling all in their path.

So, what do amateur running styles have to do with the conservation of energy? The first law of thermodynamics? If energy is neither created or destroyed, but converted, then the chemical energy in muscles was being converted into kinetic energy as their ran. But depending on their style of running they were also expending various amounts energy as sound.

The Plodders were the loudest and sound of their feet hitting the pavement was usually accompanied by their huffing and puffing as they got closer. They were doing it hard. Compared to the Tippy Toer's who made a lot less sound. But all paled to insignificance when compared to the Steam Rollers who appeared to effortlessly and soundlessly roll on by.

There are 13 different types of energy. In running you can consider chemical, gravitational, potential, kinetic, mechanical, radiant and sound. The chemical energy in the muscles is transformed into mechanical and kinetic energy as the muscles contract. Some is lost through radiant heat and sound. Of course, someone running around a circuit is not a closed system, but you get the point.

Now, what does this have to do with business? Well consider your current business energy. In the face of the impact of COVID-19, depending on your business, you may have high kinetic energy (momentum). Or low kinetic energy. Your energy output may be sound (making a lot of noise). Or running hot (Radiant energy). Or perhaps your business is quite or cold. If you think about the energy state of your business, where are you? But more importantly, what can you do about it?

Like many businesses, we were steaming along like the Steam Rollers. Plenty of kinetic energy. Then we hit the wall. In one week in March, 70% of our projects were placed on indefinitely hold, until further notice. Where did that energy go? The first law of thermodynamics says it is neither created, nor destroyed.

It had been transformed into potential energy. The potential energy within our team. Within our supplier partners. Within our network of supporters. All I needed to do was find the best way to release that potential energy in the most effective way possible.

Now, the laws of thermodynamics refer to a closed system. You can think of your business as a closed system. Or you can define the category you work in as the system. Or the market as the system.

In our case, being a global business in a niche category, we turned to our network or supporters. We used our potential energy to ramp up what we have always done. Support, stimulate and encourage out network. We started an industry- based mentor scheme. A program of industry webinars and placed even more energy into our content and social networking programs.

The concept of the laws of conservation of energy transforms the way I view my business. Instead of the ups and downs, it is now simply a transition of one energy type to another. Gravitational potential of being on top, can be transformed into kinetic rolling down the hill. Potential energy in the people and resources, extends beyond the company to the network of clients, suppliers and supporters. Energy can be transformed into sound, when we need to be heard and heat when running hot.

So, the question is, what is the energy state of your business? And what opportunities to transform does that present?

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Pondering various running styles on a sunny winter afternoon and 'the law of conservation of energy' got Darren Woolley of @TrinityP3 thinking about business and particularly business transformation. @darrenp3

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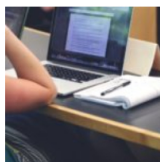
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