

Holiday Greetings from Focus Consulting Group

Note: this is a 100% fact free newsletter

When I wrote in 2006 that the year was “marked by relative peace and tranquility,” I should have guessed that all hell was about to break loose in the economic world. Never tempt the gods. And so it is that what started out as a “subprime problem” in 2007 has now become a full-fledged-no-holds-barred financial food fight in 2008. This mock cover of *The Economist* (edited for our “G” rating) pretty well sums it up:



It's no wonder that President Bush has been so cordial to Obama, he's probably eager to get off the hottest seat on the planet. And the way Obama keeps smiling makes us wonder if he reads the newspapers.

Clients ask us how Focus Consulting is doing, and I have to confess—rather sheepishly—that business has never been stronger. (Unlike an investment banker friend who told us that the most often uttered phrase by his ilk is: “would you like fries with that?”) We had engagements in Capetown, Tokyo, Singapore, and Moscow this year, adding to our list of international clients. Under the “Dodged a Bullet” headline, I had sent a proposal to an Indian firm for an engagement in November. The location: Mumbai. The hotel: Taj Mahal. When the market collapsed in October, they asked for a postponement. Phew.

This year also marked the first year of our firm's Advisory Board. We now have nearly 30 industry leaders who are partnering with us in our mission of “supporting conscious leadership.” In November we hosted our first board meeting (via Webinar, so no one can throw shoes at us) and began a dialogue about “what does it mean to be a conscious leader?” We reached general agreement that Bernie Madoff would not qualify.

Sometimes life is too good—and juicy—to improve upon. Consider this. In our book, “Investment Leadership” we wrote about a fictional investment firm called “Allstar.” It rose to great heights and then collapsed because it committed all the usual sins. This month *The Economist* magazine wrote about “New Star Asset Management”, a real firm that “embodies all the sins of its industry; charging too much and paying its managers too highly, promising performance it could not deliver, and launching too many funds.” Allstar and New Star are the same story in slightly different outfits, which is why we keep preaching the importance conscious leadership, strong culture, and sustainable practices.



(FCG: Jim Dethmer, Liz Severyns, Jim Ware, Fran Skinner, Jamie Ziegler. Not pictured: Jack Skeen, Michael Galfer, and Bernie Madoff.)

From all of us at FCG, we don't care what all those other people are saying about you, WE think you are WONDERFUL!
Seasons greetings and Happy New Year,

4137 RFD
Long Grove, IL 60047
847-373-8853

jware@focusCgroup.com
www.focusCgroup.com

...And from the Ware Family,

Our family is adjusting to the new economic reality where a 401k is now a 201k, and “down 20%” is the new “flat.” We’re also learning to use the new language coming out of this crisis: “I’ve been Lehmaned!” and “Hey, don’t AIG me!”

Friends and family ask me—the supposed expert—to explain the current financial crisis, and the best I can do is show them this photo:



No, our two girls Nikki (6) and Alexandra (7) did not cause the financial meltdown but their cleverly constructed house of cards represents the kind of financial stability that supported the risk practices of Bear Stearns, Lehman, AIG and other major institutions.

On the political front, Jane and I took great pride in exercising our right to vote and, as usual, canceled each other out. Our mothers—both dyed in the wool Republicans—are still clutching their chests and breathing heavily, as their beloved GOP leaders examine their wounds and decide where to lick first.

Janey asked me NOT to write about her successful career in HR at Baxter, where

she manages to balance a full time career with successfully parenting two angelic kids (pictured below)...so I won't even mention it.



Janey and I hosted a holiday dinner for our FCG team which was great fun as we reviewed the victories and bloopers from 2008. A highlight of the evening was Fran's version of a blooper from one of our Canadian trips. Chalk it up to Fran's Irish heritage, but she had us gasping for breath and wiping away tears of laughter as she recounted one of my infamous blunders. The team voted unanimously that Fran should do a Webinar on our top gaffes, with yours truly in a starring role. For now, we'll just share the Holiday photo:



(FCG team with their spouses. The women on the right were mistakenly informed that they were attending a funeral. The women on the left, a luau.)

With warm wishes for the New Year,

4137 RFD
Long Grove, IL 60047
847-373-8853

jware@focusCgroup.com
www.focusCgroup.com