

## Source of Innovation—the view we chose

Constraints - what is shackled together, by form

Restraint - to hold together, by choice

It's easy to assume you're doing well when you have plenty of resources. Problems can be ignored, for now. Waste can go unnoticed, for now. Revenue shortfalls can be covered by cash reserves, for now.

In fact, “more” — more money, more time, more automation, more connections, etc. — can actually make long-term success more difficult. Constraints can often be a blessing in (seemingly painful) disguise.

Constraints can also fuel creativity and innovation and built forward momentum by eliminating the temptation to sift through seemingly infinite possibilities.

### Businesses and Constraints

In a [2017 study](#) published in *Academy of Management Journal* researchers asked employees to rate their willingness to embrace contradictions. They were then asked to rate how often they experienced resource constraints: Limited time, limited funds, limited resources, limited supplies, etc.

Meanwhile, their bosses rated each employee in terms of overall performance, creativity, and innovation.

What happened? Employees who ranked on the low end of what researchers called “the paradox mindset” scale (meaning they disliked contradictions, much less embracing them)

struggled with constraints: Their performance dropped whenever they felt resources were insufficient.

On the flip side, employees who found it challenging and even fun to overcome constraints were the better performers, especially when creativity and problem-solving was required.

And here's the kicker: The presence of constraints often caused the performance of those employees to *improve*.

Yep: Constraints made them better, not worse. But they have to learn to do so since we are conditioned to fear and avoid restraints.

Nearly every successful founder I've spoken to is grateful for the lean days: The bootstrapped, scrappy, thankful-for-anything-that-came-their-way days. It demands their valuing the restraints and finding the opportunity they represent.

They didn't have money to throw at problems. They didn't have time to wait for the "perfect" solution. They didn't enjoy the luxury of linger over every decision. Instead, they had be creative. They had to innovate. They had to make choices, and move on.

Looking back, they all say those constraints, transformed into restraints, built the foundation for later success.

Embracing constraints as restraints — like limited resources, opposing demands, or seeming contradictions — could help you look at old situations in entirely new ways. When you value and work with constraints, you turn the constraints in restraints which are the source of creativity, understanding and change

Teaching your organization and each person in it to value, embrace and utilize the power of restraints is the work of leadership.

### Process

There are six ongoing arenas in which to seek out and appreciate the sources of restraints that can serve as a source of creativity.

There are those who are not in the business, but have a stake in it. And sometimes some we want to have a stake in it and have to reconcile their restraints

A major source of restraints for the business is the culture and how it shapes and makes possible, or limits, the possibilities.

A third source of restraints is the organization that must carry out the strategic direction established by a Core Team. Against, a source of creativity.

The fourth arena is the growing business and the restraints that growth itself imposes. What is past and done, new and opening and how to balance that evolution. This nature of restraints are also a rich source of creativity if we can value the restraints

The fifth arena is the energies which compete for our attention, resources and dreams. The pushes and pulls of economic, regulatory, international affairs, history, aspirations, all provide an environment of restraint.

The sixth arena is others who are competing for the same space, attention and resources. Without creativity it leads to a zero sum gain and a degeneration of the space for all.

Process:

1. In each of the six leadership arenas, examine the restraints to understanding, pursuing, and achieving the value. They present. Learning to hold all three forces together in mind.
2. Examine at three rings/lines of work. e.g. the immediately impactful restraints that grab our attention; the unfolding parameters that are changing (technology, global opportunity in the proximate environment, and our essence expression into the universe.
3. For each key stakeholder to that arena, what are they looking for in terms of reconciliation?
4. What needs to be activated directly, in partnership building or tracking, in capability and systems building?
5. Where are we paying appropriate attention, under attending, over attending?
6. How might we shift our engagement with the organization to refine our work and way of working?
7. Take the next arena and reflect on the same, similar and evolved version of the questions.