



WHAT A COINCIDENCE! ... OR IS IT?

Ever notice how you can be thinking of someone you hadn't seen in years and the phone rings and it's them? Or you seem to see signs for something over and over?

Several years ago, my dad was diagnosed with colon cancer and I was flying from LaGuardia to Detroit for his consultation with a surgeon. In the cab, someone had left a People Magazine with the cover story about Farrah Fawcett having colon cancer. When I walked into the airport bookstore, right at eye level was a book "What Your Doctor May Not Tell You about Colon Cancer." Of course, I bought it – the coincidence wasn't lost on me and I took it as a sign that there would be a way to navigate this unexpected change. Then, I found out my seat mate's sister worked in the oncology department at Henry Ford Hospital. OK, I thought, I am awake and seeing the synchronicity in what was around me. Everything was coming together as though the universe had a greater plan in mind than I could imagine and, coincidentally (or not), circumstances kept lining up as we learned about and dealt with my dad's illness and subsequent surgeries.

It seemed like that was much of my experience this past week as I was preparing for the Inaugural Private Equity Conference at UNC's Kenan-Flagler Business School. I was a panelist on the topic of Convergence – how hedge funds and private equity firms are navigating the waters with each other. The word convergence started popping out at me – in a magazine article on PrivateEquityCentral.net and again on the cover of a book in the airport. And, I realized that convergence meant many things to many people. But, the common theme of the conference (which by the way was sold out and exceptionally well run by the students) – "convergence" – was addressed by many of the panels. For some, it meant a "coming together", for others it signaled a "takeover" or sign of "conflict". For many, it was evidence of an intersection of commonality.

I had the privilege of participating as a panelist and moderated another panel. In both instances, I heard wise, experienced practitioners remark that convergence was beneficial and, in some cases, that convergence had already happened throughout the industry. Convergence happens when there are synergies between two different aspects of the business. Bringing together the best pieces of both makes the resultant product/service/organization stronger, more nimble, better able to compete in a sharpening landscape.

It made me think about how there must be synergies between a candidate and a firm for it to be a great match. But, of course, to be able to take advantage of the overlap between your skills and the needs of the employer, you must know in advance with precision both what your skills are and where you can be a nimble addition to the team you're looking to join.

During my visit at UNC, I had the opportunity to meet with dozens of students to help them sort out how what they had done before business school and during their internships uniquely positioned them to fit with the firms they're looking to target in their career search. We talked about how important it was to jettison the pieces of their resumes that didn't support this new objective and to ensure that they were tailoring their resumes for each opportunity they were chasing. Think about it, convergence – whether it's a newly combined private equity/hedge fund strategy or the relationship between a candidate and an employer – has to bring together the best pieces of each and let fall by the wayside the things that don't serve their new joint mission. The same thing has to happen for you, whether you're wondering whether to add a new product to your lineup or to look for a new team to join. Winnow down the important aspects of what you're great at and hunt for the place where that advances the objectives of a firm – now you've got convergence. Otherwise, if you bring nothing new, you're simply a replacement part.

In addition to bringing something special to the deal (and you all do, you just have to sort out what it is and who needs it), a little synchronicity helps in all convergence, too. You'll notice that the firms who have created hybrid strategies saw signs that the time was right for them to step into another space or to tweak their product or model. Undoubtedly, those signs were subtle and they were on the lookout for them. While they could have easily “stuck to the playbook” or chalked it all up to “coincidence”, wise players in this market – be they candidates or employers – have their antennae up for the winds of change and are able to navigate those changes by positioning themselves for opportunities where they have something unique to add to the mix. And, they're also alert to the synchronicity around them.

The most successful players in the business will tell you that they worked hard, had a plan, kept their eyes open for changing market conditions, and had a little bit of luck. Coincidence? I think not!

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