

# Depth Perception

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## Solidity and long-term solvency

*"Don't try to be great. Being great involves luck and other circumstances beyond your control. The less you think about being great, the more likely it is to happen. And if it doesn't, there is absolutely nothing wrong with being solid."*

-Charles Wheelan

Wall Street Journal, 28 April 2012

Over many years in organizational development I've worked with a variety of businesses, service and ministry organizations that lasted beyond their founder's lifetime. In some cases mission had to be retooled, expanded or changed altogether. Sometimes it simply needed to be refreshed for a new generation. But they lasted and continue to do meaningful and fulfilling work.

I'm convinced that solidness is a key factor in the continuation of an enterprise beyond one generation. Flash builds momentum. It might even begin to establish brand and attract an initial marketplace. Solidness is what keeps it going.

Many people quickly nod their heads at this sentiment. A few might try to combine the volatile mix of flash and solidness and quickly discover that one or the other will drive the organization's DNA. Perhaps the nature of a particular marketplace will determine which of the two is more useful. But consider the difference. Flash has the life of a dragonfly. It is beautiful but cannot survive the winter. Solid is a Galapagos Tortoise—slow, steady, not particularly attractive, and yet it outlives most things. Here is a point of reflection: Why is it that the Fortune 100 comes and goes over a 40 year period, but organizations like *The Economist*, The Salvation Army or a fourth generation family farm last multiple centuries? Solidness factors in there somewhere.

Organizational leaders who are solid and build solid organizations know that this year's profitability might well ruin next year's solvency. It is next year's solvency and the foundation for solvency to continue for a decade or more that makes for meaningful work, impactful mission, and memorable legacy.

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