



# VIEWS&VISIONS

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## The Status Quo's in the Rearview Mirror

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Adventures on the Gorge

Dave Hartvigsen is President & CEO for Adventures on the Gorge, having relocated from Colorado in October 2013. With a career spanning almost 40 years, he has worked for Hilton, Carlson Hotels, Intrawest and Xanterra Parks & Resorts. Dave's executive roles have included sales, marketing, operations and business development roles across four continents and thousands of properties.

Immediately prior to joining Adventures on the Gorge, Dave served as Vice President of Sales & Marketing for Xanterra, the nation's largest national park concessionaire, which included such destinations as Yellowstone, Grand Canyon, Crater Lake, Rocky Mountain, Mt. Rushmore, Bryce Canyon, Death Valley and Zion National Parks. Prior to that, Dave was Senior Vice President of Lodging for Intrawest, helping grow the company from approximately 4,000 to 7,500 resort homes and condominiums spread across a portfolio of ski, golf and beach resorts in the U.S., Canada and Europe. Principal among those were such destinations as Whistler, Mammoth, Steamboat, Copper Mountain, Sandestin, Snowshoe, Stratton and Tremblant.

Hartvigsen is a graduate of Utah State University where he earned a BS in hydrology and watershed management. He is an inaugural graduate of the Executive Leadership Program for the Carlson School of Management at the University of Minnesota. He was previously honored as one of the Top 25 Extraordinary Minds by the Hotel Sales and Marketing Association.

Many years ago, I was asked to take on an important leadership role for Carlson Hotels by a man whom I deeply respected, Brian Stage. After accepting the new challenge, I asked Brian, "What do you most need me to accomplish?" Brian said simply, "I need you to be an agent of change." With those words, I got to work. Within a few months, a number of tasks, projects, policies, etc. were underway. About the same time, I was on the phone with my wife, Eileen, and I said, "Wow, it is so hard to get people to accept change. I feel like we are moving at a snail's pace."

Shortly afterward, my wife and I were invited to a welcome reception at the new resort I was managing in Minnesota. Laurie, from accounting, introduced herself to Eileen and said, "It's amazing how fast our resort is changing. We're moving at lightning speed!"

Sometimes, perception is not reality.

Effective change is largely driven by the belief that change can begin today. There is no need to wait for tomorrow. The reality is that once



you know you should make a change...just get on with it! One's will to get things done usually can overcome any inertia, and this can occur the very instant that one decides to make a sincere commitment to change. People rationalize that we can or should adopt change later. Don't fall for that. Change now.

Oftentimes in our company, a new concept will surface and someone will say, "That's a really good idea. We should start planning for that next year." My wiring is completely different. I usually say, "There is no reason to wait. Let's go." It is not always that easy from a practical matter, as a new course of action may be affected by approvals, funding or other logistical issues. But that aside, don't wait. That chance may not be there tomorrow.

At Adventures on the Gorge, we have been sharply focused on continual improvement. There are always ebbs and flows on that path, but from the days when the company first was founded to the present, it would be fair to say that we have been characterized by a non-stop determination to get better, to be adaptable and to be innovative. You can't have those traits if your organization is imprisoned by the status quo. Personally, I am always at war with the status quo. It's a "love-hate" thing. I hate it when I'm dealing with it, and I love it when it is in the rearview mirror.

Last year, we opened our new conference center, The Lookout Post. After a great deal of dialogue, it was clear that the theme of this building



**Image 1 & 3:** The Lookout Post Conference Center, located on the very edge of the New River Gorge, provides group meetings with focus and energy in a remarkable, dramatic location; **Image 2:** Half-day adventures on Summersville Lake can include stand-up paddleboards, kayaks and/or lakeside rock climbing, all from a private pontoon boat island; **Image 4:** White water rafters take a refreshing spin and enjoy majestic and breathtaking scenery on the Lower New River

needed to work well with our company's vision of "Leading the World Outdoors." After much reflection, we decided that our theme should reinforce the notion of "pathfinding." We contemplated a lot of different words, such as discovery, exploration, adventure and trailblazing. "Trailblazing" is an intriguing term, and it somewhat implies that one ventures into the wilderness, hacking a pathway through using determination and courage, and ending up somewhere else. Pathfinding has much of the same adventurous connotation. But a great pathfinder *leads* their way through the wilderness to arrive at a predetermined destination. Great

pathfinders lead from the front, and by example. They have a clear vision of where they're going and, by design, they leave the comfort of the status quo in pursuit of something better and, with clear intent, they leave the status quo in the rearview mirror.

Dave Arnold, who is one of the original partners of Class VI and a revered West Virginian, loves to say, "Adapt, migrate or die," which is a phrase he learned from his wife, Peggy. Those are pretty strong words, but the phrase has great clarity and its meaning is indisputable. In the end, change can be about getting from a bad

place to a better place, but for many it can also be about getting from a good one to a great one!

That is what we want to do. ▶