

When Benjamin Braddock received advice in the 1967 movie, "*The Graduate*", he was told "one word, son, one word: plastics". When my oldest son graduated from college, I reminded him of that scene and told him that the single word for him was "internet". The Internet was rapidly changing our world and the way the world worked. Even the dot-com bust did not annul the way the Internet impacted business, information, communication and our worldview.

What brink are we standing at the edge of now? What will soon be woven into the fabric of everyday life that we aren't paying attention to right now? I don't know what you would advise but I have something in mind. I just can't say it in one word. I need two: Waste Management. It's been big business for a long time but it's going to get bigger and the way it functions is going to undergo a major overhaul. Those renovations to managing our waste are going to transform the way we live in the United States. (At least, I certainly hope so.)

Think about those two words "waste management" for a moment. What do we waste? What is our waste? How do we manage it?

Humans, as any animal, have always created bodily waste. We somehow knew enough to dispose of it in an area away from our food and water. Then we started to make stuff and there were scraps left over. We devised tools and utensils out of wood, bone, stone and other natural materials. The little piles of debris from tool making and cooking left evidence of how we lived but they were not harmful in any way. For thousands of years, our waste did not vary much from the original kinds. Eventually we left bottle dumps instead bone dumps. At some point in recent history, that all changed. We created new, harmful and even deadly substances. We began to purchase things that had little use and only temporary use. We became dependent on things we did not make and could not fix. We became accustomed to those very same things breaking easily and being disposed of. We stopped growing our own food. We even stopped preparing our own food and, yet, we began to throw away more and more food, as never before. We used to live in nature. Now we control, manicure, trim and mow nature and then we stuff the trimmings into a plastic bag.

It was not very long ago that we were allowed to dig trenches in the earth, fill them with whatever we wanted, cover it over and call it a 'Sanitary Landfill'. We thought of it as sanitary if we controlled flies and odors and made it disappear. Out of sight out of mind.

Our learning curve on these matters is rapidly accelerating. It is only recently that the Rachel Carson's, Silent Spring) and Erin Brockovich's of the world taught us the dangers of dumping hazardous waste and we are still learning the hard way.

We are running out of room for destruction dumps. If it can be reused, it doesn't belong in a hole in the ground. If it can be composted, it doesn't belong in a plastic bag. If it is dangerous, we need to identify it as such and isolate it. That is the basic, common sense guidance behind current standards of waste management.

We are quickly approaching a time when, whether we want to or not, we will manage our waste responsibly. As long as we do not behave responsibly, there will be organizations in place whose job it is to tell us how to. DEP is one such organization.

Think of DEP (Department of Environmental Protection) as the friend with the good advice. You can pay attention now or you can pay attention later. The good advice remains the same. Acting on the good advice has rewarding benefits.

Recycling currently reduces two million metric tons of carbon dioxide from our atmosphere. That is like removing 1.6 million cars from the road.

Recycling currently conserves 85 million BTU's. That could provide power for 820 thousand homes.

Recycling currently employs 19,500 people at 1,400 businesses and organizations.

So, all you entrepreneurs, think about waste management. This is still an area full of potential.

Picture dumpsters with labeled compartments. Picture pick up and dump trucks with labeled compartments.

If people were willing to pay others to pick up their pooch's poop, why wouldn't those same people pay others to compost and recycle for them? Jump in and take advantage of DEP's waste bans and our laziness.

Interested in helping others? Take advantage of this nation's excessive waste and pick up our useable items to give to others.

Scientifically minded? We need nontoxic glues, renewable fuels and compostable packaging. We need ways to remove toxins from our wastewater.

There is a multitude of ways to make the earth a cleaner safer place and make money at the same time. Just remember two words, my son and my daughter, two words: waste management.

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