

marketer

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Take Action!

Build Business 2012 Preview

Water the Bamboo:

An Interview with Keynote Speaker, Author Greg Bell

BY CRAIG PARK, FSMPS, ASSOCIATE AIA

Greg Bell, founder and Chief Bamboo Farmer of the Water the Bamboo Center for Leadership and author of the best-selling book *Water the Bamboo: Unleashing the Potential of Teams and Individuals*, will deliver the closing keynote address at this year's SMPS National Conference, *Build Business: Take Action*, July 11–13 in San Francisco.

Based in Portland, OR, Greg's company provides essential value by helping its clients create lasting change while not only maintaining their sanity but bringing fun into the process. Greg and his team help clients formulate and refine their core values, vision, goals, and strategic relationships with a healthy bottom line in mind.

Greg learned the virtues of discipline and hard work from his grandfather, a Texas farmer. Greg was the first in his family to graduate from college. He played basketball at the University of Oregon where he was twice named Inspirational Player of the Year. After receiving a political science and law degree from the University of Oregon, he practiced law within a large organization.

Personal events inspired him to re-evaluate his life and priorities, and he helped launch the Coaches vs. Cancer campaign for the National Association of Basketball Coaches—a non-profit that has raised over \$50 million for cancer research.

*Recently, Greg sat down with SMPS Fellow and Past National President Craig Park to discuss the philosophy described in *Water the Bamboo* and the application of those ideas to marketing and business development in the design and building industry.*

"Every day, before my feet hit the ground, I ask, 'What's going well?' Even on my worst day, I can find something that is working and that fuels me for the rest of the day."



Marketer: What was the genesis for *Water the Bamboo*?

Greg Bell: My goal for the book and my talks is to have them be a mirror. My theory is that you have all your own answers, but you never ask yourself the questions. In my book, I ask more than 200 questions as a part of a Socratic Method of inquiry. I ask, “What are your values?” I don’t tell you what your values should be.

I began the book based on one of my popular early speaking programs, “Bring Your Spirit to Work.” That program was based on the idea that everyone starts a new job really excited, but over time, it often becomes just a job. My thought was, “How can I help rekindle people’s attitude and spirit as if it were the first day?”

One day, during the writing of the book, I called one of my clients and asked what they were doing. They replied, “We’re watering the bamboo.” This phrase was drawn from one small part of that presentation, but it seemed to resonate with many of my clients. It hit me then that this was the book to write. The phrase *water the bamboo* became my mantra, because it was more than just a book: It was an idea and an inspiration. And three years later, it became this book, which was the foundation for the Water the Bamboo Center for Leadership.

Marketer: The economy’s impact on the A/E/C industry is causing major disruptions, including business failures, acquisitions, and downsizing, and is forcing many firms to reevaluate their visions and missions to deal with harsh realities of limited capital funding, fewer projects, and greater competition. How can our organizations use the *Water the Bamboo* concepts to help their people become more strategic and ultimately to be more successful?

Bell: One of the things I have been telling my clients during these tough times is that there is somebody out there who is going to enter your industry and they are going to win. Even though they’re just starting out, they will become one of the big players in 10 years. I think the question is, what are they doing that you are not? What is it about them? What attitude are they going to bring to their business? I believe it is going to be a water-the-bamboo attitude.

They are going to show up, and they are going to water. They are going to have faith. They are going to have belief in what they are doing. They are going to have discipline and courage. Everyone around them is going to tell them, “This isn’t going to work. This is the worst time to start a company.” And after all that, they are going to say, “Mind your own bamboo!”

A lot of people think it’s about the bamboo, but really it’s about the watering. It’s about the effort—putting in the time and energy and nurturing the project. While everyone else is talking about the recession, the problems and challenges, and worrying, the bamboo farmer puts all that energy into their growth. Ask yourself, “Does worry work?” It never has once, never solved any problems.

What would you do if you thought what you were doing wasn’t going to work? You wouldn’t do anything. You wouldn’t make the call. You wouldn’t go out to seek the work. What if you had a different attitude? You may have to work harder, but it’s just work. It’s part of the process. It’s about character. My ultimate goal is that everyone becomes a bamboo farmer.

Marketer: In your book, you speak of attitude and enthusiasm as important characteristics to bring personal vision and projects to completion, regardless of the circumstances. What advice would you give SMPS members, who have roles in marketing, public relations, and business development, to help develop and advance their personal visions?

Bell: It is all about being really clear about what your vision is: *a burning desire*. If it’s too vague, it fades. One of the tools I use is a vision board. Mine illustrates visions for what I want to see in my life and how I want things to be. There are pictures on it. My values are on it. My family is on it. I look at it every day to remind me, because there are lots of distractions in life. I believe that, when a person leaves their house, they should know who they are and what they are after. If you don’t, you can get a little sideways.

If you have a vision, then you know when you see it. For most of us, you say “no” to a lot of things before you see the thing you want. Then when you see it, you’ll know, “That’s in line with who I am as a person; that’s in line with my vision.” Then you know what you can say “yes” too.

“Don’t lose sight of the importance of relationships. Everyone in your company probably has several hundred relationships. Everyone has to be on board with the marketing of your firm and selling your services. If everyone in your network is not talking about your firm in positive ways, you can miss a huge opportunity for growth.”

Marketer: How can they best align their personal vision with that of their company?

Bell: We talk a lot about technology and social media, but ultimately we are in a *relationship age*. People and companies who realize this will thrive. The last project you got was because of the relationships you have. The next project you get will be because of those relationships. Relationships are critical to our own personal vision and mission, to our own marketing and public relations. Technology is a great medium to get our message out, but it's really your relationships that will yield results.

As an example, marketing needs to have internal relationships that align with the external relationships—the clients you are trying to connect with. Too often we get caught up in creating a message with a focus just on the medium. But without those relationships, no one will come to your Web site; no one will look at your brochure.

Don't lose sight of the importance of relationships. Everyone in your company probably has several hundred relationships. Everyone has to be on board with the marketing of your firm and selling your services. If everyone in your network is not talking about your firm in positive ways, you can miss a huge opportunity for growth.

You have to have balance. How do you keep contact with your key contacts, helping them, and letting them help you? You need to have relationships, but you also have to have results. If you take care of your relationships, results will happen. You need to have balance between the two.

Marketer: What advice can you give SMPS members about using the concept of the Bamboo Circle to stay connected and improve our business relationships?

Bell: Your Bamboo Circle is your *A List*. You can have a personal A List and a professional A List. Your A Lists are your go-to people. What's interesting about a grove of bamboo is that, underneath, each bamboo shoot's roots can grow over 100 yards. Because all of their roots are interlocked, when an earthquake hits a bamboo grove, nothing happens.

Similarly, if you have developed a strong Bamboo Circle, you can handle setbacks. Winning is the easy part of life. Losing is when you need to be strong and together. That's when a Bamboo Circle is most effective. Who do I call when it doesn't go well? Who do I call when I need an idea? Who do I call when I need a project? That's what I think about when I think about a Bamboo Circle, but you have to build it before you need it.

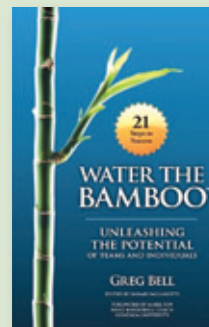
"If you take care of your relationships, results will happen."

Marketer: Your book speaks with a language of discipline, patience, persistence, hard work, optimism, courage, and sustainability and the importance of integrity, resilience, versatility, and flexibility. Which of these characteristics do you think are the most important for people in our industry?

Bell: Drawing from the metaphor of the bamboo farmer, the first thing you have to have is patience. You have to have patience with the process and patience with the people. Like the seed of any bamboo, or the seed of any idea, the bamboo farmer has to bring the water. Next, persistence is important. You can't just water one day and expect results.

Self-discipline is probably the most important character trait. If you look at any successful person, self-discipline shows up in many aspects of their life. Top salespeople always make *one more call* then the rest.

The fourth trait would be courage. This concept, while natural, goes against the grain. We live in a society with expectations of instant gratification and overnight success. You have to have courage to take on the bamboo philosophy, because everyone is going to question what you doing. Most great successes start out as delusional ideas.



Greg Bell's book, *Water The Bamboo®: Unleashing the Potential of Teams and Individuals*, is reviewed by SMPS member Jessica Taft on page 40.

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And finally, you need belief in what you are doing, belief in your company. The notion of belief allows you to sustain over time. And to extend the bamboo metaphor, while you wait, you can grow beans and corn on top. You often have to do other things to sustain while your bamboo takes root and grows.

Focus on these five traits is the core of my message. Bamboo is strong, but it also is flexible. When you take on the qualities of bamboo, you can be resilient, adaptable, and versatile.

Marketer: Do you have any last advice for SMPS members on developing a personal approach to enduring success?

Bell: I’m often called in to be a motivational speaker, but I tell them I can’t do that. Motivation comes from within. Inspiration comes from without. Motivation is the car, inspiration is the fuel. When these two are combined, you get movement.

Find those things in your life that inspire you and put them in your life every single day. Every day, find two or three things—it could be a song or a poem—whatever moves your heart. Make sure those things are part of your routine.

I have my own rituals. Every day, before my feet hit the ground, I ask, “What’s going well?” Even on my worst day, I can find something that is working and that fuels me for the rest of the day. Then at the end of the day, I ask myself, “What went well?” Those two times of the day are the most critical. I do these rituals because I want to have great days and great dreams.

Marketer: I really enjoyed your metaphor of watering the bamboo. It explains how long it takes before an idea grows, the discipline to help it grow, and when it grows, just how fast it happens. I think it’s a message we all can apply to our lives and our business.

Bell: When you look at any effort, it takes time to get traction in life. If you think about it, what are grown are the roots. That is the foundation for any person, for any company, or for any marketing effort. It’s a universal message. **m**

About the Interviewer



Craig Park, FSMPS, Assoc. AIA, is a principal with strategic technology consultants, The Sextant Group. Craig is a past president of SMPS National, recipient of the 2007 Weld Coxe Marketing Achievement Award, and author of *The Architecture of Value: Building Your Professional Practice*. Craig can be reached at cpark@thesextantgroup.com.

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Hyatt Regency San Francisco
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Closing Keynote Address: “Water the Bamboo: Unleash Your Potential”

Greg Bell, Author and Founder, Water the Bamboo Center for Leadership

JULY 13, 9 – 10:30 AM

Breakout Session 104: “Water the Bamboo: Thriving with Change”

JULY 13, 10:45 AM – NOON