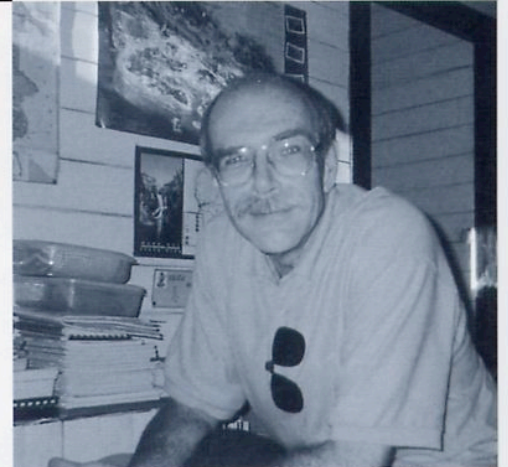


Lawrence Poole
President, International Institute
for Creative Development,
Les Consultants Trans/Formation 2000 Inc.,
and La Quinta Mayam in Costa Rica



Biography

To speak with Lawrence Poole is to connect with a truly formidable life force. The passion and conviction that he conveys about his life's work – the teaching of creative thinking through various media – is infectious. It is therefore no surprise that he has enjoyed success as a motivational speaker, consultant and author, and now also in the development of a tourism business in Costa Rica specializing in accessible tours, and the release of creative energy through contact with the natural environment. He has held several management positions, from sales manager to vice-president of marketing, and was also founder-president of a company involved in manufacturing, distribution and retail sales. Poole is also actively engaged in working for social change through his involvement with the advisory committee on accessible transport at Transport Canada, and through his consulting work with the United Nations' Genesis II Peace initiative, among other organizational affiliations.

Though Poole has considered self-employment all his life, it was following a motor vehicle accident in 1977 in which he became a paraplegic that he developed his current philosophy. After 11 months in the hospital, and being declared dead four times, Poole experienced a paradigm shift in his thinking that helped him to come to terms with the severity of his disability, and the changes to his lifestyle that it would necessitate. Poole says that he had no choice but to develop an intellectual flexibility that would enable him to deal with his new situation as a person with a disability. An important component of this intellectual flexibility included strategic thinking, as he had to totally reconceptualize his life goals and the means of attaining them, in addition to the very practical issues of daily living. He quickly discovered that his new-found insights were directly salient to managing the pace and degree of change in today's society, at personal and business levels.

Being an Entrepreneur with a Disability

He says "if you're leading change, you are kind of protected from it, whereas the people behind get stressed and must react;" being proactive and anticipating change is the easiest way of managing it. Moreover, "you can't be depressed when you're working for change."

The Entrepreneurial Experience

Lawrence Poole has always embodied the entrepreneurial spirit, beginning with a dance hall venture right out of high school. His business training is rooted in hands-on experience, complemented by training from the Alexander Hamilton Institute which he has reinforced with various business seminars and workshops. Following a failed hot tub and sauna venture during the 1980s that left him with a bitter understanding of the banking business, Poole and his wife Suzy decided to finance all subsequent business undertakings themselves. He says that while each of his more recent ventures has been financially profitable within the first year of operation, or on a project-to-project basis, this is essentially a non-issue for him: "I'd rather have nothing and work for myself than be an indentured servant to someone else. All I have is my time, so investing all I have to serve the 'creative spirit' is the only way to go."

Poole feels that there are considerations specific to entrepreneurs with disabilities that shape the individual's approach to self-employment. For many, these involve accessibility and personal health issues around which business strategies need to be designed. A resident of Montreal, the mobility difficulties of using a wheelchair in such a cold and snow-bound city prompted him to seek a warm retreat during the winter months. This led to starting a second business in Costa Rica that would provide some income during the months that he spends there. Poole does not attribute any advantage to being disabled in his work, despite the fact that his personal understanding of the difficulties associated with travel for disabled people resulted in the development of one element of his "winter business." Rather, he sees the opportunities afforded by his personal knowledge as the practical exploitation of identified needs that happen to be associated with disability issues. Had he not become a paraplegic, he would certainly be identifying and meeting other kinds of needs, and so fulfilling his entrepreneurial drive in other ways.

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Advice to Businesses Serving Entrepreneurs

Lawrence Poole has spent 20 years advocating for accessibility and for a "levelling of the playing field" in terms of providing people with disabilities with the same opportunities and choices enjoyed by others. He would like to see the business community embrace his idea of an "economic incubator," by which professionals typically involved in the entrepreneurial process (such as bankers, lawyers, business development consultants) invest in the individual's idea with a view to being repaid once the business becomes productive. In this way, these professionals are investing in the entrepreneur as opposed to requiring payment for services rendered at a time when most entrepreneurs, and people with disabilities in particular, are cash-poor. Such a strategy is essential to many people with disabilities who are disadvantaged by their lack of previous work experience generally, and business experience in particular – typically results of prejudicial attitudes which bar these individuals from access to the labour market.

Advice to Prospective Entrepreneurs

Poole's advice to others considering entrepreneurship reflects his general emphasis on process over results: at some point, people need to start doing, and so initiate the learning process. Becoming informed about the market or product in which one is interested is an essential part of developing a good business plan, but should not be an entirely intellectual exercise. As such, Poole is a strong advocate of volunteerism, which provides direct access to learning how a business concept or product works and immediately engages the individual in the process of becoming an entrepreneur. In effect, Poole states that "an entrepreneur is a dreamer who acts."

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