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END OF TIMES

Included in the eight beatitudes are blessings for the meek, the persecuted and the poor in spirit. To hell with that—martyrdom is for suckers.

In September 2018, there was an exodus from *Atlantic Business Magazine* as we hit the road in search of answers. Our quest was this: to discover how is it possible that this region—graced with generous resources, a healthy environment, free education and healthcare, a democratic society, ample land for development and a relatively small population amongst whom to share such wealth—how could such a region be perennially persecuted with debt, deficits and negativity? To put it more succinctly: what’s holding us back? And, even more to the point: how can we unlock our growth potential?

So we wandered, from Charlottetown to Moncton, then to Halifax and St. John’s. And in each stop we entreated workshop attendees to boldly go beyond traditional mechanisms of economic development to explore and embrace visions for the future that would flip the status-quo. The Wright brothers didn’t dream of building an aircraft; they dreamed of flight. When the world turned to their TVs back on July 20, 1969, it wasn’t so they could celebrate the engineering miracle of a NASA control room—it was to witness the wonder of seeing astronauts walk on the moon. What is our vision for Atlantic Canada? What do we want our society to become? And how can we effect that transformation?

The answers were a revelation. The 10 commandments delivered unto us by #thinkBIG2018 participants, in order of ascending priority, are as follows:

10. We shall not become an innovation economy until we have reliable high speed internet access throughout the land (including rural and remote areas like Lunenburg County and the province of P.E.I.).
9. We shall not continue to quietly accept governments that fail to represent their constituents—beware the consequences of a disenfranchised populace.
8. Remember that nothing changes without change (and that resistance is a self-fulfilling prophecy of futility).
7. Find ways to honour and expand a dwindling workforce; businesses can’t expand without labour.
6. We must work to merge our regional political influence for mutual economic gain.
5. We shall not truly embrace entrepreneurship so long as regulatory environments stifle initiative.
4. We must realign our education system to meet today’s workplace needs and technologies.

3. We must work harder to attract and retain immigrants.
2. We must celebrate our region’s success stories through enhanced marketing initiatives.
1. We must find ways to increase regional economic collaboration, similar to the success of the Atlantic Lottery Corporation and the Ocean Supercluster.

You’ll find more on this new testament of priorities in this issue’s #thinkBIG2018 editorial package. Drew Brown’s essay on the general loss of faith in elected officials—Mother can I trust the government?—offers some intriguing suggestions for reengaging the electorate. In AIPP: A Love Story, Stephanie Gough explores the triple threat of labour shortages, immigration and excess regulation. The Nova Scotia Community College’s Don Bureaux separates perception from reality with a compelling argument for the relevance of post-secondary offerings (see Room for Improvement on page 37). And, like a modern day magazine version of the loaves and the fishes, we deliver brain food for the masses via Gabby Peyton’s round-up of #thinkBIG2018 ideas.

One more thing: in case you missed the extensive use of personal pronouns throughout the above (you, we, our), it was deliberate. The most impressive, but rarely overtly stated, message from our #thinkBIG2018 initiative was the changing mindset of participants. Yes, there were those who continue to follow Atlantic Canada’s old testament style of thinking (expecting some generic “they” deity to save the day)—but the majority indicated they were no longer willing to depend on someone else for salvation.

With that in mind, I’ll close with this final thought of the day: the gods help those who help themselves. Atlantic Canada has the potential to be our promised land: what are YOU going to do about it?

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FEEDBACK

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