DOING BUSINESS NAKED

SPEECH FOR

DAWN GREY

Hello everyone and thank you all for giving me the opportunity to be here today. I want to thank \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ for inviting me to speak and share some ideas about the produce industry. For those of you who don’t know me, I am Dawn Gray and I have been in the fresh produce business for just about all of my professional career, and although I may not have been around when Adam and Eve had that very first incident with that now notorious apple, I think it’s safe to say that I’ve worked in just about every phase of this business, in all parts of the world, for a long, long time!! (**Wait for the laugh**). I guess it’s more than a coincidence that I should mention Adam and Eve, because today we’re going to discuss “doing business **naked**.” Calm down, don’t worry…. we’re still about **corn**, not **porn** (**Wait for the laugh**) and it’s way too cold for any of us to consider “**peeling,**” but it really is in the best interests of our industry’s growth, effectiveness and success to explore the meaning of doing business naked-or maintaining and supporting transparency in today’s global, conscious, and connected marketplace.

With only a few strokes of an omnipresent keyboard attached to either a computer or a Smartphone, anyone, almost anywhere can access the most detailed or obscure information or statistic. Simply Googling a colleague can lead to fascinating discoveries. A friend of mine found out a business associate was “voted off” a popular “survival” show in the fourth episode a few years back!! A simple search on our industry yields **79,800,000** hits, along with this bit of information: did you know that even as far back as 2011-yes, time and information move so quickly in this day and age that even **two years ago** seems like it was ages ago, the website for the Organic Trade Association informed us that “U.S. sales of organic food and beverages have grown from $1 billion in 1990 to $26 billion in 2010…. Experiencing the highest growth in sales during 2010 were organic fruits and vegetables, up 11.8% over 2009 sales.” Now I know that many of you are impressed by the statistic, but the point of my sharing that statement is to demonstrate that information, data and disclosure are literally a click away. We are living in an era of accessibility, an era of **transparency**. We use it to our advantage in our businesses as do our partners and colleagues, and the consumer has **really** gotten **savvy** as well as hungry for truth and enlightenment when it comes to the products they use and the food they eat.

Modern companies are using an expression, “**default to transparency**,” and although I will talk more in depth about this in a little while, it’s so important in our industry conversation, that I want to introduce the concept gently before we really get into it.

Let’s face it. Transparency, especially in business, means honesty, candor, and integrity exist, and it means there’s nothing to hide. A transparent business is a compliant business, one that respects colleagues, employers, employees, government agencies, and of course, the consumer. Whether you’re a grower, packer, or shipper, wholesaler or food service distributor, it’s time to explore what “getting naked” looks like and it it’s time to bring that transparency to our industry!! Let’s face it, the gig is up and there’s no place left to hide!!! Nor should we want to!!

I am sure all of you, at your particular levels of participation in the produce industry, do whatever is possible to avoid adversities and crises with regard to food safety, and as of today, to a point, we all do our best to be compliant, however, we are all faced with the threat of food borne illnesses terrorizing both the public and our livelihoods. In July of this year, a friend of mine got a simple salad at a very popular globally recognized food establishment…. hint-they sell a lot of coffee too. It seemed like a good choice at the time: a chicken Caesar salad on the “it girl” of greens, kale. What seemed at first like a tasty yet uneventful lunch turned into a nightmare several hours later as my friend experienced chills, fever, overwhelming nausea, stomach cramps…. and you can guess the rest. She wound up missing several important meetings at work, continued to run a fever for most of the week, and worst of all, has not had the stomach to set foot into that very, VERY popular food establishment since the incident. What might have been a seemingly careless gesture on the part of an employee at the preparation stage resulted in illness, loss of faith and the issue of questionable credibility with regard to the business and the way they handle their food. Was the kale properly cleaned? Were the handlers following all required procedure? Was there raw chicken around that might have tainted the uncooked ingredients? Was there transparency in every step of the process that brought the ingredients to the salad prep area and from the salad prep area to the customer and all steps in between? We don’t really know in this instance, but I have to say, both my friend and I think twice before buying prepared salads. We can eat one thousand prepared meals containing raw fruits and vegetables, but it only takes one incident to damage professional credibility and more importantly, our appetite.

In the early part of 2013, Popular Science presented an article entitled, “Majority of Foodborne Illnesses Caused by Green Vegetables.” The article goes on to tell us that the greatest number of illnesses concerning food discover leafy green vegetables at the source. Although I think the attendees at this conference would prefer the villains were raw cookie dough or undercooked meat or tainted shellfish, unfortunately the winner or **loser** is the leafy green vegetable. The article cites information from the Center for Disease Control and tells us that out of 9.6 million cases of food borne illnesses **reported** every year, contaminated plants cause 51%, and half of that finds its roots in those leafy green vegetables. And these numbers concern only the United States! Imagine the global economic impact the lack of clarity and accountability can cause. That’s the bad news. The good news is that food borne illness caused by vegetables will get you sick while contaminated chicken just might kill you!! (**Wait for the laugh**). It’s also been thought that many cases of food related illnesses go unreported. My friend just toughed it out and nothing was recorded, but when we think of the damage and loss that can result in almost 5 million cases of food poisoning annually, it’s staggering!! It’s time to really assess our practices and consider the benefits of sharing our processes and concerns with the intention that disclosure and exposure work to eradicate disease based on carelessness. With the costs of healthcare climbing and the need for people to work more and more, absences and illnesses resulting from lack of transparency at any level of the food chain has the potential to inflict serious financial damage to the consumer, the vendor and the industry.

I’m sure we remember the cantaloupe crisis of 2012, and although the cantaloupes involved in that incident were grown in North Carolina and southwestern Indiana, the website **Food Safety News** informs us that it was actually California, not in any way implicated in the incidents last year, that stepped forward and initiated procedures to insure more transparency and ultimately more safe practices reflected at the consumer level, for their melon crops. California is a major player in the melon market, shipping about ten million pounds a day. To the growers and consumers in that state, the local industry took a look at the situation and asked themselves to identify the food safety tips needed to insure healthy eating rather than risk the public’s abandonment of an important segment of the California produce business. The listeria outbreak of 2012 devastated the entire US produce industry last year, but the California growers were proactive. The article tells us that, “in an unprecedented move, the state’s cantaloupe growers gave a 100 percent thumbs-up to a mandatory plan that requires them to follow government food-safety standards. Going one step further, they also voted in favor of contributing check-off funds levied on their cantaloupes to pay for the cost of California Food and Agriculture Department and USDA inspection audits. All of that even though California has never had a foodborne illness outbreak linked to whole cantaloupes.” Food Safety News also goes on to quote Stephen Patricio, president and CEO of Westside Produce in California and Chairman of the California Cantaloupe Advisory Board, who went further and said, “…. our state is recognized for the food safety standards our growers are following.” He also encourages consumers to be educated about the produce they purchase and to actively learn as much as possible about their fruits and vegetables. He encourages people to read labels and to be informed about the source of their sustenance. Later on that winter, there was a conference in San Diego and many of the nation’s cantaloupe producers applauded the California initiative instituted to ward off further potential crises, and thus we see the power of transparency in action.

Various agencies and organizations throughout the produce industry are working diligently to offset and hopefully eradicate foodborne illnesses. Let’s face it, one man’s stomachache can be another’s professional undoing if damage and lost faith are taken too far. Organizations like the California Leafy Green Marketing Agreement focus on criteria to eliminate or at least fundamentally reduce the possible spread of foodborne illness at the source. The mission of the organization has been “to establish a model program created in 2007 to protect public health.” The formula is working. The organization demonstrates a proven collaboration between government and farming communities by incorporating science based food safety practices and mandatory government inspections, all in an effort to maintain the quality and level of respect for the product by the public. There are many phases of assessment and compliance required in order to qualify for this initiative and the one hundred members represent just about 99% of the fourteen categories of leafy green vegetables grown in California. The food safety practices adhered to by the organization have been developed by university and industry scientists, food safety experts and farmers, shippers and processors. The participants are regularly audited and the transparency and accountability shows in the quality of the product. From arugula to butter lettuce, chard to escarole, kale to cabbage, leafy green vegetables are one segment of the pride of quality vegetables produced **consciously** in California.

In this day and age, people are working harder. They’re working longer hours and they have less leisure time and less disposable income. Every penny earned is precious and in order to maximize value while exploring the most viable and affordable means of living a healthy and healthful lifestyle, they are paying more and more attention to what they eat. You heard the statistic demonstrating the growth in popularity of organic produce. That shows us that people really do care and the movement is catching on, but what we have to realize, as an industry, is that organic is not a fad or a panacea. It’s a philosophy-one that embraces a respect for the food as well as the process and global impact that consciousness on every level can inspire. It is no longer enough to just abandon pesticides in organic farming. The consumer wants to know that the organic food they purchase follows the best practices including conscious packaging, shipping, distribution, and labor. The consumer ultimately wants to know what’s going on with the food they eat, and that in turn creates a mandate for the grower, distributor, wholesaler, retailer and everyone involved: “Tell us what you’ve got, how you’ve grown it, shipped it, and sold it, and make sure everyone is accountable.”

Of course the technology and information revolution is not confined to “manifest destiny,” in fact, the mandate for transparency in all phases of the produce industry is a call to action that can be heard worldwide. And this call to action has inspired me to take a traditional phrase and give it a makeover of sorts, one that will modernize its message for the new millennium and beyond. We have all heard the phrase known as “Murphy’s Law.” It simply states, “Anything that can go wrong, will-at the worst possible moment.” Murphy discovered and identified that condition in the late 1940’s and although we have all been at the receiving end of its wisdom at one time or another, I am here to propose “Gray’s Corollary on Murphy’s Law” and that is: “Any detail that can be discovered will be requested,” or, “Give up and reveal.” (**Wait for the laugh**). Let’s also remember that someone is watching-whether you are aware of it or not. Be prepared for candor, accountability, and conversation. There’s nowhere to hide. Be proud of your product and its source and be prepared to share the process. Ultimately, transparency fosters partnership and an improved vendor client relationship and understanding at every level of the business.

At the 2013 Institute of Grocery Distribution Conference in London, it was revealed that research has clearly shown that there has been a significant increase in shoppers demanding more information and details about food origin. In an article in the Fresh Produce Journal, IGD CEO Joanne Denney-Finch asserted her belief that “The industry has never been under more scrutiny and that trust needs to be built.” She points out that “there needs to be a revolution in ‘trust and traceability’ and although it will take time, it can be the biggest opportunity of our generation.” She also cited that “Every day the world becomes more transparent: Wikileaks, Google Street View, instant reporting through social media and consumer blogs…” She goes on to say that whether we like it or not, the lid is lifting on everything. The article tells us that IGD research revealed that 56% of shoppers interviewed want to know more about the origins of the food they buy, and that percentage more than doubled over the past two years. Demand for transparency is gaining momentum. We have to be very candid about this. At this point in the revolution, the consumer will no longer prescribe to the adage “ignorance is bliss.” Although the tagline, “An educated consumer is our best customer” may have been coined by an off price clothing retailer, I think it’s clear that those are words to live by in our industry and it is our job to educate, inform and support the growth of our products, services and industry understanding and credibility.

South African venture capitalist Roelof Botha had this to say on the topic, “Social enables word of mouth at an unprecedented scale. Its most powerful effect, through reviews and recommendations, is to put product quality and value for money as the key to success in commerce. Social brings a level of transparency that prevents marketers from advertising their way to success without underlying product quality.”

As consumers, we expect the most “bang for our buck,” and if we don’t feel that we have received value for our hard earned dollar, we now have a very large and powerful community in which to share our comments and concerns. As people engaged in business, we also have the responsibility to conduct ourselves in a manner that will address circumstances in order to minimize negative commentary and adversarial conditions.

It’s no secret that with the technology revolution that is just beginning, all of us-industry professionals and consumers alike have unprecedented access to information as well as **the need to know**. There is no longer any reason to “hide,” nor is there an opportunity to do the same. Industry transparency has the potential to create a new community of understanding, appreciation and tolerance. In turn, new methods of doing business in this new “naked” society have the power to inspire, identify and nurture secondary and tertiary tiers of our businesses.

Whole Foods was featured recently in an article titled, “ Whole Foods’ New Product Ratings: Transparency Bears Fruit.” The article shows us how, once again, Whole Foods is at the vanguard of providing greater access to transparency to its colleagues and consumers for its produce and fresh flowers. The retail chain has instituted and announced a new comprehensive rating system for these two categories, similar to the animal welfare standards established for meat and the sustainability criteria set in place for seafood. This initiative is considered a major endorsement of the “good food movement” and Whole Foods shows their commitment to responsible production, down to the engagement of third party certification to insure accountability and quality. The store’s CEO and co-founder, John Mackey had this to say on the topic, “We are constantly evolving and looking at ways we can improve our communities and our planet, support our supplier partners, and help our customers make informed choices by providing them with deeper transparency. Implementing our new comprehensive produce ratings system is our latest effort to do just that.” And to further show that Whole Foods is at the vanguard of responsible retailing, as they realize that innovations may conspire to drive prices up creating issues for some less affluent consumers, they are also seeking out solutions. They are planning to open stores with more moderate pricing structures in low-income neighborhoods, such as in Detroit and the Englewood area in Chicago. How do they plan on doing that? I think all we would have to do is ask to find out!!! (**Wait for the laugh**). I think more to the point is not so much HOW they plan to open stores in economically challenged neighborhoods but THAT they plan to do it. I applaud their creativity and spirit and their commitment to provide healthy food alternatives to a broader consumer base while expanding their presence in different levels of the communities they serve.

The Whole Foods coding system for produce and flowers will be instituted and in use towards the end of 2014. They will use a “good, better best structure” and their list of ten aspects of production to be watched show us that to this conscious retailer, organic and sustainable means far more than pesticide free. The criteria that will be evaluated include pest management, farmworker welfare, soil health, waste, recycling, and packaging, energy and water conservation and protection, climate conditions, etc. As you hear of these innovations, think about how **your** businesses can be positively impacted and influenced by this movement.

The article about the new Whole Foods product ratings initiative goes beyond just promoting Whole Foods and their mission. We also hear from farmers like Jim Cochran of Swanton Berry Farm in California. He touts the practices at Whole Foods and acknowledges the impact they’ve had on the produce industry. He also applauds the thoroughness of the new standardization stating, “They go well beyond organic by quantifying every major issue of sustainability plus labor standards. Such a systemic approach, if implemented properly, will be a game changer for the produce industry. Yes, it will be a game changer for the industry.

Already we see that more and more players in the organic, sustainable, transparency ethos of our industry are claiming major market share. The article mentions Chipotle and they really have been a game changer. Up until the recent past, the phrase “healthy fast food” was an oxymoron, but Chipotle and others are working hard to upend that theory. The first glance at the home page on their website leads you to their page known as “Food With Integrity” and with one click, please pardon the expression, they “**spill the beans**.” (**Wait for the laugh**). On the FWI page, topics are broken down by “fact” categories and in plain sight, with an invitation to even share the data through social media channels, we can learn about:

* **SUSTAINABLE FARMING-** This method of farming uses techniques such as crop rotation, soil conservation, natural fertilization and polyculture planting. In livestock production, they use pasture-based systems, feed animals what their bodies are designed to digest, and treat their animals humanely. Sustainable farms produce foods that are tastier and more nutritious than foods produced on factory farms, while also preserving the long-term health of our environment.
* **TRANSPORTATION-** On average, lettuce will travel over 1500 miles to reach a US dinner table. When seasonally available, Chipotle sources local produce within 350 miles of each restaurant.
* **GIVING BACK**- Chipotle teams at each of our locations project the amount of food that they cook and serve each day so food does not go to waste. Leftover food from any of our nationwide restaurants can be donated to the Harvest Program to help eliminate hunger in the US.

Currently there are seven pages of Facts With Integrity on the Chipotle website and I would say that it’s a good bet that they are adding new facts and disclosures regularly. In addition to these facts, there is also a section acknowledging their disclosure of the California Transparency in Supply Chains Act of 2010, and they acknowledge their commitment to finding “better, more sustainable sources for all of the ingredients we serve.” Chipotle is committed to transforming the practices and reputation of the fast food industry and they are doing it one burrito at a time.

Thanks to Chipotle’s commitment to environmentally conscious, tasty, and nourishing food, other companies have also been recognized for the considerable impressions and impact they’ve made on the industry. Prêt a Manger started as a little sandwich shop in Hampstead in north London. Their philosophy is “Here today, gone today,” and obviously their popularity has caught on. They believe in serving good healthy food, all of which is prepared on premises and made throughout the day. They avoid using ingredients with preservatives or those made with obscure chemicals and concurrently with the “Here today, gone today” philosophy, they have partnered with organizations and food banks in the cities they serve. Along with transparency, they give back. They give to City Harvest in New York, Thrive, DC in Washington, and the Greater Chicago Food Depository, to name a few. What started as a small sandwich shop with limited presence in London, Hong Kong and New York, has grown up and into a real player in the sustainable and transparent food service industry in major cities of the United States and the world. Currently there are almost forty Prêt a Manger stores in the New York area providing healthful options to consumers, and that number is growing. On a recent visit to New York, it seemed like Prêt stores were almost as ubiquitous as pizza places used to be!

There are many ways and means to doing business naked in this industry. We’re all really fortunate to be involved in a variety of aspects of a business that is ultimately an essential part of life. In many ways we have a captive audience, but that audience also has choices. We all have to eat to live, but no one has to ingest your product in particular. No one is omniscient and neither is any one company. There are ways of conducting business and then there are ways to conduct business that are inclusive, fun and informative. The technology revolution also provides us with new ways of informing the public and supporting our industry. The future is now. Innovation has arrived. New forms of information technology are here, so why not use them to share your message?

Some of the methods of communication can be considered quite mind-boggling. In particular, I’d like to discus QR, Quick Response, and its cousin, Augmented Reality. QR codes have gained in popularity over the past couple of years when printed on packaging and wrappers for produce, but recently, I’ve learned of this method taken one step further in the fresh fish industry. When a QR code is on a food package in a store, it invites the customer to scan an image and instantly

learn more about the product, providing “first person” transparency. That information can be anything, from grower-specific information to recipes, ideas and facts about the selected product. We have recently discovered, thanks to an article in Guardian Sustainable Business, that enterprising restaurant owners have begun to include edible QR codes on their food, making it easier… and more fun than ever, for consumers to “learn while they dine.” There is a woman named Caroline Bennett who founded sushi restaurants called Moshi Moshi. In honor of serving the 10,000th Marine Stewardship Council’s certified seafood dish, Moshi Moshi brought technology and taste to the lucky diner. The QR code was printed on edible seaweed and rice paper using squid ink and when served to the diner, all he or she had to do was scan the code to learn all about the sourcing and sustainability of the fish used in that landmark dish. To me, technology of this caliber and participation at this level offer an unprecedented opportunity to all of us in every aspect of our industry!! Talk about thinking outside the bun!!! Imagine using Quick Response codes with YOUR products!! Think of the stories you might tell!

As I said, the kissing cousin of QR is Augmented Reality. Working in much the same way as QR, the legend of the Emperor’s New Clothes as translated to the produce industry has a chance to be told as never before. The emperor was convinced he was wearing the most beautiful suit of clothing when really there was nothing, and thanks to modern technology, we can now scan virtually

nothing and see a whole new reality take place in what can almost be described as a parallel plane. We’ve been talking about doing business naked, and these techniques let us look at our products with “new eyes” while offering opportunities to share information in innovative and exciting **interactive** ways. Where ordinarily we may view our fruits and vegetables just as they are in reality, in an augmented state, we have the opportunity to see beyond the real. We now can focus on the details and information that in the past we thought did not exist. With a simple app on a Smartphone, consumers can scan a label and enter the in depth world of your product. It’s truly a “Through the Looking Glass” experience. There are apps like Blippar that scan a simple Heinz Ketchup label and right in front of our eyes, recipes appear!! QR and Augmented reality bring products to life…just download the most recent Ikea catalogue and you’ll see what I mean!! Scan or click on the plus sign on certain pages and find new ways to arrange furniture, follow the steps to making a sofa, place a new piece of furniture in YOUR living room, get a 3-D panorama of a setting in the catalogue, or most importantly, learn of the good work that the Ikea Foundation is doing by developing and providing housing based on the Ikea “knock down furniture” principle for displaced refugees in the neediest parts of the world. How would augmented reality support the transparency and authenticity of YOUR brand? What is the message you want to convey about the efforts and steps YOU take to produce and market a quality conscious product? How would you envision employing this technology to support and grow YOUR brand identity and connections throughout the industry? What’s under that peel that you want to reveal? You now have the wherewithal to explore new methods of informing your colleagues and public.

There are young mavericks out there in new areas of business that are really challenging the status quo of more traditionally organized enterprise. These people have come of age in this era of innovation and to many of us, they don’t exist yet. To their contemporaries they may already be a force, so it’s up to each one of us to do the research and discover what’s happening in the present that will ultimately affect us in the future. With regard to transparency in business, there is one person that takes nakedness to new levels. His name is Leo Widrich and for his business and his life, transparency is his most apparent fundamental operating principle. It was Leo to whom I was referring in the beginning of my talk with you. It is from Leo that I first heard the term, “default to transparency,” and so let’s now take a look at who he is, what he does, how he promotes his philosophy, and how that will have an effect on you and me in our businesses-whether we like it or not. Leo is a cofounder and COO at Buffer, a company that promotes a smarter way of sharing information on social media streams. Some may think that Buffer’s philosophy might be a bit Utopian in this day and age, but hey, Leo and his partners are young, they probably haven’t been burnt by any industry drama…YET, and let’s face it, their philosophy just might work. Some of the tenets in their arsenal of corporate values are:

* **Always choose positivity and happiness** – I know…seems kind of naïve to me too!!! Their mission goes on to clarify, “you never criticize or condemn team members or users,” “you never complain,” “you are deliberate about giving genuine appreciation.”
* **Be a “no-ego” Doer-** “You don’t attach yourself to personal ideas,” “you are humble,” ‘You approach new ideas thinking, ‘what can we do right now?’”
* **First listen, then listen more-** “You seek first to understand, then to be understood,” “you focus on listening, then responding,” “you are suggestive rather than responsive.”
* **Have a focus on self Improvement**
* **Live smarter, not harder.**
* And of course**, Default to Transparency,** which is detailed further like this:
	+ You take pride in opportunities to share our beliefs, failures, strengths and decisions
	+ You use transparency as a tool to help others.
	+ You always state your thoughts immediately and with honesty
	+ You share early in the decision process to avoid “big revelations.”

There are other points in the mission statement, but I think the message is clear for these. Leo is a young man who, with his teammates, is inventing the business structure within which he wants to operate and he has the nerve to be honest, open and idealistic, and it just might work. I also think that it may be an extreme case of idealism, but it’s one we can learn from and if we take only one thing from his commitment to openness, we’re one step closer to achieving that transparency in our businesses and ultimately the industry. By the way, Leo and his Buffer team are also committed to the quality of life for all team members. In an article written by Leo in Fast Company entitled “Why Transparency is your Biggest Untapped Competitive Advantage,” he goes on to explain further that he credits “default to transparency” as one of the leading catalysts that took his company’s bottom line from $0 to over $1 million in about two years. Leo says he read a quote by a man named Marc Effron, president of the Talent Strategy Group, and this quote, actually a question, transformed the way in which Leo views corporate transparency. Here’s the question. **“How long do you feel it’s appropriate to lie to your employees about their future?”** That’s fairly confronting, isn’t it?Leo goes on to explain that the mission of transparency began with improving themselves and then supporting their employees to be the best that they could be. They do what they can to support their employees, and the number has doubled since the beginning of the year. The Buffer culture believes it’s more important to take care of oneself than to squeeze in an extra hour of work. You can see by the mission statement that everyone is respected and expected to be respectful, and of course they believe in treating their employees well. Transparency at Buffer is a work in progress from salaries to corporate liquidity to health and well-being. Can you imagine the upside to companies if this business model really works? I think it’s a noble idea and worth a try and it’s certainly worth a little bit of provoked thought. What steps would you dare to take to bring more transparency to any and every level of your organization? Let’s face it. It’s not the meek that will inherit the earth, it is the young, and from the looks of things, they’re ready to turn the business world on its ear!!

The article in Fast Company also sites the work environment at Google. In illustrating the theory that transparency drives us to be better, he discusses his passion to create a company that is both great and good and uses Google as an example. Most of us only know Google as the site to give us any information we want or need at any time no matter what, but few of us get a glimpse inside the corporate culture. The article states that, “Google’s mantra is “Don’t be evil.” Their mantra combined with their dedication to corporate transparency propelled an otherwise unknown entity into a marketing force that is now a global brand larger than Coca Cola. Google is also regarded as one of the best places to work-anywhere.

The technological and corporate mavericks of our time and tomorrow are building off the shoulders and foundations of those who preceded them. The young upstarts at the start-ups are the ones to watch, and believe me, the more I hear

about what these people are dreaming up, the more astounded I am. I’ve given you a few examples of the new thinking and implementation that is on the vanguard of the next waves of innovation in business and communication, and from what I see, all signs point to revelation-and by that I mean a **revealing** of information, process and resources in order to create new and stronger relationships throughout our businesses and industry. It is our responsibility to do our research and observe and chronicle what is going on and then really think of how to use these amazing apps, innovations, and procedures to our advantage in our own industry. Although each one of us exhibits a determined focus on the missions we’ve created for ourselves, it is urgent for the survival and healthy sustenance of our industry to be aware of, and tap into, these new connections and technologies. Remember: **ADAPT OR DIE**. As far as I am concerned, the latter will come soon enough, so I personally want to do my best to honor the former. Adaptation acknowledges resilience, sustainability, and a true commitment to remaining relevant in a world that is morphing at warp speed. We have to find the balance between honoring tradition while accepting innovation, and I truly believe there is a way for each of us to adapt in order to survive in this world. Each one of you is honored and respected for the knowledge and industry expertise you bring to the table, and now is the time to take that knowledge, your integrity, your pride in your business, and your considerable experience, and fine tune all that you’ve got to enter the conversation of a new age.

In conclusion, I want to leave you with some additional points to consider. As I said in my introduction, I have been a professional in this business for many years. I have been blessed with having opportunities in various sectors of the produce industry and I’ve had the privilege of working in several different markets around the world. From \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ in New Zealand to my tenure at \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ in England and then \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ in South Africa, and on to various assignments across the United States, I have been honored to work with fascinating people all over the world, including all of **you**. I’ve learned the language and the nuances of working in many aspects of this business and each one has taught me, and continues to teach me and reveal to me the most interesting facts and phases of this vital trade. You may have heard the expression, “I am part of all that I have met,” and to me that has been the real gift of my career. I am always humbled and thankful to have the opportunity to meet and speak to groups like this one today, and it really has been a pleasure and a privilege to initiate and explore the conversation of transparency in our business. I appreciate that to several of you, some of the information I discussed today might seem “a little out there,” but remember that the beauty of a conversation is that it is not a monologue. We are all in this together, and as we communicate together, we learn the way to embrace the future, decipher what it holds and what it might mean to each one of us and the businesses and principles we support. I’m sure many of us may have kicked and screamed at the onset of change decades ago or years ago, but here we are, facing new challenges and opportunities every day. It’s essential to maintain an open mind and a healthy curiosity as we explore our part in the future marketplace. These are very exciting times and, as with anything in life, nothing stagnates. The world keeps moving and so does progress. I invite you to think about our session today and see if you have any thoughts or questions that you might want to discuss. Partnership used to explore new territory is not only wise, it’s encouraged, and of course it’s also an essential element in true transparency.

Business consultant John Gerzema recently said, “Transparency, honesty, kindness and good stewardship, even humor, work in business at all times.” On that note, I say thank you for allowing us to get “a little naked together,” and may we see **more** of each other in the future!! (**Wait for the laugh**)