



Tell Your Story Newsletter (TYSN):

Specializing in Entrepreneurial and Organizational Storytelling

Let me tell your story!

Welcome Mid-March, 2019!

After enduring about 10 winters in one, this past season (thank you, "polar vortex"), Saskatchewanians have been unbelievably relieved to get outdoors and walk again!

I hope that this third month of our new year has begun well for you and that you, too, find some time to enjoy our more moderate (read: warm!) weather.

In this month's issue, I explore the painful reality that Saskatchewan's business climate is lagging, a topic recently discussed by three small business leaders on Lenore Swystun's wonderful and eclectic community radio show, "Civically Speaking."

In Storytellers' Corner, I offer a "Tip of the Month"--a resource that can help anyone, and certainly writers, deal with insomnia.

March is typically a month that transitions from bitter wintry winds to the sunshine and promise of early spring.

May the lengthening of the days and your hopes for the coming months of 2019 bring you renewed health, personal growth and prosperity, valued readers.

Sincerely,
Elizabeth

Principal
Storytelling Communications

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Article One: Why is Saskatchewan's Business Climate Lagging? We'll Only Grow if We Grow Small Business, Leaders Say (an excerpt from my special report on the Feb. 19th podcast of "Civically Speaking")

On the February 19th, 2019 episode of Lenore Swystun's highly thoughtful and eclectic public radio program, "Civically Speaking" ([CFCR 90.5 FM](#)), entrepreneurial leaders Monica Kreuger (founder of Global Infobrokers and CVO of the Praxis School of Entrepreneurship), Sara Wheelwright (Founder and Owner of S&E Trusted Online Directories, and Trusted Marketing Services) and Mark Zielke (Team Lead of StartFreshMedia.com, President of KwickAutoRepair.ca and People's Advocate) participated in a "[state of the union](#)" style discussion on the shape of small business in Saskatchewan. Here are some highlights.

Since 1990, Monica Kreuger and her team's Praxis School of Entrepreneurship has trained about 900 new and diverse entrepreneurs. (Full disclosure: I will complete the program next month.) But it has not seen a change in the types of small businesses that entrepreneurs offer. Instead, as Kreuger stated at the outset, the changes that have occurred during the past five to 10 years among proteges of the program have been due to gender and cultural diversity: Praxis has seen increasing participation from women, Indigenous people and from international newcomers or new immigrants. These are all good developments.

Kreuger, Wheelwright and Zielke agreed, furthermore, that there are always challenges to stay in business and to keep a business growing—we have to keep innovating and reinvent, or we won't be able to keep operating our businesses. Entrepreneurs must be nimble.

Mark Zielke sees and hears little optimism among small business owners whom he meets in the province. He cites that one property developer in construction in the city has laid off half his staff in the past six to 8 months. Zielke asserts that "the status quo isn't working and . . . there are a lot of businesses that aren't able to adapt."

"This is the new norm, he says. It's not going to pass. "What are you going to do to adapt and to break in and get people into your [small] business?" People on the street whom Zielke talks with are equally worried.

Kreuger agrees that present economic challenges are the "new norm," but that to adapt, we need to look at "new business models. What we're looking and seeing now and stats show it that . . . there is continuing growth in small businesses and entrepreneurship, but in certain age categories" such as "the 55-64 year range [who are] stepping out of traditional business . . . taking their expertise and starting their own companies. But where I see us having to reinvent how we operate as businesses is starting to collaborate in smaller groups—how do we help each other succeed?"

Praxis' entrepreneurial training schools do this. Sara Wheelwright's intensive marketing services do this and Lenore's consulting and broadcasting work do this. Zielke similarly converses regularly with small business owners to hear their fears and hopes. How do we come together, to "lift each other up," and "collaborate, cross-market," Kreuger asks? This is about more than just keeping one's business going. "It's about helping each other to grow," more broadly, she says.

These are questions with deep implications for our province's communities, as a whole.

What do the community and our governments need to do to be visible and to encourage innovation? What climate do we need to build, to support small business?

Wheelwright says that Saskatoon's municipal government does not currently support small business. The City is not visible (whereas not-for-profit supports like WESK, the Saskatoon Chamber and the NSBA are). The downtown is not vibrant during daylight hours. Many storefronts have closed: The City needs to become involved. Downtown vibrancy will drive business growth, she says. How can we afford to build new bridges and host new festivals unless there's a vibrant downtown to support it all?

Zielke observes that business cannot be a silo, but should draw others to participate in it. Entrepreneurs are risking their mortgages, inheritances and many investments. He cites the recent report of the Saskatoon and Area Homebuilders' Association as showing that less than half the number of annual building permits is being requested for Saskatoon. He says it's a "litmus test" for what's going on in Saskatoon's economy.

Kreuger says that the "lens has not been placed" properly "by all [three] levels of government" on "the small business and entrepreneur." There are plenty of policies and procedures and focus on support medium- to large-sized businesses, which are necessary. But she challenges governments to look at small businesses. When (according to the Canadian Federation of Independent Business) "87% of our businesses in Saskatchewan have fewer than five employees, including the solopreneurs, . . . we need a lens at the local, provincial and federal level[s], where we can address policies, from the perspective of the small business . . . Because we're small, we don't have a lot of time to go through all of the various procedures that larger companies have. And to do one policy to fit all . . . doesn't work."

On how to think about small biz policy, Wheelwright says the City and Province need to "cut the red tape," so that small business owners can find the time to sit on boards and engage actively in the community—something almost none of them currently has the time to do.

Small business owners are the hardest working members of our community, the speakers agreed. We wear many hats, including developer, researcher, sales and marketer, service provider, communicator, bookkeeper and more. . . . We have little time to do deep dives into government policy or to lobby various levels of government to make much needed changes in policy. So small businesses struggle and, in some cases, flounder.

Wheelwright says that [business] internships, for one, should provide “hands-on” business experience, allowing small business owners to acquire “massive skills and experience” that they can use, as they build their businesses.

Small businesses underpin our community, but lack the “tons of resources” that large companies garner, to do all of the wonderful things that get celebrated in the media.

Kreuger cites as an example the Federal Government’s Temporary Foreign Worker Program (TFWP), as a rare program to focus its lens focused on small business. The TFWP allows companies with less than 10 employees to find policy that optimizes their use of the program. If that small business-friendly lens “was focused on every business policy out there, we would see much more engagement by [the] small business and entrepreneur[ial] community,” and we’d simultaneously be much more seen by the community. Community would see “we are a part of them.”

“Without a healthy and vibrant business community,” Kreuger says, “we have no community at all.”

She cites the example of a small town’s grocery store: When it closes, the community dies. That’s a business we need. Two or three people (or more) who lose their jobs, when a small business closes, add enormous burden to the community.

And at the end of the day in SK, “most businesses [87%] are small.”

Each small biz contributes “\$165K /year to the province’s GDP. If we help small businesses to grow one or two people more . . . [with lens on policy] we will make a huge difference on the GDP.”

Municipal, Provincial and Federal Governments need to move their “lens” to see and include small businesses in their policies. A “one size fits all” has dominated in SK through the 20th and 21st centuries, but simply “does not work,” Kreuger says. We are missing out on great opportunities for community enrichment and financial growth and development. For instance, innovative internships, collaborative working models (starting, for instance, with Saskatoon Makerspace) could offer vibrant growth.

It can be tough to acquire these skills of collaboration, she observes. But it’s very necessary. “What can we do together as a group?” It’s easier for young entrepreneurs, who are working in incubators and start-up groups, already. But we need more than that and we are not all tech start-ups.

“. . . [W]e should ask what entrepreneurial models and policies are best for the city and for businesses to grow and scale?” Kreuger argues that we need to be clearer at the civic level about the management of small businesses.

For instance, one way to measure the undue burden on small businesses is property taxes. The media tends to discuss these as if there's a competition between business and personal sectors.

She summarizes that when small businesses rent space from property owners, the cost of the taxes gets filtered into rent, making business unaffordable to the entrepreneur/small business owner, who then reverts to "home-based operations and reverse growth."

The statistic Kreuger cites that "87%" of SK businesses are small, means that there are 150 K such bizzes in the province, as a whole. We fuel SK's economy. The small business owner "is in SK forever. We stay and grow. That is not the case with large employers, who are not always here," Kreuger says.

For instance, consider the large potash industry giant, Nutrien, who recently announced that it was bringing two of its executives back to Saskatoon from their head office in Calgary. Kreuger laments that we continue to give incentives to large businesses to do such things, but seldom (if ever) to small ones, when it's the latter which will *always* stay and grow. A 50% increase in growth is quickly achieved by and achievable for a small enterprise.

While the Provincial and Federal Governments must contribute, "Civically Speaking's bold "state of the union" style discussion on small business (ably moderated by Swystun) offered that such civic services as better snow removal, subsidized/free parking passes for the downtown core and other, small business incentives would alone boost community life.

The time is past due for the City of Saskatoon's Government—and its Provincial and Federal counterparts—to *listen*: For the future of our city and our province, we must *act* to raise the profile and pride of the local small businesses on which we are based.

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STORYTELLER's CORNER



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Tip of the Month: The "Waking Up" Meditation App

An informal poll taken recently of freelance writers and entrepreneurs exposed a sorry truth: Many of us are beset by at least occasional insomnia and disruptions to the length or quality of our sleep.

Some, like me, have found that the usual practices of ending screen time (TV, computers, smartphones and other portable devices) at least two hours before bedtime; taking warm baths with Epsom salts; drinking warm milk or sedating herbal tea; and even trying prescribed sleeping pills (Zopiclone, anyone?) fail to help.

Sometimes an over-stimulating day or evening can leave me reclining and rising; tossing and turning, for hours.

Such sleeplessness reduces our capacity to be productive at work and to cope with the daily stresses of family, career, health and so on.

My friend, freelance journalist and CBC producer, Ashleigh Mattern, recently recommended a smartphone meditation app that has already helped me to relax each night and so sleep better. At <https://wakingup.com/> American Sam Harris—neuroscientist, philosopher and bestselling writer—features a daily meditation program suitable for “beginners and experienced meditators alike.”

As his website says, ” ‘Waking Up’ guides you through a 50-day introductory course, teaching a progressive series of meditation techniques, before unlocking access to an ongoing series of daily meditations,” all of which are created and led by Sam Harris. Harris has practiced meditation for more than 30 years, studying with Tibetan, Indian, Burmese and Western teachers of the craft, both in the US and overseas.

Unlike other apps that I have tried, “Waking Up” does more than soothe a troubled mind in each moment, but stresses what discoveries and realities we can learn about the ways our minds function. Pain, stress and loss are among the emotional experiences explored and released through meditation.

And, remarkably, free access to the course for the first year is offered to those on low incomes, who wish to subscribe.

Harris has written five bestselling books and given public lectures on neuroscience, meditation, philosophy and religion and focuses on, in his words, “how a growing understanding of ourselves and the world is changing our sense of how we should live.”

Accolades have poured in. Business guru Tim Ferriss praises the program, saying, “Whether you want to sharpen your mind or experience more peace, this can help in dramatic fashion. The power of its progression is hard to overstate.”

And Harris' soothing tone lends his voice a power to restore and relax. Visit the above website for more information.

And let me know on my "[contact](#)" page if "Waking Up" restores your powers of sleeping and waking, as it has mine!

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SHOP NEWS:



Special thanks in this month's issue to Danielle Potter (Quint Development) and Ebonie Becker (Northern SK Independent Living Centre) for reviewing HR-Style resumes with me. Both women demonstrated what we all know--the importance of customizing resumes for individual job postings. They also shared tips on how to keep the resume real and effective, for today's job seekers.

Renewed thanks to friend and colleague Ashleigh Mattern for recommending apps and other online tools that continue to enhance my life as a freelancer. Thank you, Ashleigh, and congratulations on your recent success in writing for the CBC in Yellowknife!

Since I made the leap last July to join Praxis' entrepreneurial training program (startSMART), I've been reading, writing and strategizing about how to provide communications and marketing services that best serve you and my other prospects.

While developing services to write HR-style resumes and companies' legacy stories, I have also returned to teaching business communication seminars on blogging and media release preparation, within the startSMART program. Thank you to Praxis Founder and Chief Visionary Officer Monica Kreuger for once again extending to me this opportunity.

And special thanks to Vishakha Thakore-Rai and local staff at Globe Property Management who have worked very hard to keep the building where I live and work a good and positive space. Although the needs of my home office require me to relocate this spring, I appreciate the efforts of these folk to keep life livable.

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ABOUT US:

Between 2011 and December 2018, Elizabeth Shih Communications chronicled the stories of B2B marketing and communications on the Prairies and across the country.

Effective January 1, 2019, I rebranded as "Storytelling Communications." I now help Canadian newcomers land their first or better jobs; I assist SMEs in closing more sales by communicating more effectively; and I write the legacy stories of major companies.

Interested in learning more? Please contact me through my CASL-compliant website (www.elizabethshih.com).

After I receive your message, I'll be pleased to discuss projects with you!

Please visit my website for more information (www.storytellingcommunications.ca).