

GOODBYE TO ALL THAT

A wire rope is a piece of industrial equipment that supports a load under tension, such as a load being lifted by a crane. A wire rope is composed of a number of strands of steel wire woven together to form the rope. The number of individual strands in a rope and their size will vary depending on the maximum rated load of the rope under tension plus a safety factor. Wire ropes fail, and the trick is to conduct regular examinations and to remember never to have any part of your body near the rope when it fails. Failure of the rope commences when a single wire fails due a number of reason including corrosion or poor manufacturing or physical damage. When the first wire fails it places additional load on the other wires and eventually the next weakest wire will fail and so on. Eventually, in the absence of proper maintenance, the whole rope will fail, usually catastrophically. There is nothing that can be done to stop the deterioration and eventual failure: there is no silver bullet.

The strength of an individual and ultimately a society is like a wire rope. Both are the product of a number of strands that make up the whole: for example, education. Unlike the wire rope, the strands that form an individual and a society have complex relationships whereby the failure of one strand can affect multiple strands causing increasing stress on the overall strength of the individual and the society.

In Australia we are living at a time where almost all the strands that are critical to the strength of the individual and consequently our society are partially or wholly broken and it appears this situation is only likely to progress and intensify. Let me identify some of these strands: I am sure that readers can readily add their own. Two points: one, other than then first two strands identified there is no order of priority; two, I do not intend to be exhaustive for each strand, simply to introduce some examples. Additional proof statements are easily found in the daily media.

Discipline: It is difficult to settle on discipline or respect as the most fundamental strand. I choose discipline as respect, to a large extent, is not inherent and has to be taught and that takes discipline. Today, discipline appears to be absent or marginal in many areas: the schoolroom, the home, public behaviour, our parliament, to name a few.

Respect: Respect seems to be regarded as one of yesterday's virtues as we see in almost all areas of public and private life: customer service, attitude to the elderly, simple gestures such as opening a door, road rage, to name a few.

Education: Where does one start? In no order: lack of emphasis on the three Rs; the inclusion in the syllabus of lifestyle matters, not the least being gender studies that are the province of the home; no inspectors; no teachers colleges; assessment rather than exams; low admission marks for university (including education!); universities driven by revenue not academic excellence; consequently a lack of quality in both university and technical graduates; money seen as the answer.

Law and order: Where are the policeman on the beat and the patrolman on the highway? Police visibility, a primary requirement, appears to have disappeared in place of station paperwork. Consequently we witness the following: disdain for the police; disdain for the courts; daily stabbings, shootings, rapes, home invasions, one punch attacks; random terror attacks; one could go on.

Sport and leisure: Today the only place to witness a backyard game of cricket is on a TV commercial, there are no more pickup games down at the park or a meaningful Test Match every four years. Today everything in sport is overlaid with money, gambling, razzmatazz, and success at all costs. Sport is pervasive: it has become one of the new religions. Sporting personalities who are held up as role models are too often brought down by drugs, dope, sex and dubious conduct and, don't mention the tattoos.

Health: This *is* a serious problem. There's no point in quoting statistics, they are all bad: obesity, heart problems, blood pressure, cancers, diabetes; mental health, STDs, and so on. And driving the statistics is the lack of will by the individual to take ownership of their health. This is intensified by a lifestyle acceptance of fast food, drink, drugs, snatched meals and generally poor diet.

Procreation: In the sixties the pill was the first unnatural technique in the procreation game. From there we have moved at an exponential rate through IVF, surrogacy, donor sperm, internet sperm, multiple donors, and cryogenic storage to name a few current procedures. In addition women are conceiving well past the recommended age. I know all of these aspects can be wonderful in certain individual circumstances but, simply because something can be done

does not mean there will not be consequences: there simply has not been sufficient experience to predict long-term outcomes.

(*'From Bullying to Genetics'*)

Family: What has happened to the family, that bastion of society and the nation: mother, father, and children? Well they are still there but increasingly under severe stress. Parents are often there in name only. As a psychiatrist friend said to me the other day when discussing a child with problems and I asked about the parents, "The parents? Absent." They were 'there', but the pressures of work and life in general are sapping the strength and capacity of the nuclear family to function effectively and the children are suffering. AVOs are a way of life and domestic violence appears endemic.

Morality and spirituality: Australia never was a Christian nation. However, seventy years ago Australia sat under a Christian umbrella: the Ten Commandments, 'do unto others as you would have them do to you', self-sacrifice for others, and the manners, morals and graces that flow from these principals. God was in his heaven and all was right with the world. Since then we have folded the umbrella and put it away: we worship at the idols hedonism and materialism, of sport and leisure. It shows in our social behaviour. It is a significant shift as Christian thought can be instructive in appreciating and understanding many things including the beauty in a sunrise, literature, music, art, an attitude, a thought. But do we find the time and have the mind to appreciate these today? In a recent insightful article (*'The Death Throes of Common Decency'*) Peter Smith highlighted the sad results of this shift.

Digital Technology: Forty years ago this strand would not have been present but, as it has become so pervasive today, it cannot be ignored. We have created a genie that is out of the bottle and we have lost control. Yes, the use of digital technology can and is doing much good but with it come other consequences: pornography on a massive scale; lack of personal relationships; bullying; identity theft; mental stress; personal worth and employment; medical consequences such as myopia and physical injury.

At the outset I mentioned that the strands noted above could be thought of as strands in a wire rope the only difference being, that when the strands in the wire rope fail they do so sequentially. With the strands that make up an individual and society the failure, or partial failure, of one strand can have a ripple effect across many others: for example, a lack of discipline will have a

negative impact on all the other strands. What are the consequences of the breakdown of the above and other strands? I suggest the following are some: lack of common sense; inability to plan effectively; moral decay; inability to make decisions; poor systems thinking; weak leadership.

The eventual outcome of these deficiencies will of course be long-term but I suggest we are witnessing some of the early results today. For example consider the performance of the successive federal governments over the past ten years: the NBN fiasco; the inappropriate response to the GFC; the inability to make spending cuts; NDIS funding; money as the solution to education failure; expense rorts; the citizenship fiasco; lack of leadership and capitulation over the SSM issue; lack of interest in gender and safe-school issues; the \$50B submarines in 50 years; leadership skulduggery; the power crisis; gender reassignment in the defence force; add your own.

Can this deterioration be reversed? I doubt it. Those who are being affected by these changes were born later than the 1960's. And, those who have the capability to implement the necessary changes are 60 plus and are either dead, are ignored or have run out of puff. Essentially, we are witnessing the deterioration of the capacity of the nation to cope with the increasingly complex world we are creating. Where will this end? In tears, I'm afraid. Is there a single bullet? Like the wire rope, I don't think so.

In truth there *is* a silver bullet, but I fear that a belief in our own self-sufficiency and fascination with our own brilliance will prevent us going there.

Safety note: If you have to cross over a wire rope under tension, step *on* the rope not over it. That way you will be injured rather than gutted.