



## **Stand By for 09'** **by Aaron Crowley**

Do you remember that scene from *Stand By Me*, where the four friends find themselves confronted with the reality that, to complete their journey, they have to cross the train trestle?

If you do, you'll remember that they muster the courage to venture out onto the suspended railroad ties in the thin air above the ravine, only to get halfway across when they hear the whistle of a steam engine.

As the main character screams, "Train!!!" the camera violently pans to the beastly black locomotive careening around the bend towards the bridge where they're trapped. There's no time to turn back so they run for their lives hoping to make it to the safety of the other side before the train runs them over. At the last possible second... they jump to the embankment and safety. Classic!

In a way, I feel a special kinship to that now famous foursome, having just survived 2008, the most difficult year in memory. But as much as I'd like to believe we've just jumped clear of the train, I know deep down that here, in January 2009, we are only halfway across the trestle.

While the safety of the other side is probably another 12 months away and the train is still gathering momentum, there is a silver lining to the circumstances we find ourselves in.

As the realignment between the current demand for granite counters and the existing over supply continues, the competition is increasing and margins are shrinking. While a shock to the system, these difficulties present us with an opportunity to improve as managers as it forces us to do business in a climate that businesses in mature industries experience every day.

Industries like high tech manufacturing have had to get lean or die, because of the fierce overseas competition. The grocery business operates on 1.5% to 3% margins and only the masterfully managed survive. This recession is moving our industry and everyone involved in it towards greater maturity.

This recession will force us as individual business owners to learn the hard lessons we would never learn voluntarily because our human nature seeks desperately for the path of least resistance.

This recession will teach us lessons that can't be learned from a text book (or an article for that matter). This recession will provide us the wisdom that can only be acquired through the trials experienced while completing the journey.

In the trailer to the movie mentioned above, the narrator opens with the line, "In all our lives, there is a fall from innocence. A time after which, we are never the same."

The innocence of operating a business in a bubble is falling away. The way we run our businesses will never be the same as we complete the journey from naiveté to knowledge.

As we face this New Year, let us embrace, instead of resent, the difficulties we've experienced and those still yet to come.