

The Best of Times, the Worst of Times

by Phil Phillips, PhD
 Contributing Editor
 phillips@chemarkconsulting.net

“It was the best of times, it was the worst of times...” And so begins Charles Dickens’ *A Tale of Two Cities*, with a contradictory statement about life during the French Revolution that applies today with even greater force.

As individuals residing in the U.S. we are witness to the strife of wars and upheavals around the world through modern day electronic communications, but we are not normally impacted by them directly. We’re insulated and live fairly comfortably. Yes, we have isolated instances but after they are behind us we have an uncanny ability to push the horror of events such as 9/11 to the sidelines and go on with our lives relatively unafraid and with an uplifted built-in positive attitude and hope.

We live in the best-of-times commercially since never before in history have we had a truly global economy. This tends to compel us to be more cautious before knee-jerk reacting with force to settle a dispute or to conquer a people or a land. This evolving commercial interdependence is moving us ever so slowly as a body of people globally toward greater peace as a result of this interdependence.

Yes, we have problems. Some would say these are the worst-of-times. We have ten percent of the U.S. population living in poverty; globally, we have 35 percent; we have wars in the Middle East that are disproportionately draining the U.S. Treasury; we have terrorists that have been nurtured by their leaders to destroy those that have a good life and have income producing jobs; we have countries that are leveraging their economic position by practicing violations of human rights and stealing intellectual property of other countries; we have a potential double dip recession in the industrialized countries; and since World War II the gap between rich countries and poor countries has grown rapidly.

I’m not suggesting international commerce by itself is the answer to experiencing the best-

of-times globally, but when the various world economic platelets finally become one, causing, or forcing, us all to breath in unison, we do have a chance to raise the sustenance and quality of life for all of us, thus dramatically reducing friction over basic wants.

History has proven that commerce opens up dialogue, which opens up interpersonal skills, which opens intercultural appreciation, which provides the basis for understanding and friendships, which is ultimately the basis for long-term positive relationships.

Why does it make sense to discuss international harmony and commerce in this journal? What do these two ideas have to do with paints, coatings, adhesives, sealants and other specialty chemicals? The answer is simply because they are elements that find use in just about all manufactured goods globally consumed. In addition, we have indirect and direct opportunities to positively impact international relationships on a broad geographical front during the process of marketing these universal products.

Through our outstanding industry associations and the leaders in both our large and small companies along the value chains who supply regionally and globally, to manufacturers of appliances, automobiles, trucks, furniture, electrical systems, electronics, highway systems, containers, agricultural equipment, aircraft and aerospace equipment to name a few, we can make progress in leveling the fairness playing field while paving the way for future giant steps of collaboration and friendship.

There exists within our current paints, coatings, adhesives and sealants industries leadership, a pent-up wealth of untapped rapport and respect bound up in great knowledge, experience and wisdom, that can be leveraged diplomatically through developing regions of the world.

I believe the challenge to the collective leaderships of our fine industry suppliers and formulators is to continue to step up tactical efforts to create a sustainable trust across all cultural boundaries internationally simply because it pays off economically and has both a long and short-term effect on the promotion of global peace. **CW**

Global commerce
 can lead to greater
 international
 harmony.