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Observations, insights & analysis from around the world on a medley of topics.

The idea of a new CEO without a plan for the first 100 days seems unthinkable, like a coach without a playbook. The 100-day plan suggests vision and discipline. Not having such a plan, on the other hand, might give rise to questions about managerial competence and leadership.

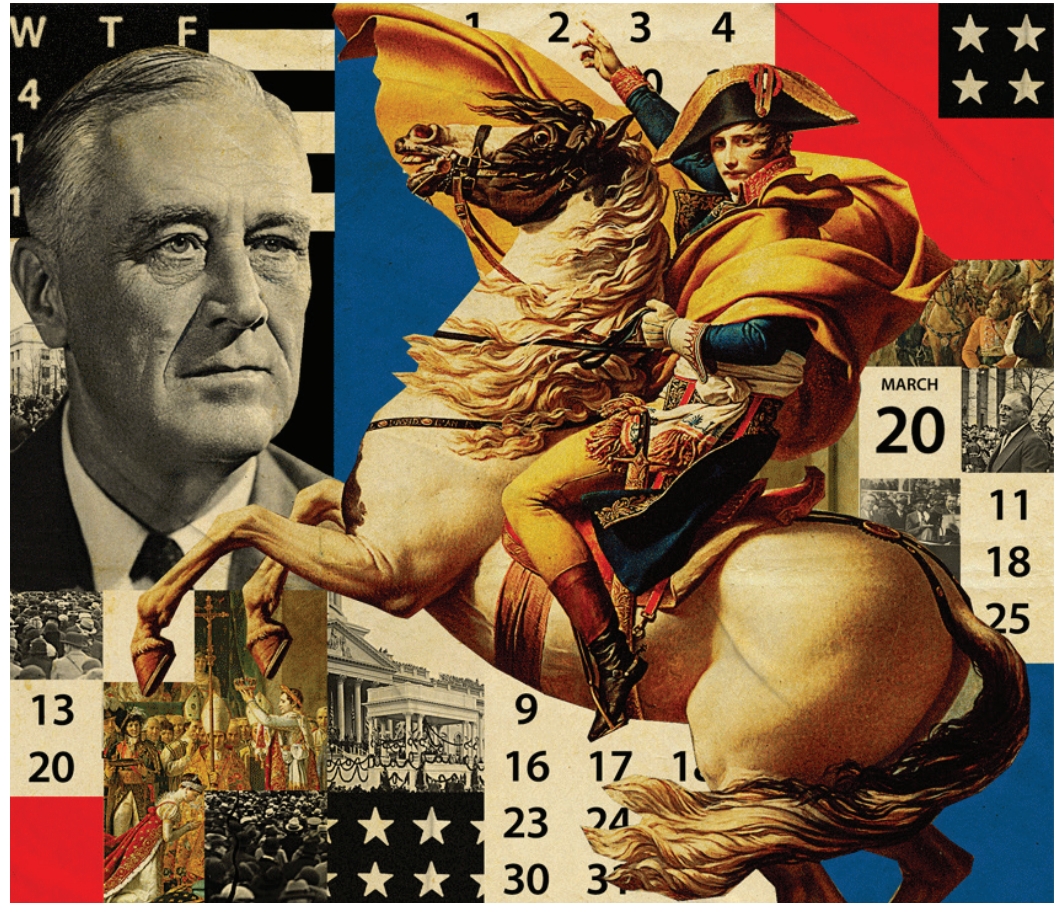
But why? How did we become convinced that there is something magical, revealing and powerful about 14 weeks and two days? If we jettisoned it, what could we put in its place that might genuinely help an incoming executive in 2024?

Depending on which source you choose, judging a leader's efficacy after 100 days dates back either to Franklin Delano Roosevelt or—further back—Napoleon. But it is stunningly obvious that 100 days today are not the same as they were in 1815 or 1933, any more than transport, medicine or life expectancy are the same. News that took weeks to reach a capital city in 1815 and hours in 1933 now arrives in milliseconds.

Over a period of five and a half years, FDR sent Winston Churchill 788 messages and telegrams—picture today's CEO, mid-crisis, writing once every four days to a key counterpart. Napoleon dictated and signed roughly 40,500 letters between 1784 and 1821—prolific, no doubt, but fewer than three a day over his nearly 39-year career.

If it feels like things are moving faster, well, they are. Research shows people are even walking, talking and reading more quickly than a century ago and, unsurprisingly, their attention spans are shorter. In an average day in 1986, we encountered 40 newspapers' worth of information; now, every day, we encounter nearly 700 full newspapers' worth of information.

Not only is a 100-day plan a bit vintage, it's also arbitrary. It survives, ironically, because it has



Leave the FIRST 100 DAYS to Napoleon and FDR

Incoming executives are expected to come armed with them, yet 100-day plans are dated and arbitrary. Brunswick Partner BILL PENDERGAST offers an alternative.

been around so long. Research from McKinsey finds: “Many executives admit it took them at least six months to achieve real impact (62% for external, 25% for internal hires). ... On average,

stakeholders give CEOs nine months to develop fully a strategic vision and win support from employees, 14 months to build the right team and 19 months to increase share price employing that direction.”

The first 100 days framework might be antiquated, but the sense of urgency behind it certainly isn't. If anything, the pressure for a leader to quickly make their mark has intensified since McKinsey's 2017 research. The median tenure of an S&P 500 CEO continues to shrink, as it does for the rest of the C-suite. For those whose tenure ended quickly, many no doubt had robust 100-day plans.

So, what's the alternative?

“Take a method and try it,” FDR said. “If it fails, admit it frankly,

and try another. But by all means, try something.” It might be time for executives to take FDR's advice and try another option, one better suited to the pace and circumstances we experience today.

One goal over a task list

100-day plans can easily become a CEO to-do list that delivers on actions and details but fails to inspire. Further, with every specific task in the plan, the CEO sacrifices some degree of maneuvering room, should conditions change—as invariably, they will.

Instead, try focusing on a single, larger goal or ambition you hope to achieve. Keep coming back to it. Make specific actions in service of the bigger goal. As the environment changes, the actions and milestones will change: the goal doesn't.

Relationships first

Given the pressures newly appointed CEOs face, the appeal of a clearly defined set of milestones—laid out in a 100-day plan—is understandable. Yet what defines the success of a CEO’s tenure may not be the achievement of milestones but, rather, the cultivation of relationships across multiple constituencies—key audiences. This at least is something that was true for FDR and remains true.

For an incoming executive, a valuable exercise is to list these groups: employees, board, investors, customers, regulators and so on. If, a year into your role, they were asked to describe you, what would you want them to say, in no more than two sentences, with perhaps three or four adjectives?

Then, what do you have to do to make those groups come away with that feeling? What would the initial engagement with each group look like?

Leaders get that building relationships and trust matter: PwC research found that 91% of business executives say it “improves the bottom line.” Yet that same research uncovered a disconnect: 84% of business leaders thought their companies were highly trusted by consumers; fewer than three out of 10 customers said the same. It’s not a stretch to imagine leaders are susceptible to similar levels of overconfidence with other key groups. The “CEO Bubble” is real—building strong, open relationships helps puncture it.

Urgency—by other means

There are other ways to achieve a sense of urgency, without a 100-day plan. Shorter, more frequent communications can celebrate progress against specific, more tactical objectives, while instilling the need for momentum.

At the same time, good leaders look for opportunities to say more and reinforce the message. “Definitely one of the things that’s gained focus is the need for communication,” McDonald’s Chris Kempczinski told us after his first year as CEO. “To lead, you have to be out there talking a lot and, in some cases, saying the same message over and over and over.”

Plan for change

Good CEO plans reflect their context and acknowledge their limits—rather than downplaying them in favor of a locked-in 100-day march. Moody’s CEO Rob Fauber, whose company understands risk as well as any on the planet, told us in an interview: “It feels like we now have one so-called Black Swan event after another, happening all the time. So, I’m not sure they’re really ‘Black Swans’ anymore. I tend to think of this as a new era.”

In such a world, it is fair to ask why an incoming executive should even invest time planning for the first 100 days when there is such a likelihood of being ambushed by a Black Swan.

When United Airlines CEO Scott Kirby’s appointment was announced in December 2019, there were reports of a “cluster of cases of pneumonia” in China; when he assumed the role six months later, the COVID-19 pandemic was threatening the airline industry’s existence.

Between Sanjiv Lamba being announced as CEO of Linde, the world’s largest industrial gas company, and actually assuming the helm, Russia invaded Ukraine.

Corey Neil became CEO of the Bank of Tampa a little over a month before Silicon Valley Bank’s collapse would briefly threaten the existence of organizations like his.

The initial planning for 2024 and beyond, whatever else it contains, clearly should have a strong dose of adaptability and rapid responsiveness.

Going forward, more and more executives will find a 100-day plan anachronistic and unsuited to their needs. They will opt, instead, for a plan that reflects today’s dynamics of communication and participation, the urgency and ruthlessness of today’s markets, and the wild unpredictability of today’s operating environment. It will be heavy on engagement, and emphasize responsiveness and adaptability. It will be focused on the right audiences and actions, with a uniquely appropriate timeline.

And such a plan will, actually, be useful. ♦

The Fire of JAMES BALDWIN

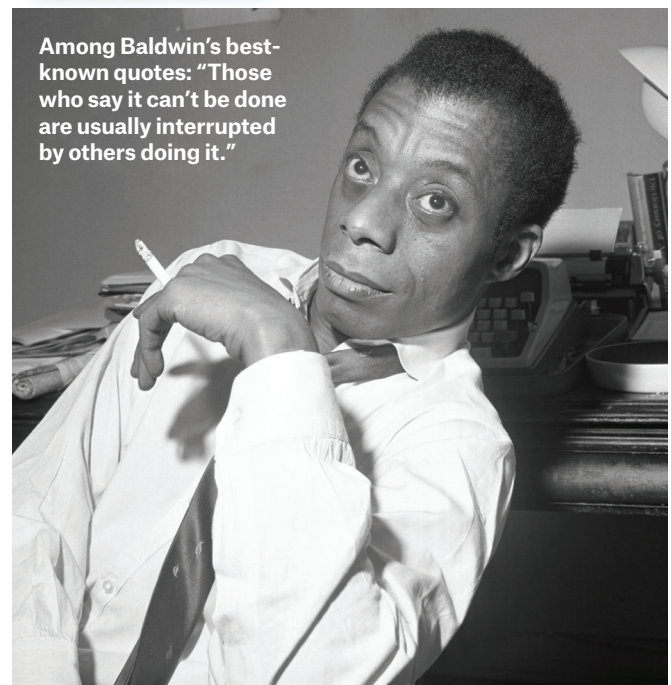
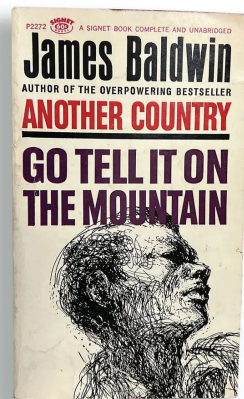
At 100, the celebrated author is as relevant as ever.

This year marked the 100th anniversary of the birth of James Baldwin (1924–1987), author of *Giovanni’s Room*, *The Fire Next Time* and *Go Tell It on the Mountain*, among many others. On explosive issues of social equality for Black and gay America, his voice was at once disarming and challenging, casual and commanding. His presence as a major figure in American literature has only grown since his death and he continues to be an inspiration in the ongoing fight for equality. In 2020, while millions took to the streets

to protest racial injustice in the United States, former President Barack Obama wrote that *The Fire Next Time* “remains a seminal meditation on race by one of our greatest writers and relevant for understanding the pain and anger behind the protests.”

In a 1960 speech at Kalamazoo College in Michigan, which appeared in his book of essays, *Nobody Knows My Name*, Baldwin spoke about the responsibility of each individual to challenge a status quo that didn’t allow them to treat each other fairly.

“Whether we like it or not, we are bound together forever. We are part of each other. What is happening to every Negro in this country is happening to you. . . . [Majorities have] nothing to do with numbers or power, but with influence, with moral influence, and I want to suggest this: that the majority for which everyone is seeking which must reassess and release us from our past and deal with the present and create standards worthy of what a man may be—this majority is you. No one else can do it. The world is before you and you need not take it or leave it as it was when you came in.” ♦



Among Baldwin’s best-known quotes: “Those who say it can’t be done are usually interrupted by others doing it.”

PHOTOGRAPH: BETTMAN/GETTY IMAGES

In a stunningly short space of time, ChatGPT, Gemini and a host of other generative AI platforms have become part of our everyday lives. These AI-driven search developments stand on the shoulders of years of advancements, shown in the timeline below. The majority were out of sight, driving the now-ubiquitous global engine that is Google.

In the 2010s, deep learning advanced rapidly, notably through the rise and development of transformer models (“neural network” technology inspired by how our brains work). This transformed image recognition, language modeling and the interpretation of user queries by search engines, significantly improving how they understand and respond to the words people use in their searches. Large-scale transformer models like OpenAI’s GPT-4 have made significant progress in generating human-like text and understanding context, dramatically influencing the current world of search and setting its future direction.

Expectations from here include:

- More precise and contextually aware search results driven by enhanced AI-powered developments in advanced natural language processing (NLP), a branch of AI that helps computers to comprehend, generate and manipulate human language.
- The integration of quantum computing, revolutionizing search algorithms and dramatically boosting performance results.
- Immersive and augmented reality, and multimodal capabilities—integrating text, voice, image and video inputs—will transform how and where users interact with information online.
- The already significant private/corporate use of Large Language Models spearheads a push for ethical AI practices to prioritize privacy and data security.

1990 The First Search Engine—Archie (archive without the ‘v’) was created by Alan Emtage, a student at McGill University, and publicly released on September 10, 1990. It indexed FTP archives, making it easier to find specific files.



Transformation of SEARCH

1993 The First Web Crawler: World Wide Web Wanderer—created by Matthew Gray, it was used to measure and track the growth of the web.

1994 Yahoo!—originally a directory of websites organized by category.

• **Infoseek**—known for its very complex system of search modifiers.

• **WebCrawler**—the first engine to index entire web pages, not just titles, created by Brian Pinkerton at the University of Washington.

• **Lycos**—one of the earliest and most popular web search engines known for the combination of directory- and text-searching capabilities.

1995 AltaVista—innovative search engine renowned for advanced features and comprehensive web page indexing.

• **Excite**—hybrid web directory and search engine known for portal features and multimedia capabilities.

1996 Backrub—the precursor to Google—developed by Larry

Page and Sergey Brin at Stanford University, it used backlinks to rank the importance of web pages.

• **HotBot**—known for its innovative features like customizable search filters.

1997 Ask Jeeves—allowed users to ask questions in everyday language; made notable advancements in understanding natural language.

1998 Google—PageRank algorithm revolutionized web search by ranking pages based on their importance derived from inbound links; quickly became the dominant search engine.

2004 Personalized search—Google begins personalizing results based on users’ search history and preferences.

2005 Google Maps—local search capabilities integrated with maps, providing geographic context to results.

2009 Bing—Microsoft’s search engine, known for its visual search capabilities and integration with other Microsoft services.

2010 Semantic Search capabilities, Neural Networks, Machine Learning and AI—applications including image recognition and natural language processing. Advanced search algorithms from simple word-matching to sophisticated systems interpreting various types of context.

2011 Google Panda update—notable improvement to query results reducing the ranking of low-quality sites and increasing the ranking of high-quality content.

2013 Google Hummingbird update—first algorithm designed to understand the human intent behind a search query.

2015 Launch of RankBrain—a machine learning-based component of Google’s algorithm that helps process and understand search queries.

2017 Development of Transformer Models—type of neural network architecture that learns context by tracking relationships in sequential data like sentences.

2018 Google introduces BERT—a significant advancement in NLP, Bidirectional Encoder Representations from Transformers, or BERT, help Google understand the sentiment, context and paraphrasing of words in search queries.

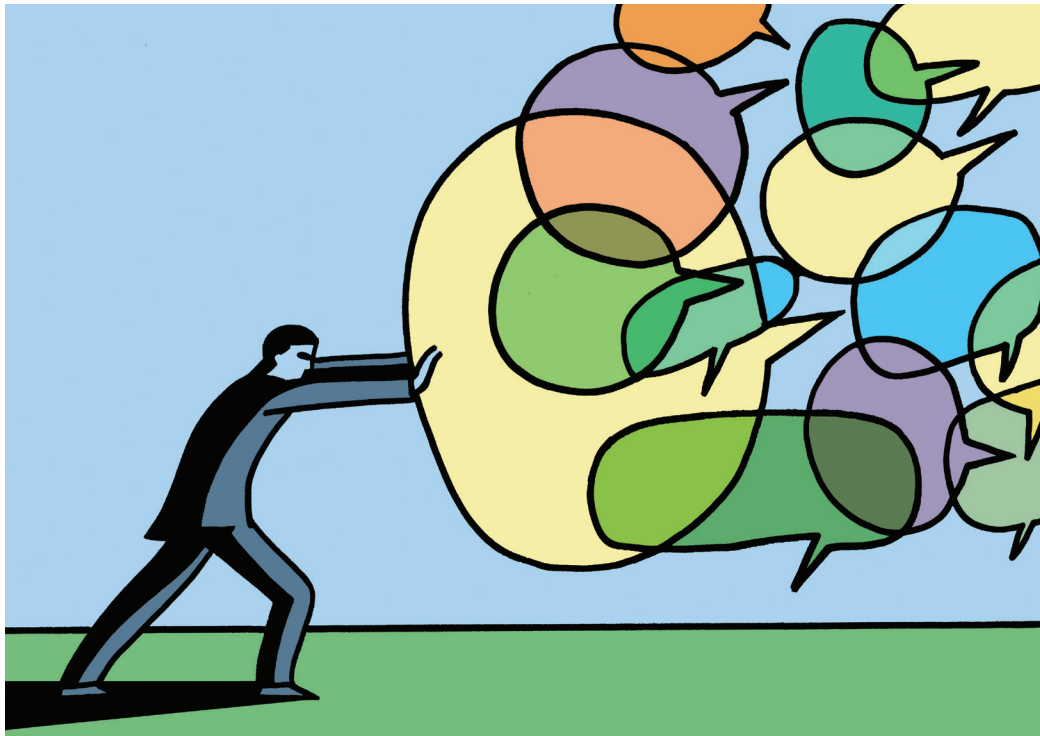
2020 OpenAI releases GPT-3—one of the largest AI models to date, having a significant impact on the ability of search engines to generate human-like text and better understand context.

2021 Google launches Multi-task Unified Model (MUM)—designed to access all media formats to collect information and further enhance the results for complex search queries.

2022 OpenAI launches ChatGPT—an AI system able to have conversations; Microsoft integrates ChatGPT into Bing for chat-based search queries; Google launches Bard, their AI chat system for search.

2024 Google releases Circle—a program that translates highlighting, tapping or circling an image, video or text into a list of search results. ♦

Jonathan Cole is a Director in Johannesburg and leads Brunswick’s global SEO offer.



Turning Back the Disinformation Tide

Defensive measures businesses can take right now can increase resilience and reduce vulnerability. We speak with experts LISA KAPLAN and PRESTON GOLSON.

The sudden, startling rise of generative AI tools has raised new fears about the spread of false information in news and social media. While misinformation and disinformation have been around forever, the viral spread of such narratives in social media poses new threats to businesses' reputations, profits and effectiveness, and can easily turn from a nuisance to a crisis.

Awareness of such threats has grown. To learn about how disinformation attacks and defenses are changing, we spoke with Lisa Kaplan, founder of the technology company Alethea, and Preston Golson, a former CIA communications director and now a Director for Brunswick specializing in cybersecurity, geopolitics and corporate reputation. They share a sense of realism about the threats organizations face, and a confidence in the tools to combat them.

How has the threat of disinformation changed? How aware are organizations you talk to?

LISA KAPLAN: They're definitely more at risk now. One of the things people have realized over the last several years is that this is much larger than just a political issue. This is an issue that is actually going to impact their ability to be able to communicate with their key stakeholders—talent, customers, shareholders and the others.

There is a pretty large concern from organizations. Those that are proactive are the ones that end up doing the best. If you do the early detection, then you don't necessarily need major surgery.

PRESTON GOLSON: Yes, in 2018, people thought it was about politics. Increasingly now it's more about the bottom line.

People may boycott your company as a result of a misinformation or disinformation narrative, or you could see your stock price fall, or you could even see physical threats to your personnel and facilities. The range of real-world impacts has expanded.

Do you think companies are trusting social media platforms too much for defense?

PG: My answer is, yes. Meanwhile it's becoming increasingly difficult, both technically and politically, for social media companies to really monitor and police disinformation.

LK: Another reality is that not every false or damaging narrative is necessarily going to be a violation of terms of service. So even if the social media companies were doing things like proactively looking at every company's mentions or posts—which, by the way, is not their business model, not scalable and never going to happen—and getting content taken down, you still have the potential for false information getting through.

What would you suggest the companies be doing to be proactive?

PG: First of all, you've got to know the environment. I like the analogy of a forest fire: you have to understand the landscape, the conditions and where your risks are. And when you

understand that, you can start a proactive campaign to deal with those.

What really helps with audiences is having other people validating and vouching for what you stand for. That's something you can develop now. Then you have them as advocates if you were to be attacked.

LK: The entire organization should be prepared to be able to fight against this type of threat. Mitigation is a team sport. Communications itself is being asked to take on a larger role. They're truly the front-line risk managers for the information that exists outside of a company.

How do you counter false narratives people are deeply invested in believing?

PG: You have to think of the audience in segments. There are the detractors—they've bought into the false narrative and it's going to be very hard for them to come off that view. There are susceptible audiences who are part of communities or belief structures closest to the detractors camp. Then there's a persuadable audience, who have not fallen to one side or the other. Lastly, there are your advocates, people who believe in what you're doing. The job is to furnish your supporters with the information that can allow them to go out and make their case to the persuadable and susceptible segments.

What message do you want to leave with our readers?

LK: The big takeaway is, you should know that this is coming and that it poses a major risk. And you are able to do something in the meantime; you're able to be proactive. And at this point, it's frankly negligent to not be thinking about this.

PG: In soccer they use the term "own goals"—scoring against yourself. If you don't know the landscape out there, you don't understand the risks, you can easily fall into a disinformation or misinformation scenario. ♦

Carlton Wilkinson is Managing Editor of the Brunswick Review.

After President Joe Biden in 2021 signed the law that made Juneteenth a federal holiday, he turned and handed the pen to 94-year-old Dr. Opal Lee. Five years earlier, Dr. Lee (better known as Ms. Opal) had walked from her home in Fort Worth, Texas, to Washington, DC as part of a campaign to get Juneteenth recognized as a federal holiday.

In the city where her famous journey for Juneteenth began, Ms. Opal is now focused on building a museum—“come hell or high water,” as she’s put it.

“I’ve got a 97-year-old poking me in the back telling me to get this done,” National Juneteenth Museum CEO Jarred Howard told Brunswick, laughing. “We have a lot of motivations to get this project done, but that’s a major one. We all want to see her enjoy this.”

Howard is leading the effort to fund and build the NJM, a 50,000-square-foot cultural center in Fort Worth’s Historic Southside neighborhood, distinctive in its design, ambition and business model. “I’m not a museum person, I’m a business person,” he says. “That’s why I was the second employee we brought on—the first was Dr. Lauren Cross, our Executive Strategist, who has a Ph.D. in this work and has done this for the better part of the last 20 years. She was the most important person to come on board; no matter how much money we raised, it would have been wasted if we didn’t have a strategy for creating and crafting the museum.”

Prior to joining the NJM as its full-time CEO, Howard had, for years, been involved in efforts to raise awareness for Juneteenth. It was a responsibility he juggled alongside being a husband, a father of two, and leadership roles first at BNSF Railway, one of the nation’s largest transportation and logistics companies, and later with Bell Flight, an aerospace manufacturer. A glimpse of how demanding Howard’s career has been: He’s a member of American Airlines’ vaunted million-miles program.

Howard also served as an executive on Fort Worth’s Chamber of Commerce from 2018 to

The National Juneteenth Museum Breaks New Ground

Its goal is to help write a new story, not just memorialize history, says CEO JARRED HOWARD. He spoke to Brunswick’s PETER DILLON and TRAVIS MALONE weeks before the museum was set to begin construction in Fort Worth.



National Juneteenth Museum CEO Jarred Howard, top, and the architectural rendering of the future museum complex.

2020. During his time there, one meeting would prove exceptionally ironic: He had to explain to Ms. Opal why the Chamber could not meet her funding requests for Juneteenth activities.

Since then, Howard has played an instrumental role in helping the NJM broaden its vision as well as raise more than \$35 million.

The NJM is set to break ground in Fort Worth’s Historic Southside neighborhood, an area once known as “the Black Wall Street of the South,” and was home to the city’s first Black millionaire. Howard and four generations of his family have also called it home. It’s an area that’s been “downtrodden and destitute” for decades, Howard says.

“This is in the heart of Fort Worth, one of the fastest-growing cities in America in one of its fastest-growing states. Texas is the ninth-largest economy in the world. If you look at communities surrounding Southside, they’re bursting at the seams with economic activity. This disparity isn’t because of some cosmic strategy to prevent development from happening here. It’s because of lines that were drawn half a century ago, highways that bisected communities, and the residual impact.”

In addition to 10,000 square feet of galleries, the NJM will house a business incubator, a food hall for local chefs and vendors, and a theater to host lectures and performances. “Those are creating opportunities for this community, and they’re creating revenue streams for us,” says Howard.

“Better than 60% of the people that start elementary school here will not graduate from high school,” Howard says. “What they can learn are in-demand trades like plumbing. What they can become, without ever setting foot on a college campus, is an entrepreneur—some of the wealthiest people in this country right now don’t have college degrees. They can learn foundational skills it takes to start a business.”

The same year that President Biden officially made Juneteenth a federal holiday, research by Gallup found that more than 60% of Americans either knew “nothing at all” or “a little bit” about Juneteenth (a year later, 40% of Americans still said the same).

On January 1st, 1863, the United States riven by civil war, Abraham Lincoln issued the Emancipation Proclamation, which freed all slaves in the country. But that proclamation was neither recognized nor enforced in the 11 states that had seceded.

It wasn’t until June 19th, 1865—two and a half years after the Emancipation Proclamation, and two and a half months after the Civil War had effectively ended—that slavery ended on American soil, a moment marked by General Gordon Granger’s arrival in Galveston, Texas, where he issued General Order No. 3, implementing the Emancipation Proclamation in the state.

“The data is pretty clear we have a lot more to do to help everyone understand its significance,” Howard says.

“If 160 years have passed, and we haven’t made it a part of the American story, then unless we’re very intentional today, it won’t be written into it.” ♦

Travis Malone is an Associate in Dallas and Peter Dillon is Managing Partner of Brunswick Arts in New York.

The day after Emmanuel Macron was first elected President of France in 2017, he flew to Berlin to meet the then-German Chancellor, Angela Merkel, to shore up the relationship with his most important foreign ally. The day after that, he hosted his first delegation at the Élysée Palace: a group of inspectors from the International Olympic Committee, who were considering candidates for the 2024 summer Games.

Two months later, he made the unusual step for a national leader of traveling to the IOC's Swiss headquarters to press France's case again. "We need multilateralism, the structures that provide agreement among nations . . . and tolerance, which the Olympic movement illustrates well," he said. "Olympic values are our values. They are threatened, called into question by many today, so it's the best moment to defend them."

The fruits of that effort blossomed across France this summer. Versailles held the modern Pentathlon, the beach volleyballers played in front of the Eiffel Tower, the Games' opening ceremony took place in a parade along the Seine, visible to vast crowds gathered along the banks.

Winning the Olympic Games was a coup that encapsulated Macron's style: personal, relentless, strategic, disregarding convention, with the guts of a Vegas high roller. Paris under Macron is a changed city, ripe with innovation and culture, sporting new vitality in its appeal for young people all over Europe. The Games have proven the high point so far of his turbulent, transformative presidency. But politically, it was an existential moment as well.

The far-right National Rally party surged in elections in June. Macron called a snap parliamentary election, a huge political risk. Had the National Rally won an absolute majority in parliament, as seemed very possible, Macron would have gone down as the president who ushered the far right into government.

Instead, left-wing and centrist parties were able to block the National Rally from gaining an absolute majority. Macron will now have to manage these factions for the remainder of his term, which ends in 2027. Large groups on the left and right want to reverse some of his signature measures, notably raising the state retirement age from 62 to 64, and abolishing the wealth tax.

Whatever happens over the final three years of Macron's presidency, he has already freed up the economy, shattered assumptions about work and the duties of the state, and taken on forces which had defeated presidents and prime ministers before him.

Only 39 when he entered the Élysée, Macron is France's youngest leader since Napoleon. When he spoke of the threat to the Olympics' values in those early weeks in office, he was doing something no other European leaders dared to do: tweaking America's new president, Donald Trump. Their later summit was a peak of political theater. Macron had studied videos of Trump using handshakes to establish dominance. He took Trump's hand and squeezed it, refusing to let Trump pull him toward him. Macron grinned toward the cameras

MACRON and the OLYMPICS

The Games represented the high point of his turbulent, transformative presidency. Brunswick's Philip Delves Broughton reports.

holding Trump's hand longer than necessary as Trump contained a wince. Game Macron.

Macron then invited Trump to be guest of honor at the Bastille Day parade in Paris. There was another epic handshake tussle, but Trump was delighted by the military pageantry and his place of honor. France was back in favor.

In April, Macron gave a blisteringly frank speech at the Sorbonne in Paris, which only he among world leaders could have given. "The era when Europe bought its energy and fertilizers from Russia, had its goods manufactured in China, and delegated its security to the United States of America, is over," he said.

Even more, he said, Russia's invasion of Ukraine had threatened the security of Europe and exposed its overreliance on America. "Once again, our Europe has lost its self-esteem," he said. "The risk for our Europe would be, as it were, to get used to this belittlement."

Long suspected of a "Jupiterian" ambition, Macron used every ounce of his executive power to implement his reform agenda, stirring popular opposition and eroding his parliamentary authority. He abolished the wealth tax, courted the world's CEOs and soon the investments rolled in. He took on labor laws which dissuaded firms from hiring young people, and dared the unions to oppose him. He introduced major reforms to education and health-care. That was all in the first 18 months. It took a toll, leaving him politically isolated.

Ahead of the Games, evoking the spirit of the ancient Olympics, Macron called for global truce while the Games were underway and was backed by China's President Xi, but neither President Putin of Russia nor President Zelensky of Ukraine would cooperate. It was, nonetheless, a very Macron idea: esoteric and oddly compelling, a fusion of history, politics and events which no other world leader could have imagined. ♦

Philip Delves Broughton is Brunswick's Editor at Large, an author of bestseller-list books and a former journalist.



President Macron addressing the International Olympic Committee ahead of the Paris Olympic Games in July 2024.

PHOTOGRAPH: ARTURO HOLMES/GETTY IMAGES



So you're ready to do business in China. How much do you plan to use WeChat? How do you plan to respond to "996" or the "lie-flat (躺平)" culture? Have you been successfully "Amwayed into this hole (安利入坑)" by a Chinese friend?

Communication is a cornerstone of any business. But in China, a culture rich in nuance in social exchanges, communication has to pass a series of challenges around language itself, including a constantly evolving vocabulary. A lack of familiarity with these language challenges can make a bad impression or damage trust.

As AI tools explode into the workplace, nuance in communication becomes an increasingly important point to keep in mind: Human editors with experience in the culture are critical. A clear message requires a real person.

Hundreds of languages are spoken in the China region. In just the international centers of Beijing, Hong Kong and Shanghai there are three different local languages. All three draw on a common set of characters for writing, but as spoken languages they are about as foreign to one another as Spanish is to Portuguese.

As Manager of Translation for Brunswick in Hong Kong, my job is to filter all of this, to grasp nuances in English and make them understood for their target audience in China, or to make sure that the details of a message in Chinese are communicated to English speakers. When a translation says "examine the results" of a survey, is "examine" really the right word? Or do they mean "test" or "assess"? Those subtle differences can play an outsized role with regard to clarity. The

Beyond the LANGUAGE Barrier

Doing business in the China region requires on-the-ground fluency of languages and culture, says JENNY SHAN, Brunswick's Manager of Translation in Hong Kong.

English phrase "loan request" requires contextual understanding in Mandarin. For artwork, the translation would be "借展申请" or "jiè zhǎn shēnqǐng," which carries the implication of use in an exhibition, while in a financial situation it would have to be "贷款申请" or "dàikuǎn shēnqǐng." Both are correct translations but

they mean totally different things. If you don't know to look for such differences, a computer translation could lead you astray.

There's more to the problem of translation of course. But effective business communication starts with language.

On the WeChat platform, China's go-to app for messaging and social media in personal and professional spheres, the tone is informal and you're likely to encounter slang and usages that are otherwise restricted to in-person office banter. Like slang in any language, some of it is obvious and some of it is obscure. And all of it is constantly changing.

"Amway" (安利, "Anli"), for instance, comes from the international franchise brand, where individuals market products to their friends. It's now used to indicate passionately sharing or recommending anything—a book or TV series, news, food, stores. The meaning is close to "evangelizing"; you're trying to persuade others to be as passionate as you are. "Fell into a hole" means they were hooked.

Recently, "996" has become a shorthand for the common 9 am to 9 pm, six days a week work ethic. Since COVID, many among the younger generation have decided to dial that back, taking lower paying, lower responsibility jobs and trying to spend more time enjoying what they have—a choice to "lie flat" (躺平, "tǎng píng") or favor rest over work.

In any city around the world, you find Mandarin or Cantonese speakers. But non-resident speakers will use constructions that reflect their time in communities abroad and are heard as simply wrong in China. Similarly a good AI translation of a dialect into Mandarin will be awkward. To get the nuance right requires understanding—human understanding.

The goal should be for translation that is transparent, so that people aren't discussing the differences between the languages at all, but really communicating about the message itself, engaged with one another. My role disappears. Then I know I've done my job. ♦