

Eating the Regional Elephant

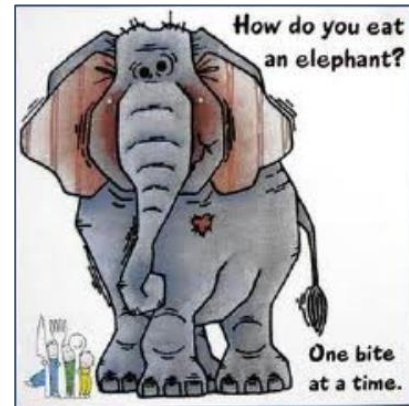
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There's an old saying about how to eat an elephant. The answer is "One Bite at a Time".

Having been in the regional business game for a few years now, I could have very easily said, "This is futile, I'm out of here." Or like Cartman from South Park, "#@!* you guys, I'm going home." Don't worry, not happening.

As I reflect on the past 30 years of our region, I see many outstanding efforts from a variety of organizations. The people involved in these efforts realized then that there is nothing fast or easy about moving a region in a positive direction.



However, people say that we have too many organizations, we're over-reliant on certain elements of our economy (Port, Military, and Tourism) that our growth is stunted or ready to suffer and that we get in each other's way. Some will even say that we're not cool.

Well, some of that is true, but let's focus on the positive (which I think is always helpful). Hampton Roads is a GREAT PLACE and if we continue on the themes of working together and modernizing our area, our region will be even better than it is today.

In my opinion, there are some great signs that we're realizing our future needs to be shaped and in fact, taking action!

Check out these two (albeit a little dated) videos: [Hampton Roads 1](#) and [Hampton Roads 2](#). You'll see that we have a great deal to offer. That's just a start and we're going to update those pieces of work very soon to share with the world!

Over the past decades, our region has evolved to become a wonderful place to live, work and play. Organizations have popped up in many cases to fill voids in our regional culture. Over time, just like in business, the competitive marketplace creates a condition that allows some to succeed and others to fail. That's business.

Yet bite by bite, we're eating the regional elephant and working to reduce our regional problems. Sometimes, though, we have to step back to get a better view of the activity.

Bite: Cities are evolving based on their competitive needs, but that raises the bar for other cities to also compete. Excellent!

Bite: The region is working on rail connectivity (light and high speed), along with the federal and state government. Outstanding!

Bite: Roads and bridges are getting improved. Wonderful!

Bite: More mixed use town center developments are getting developed. Awesome!

Bite: We're focusing on the economic development and competitiveness of our region. Fantastic!

Bite: We're beginning to realize that stimulating growth of small business to second stage and beyond will create jobs. Terrific!

Bite: The technology sector is getting more and more regional attention as a high growth opportunity everywhere, including our region. Brilliant!

Bite: We're working to mentor and help the younger generation understand the business and political landscape to enable them to be our future regional leaders. Tremendous!

Bite: Our cost of living and tax base is remaining attractive compared to many other areas of the country. Thank You!

Bite: Our climate, geography, culture and history makes our area such a great place to live and raise a family. OK, never mind about this winter, it's SPRING!

Bite: We're doing [TedXs](#) again. NASA did a couple on the Peninsula a few years back, but new entrepreneurs are launching them again, this time on the Southside! Look at [TedX Great Bridge](#) to see a recurring series of Women in Hampton Roads and Youth. Watch of the combination TedX/Enabling Next Gen Symposium planned for October 16, 2014. We're looking for ways to stop Brain Drain and maintain Brain Gain in our area. We hope this to be a recurring, annual program to achieve progressive advancement. Fantastic!

Bite: We're taking Economic Competitiveness VERY seriously. Talk to the [Entrepreneurs Organization](#) to see how over 50 area companies, \$2B in regional revenue and over 4,000 employees are looking to get involved and contribute to area strategy development from companies who are succeeding and growing. Monumental!

Get the picture? We're working on addressing the problems. We're trying to diversify our economy. We've got actions and activity that are focused on many of the right areas.

Our region is working to compete. Working to be a better place. Perhaps we'll never be a Silicon Valley, Austin, wherever. Perhaps we need not worry to be like somewhere else (per se), but cherry pick what works for this region and place a small number of very good, strategic bets. We're getting there. We're eating that regional elephant one bite at a time.

Who's doing all this? No one group. It's the collaboration of private and public sector participants who truly want to make a difference. Those who truly are going to try and move the needle.

We need help from everywhere. This is a big elephant and one that's been around for a long time. Old habits change slowly.

We need to prioritize. We need to balance. We need to make sure-footed progress. None of this happens immediately and none of this happens without a cost.

Our generations (younger to older) need to work together and learn from one another to advance our collective cause.

We must all realize that standing still is the worst answer. We need to be actively eating that regional elephant bite by bite. The more people at the table, working together, the faster our big challenges will be reduced.

American author Robert Fulghum's quote sticks with me: "The grass is not, in fact, always greener on the other side of the fence. Fences have nothing to do with it. The grass is greenest where it is watered."

Our regional leaders from decades ago got it right. Cities will always be cities and have their interests at heart. That's what makes them compete and raise the bar for everyone else. However the region is the fabric in which we all exist. Working together to create regional solutions, even if it's city by city, it is how we win the larger game.

Now, who's hungry enough to pull up a chair at the table?

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