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## What I Learned From Little Green Frogs in Texas

They were sitting there, on the road, in a slight little puddle of water, little green frogs, cute as a button.

I was fascinated watching them dart in and out of a culvert. Their goal was to get into the puddle -- the hotel sprinkler system was on, and some of the runoff was making its way onto the road. Once there, the frogs would spend but a moment enjoying the water, before their natural instinct took over -- they'd spot a gull in the distance, with the result that they would jump right back into the culvert. But they were determined to enjoy their little pond!

You could see their little green eyes looking out from the darkened culvert as soon as they had gone back in watching to see if the gulls had left. As soon as the gulls were gone, they'd jump back out again. Only to repeat their retreat again moments later, as yet another avian adversary flew in.

This small bit of inconsequential theatre was occurring during a hot, muggy September day in Houston last year. I was there to provide the opening keynote for a conference examining the future of the meetings and conference industry. The attendees come from a wide variety of backgrounds, including association executives, professional meeting planners, industry suppliers, and others involved in the event management industry.

In my keynote, I spoke about the fact that many organizations need to start thinking about the future again. We need to take the time to understand the important trends that might affect us through the next five, ten or fifteen years, and from that, we had better determine strategically what we might do to respond to some fairly unique challenges, issues and threats.

It's an important message, and seems to be one that I am often delivering today. Yet the frogs in Texas soon provided me with a unique method of getting that message across.

I first encountered the frogs after my keynote session was done, the coffee break had drawn to a close and another speaker was well underway. At that point, I decided to hike back to my room at the other end of the complex, and noticed the frogs amusing behavior. Captivated, I watched them for a few minutes and then moved on.

Returning to the conference center later, I noticed they were still in the midst of their game of hide-and-go-seek with the gulls. I observed them again and again as I made my way back and forth from the hotel to the conference center several times that day.

It was great fun watching them. That is, until 4PM, when the conference came to a close.

There were my little green friends, sitting in the road, focused on the short term threat of the sea-gulls. They didn't notice the fact that all of a sudden, several hundred cars started leaving the parking lot, coming from the other direction.

Their demise was painfully brief but dramatically ugly.

And that's when I clued in to the fact these little green frogs in Texas had established a pattern of behavior similar to that of many people in the world today. They are focusing on short term threats and problems, seeming to give precious little thought to some of the long term trends that might present them with even greater challenges.

Which leads to this question -- how many of your members are like the frogs in Texas? Are they so focused on the short-term threats and the short-term issues that surround them that they have forgotten to think about the long-term trends that might have a bigger impact on them?

People need to start thinking about the future again. Not a future that comes in the next few weeks or the next few months, or even what might come next year. They need to start thinking long term again; a type of thinking that seems to have come to an end in the last few years.

Otherwise, they'll find that they are not unlike those frogs on the road in Texas. Extremely focused, but looking at the wrong threat, in the wrong direction, at the wrong time. With the result that when the real challenge occurred, they became just a bit of terrible road-kill.

*Jim Carroll, a futurist, innovation and trends expert, worries about the fact that too many people seem to be like the frogs in Texas. You can learn more about this concern at <http://frogs.jimcarroll.com>, and can contact him at [jcarroll@jimcarroll.com](mailto:jcarroll@jimcarroll.com)*



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