

20 QUESTIONS

Futurist eyes next-generation work trends

By Gyle Konotopetz
Business Edge

When you ask Jim Carroll how he's doing today, he seems out of his element. But ask him about tomorrow, next year or 2010 and Carroll's unbridled passion is unleashed and you begin to understand the meaning behind his latest book, *What I Learned From Frogs In Texas*.

Thinking in the future has become a way of life for the one-time chartered accountant from Mississauga and it's also what drives his business, J.A. Carroll Consulting.

Carroll is a futurist, business consultant, keynote speaker and author who helps clients such as Motorola, Nestle and Caterpillar think in the future and prepare their businesses for rapidly evolving social, economic and workplace trends.

As a small-business owner, Carroll also has a passion for assisting small businesses and doesn't pull any punches in discussing the challenges of small-business owners in maintaining an edge in an innovative, technology-driven marketplace.

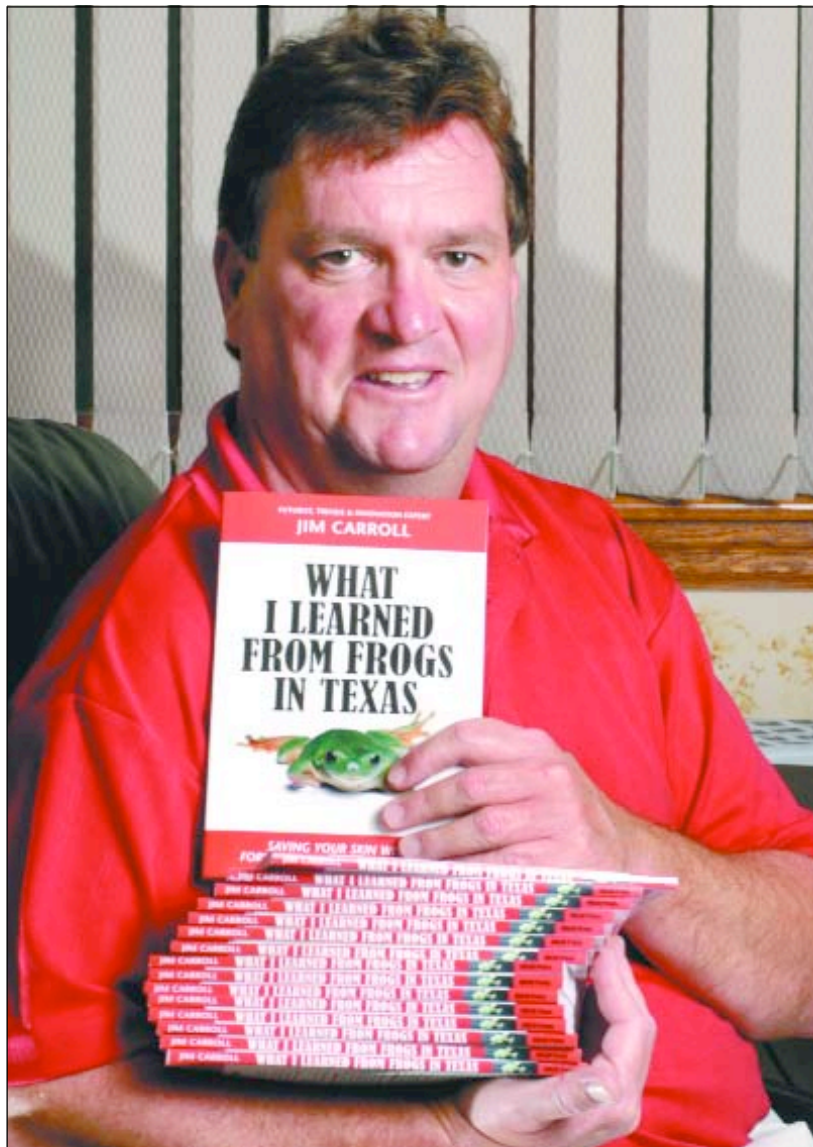
1. Are you from an entrepreneurial background?

"Actually, I have an incredibly strange background. My dad was an engineer and, I don't play this up very much, but I'm actually a chartered accountant. I became a CA in 1981 at age 20. I don't know what drew me into that as a career choice, but from a business perspective, it's probably the smartest thing I ever did even though I no longer have anything to do with that."

2. Who was your most important mentor?

"At the accounting firm I was with in the mid-'80s, there was a fellow named Bill Detlefsen, a partner at Thorne Ernst & Whinney (the firm now known as KPMG International). He was 50 or 55 and he was one of the few people that age who was willing sit back and listen and give a guy like me enough rope to go out and do various things. I worked as a chartered accountant, but around 1982 I started to get involved with computers and bulletin boards and electronic mail, and all that kind of stuff. I mean, I was running around in the early '80s saying that there was this huge thing (high tech) coming that was going to change the world and we'd better pay attention to it. That was 10, 12, 14 years too early. I started to get immersed in that world and all my accounting friends were saying to me, 'What are you doing throwing away a good career getting involved with this technology stuff?'"

3. Was it an easy decision for you to leap from your accounting career into your own business in 1989 as a business consultant and speaker?



Brennan O'Connor, Business Edge

Predicting market trends with books such as *What I Learned From Frogs In Texas* keeps futurist Jim Carroll on the crest of workplace evolution.

"It was becoming absolutely stifling in terms of creativity. I had to get out and do something different. The thing that ticked me off was that in the corporate sector, somebody was controlling my life and I didn't want to have that anymore. I had to go out and do my own thing. It just sort of took off like a rocket. I've been wonderfully successful from a business perspective but boy, the time I get to spend with my two sons, who are 11 and 13, and my wife (Christa, his business manager) is so important. Sometimes, I talk on stage about the work/life balance and how this is a wonderful existence. My sons have never known a world where mommy and daddy have not worked at home."

4. What's the best piece of advice you can provide to someone starting a small business today?

"You've got to do something you believe in and have passion for. If you don't, it's not going to work. At the time I started my business, I came to realize that my passion was helping people think differently about the world around them. You know, I think differently about the world and I real-



ly quite enjoy helping people change their way of thinking. Every once in a while, someone will come up to me and say, 'I heard you speak five years or 10 years ago and you really changed my way of thinking.' And that's just a really cool thing to realize. If you're not doing something that doesn't count to you at the end of the day, it's not worth it. The money's nice, but it's not about the money. It's about what you do from five o'clock to 10 o'clock from the time you hang up the keyboard and turn off the light."

5. What's the biggest mistake small-business owners make that can lead to their demise?

"Not learning how to market. Beyond that, it's not having the confidence in what you know and what you can do. I think a lot of them can fail because when things get a little topsy-turvy at the start you can sort of give up your courage. You've got to learn how to market. You've got to learn how to convince people that you know what you're doing, that you've got the goods, that you've got the right idea, that you've

got the right thing. The key is courage and confidence."

6. What's the most important business trend that small-business owners need to know about to prepare for the future?

"This next generation is completely different in terms of how they think. Kids today 15 and under coming into the workforce are not going to want to have a job, they're not going to want to have a career path, they're not going to want to work for a company. They are the ultimate entrepreneurs. You're not going to be able to hire them. You're going to be able to contract them at best. Getting skills, getting people, getting what you need to get the job done, I think that's going to be the toughest thing to figure out. And to do that you're going to have to think really differently. I was dealing with this engineering company in Kelowna that was hiring a young kid, a young engineering student. And he turned down the job because they kept talking about the nine-to-five culture. He looked up at them and said, 'Ya know, dude, there's some fresh powder in the hills.' He said, 'I'm just not there, I don't think that way.' Their whole concept of the world and whole concept of work is just completely different from what most people think. I say to people that I work really hard to not have to go get a job because that's the way I think about it. And I think that's how the next generation is thinking."

7. How serious is the job shortage issue in Canada?

"It's huge and it's not for the reasons that people think it's huge. Everybody's talking about the retirement of (Baby) Boomers. That's one aspect of it. Everybody's talking about how difficult it is to attract the next generation. And you've got all these employers running around and asking, how do we become the employer of choice and how do we make people like us? But I don't think that's the issue. The big issue is that skills are becoming extremely specialized. There's so much knowledge happening and so much stuff happening so fast. I've got a certain set of skills, but increasingly, those skills become narrower and narrower. Somebody who is focused on a marketplace might find that the people that they're dealing with, their skills are becoming ever more specialized every moment."

8. So what's the biggest challenge for people in dealing with that issue?

"You have to think in the future because everything is happening faster than ever before. There's a joke I started telling on stage about three years ago. I said, 'Why wouldn't Google get into the business of building cars because everything happens pretty darn fast?'"

20 QUESTIONS from Page 6

Speed of change keeps consultant hopping

"I started it out as a joke and about a month or two ago there's this startup in California that is getting into the car business (marketing an electric sports car) and two of the founding investors are from Google (Larry Page and Sergey Brin, Google's co-founders). In terms of a prediction, what might have seemed funny three years ago is all of a sudden becoming reality. This is a challenge figuring out where we're going to be in five years because things are happening a lot faster than people are thinking."

9. How far into the future do you think?

"You can see big, broad changes 10, 15 years out. The Boomers will be out of the workplace and they have been very resistant to change. Their whole existence has been to fight change. And we've got this huge pent-up frustration with the subsequent generation behind them just waiting for them to get out of the way so that they can come in and cause a lot of change in the workplace and the way that business is done. That's a prediction you can know for a great degree of certainty 10 to 15 years out. I'm talking in Las Vegas to a conference of telecom companies. And I'm not going to start preparing for that keynote speech until about a week or two before the event. That's because things are happening ridiculously fast."

10. What's going to be the most dramatic change in the workplace a decade from now?

"I think it's going to be that the concept of nine-to-five will have just absolutely disappeared. It doesn't mean that we're going to become a nation of home offices, but I think there will be a lot more choices that people will be making as to where and how and when they're going to be doing the work and what constitutes the organization. You talk to senior managers and CEOs today and they talk about how they have to become more collaborative and team oriented. I think the

generation of 15- to 20-year-olds just look at that talk and go, 'duh.' They say: 'We do that, we're on instant messaging, we've got webcams, we're just collaborative by nature and we don't give a heck whether we're in the same room or not. We know how to work cross-country, around the world, globally and how to form instant teams. We come together to form some function, then disband and move on to the next thing because we're the generation that gets bored so darned easily.' I think they're just going to shake up the concept of the workplace to a huge degree. The reason that hasn't happened is because of simple Boomer resistance to change."

11. What do today's senior managers need to learn about managing their businesses into the future?

"This is what executives need to understand – velocity, agility and flexibility. Velocity is an important word to think about because things are happening faster than ever before. I also stress agility because we've built these structures and these organizations in which we move slow and we think slow and we act slow. But we can't do that because our customers are changing too quickly and our competitors are taking our market too quickly. So we've got to have a lot of flexibility to change very, very quickly. That's probably been my key consistent message in the past five or six years."

12. Who's the business leader whom you would walk over hot coals in bare feet to have coffee with?

"I don't know if I've got an answer to that one. I don't read a lot of the bestselling books out there. I look at *Business Week* and *Forbes* and things like that, but I've never read about Sigma (a corporate leadership philosophy) and I've never read Jack Welch (books written by the former General Electric CEO). I don't really learn from leaders and executives. I learn from everybody else out there who is reinventing the future.

JIM CARROLL

■ **Titles:** Futurist, business consultant, speaker, author.

■ **Company:** J.A. Carroll Consulting.

■ **Key Clients:** Disney, DaimlerChrysler, Caterpillar, Nestle, Motorola, Verizon.

■ **Born/Raised/Age:** London, Ont./Halifax/47.

■ **Education:** Dalhousie University (bachelor of commerce), completed chartered accountant certification in 1981.

■ **Family:** Wife Christa (J.A. Carroll business manager), two children.

■ **Career:** Carroll has been working as a business consultant, speaker and author fulltime since 1989. Prior to that, he spent 11 years as a chartered accountant with KPMG (the company was then known under various different names).

■ **Books:** Carroll has authored or co-authored 35 books in the past 10 years. His next book, *The Masters of Business Imagination Handbook: 100 Ideas for Recharging Your Creativity*, is due for release this year.

■ **Favourite TV show:** *The Sopranos*.

■ **Favourite celebrity Boomer:** Neil Young ("a Boomer who's not old.")

■ **Wheels:** PT Cruiser.

■ **Favourite pastime:** Downhill skiing.

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Jim Carroll

to the stage and the passion he has. Not to criticize, but I'm out on the circuit with some pretty big names in the U.S. I'm getting some incredible U.S. clients and I see some of these guys who write a *New York Times*-listed bestseller and they get out there and they have a fee of \$80,000 US or \$100,000. And I see them deliver the same type of speech that they did a couple of weeks before to a totally different type of audience. I do a ton of work for every group I deal with and really try to understand them. My fee in the U.S. is \$10,000 (US)."

15. What kind of a report card would you give Canadian business schools, in terms of how they're preparing the business leaders of tomorrow?

"You know, I don't know if I've got an opinion on that. I think getting the chartered accountancy background was the smartest thing I ever did. Some type of fundamental business background is important. Everybody is focused on MBA. But what I'm trying to say to folks is, 'Look, everybody has figured out pretty well how to run a business better, but we've got to figure out how to transform business better because of the way things are changing.'

Companies don't offer that. It's not the underground but it's the mainstream. What are people saying?"

13. Have you ever had the desire to start your own business beyond what you do today?

"No, not really. I'm 47 and I've still got a few good years left on the speaker circuit. I quite enjoy that. I have a lot of fun with the crowds. I often sit

back and wonder if I will be able to do the type of travel I do today when I'm 55. I think I can just up the fee, up the brand value and decrease the number of gigs that I do."

14. Who's the speaker you most admire?

"Oh, Bill Clinton. That's an easy one. I've never seen him. I'd love to see him based on everything I've read about him as a speaker. It's what he brings

See OPINION Page 10

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Time management includes traditional list

Business Edge

“To do” or “not to do” is the question of the day, according to a recent RBC Royal Bank small business survey.

High-tech tools may keep Canadian small businesses wired into their working world, but when it comes to managing time and productivity, 58 per cent of owners still rely on the humble “to do” list.

That’s one of the findings from RBC’s 2006 Small Business Survey, conducted by Ipsos Reid. Other ways small business owners save time include online banking services (60 per cent), accounting software (38 per cent) and communication technology (35 per cent).

“Small business owners may well be creating and storing their ‘to do’ lists on computers or cellphones, but it’s interesting to see something as straightforward as the ‘to do’ list rising to the top,” said Kristina Depencier, RBC’s national manager for small business.

But knowing what needs to be accomplished in their time-challenged workdays,



and actually getting that work done, continues to be the challenge.

“More than one-third (36 per cent) of the small business owners who participated in our survey told us they would like to be spending more time attracting new clients. Almost that same number (32 per cent) indicated that time-drainers such as administrative and computer information/technology tasks are taking up too much of each working day,” said Depencier.

Ideally, the owners surveyed indicated they wanted to spend more than two-thirds (67 per cent) of each week attracting new clients, while in reality they admitted they were spending less than half (47 per cent) of their week doing so.

Similar “reality” gaps were noticeable when it came to developing their business network, their business skills and planning for the future.

SURVEY from Page 10

Workplace attitudes ‘will change’

19. When you think about your children being in the workforce some day, what do you think it’s going to be like for them?

“There are a lot of people out there who are really miserable with their jobs. I collect a lot of statistics and observations. There was a survey that came out that something like 39 or 42 per cent of people admitted that on their very first day in a new job they were already looking for something else to do. There are a lot of people who just hate their jobs, hate their careers and they don’t know how to get out. This next generation won’t be like that because they have the tools, they have the knowledge, they have this sort of built-in entrepreneurial spirit that they’re going to do what they want and create an environment they’re going to enjoy. I think they’ll enjoy work a lot more because they will work more to shape what their career will be.”

20. How do you see your own career evolving over the next decade?

“I really don’t know. Ten years ago, I would lay in bed worrying about that. I don’t anymore. Not because of any huge degree of financial security but because I think I’ve developed the set of skills, the capabilities and probably the outlook that I can do whatever needs to be done. I think my most important goal is trying to stay focused on the balance. I think the important thing is letting your life be more important than your work and that’s the hardest thing to keep control of, I think, when you get busy and when you do become successful – whether it’s doing the type of thing I do or

whether you’re a small business person. It’s about keeping life first as opposed to work. It’s how you define your success. I’m hugely lucky. When I look at a lot of relationships between kids and parents, I think, ‘Boy, I’m lucky to be doing what I’m doing and to have done what I’ve done.’ I see people who wake up when they’re 45, 50 or 55, their kids are off to college and they go, ‘Oh, I never got to spend time with them.’ How could you ever let that happen? Success is not just the bottom line. And it sounds trite, but it is extremely true.”

(Gyle Konotopetz can be reached at gyle@businessedge.ca)

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