Greetings to our ‘ohana, friends, family and casual readers of Saturday Briefing from Outrigger Hotels and Resorts. Welcome to 2016!

Nearly a third of a century ago, on January 21, 1984, my staff and I cranked out the first issue of Saturday Briefing as a way to strengthen communication with our ‘ohana. Now after 32 years of pondering current events and distilling them into a weekly editorial, I have learned that while the news headlines change every day, the fundamental concerns that affect our society and our industry remain much the same.

To remind myself – all of us, really – of what was going on back then, I took a quick look at Wikipedia and noted a few events that took place in and around 1984:

- Ronald Reagan, United States president, was re-elected in November 1984, defeating Walter Mondale.
- Beirut, Lebanon, CIA station chief William Buckley was kidnapped and tortured by Hezbollah; he died in captivity in 1985.
- This followed Hezbollah’s April 1983 car-bombing of the U.S. Embassy in Beirut, which killed 24 people, and Islamic Jihad’s bombing of the U.S. Marines’ Beirut barracks that October, which killed 241 American servicemen. The barracks bombing prompted President Reagan to withdraw the Marines from Lebanon, which may have, in part, facilitated Buckley’s kidnapping in 1984.
- HTLV-III was identified as the virus that causes AIDS.
- Four African-American youths boarded an express subway train in the Bronx, the northernmost borough of New York City. They attempted to rob passenger Bernhard Goetz, who shot them. The event started a national debate about urban crime, which, though reduced, still plagues America today.
- Harbor-UCLA Medical Center announced history’s first embryo transfer from one woman to another that resulted in a live birth.

- Michael Jackson won a record eight Grammy Awards but his hair caught fire during the filming of a Pepsi commercial.

On the surface, it sounds as though things have not changed much over the past three decades, but if one looks a little deeper, it’s clear that in many parts of the world, the pace of change is accelerating and the magnitude is increasing too. Our careers, our industry, our climate, our demographics – almost everything is undergoing significant change. In more than eight decades of life, I have never seen a time like this.

Or maybe I’m overlooking other tumultuous times. Perhaps the world has experienced a period of similarly rapid and tectonic change. Let’s take a look.

In 1938, my parents, Roy and Estelle Kelley, may have felt much the way many do today when we look at the world spinning, it would seem, out of control. In that year, Nazi Germany annexed Austria in the Anschluss, the propaganda term Hitler used for his takeover of that neighboring German-speaking nation. The free world, led at the time by Britain and France, did not resist and, later, trying to appease Hitler’s expansionist appetite,
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British Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain signed the Munich Agreement, which allowed Germany to seize large parts of Czechoslovakia. This emboldened Hitler, who invaded Poland in 1939 and, in 1940, overran almost all the rest of Europe. World War II was underway.

Today, fanatics are again making news. They have taken over or are fighting for control of many nations in the Middle East. And once more the response of the free world has been timid. The Obama administration recently negotiated an agreement with Iran that proponents claim will keep that nation, widely regarded as the world's foremost state sponsor of terrorism, from developing nuclear weapons for at least 10 years. However, others believe the agreement will actually "pave the way" to an Iranian atomic bomb. In any case, it appears that Iran has already broken some of the agreement’s provisions.

Elsewhere, assaults, acts of terror, destruction and mayhem take place almost daily across Europe, in the streets of Paris, coffee shops in Tel Aviv, and office parties in San Bernardino, California.

The world’s economies are shaky too. China, once booming with double-digit annual GDP increases, is now seeing its economy slow and the value of its currency fall to the lowest point in several years, with unpredictable impacts on its global trading partners. Trading on China’s stock markets was temporarily suspended this week.

When we step back and look at the global picture, we see that the price of oil has plunged, which provides an economic boost for many, but hard times for oil producers and those who depend on them, from Russia to Texas. Many countries – not just Greece – are way over their heads in debt. And pundits everywhere are scrambling to stay abreast of events.

In spite of all this many economies are rolling forward. The U.S. is enjoying a building boom – office buildings, warehouses and many, many hotels.

Putting aside politics and macroeconomics for a moment, the changes that impress me most are in the area of technology. It is hard to believe how far we have progressed in just the past two decades. Around the time Saturday Briefing was born, a good part of Outrigger’s reservations were recorded by hand in an office in California because the cost of long-distance telephone service to Hawaii was extraordinarily high. Today, thanks to the invaluable help of our IT department, Outrigger remains on the leading edge of the hospitality industry’s use of computers and cell phone apps. These link us with industry partners and customers who now have the power at their fingertips – literally! – to book virtually any form of travel, from beach vacations to African safaris.

In addition, Outrigger now has sales offices throughout the world.
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This week we announced the opening of a sales and marketing representation office in Dubai. This will support an effort to attract Middle Eastern guests to Outrigger’s nine beachfront properties in Asia and across the Indian and Pacific oceans.

Compare that with our sales efforts in the 1950s. Back then, Roy and Estelle used to drive up and down California, stopping in towns large and small to chat with travel agents and drop off hotel brochures while their kids – Pat, Jean and I – waited in the back seat of the family Chevrolet.

By 1984 it was my turn to fill suitcases with Outrigger brochures, fly to cities like Sydney and Tokyo, and personally deliver them to independent travel agencies.

Today, thanks to digital media and the Internet, marketing materials can be delivered across the world in milliseconds. But technology is no replacement for strong personal relationships and local market knowledge, so we maintain a global sales and marketing network – now augmented by our new office in Dubai.

In addition to today’s sales offices and our unremitting efforts to maintain good relations with industry partners and promptly get updated sales materials into their hands, we now use social media and a host of other technologies to present our products and attract guests. “Big Data” allows us to focus on those who are most likely to book one of our properties.

Yes, we have changed in many ways and will continue changing with every passing day. The pace is breathtaking and, to some, frightening.

But let’s not let this complicated era affect our optimistic outlook. Let’s maintain the spirit of hospitality as practiced by many preceding generations across Asia, the Pacific, and the Indian Ocean. Whether you call it the Bula Spirit in Fiji, Ensame in Mauritius, Inafa’maolek in Guam, Mittrapat in Thailand, Ekuveriya in the Maldives, or Ke ‘Ano Wa’a in Hawai’i, it all comes down to “working as a family in harmony with the culture and environment of the places where we do business.” That’s the Outrigger Way! 🌴