



The Power of Fear



Jim Balsillie wrote in a 2017 Globe and Mail article that in the area of machine learning—considered one of Canada’s key assets in the global economy of the future, and where our government is investing a large amount of R&D dollars—Microsoft owns 1030 patents, while all of Canada owns 48. No matter how we slice it, it’s obvious that Canada is losing ground, and this fear may lead to amazing transformation. Perhaps helping us to shake free of what Jim Balsillie calls a “stubborn reliance on antiquated policy strategies that have nothing to do with how wealth is generated in the 21st-century global economy.”

I came to Canada when I was 14 years old. For all my life, my parents had saved their money to give their daughter a chance. On Sept 2, 1992, I ended my summer vacation from an all girls middle school in a third world country and began attending a private school in mid-town Toronto, with peers from a socio-economic class that I could barely relate to. My English vocabulary was less than 10 words. When I walked in through the doors of the 19th century mansion that housed my high school, I took one look at the hand-painted portrait of Queen Elizabeth II hanging on top of the majestic fireplace, and I experienced a kind of fear that I can still feel in my bones today. But I feel lucky to have experienced that fear because it made me work really hard to get away from it. I transformed my inability to speak English into a proficiency. In undergrad, I was scared of the lab and didn’t take any courses that had a lab component and I ended up with a PhD in science. I started Spindle from a place of fear too and while I don’t know where it will end up, everyday I am thankful for the decision.

This makes me think about Canada, the place that I have so much love and respect for. Spindle was founded on a principle to help Canadian innovators maintain our domestic prosperity and our status on the global economic stage. But I know from my personal experience, that to achieve this, we need more than a little help from a bunch of consultants; we need to acknowledge the fears that have frozen us in the 19th and 20th centuries and do the work that’s required to overcome them. For instance, we need to move past our comfortable policy structures of de-risking and incentivizing and move into aggressively boosting IP generation and company scaling. We need to produce, protect and export Canadian innovations, the kind that we are currently importing at a high-price from other more leading-edge countries like the US. Our traditional ways of doing things have served us well with the “bread and butter economies” that this nation is built on and of course we are scared to change, we don’t know what to change, and the task is becoming increasingly immense day by day. But our fear of change, which is a mild background component of our culture (and one that we can easily suppress), will soon be replaced by a different fear, that of obsolescence—and this variety, we won’t be able to ignore.