Being relatively young of age and having been married little more than 5 years, I don’t profess in the least to understand all the aspects and reasoning for the differences between men and women. However, I would like to share an observation I have made about my own specific relationship. I do so with no intention of stereotype.

When our kids have finally gone to sleep, my wife, Lindsay and I share with one another experiences of our day. I have noticed that during this very usual conversation a regular situation occurs. When my wife recounts a problem encountered, I immediately respond with a proposed solution or variety of solutions, sometimes even before she is done talking. Lindsay reacts disinterested to my solution or ideas and later that evening I realize she was not looking for a quick answer to her problem but for me just to listen.

I don’t intend with this description to infer any major league analogy to our topic here today, rather only to provide an example of a circumstance where our natural instincts to quickly solve the specific problem before us may not yield the broader outcome we desire.

A superior reaction to the problem, especially in regard to the real big ones like security at international border crossings, might be to re-examine our goals. A re-examination of our goals may reveal that a broader strategy or even additional goals or an additional fundamental purpose is necessary. In contrast specific solutions may only put a “band-aid” over a small surface wound with huge internal malignancies.

The President is credited by nearly everyone for having delayed the natural reaction of pushing the cruise missile button on September 12th and instead taking the time to carefully plan a comprehensive strategy intent on satisfying much loftier foals then merely seeking retribution or making box cutters prohibited carry-on. I believe he accomplish this by re-examining his charter and changing his charter.

From 1789 through today, U.S. Customs has been the principal revenue collectors of the United States Federal Government. While, of course, U.S. Customs is charged with enforcing numerous Laws of the United States at our borders, Customs is a duty collector and since the 80s a drug enforcer. On at
least three occasions of returning from Canada to the U.S. since September 11th, I have been asked only questions related to the potential impost of duty. For example, I pull up to the primary inspection booth, the Customs officer asks “any alcohol or tobacco?” I reply “no” and the officer responds by saying, “go ahead.”

The public outcry and the recommended changed to our security needs absolutely cannot be to change or add-on to the questions the officer asks, but rather to amend the Charter. The purpose of Customs, its reason for being must change; it has to be categorically changed. Ensuring the safety and security of our borders and the traveling public must be the pillar. In 2000, U.S. Customs collected $22.1 billion for the U.S. Treasury.

This historical role is not the fault of Customs. I am not blaming them or taking a shot. They, like the majority of us find ourselves in the same position.

My organization operates the busiest border crossing in terms of trade in the United Stated. It was built in the 1920s as the longest suspension bridge ever at the time. At that time, and until the advent of terrorism in our country, a bridge’s success could be assured by successfully engineering and construction of the physical infrastructure alone. Now satisfying those requirements alone don’t even get a passing grade.

Obviously, the number of gates, terminal square footage and runway capacity have done little to assure any of our nation’s airports success since September 11th. I am not minimizing the importance of those items, but they’re just pre-requisites today, while in the past they were homeruns all by themselves. Safety and security is the new ballgame in town.

At our organization I can say that we just didn’t get it the first few days after September 11th. We had lots of excuses for not seeing straight form the outset, a very busy crossing, huge demands from the just-in-time needs of our auto industry with thousands of layoffs as the ultimate repercussion, and the risk of our structure itself as a target, as well as being in a general state of shock.

But upon our reflection, stimulation by significant public outcry for maximum safety and security while traveling across the border, along with the important forward thinking from the City of Windsor, the home to the Canadian half of the Ambassador Bridge – we changed our charter.

We decided that our most important reason for being was the “safety and security of the traveling public,” who use our facility. If we could not do that, nothing else mattered.

But we are also reminded that life is complicated. So we were not surprised when the import and export community further suggested that border crossings needed to become more efficient then they were pre-September 11th. All of this to be accomplished under the new safety and security umbrella.

The fact we changed our charter doesn’t mean we now have the exact right answer for how to decide each and every issue dealing with safety and security at the Bridge. But it sure makes deciding and acting on the fundamentals much easier.

For example:
- We need more Customs, INS, and border patrols from both countries, staffed at the Bridge.
- We don’t want any travelers or goods inspected after they cross, but rather before.
- We need to respond to the import and export communities’ need for efficiency, which is part of their survival plan.
- We want to augment and re-develop our plaza and offsite facilities to best accommodate our 1st three prescriptions.

These positions obviously don’t provide detailed assurances of our success but they do provide necessary direction. This direction has been embraced by the U.S. Congress and the President through the funding of additional INS and U.S. Customs staffing on the U.S./Canada border. Governor Ridge and Minister Manley of Canada have included pre-clearance as part of their 30-point smart border agreement. As well, support from congress has been significant. Both Michigan Senators, Carol Levin and Debbie Stabenow, as well as numerous members of the Michigan Congressional Delegation including Congresswoman Carolyn Kilpatrick, Congressman John Dingell, Congressman Joe Knollenberg, Congressman Sander Levin, Congressman Dave Camp, and others have called for “reverse customs” (meaning inspection prior to crossing). This anticipates a small resolution in the way we do things at the U.S./Canada border.

These actions provide evidence the Charter is changing for the entire northern boarder. Safety and security at the border and for the traveling public is paramount.

This doesn’t mean that there aren’t many voices, bodies, organizations, and interest groups that aren’t proposing specific resolutions to specific safety and security problems under the cloak that “if we only made this one change at the border,” all of our safety and security concerns would be solved.

For some, the allure of past solutions to transportation problems is irresistible and the notion of what we really need to do is build new infrastructure – more bridges or tunnels over or under the river, this some say would solve our “problem.”

For others the stock market decline of the tech stocks has not shaken their conviction that if we only applied brand new technologies in the form of I.D. cards, facial recognition, or countless other devices and systems would solve our “problem.”

And there are some who think that if we only deployed the systems and procedures that we already have the way they were designed to be; instead of the way they are deployed, this action would solve the “problem.”

While, of course, some of these ideas on “how to solve the problem” may have meerit. All fail to recognize that providing safety and security to our borders and the traveling public is not a problem to be solved like a rubik cube, rather it requires a constant mission motivated by a fundamental change to our basic character.

The Charter must be changed. By way of example, here are some of the questions we should ask ourselves:
- Is the flow and efficiency of traffic on our highways, bridges, tunnels, ferries, trains, etc. more important than safety and security?
- Doesn’t safety and security demand a position at least equal in importance of mission to that of traffic flow and trade and commerce?
- Is safety and security superior to the collection of duties?
- How much water can Customs carry and do a world class job out of it?
- Does what we do matter if we don’t have safety and security first?

I’ve enjoyed very much the opportunity to have these brief few moments and to share our new Charter with you. I would also like to leave with the Transportation Research Board a 157-page study we commissioned. It is our hope that the Transportation Research Board would thoughtfully review this matter of safety and security at our borders, review our study and support our call for the new Charter.