FROM THE DESK OF

J. RANDALL GLADDEN

Issue No. 003
October 2026

Perspective · Strategy · Opportunity

Each month I share my perspective on the economic, business, and leadership – not simply to understand, but to challenge how we think, expand what's possible, and empower decisive action.

A conversation this week with the leader of a nonprofit stayed with me. Giving has shifted so dramatically that they are having to find new ways to fund their efforts. It reminded me how far a change in confidence can reach.

The Warning Beneath the Spending

Retail sales rose in August, yet consumer confidence fell sharply in September. And expectations continue to weaken. People are still spending, but they feel less optimistic about what comes next.

That is where we need to pay attention.

Listen to what people are saying about their ability to keep up. Then watch what they do. A customer takes longer to decide. A family delays a purchase. A donor gives less or pauses a commitment.

Small decisions, repeated across enough households, can change the picture quickly.

The impact moves beyond the business that loses a sale. Delayed hires close off income and experience. Smaller orders put pressure on suppliers and their staff. Nonprofits face hard choices when support declines. Each decision may make sense on its own; together, they can weaken stability of households and communities. And the next generation has fewer places to learn, contribute, and find its footing.

KEY INSIGHT

LORD & GLADDEN
619.417.0336
contact@lordandgladden.com

What consumers spend tells us what they did. Their confidence helps us understand what they may be willing and able to do next.

Leaders at every level need to recognize the shift while there is still room to act. Listen for the hesitation in decisions that used to come easily. Watch where commitments begin to slow and consider who else feels the impact. Use what you see to build stability where you can – protecting essential work, developing emerging leaders, and helping people build the skills and judgement they need for the next season. Early recognition matters when it changes how we prepare and help others succeed.

What begins as hesitation in the marketplace can become uncertainty inside the organization.

When Uncertainty Spreads

Uncertainty rarely stays with the person making the decision. While a leader weighs the options, the team is making decisions of its own. Without a clear direction, people fill in the gaps, trust weakens, and a team that needs to move together can begin pulling apart.

Bring them in. Share what you know, what you are watching, and what matters most now. Tell them what might cause a change in direction. Then ask what they are seeing. People closest to the work often recognize a shift before it reaches a report.

Give them a real part of the response. Let them help identify problems and test solutions. Entrust them with the decisions they are ready to make, with clear priorities and the support to learn from the results. Involvement builds ownership; exercised judgment builds capacity.

KEY TAKEAWAY

Do more than navigate the moment. Give ownership to the team and develop those who will carry the next one.

People draw closer when they understand the direction and know their contribution matters. As they take responsibility together, the team grows stronger through the very conditions testing it.

The Next Generation Needs a Way In

Maybe it is because I have two young adult sons, but I find myself increasingly concerned about the future our young people are stepping into. Education costs more, but offers less certainty, and can leave young people with debt that strangles their choices before they get started.

Homeownership feels further away. Even finding that first opportunity to build a career can be difficult. We can tell them to work hard and prepare but also need to recognize that the path we knew may no longer work the same way for them.

WHAT WE CAN DO

Leaders can help create a path. Give them meaningful work and let them see how decisions are made. Introduce them to people who will share their experience, offer perspective, and help them develop. Opportunity matters most when it gives someone a chance to grow, contribute, and build a record they can carry forward.

We also need to prepare them for a world that will keep changing. That means teaching more than the steps that worked for us. Show them how to recognize a shift, ask better questions, learn a new skill, and make sound decisions when the familiar answers no longer fit.

Bring them into the work of solving real problems. Encourage their initiative, help them sharpen their judgment, and let them learn from the results. Initiative and judgment help them create value that is uniquely theirs and difficult to replace.

Final Thoughts

The effects of declining confidence can reach further than the economic headlines suggest. They influence the work we sustain, how our teams respond, and the opportunities young people receive. We can recognize the shift early, strengthen those around us, and **help them shape what comes next**.

The future is yours to own. What will you build from what you've been given?

Until next month, continue building, governing, and creating opportunity where others only see uncertainty.

Until next month,
J. Randall Gladden
Founder | Lord & Gladden