

Balance is the Key to Power

date

ideas

why is it important to me?

What action will I take?

what is my first step?

core

experience

contribution

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# THE FIRST SUSPENSION BRIDGE AT NIAGARA FALLS



Over 150 years ago, William Hamilton Merritt dreamed of building the first bridge over the Niagara River, near Niagara Falls. In 1846, permission was received from the Governments of Upper Canada and the State of New York for the formation of two companies with the ability to construct a bridge at the Falls. They were the Niagara Falls Suspension Bridge Company of Canada and the International Bridge Company of New York. The companies would build and own the bridge jointly. In the fall of 1847, the bridge companies commissioned Charles Ellet, Jr. to construct the bridge at a site selected along the Niagara River. The site was located along the Niagara Gorge and was the narrowest point from shoreline to shoreline.

The first obstacle was to create a line of communication followed by a solid line in order to establish a link from the Canadian side to the American side. The width of the gorge was 800 feet. It was too dangerous to attempt to establish this link by water. It occurred to someone that kite-flying might be the answer to this difficult problem.

A contest was held with a five dollar prize being offered to the person who could fly a kite across the Niagara Gorge. A young American boy named Homan Walsh won the contest on the second day of the competition flying his kite from the Canadian shoreline to the American shoreline. The string of his kite was fastened to a tree on the American side and a light cord was attached to it and pulled across the gorge. Next came a heavier cord, then a rope and finally a wire cable composed of a number of strands of number ten wire. These small, seemingly insignificant, strands became the beginning of the new bridge that would carry people and animals between the two countries.

A fifty foot wooden tower was erected on each bank and wire cable measuring 1,190 feet was passed over the top of the towers and anchored. Initially a metal basket, looking like two high backed rocking chairs facing each other, was pulled from one side to the other. One hundred and twenty-five people crossed each day in the basket contraption for a one dollar fare. The first of these trips was made on May 12, 1848. A foot bridge three feet wide was soon built allowing a great number of people to cross the Niagara River Gorge daily for a fee of twenty-five cents.

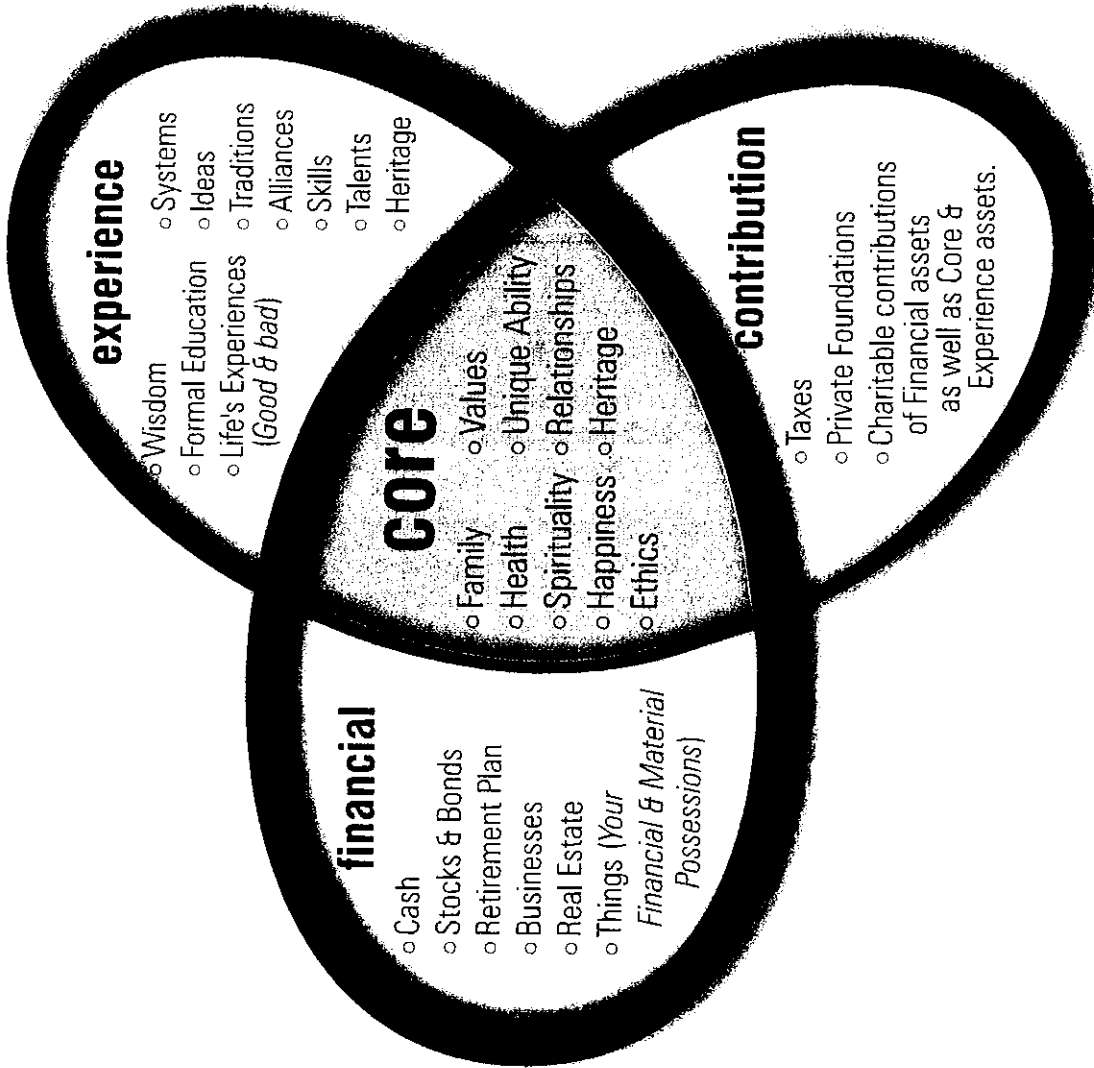
On July 26, 1848, the first Niagara Suspension Bridge was completed. Charles Ellet, Jr. was the first to ride across in a horse and carriage. It was officially opened to the public on August 1, 1848. This bridge was 762 feet long and 8 feet wide. It had a heavy oak plank roadway suspended 220 feet above the river. Although it swayed and dipped under a heavy load or the wind, there was no record of any accident or injury occurring to a person crossing.

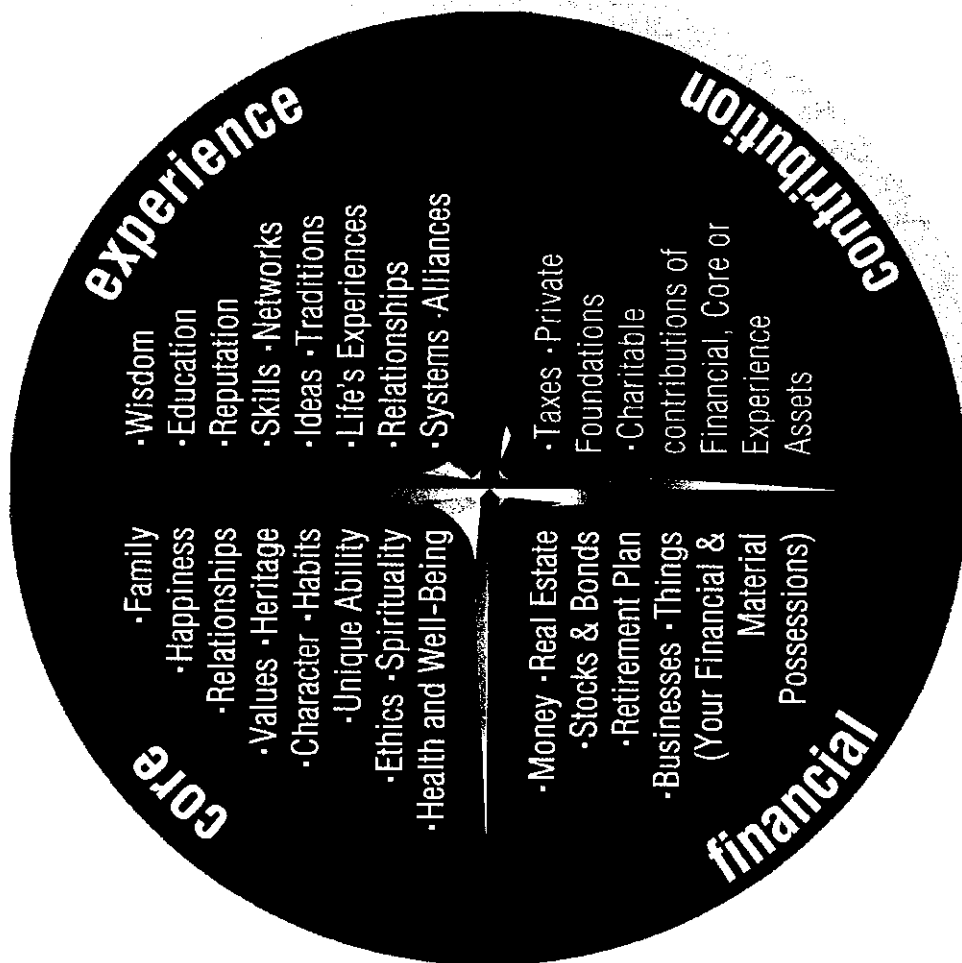
The bridge consisted of four massive wooden towers each 80 feet high, two on each side of the bank from which cables were suspended. There were four cables - each composed of approximately 120 strands of Number 10 wire. Each cable had been stretched at an equal tension, with wire passing around an iron yoke at each end as a means of anchoring the cables to the rock. Suspending wires connected the cross cable to the wooden superstructure below. It is hard to believe this entire infrastructure began with a kite string.

**what is your kite string?**

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