

Surviving—and Thriving—in an Age of Uncertainty

You can't control change, but you can control your reaction to it. Change is natural, and leaders face it and embrace it, or ignore it and lose.

Dot-coms are toppling like dominoes. Corporations are announcing massive layoffs and reorganizations. Smart business leaders are taking a reflective step back to look at this time as an opportunity to strengthen products and services that are being produced in their organizations.

Change is nature's way of clearing out the old as preparation for a new beginning, so it makes sense to at least get comfortable with the process of change. As a change leader the best thing you can do is to keep your eye on the future, mark your target and move toward it by taking positive action toward developing business goals, looking for ways to implement change, and developing a balance between what needs to be continued and what needs to be changed. This period of change forces you to do what you should have been doing, looking for ways to internally create the change needed to develop products and services that will cause your organization to be successful. During the change process is when leaders' arrogance, lack of internal communication, and out dated products and services are exposed. These issues need to be addressed through a developmental change process.

•Developmental Change Process.

Focus on future business opportunities by asking employees for input, knowing customer needs, and organizational restructuring that can lead the way to building a successful organization. Here are some tips for developing a new way of thinking:

- ✓Think about change, competition, and educated consumer demands.
- ✓Deal with the situation as it is and develop alternatives. Reflect on present strengths and future needs.
- ✓Listen attentively to issues, concerns, and ideas from employees. Get all levels of employees involved by pushing up communications from the employees who have their hands on the products, services and customer-wants. The greatest lost resource in an organization is the lack of input from employees at the lower levels of the organization.
- ✓Approach the future as a beginning, not as a repetition of past events.
- ✓Accept where you are and plan for the future. Do not put energy into "I should have."
- ✓Utilize and build on your strengths as you plan.
- ✓Realize that change involves risk taking and flexibility. You want to build a fluid organization, not a mechanistic, robot like organization.
- ✓Create a clear vision and direction and communicate it for everyone to follow.

• **Four Organizational Questions to ask.**

What are our strengths?

What needs to be eliminated?

What needs to be acquired?

What needs to be avoided?

• **Understanding the change process.** Here are the steps:

Present. Analyze the present situation. What led up to it? What is occurring now? What will be the outcome without change? What are the organizational standards and traditions?

Future Results. Identify needs, wants, and desires that will influence others to want change. Know the destination, the goal. Know the vision through understanding, reflection, intuition, and a sense of direction.

Strategy. How will you get where you want to go? Understand the “what” and the “how” needed to reach the destination. Will you go straight through or change in the middle? Strategy cannot be implemented without having a clear understanding of future results.

Transformational action. Know the actions that are to be implemented and measured to ensure that each step or phase of the strategy is accomplished. These are the day-to-day actions of the major plan. This is what puts strategy in place and holds people accountable.

Reassess. When you arrive, do you know where you are? Did you achieve the results you wanted? Measure what the strategy and transformation did for the organization.

Nature is our teacher when it comes to change; think of a forest fire that clears away old, dead growth to make way for burgeoning new life.

As a forest fire burns off the old leaves and foliage, the changes in business burns away excess and obsolete technologies, products, and services. Nature teaches that the strong survive and so it is in business. Every product and service should now be examined through the “fire” to see what needs to be saved and what needs to be eliminated. These change cycles that occur in business are a cleansing period—a time of rebirth—and will ultimately lead to a healthy, thriving future.

Finally, keep in mind that relentless changes in the business world are normal, cyclical and in the end, healthy.

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