Better Business Focus

August 2018

Expert inspiration for a Better Business

Better Business Focus is the essential key for business owners and managers. It achieves that by focusing on the way in which successful businesses compete and manage their organisations. It focuses on how people are recruited, coached and developed; on how marketing and selling is undertaken in professional markets as well as in markets with intense competition; on how technology and the Internet is reshaping the face of domestic and home business; and on how people are being equipped with new skills and techniques. In short, it offers expert inspiration for a better business.

This month's contents

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Drayton Bird

Where to find missing profits (again)

I must apologise for what follows, because I said something very similar previously.

However, I am prompted to repeat it with variations because of something which I remembered this morning.

I was writing to a client who has three unique products - products so good that, amongst others, the military, the banks, the railways and telecoms are interested in them - not to mention some of the world most famous brands.

Other people can see that they are great products, too, because he had no trouble raising a lot of money.

Yet he was not making a profit, which must have frustrated him - and plain maddened me - because I knew precisely what he had to do.

So this is what I wrote - and if it rings any bells with you, I'm glad!

"You have an almost unnatural ability to come up with winning products - I was actually telling someone about it the other day.

But you're only half way - from what you told me - to making a profit on them.

Without even looking I wager I can tell you where the missing profits are.

They are in unsold leads. Millions of pounds worth of profits.

I recall that the very first thing I ever wrote for you was a follow-up to people who had enquired but not bought.

I will lay a lot of money that it is not being used systematically - and probably not at all. The reason is that your sales manager is in charge of this. For in nearly 50 years in this business I have ALWAYS found that:

1. If a sale is not made the average salesman (or sales manager) thinks it will never be made because the prospect is:

a. Not interested or
b. Stupid or
c. Has no money or
d. Not the real decision-maker
e. Not the right kind of company
f. Not a genuine prospect

2. Whereas in fact:

a. They did not like the salesman.
b. The sales pitch was no good
c. They had something else they needed to buy
d. "Something came up"
e. They moved to another job
f. They couldn't persuade the money people

I guarantee that you have all the sales you need lying around in unsold leads but not followed up ... and I bet your sales manager doesn't believe it.

This is your friend speaking!

Best,

Drayton

P.S. Don't forget - if you have a friend or colleague who you think would like to hear from me, please forward me their address. They'll get a polite invitation - which they can decline - and I never share my email lists.

About the Author

In 2003, the Chartered Institute of Marketing named Drayton Bird one of 50 living individuals who have shaped today's marketing. He has spoken in 53 countries for many organisations, and much of what he discusses derive from his work with many of the world's greatest brands. These include American Express, Audi, Bentley, British Airways, Cisco, Deutsche Post, Ford, IBM, McKinsey, Mercedes, Microsoft, Nestle, Philips, Procter & Gamble, Toyota, Unilever, Visa and Volkswagen. In various capacities – mostly as a writer – Drayton has helped sell everything from Airbus planes to Peppa Pig. His book, *Commonsense Direct and Digital Marketing*, out in 17 languages, has been the UK's best seller on the subject every year since 1982.

Co-ordinates

Drayton Bird Associates
Web: http://draytonbird.com
Tel: +44 (0) 845 3700 121
Email: drayton@draytonbird.com or db@draytonbird.com

Ron Kaufman

The steering committee setup checklist

At UP! Your Service, we have developed a comprehensive checklist of strategic implementation activities that help our clients plan, implement, and sustain the momentum of a service culture building program.

We are happy to share with you one of the many tools from our proprietary Service Culture Development Checklist: **The Steering Committee Setup Checklist**.

What is a Steering Committee?

A Steering Committee is a group of leaders providing top level support and guidance to your service initiative. They are an action-based task force giving direction, breaking down barriers, reviewing results, and making recommendations for ongoing improvement. Steering Committee members should come from a variety of functional areas in the organization.

Why do you need a Steering Committee?

A Steering Committee ensures success by representing the concerns and interests of everyone in the organization and aligning the service culture building activities underway.

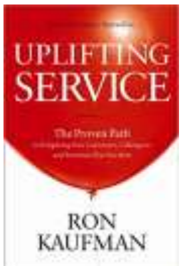
Here is the checklist we use to help our clients set up their Service Culture Steering Committee:

The Steering Committee Setup Checklist

1. Steering Committee members from across the organization have been identified.
2. Steering Committee members have been invited to join.
3. The Steering Committee has been officially formed, including communication with all members.
4. A Sponsor for the Steering Committee has been identified.
5. A Project Manager for the Steering Committee has been identified.
6. The Steering Committee has been announced to the organization.
7. Proposed agendas for Steering Committee meetings have been established.
8. The Steering Committee has established ground rules for operation and measures of committee effectiveness.
9. The frequency and duration of Steering Committee meetings has been confirmed and scheduled for 6 months.
10. The role and involvement of the UP team with the Steering Committee meetings has been agreed.
11. The Steering Committee has created an overall communications plan for the service initiative.
12. Frequency, methods, and mediums for communication from the Steering Committee to stakeholders and the organization have been determined.
13. A plan for rotating Steering Committee members at designated intervals (6-12 months) has been created.
14. Measures of Success have been identified and confirmed.
15. Priorities from The 12 Building Blocks of Service Culture have been identified based on the Service Culture Indicator (SCI) report.
16. Scoping of support from the team at UP! Your Service team has been confirmed.

About the Author

Ron Kaufman is author of The New York Times, USA Today and Amazon.com bestseller, "Uplifting Service! A Proven Path to Delighting Your Customers, Colleagues and Everyone Else You Meet" and 14 other books on service, business and inspiration. He is also the founder of UP! Your Service, a company that enables organizations to build Uplifting Service cultures and enjoy a sustainable advantage.



Co-ordinates

Mail: UP! Your Service
50 Bayshore Road, Suite 31-02
Singapore 469977
Tel: (+65) 6309-9668
E-mail: Enquiry@UpYourService.com
Web: www.UpYourService.com

Braden Kelley

A peek inside the mind of Jeff Bezos

It is not too often that the leader of a Fortune 500 gives you an insight into how their company achieves competitive advantage in the marketplace in a letter to shareholders, instead of launching into a page or two of flowery prose written by the Public Relations (PR) team that works for them. The former is what Jeff Bezos tends to deliver year after year. This year's letter is particularly interesting.

The two key insights in this year's letter were that:
#1 – Amazon strives to view itself as a startup champion riding to the rescue of customers
#2 – Amazon chooses to be customer-obsessed, not customer-focused or customer-centric, but customer-obsessed

Both of these are crucial to sustaining innovation, and are supported by Jeff's other main pieces of advice:
– Resisting proxies
– Embracing external trends
– Practicing high velocity decision making

But, I won't steal Jeff's thunder. I encourage you to read Jeff's letter to shareholders in its entirety, check out the bonus video interview at the end, and add comments to share what you find particularly interesting in the letter.

Keep innovating!

2016 Letter to Amazon Shareholders
April 12, 2017

"Jeff, what does Day 2 look like?"
That's a question I just got at our most recent all-hands meeting. I've been reminding people that it's Day 1 for a couple of decades. I work in an Amazon building named Day 1, and when I moved buildings, I took the name with me. I spend time thinking about this topic.

"Day 2 is stasis. Followed by irrelevance. Followed by excruciating, painful decline. Followed by death. And that is why it is always Day 1."

To be sure, this kind of decline would happen in extreme slow motion. An established company might harvest Day 2 for decades, but the final result would still come.

I'm interested in the question how do you fend off Day 2? What are the techniques and tactics? How do you keep the vitality of Day 1, even inside a large organization?

Such a question can't have a simple answer. There will be many elements, multiple paths, and many traps. I don't know the whole answer, but I may know bits of it. Here's a starter pack of essentials for Day 1 defense: customer obsession, a sceptical view of proxies, the eager adoption of external trends, and high-velocity decision making.

True Customer Obsession

There are many ways to centre a business. You can be competitor focused, you can be product focused, you can be technology focused, you can be business model focused, and there are more. But in my view, obsessive customer focus is by far the most protective of Day 1 vitality.

Why? There are many advantages to a customer-centric approach, but here's the big one: customers are always beautifully, wonderfully dissatisfied, even when they report being happy and business is great. Even when they don't yet know it, customers want something better, and your desire to delight customers will drive you to invent on their behalf. No customer ever asked Amazon to create the Prime membership program, but it sure turns out they wanted it, and I could give you many such examples.

Staying in Day 1 requires you to experiment patiently, accept failures, plant seeds, protect saplings, and double down when you see customer delight. A customer-obsessed culture best creates the conditions where all of that can happen.

Resist Proxies

As companies get larger and more complex, there's a tendency to manage to proxies. This comes in many shapes and sizes, and it's dangerous, subtle, and very Day 2.

A common example is process as proxy. Good process serves you so you can serve customers. But if you're not watchful, the process can become the thing. This can happen very easily in large organizations. The process becomes the proxy for the result you want. You stop looking at outcomes and just make sure you're doing the process right. Gulp. It's not that rare to hear a junior leader defend a bad outcome with something like, "Well, we followed the process." A more experienced leader will use it as an opportunity to investigate and improve the process. The process is not the thing. It's always worth asking, do we own the process or does the process own us? In a Day 2 company, you might find it's the second.

Another example: market research and customer surveys can become proxies for customers – something that's especially dangerous when you're inventing and designing products. "Fifty-five percent of beta testers report being satisfied with this feature. That is up from 47% in the first survey." That's hard to interpret and could unintentionally mislead.

Good inventors and designers deeply understand their customer. They spend tremendous energy developing that intuition. They study and understand many anecdotes rather than only the averages you'll find on surveys. They live with the design.

I'm not against beta testing or surveys. But you, the product or service owner, must understand the customer, have a vision, and love the offering. Then, beta testing and research can help you find your blind spots. A remarkable customer experience starts with heart, intuition, curiosity, play, guts, taste. You won't find any of it in a survey.

Embrace External Trends

The outside world can push you into Day 2 if you won't or can't embrace powerful trends quickly. If you fight them, you're probably fighting the future. Embrace them and you have a tailwind.

These big trends are not that hard to spot (they get talked and written about a lot), but they can be strangely hard for large organizations to embrace. We're in the middle of an obvious one right now: machine learning and artificial intelligence.

Over the past decades computers have broadly automated tasks that programmers could describe with clear rules and algorithms. Modern machine learning techniques now allow us to do the same for tasks where describing the precise rules is much harder.

At Amazon, we've been engaged in the practical application of machine learning for many years now. Some of this work is highly visible: our autonomous Prime Air delivery drones; the Amazon Go convenience store that uses machine vision to eliminate checkout lines; and Alexa, our cloud-based AI assistant. (We still struggle to keep Echo in stock, despite our best efforts. A high-quality problem, but a problem. We're working on it.)

But much of what we do with machine learning happens beneath the surface. Machine learning drives our algorithms for demand forecasting, product search ranking, product and deals recommendations, merchandising placements, fraud detection, translations, and much more. Though less visible, much of the impact of machine learning will be of this type – quietly but meaningfully improving core operations.

Inside AWS, we're excited to lower the costs and barriers to machine learning and AI so organizations of all sizes can take advantage of these advanced techniques.

Using our pre-packaged versions of popular deep learning frameworks running on P2 compute instances (optimized for this workload), customers are already developing powerful systems ranging everywhere from early disease detection to increasing crop yields. And we've also made Amazon's higher level services available in a convenient form. Amazon Lex (what's inside Alexa), Amazon Polly, and Amazon Rekognition remove the heavy lifting from natural language understanding, speech generation, and image analysis. They can be accessed with simple API calls – no machine learning expertise required. Watch this space. Much more to come.

High-Velocity Decision Making

Day 2 companies make high-quality decisions, but they make high-quality decisions slowly. To keep the energy and dynamism of Day 1, you have to somehow make high-quality, high-velocity decisions. Easy for start-ups and very challenging for large organizations. The senior team at Amazon is determined to keep our decision-making velocity high. Speed matters in business – plus a high-velocity decision making environment is more fun too. We don't know all the answers, but here are some thoughts.

First, never use a one-size-fits-all decision-making process. Many decisions are reversible, two-way doors. Those decisions can use a light-weight process. For those, so what if you're wrong? I wrote about this in more detail in last year's letter.

Second, most decisions should probably be made with somewhere around 70% of the information you wish you had. If you wait for 90%, in most cases, you're probably being slow. Plus, either way, you need to be good at quickly recognizing and correcting bad decisions. If you're good at course correcting, being wrong may be less costly than you think, whereas being slow is going to be expensive for sure.

Third, use the phrase "disagree and commit." This phrase will save a lot of time. If you have conviction on a particular direction even though there's no consensus, it's helpful to say, "Look, I know we disagree on this but will you gamble with me on it? Disagree and commit?" By the time you're at this point, no one can know the answer for sure, and you'll probably get a quick yes.

This isn't one way. If you're the boss, you should do this too. I disagree and commit all the time. We recently greenlit a particular Amazon Studios original. I told the team my view: debatable whether it would be interesting enough, complicated to produce, the business terms aren't that good, and we have lots of other opportunities. They had a completely different opinion and wanted to go ahead. I wrote back right away with "I disagree and commit and hope it becomes the most watched thing we've ever made." Consider how much slower this decision cycle would have been if the team had actually had to convince me rather than simply get my commitment.

Note what this example is not: it's not me thinking to myself "well, these guys are wrong and missing the point, but this isn't worth me chasing." It's a genuine disagreement of opinion, a candid expression of my view, a chance for the team to weigh my view, and a quick, sincere commitment to go their way. And given that this team has already brought home 11 Emmys, 6 Golden Globes, and 3 Oscars, I'm just glad they let me in the room at all!

Fourth, recognize true misalignment issues early and escalate them immediately. Sometimes teams have different objectives and fundamentally different views. They are not aligned. No amount of discussion, no number of meetings will resolve that deep misalignment. Without escalation, the default dispute resolution mechanism for this scenario is exhaustion. Whoever has more stamina carries the decision.

I've seen many examples of sincere misalignment at Amazon over the years. When we decided to invite third party sellers to compete directly against us on our own product detail pages – that was a big one. Many smart, well-intentioned Amazonians were simply not at all aligned with the direction. The big decision set up hundreds of smaller decisions, many of which needed to be escalated to the senior team.

"You've worn me down" is an awful decision-making process. It's slow and de-energizing. Go for quick escalation instead – it's better.

So, have you settled only for decision quality, or are you mindful of decision velocity too? Are the world's trends tailwinds for you? Are you falling prey to proxies, or do they serve you?

And most important of all, are you delighting customers? We can have the scope and capabilities of a large company and the spirit and heart of a small one. But we have to choose it.

A huge thank you to each and every customer for allowing us to serve you, to our shareowners for your support, and to Amazonians everywhere for your hard work, your ingenuity, and your passion.

As always, I attach a copy of our original 1997 letter. It remains Day 1.

Sincerely,
Jeff

About the Author

Braden Kelley is an experienced innovation speaker, trainer, and digital transformation specialist. He is the author of Charting Change and of Stoking Your Innovation Bonfire, the creator of the Change Planning Toolkit™ and an InnovationExcellence.com co-Founder. Braden has been advising companies on how to increase their revenue and cut their costs since 1996. He writes and speaks frequently on the topics of continuous innovation, digital transformation, and organizational change. He has maximized profits for companies while living and working in England, Germany, and the United States. Braden earned his MBA from top-rated London Business School.

Co-ordinates

LinkedIn: Linkedin
Twitter: Twitter (@innovate)
Web: http://bradenkelley.com

Marissa Levin

5 things leaders can do now to help end the mental health crisis

Mental health issues have reached a point of crisis. Leaders can and must step up to address the stigma and work toward resolution.

For many people, mental health used to be a topic that applied to other people. "Disorders" such as depression and anxiety didn't impact "normal" people. Today, mental illness is known as a common thread in most families:

- 44 million adults experience mental illness in a given year
- 16 million American adults live with major depression
- 42 million American adults live with anxiety disorder
- One-half of all chronic mental illness begins by the age of 14; three-quarters by the age of 24
- Depression is the leading cause of disability worldwide
- Mental illness costs America $193.2 billion in lost earnings every year

Mental illness impacts everyone. I'm transparent about my own struggles with anxiety and depression. As a leader and influencer, I believe it's my obligation to shed light into the darkest corners of my journey so others know they are not alone in their fight.

The suicides of Kate Spade and Anthony Bourdain have amplified the conversation about mental illness, following the string of horrific school shootings that continue to occur in the American school systems.

Business leaders cannot sit idle or remain silent.

Here are five initiatives leaders can consider today to start breaking down the stigmas around mental health, in their organizations and beyond.

1. Examine the culture.

Neuroscience research proves that employees crave three things: to feel safe, to feel they belong, and to feel that they matter. When organizations provide these, employee loyalty doubles.

Organizations that foster cultures of trust report 74 percent less stress, 106 percent more energy at work, 50 percent higher productivity, 13 percent fewer sick days, 76 percent more engagement, 29 percent more satisfaction with their lives, and 40 percent less burnout.

2. Create opportunities and spaces for daily time-outs.

Mindfulness and meditation are increasingly becoming mainstream concepts that organizations are integrating into their health and wellness programs. Apple, Nike, and Google offer mindfulness curriculums to their employees.

However, there are many approaches that companies of all sizes can take to encourage organization-wide mindfulness.

Further, leaders can role-model healthy, stress-reducing behaviours such as taking regularly scheduled breaks or engaging in walking meetings, rather than staying chained to a desk or conference room. They can also institute "mental health days" so that employees know it's OK to step away from work to care for themselves.

3. Make fun a line item in the budget.

When I was running my first company, Information Experts, we experienced the stresses any fast-growing organization does. We established a Good Times Committee composed of employees who planned events throughout the year to inject fun into the culture. These activities took the edge off our most stressful times.

4. Be aware of employee triggers.

I remind all of my CEO clients that as the CEO, they play the role of the "chief emotional officer." When we hire employees, they all arrive with invisible but significant baggage. They bring with them at least 20 years of lifetime history that has shaped who they are and contributed to how they got to this point in time. They are so much more than what their résumé conveys and the interview indicated.

Seeing our employees as people - and not simply resources to help us achieve a revenue or growth target - is essential in creating empathetic, emotional connections.

There will be times when life impacts how employees show up and how they perform. One can not simply separate life from work. Knowing potential triggers and giving employees room to be human goes a long way in fostering a mentally healthy environment.

5. Provide access to resources for support.

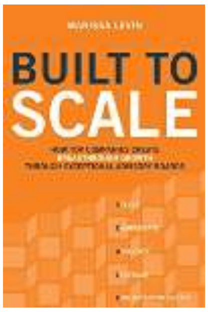
One of my clients runs a cancer centre. His employees help patients and family members that are facing life-or-death scenarios. Previously, these stressful situations provided no emotional outlets for the employees. We established closed roundtables in which employees could discuss their situations and the impacts they were having in their personal and professional lives. Simply creating a time and space for them to release their frustrations and stress has resulted in much greater employee satisfaction and engagement.

Organizations can provide brochures for mental health support, as well as names of websites and phone numbers such as the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline and National Alliance on Mental Illness. Sharing this information with employees conveys that asking for help is acceptable and encouraged, and that no one has to suffer in silence or alone.

Leaders have the obligation and opportunity to *be the change they wish to see in the world.* Regardless of title, position, or what's in our bank accounts, we are all in this together.

About the Author

Marissa Levin is the founder and CEO of Successful Culture, which helps CEOs and leadership teams master the three most critical aspects of business growth: leadership development, strategy formulation and execution, and organizational culture assessment and improvement. She is also the author of Built to Scale: How Top Companies Create Breakthrough Growth Through Exceptional Advisory Boards.



Co-ordinates

Twitter: twitter.com/marissalevin
Web: successfulculture.com/

Sunil Bali

Composing vs. decomposing

Fifty-four years after releasing their debut album, The Rolling Stones are in the recording studio working on their next one.

When Keith Richards was asked why, at the age of 74 with over $300million in the bank, he feels the need to write a new album, he replied, "*If I'm not composing, I'm decomposing.*"

Richards was then asked "*But don't you find it stressful working 12 hours a day at the age of 74?*"

He replied: "*Stress isn't working 12 hours a day doing a job you love. Stress is working 8 hours a day doing a job you hate.*"

Harvard psychologist Shawn Achor says that the happiest people are those that express themselves and create everyday….. whether this is a song, a soufflé, a spreadsheet …. or whatever …. the choice is yours.

About the Author

Sunil is a Performance Coach, Speaker and Author.

Ex Head of Talent for Vodafone Group and Santander, and having run a £50m business, Sunil has been responsible for hiring over 50000 people and has had the pleasure of working with some great entrepreneurs, professionals and leaders.

Co-ordinates

E-mail: sunil@sunilbali.com
Web: www.sunilbali.com
LinkedIn: linkedin.com/in/sunilbali1

Greg Satell

The platform fallacy

It seems like every business discussion today is just counting the seconds before the term "platform" comes up. Books and articles are written, pundits swoon and conference audiences nod and exchange glances in knowing agreement. Everyone, it seems, wants to transform their business into a platform.

Yet take the argument to its logical conclusion and the message becomes problematic. Platforms, as many have observed, function as multi-sided markets and therefore must connect value to value. So, if everybody becomes a platform, who actually creates the value to make a vibrant marketplace?

The truth is that, while some amazing platform businesses have been created, there is also a considerable amount of survivorship bias going on. We notice the Amazons, Ubers and AirBnB's, but forget about the thousands of platform start-ups that failed. Make no mistake, even in an increasingly networked world, you still need to create, deliver and capture value.

Creating Value

When Elance was founded in 1999, it seemed like a really good idea. Taking its name from a *Harvard Business Review* article titled *The Dawn of the E-Lance Economy* the founders sought to match freelance contractors and firms much like Monster.com did for full-time recruiting. Unfortunately, the business really never gained any traction.

So, the investors decided to hire a new CEO and take the company in a new direction. Instead of matching firms to freelancers, it would help companies manage relationships. This idea met with much greater success and Elance became a pioneer in vendor management software. In fact, it became so successful that it attracted stiff competition from the likes of SAP and Oracle.

So Elance sold the software business and return to the original idea. This time though, it applied what it had learned about making relationships successful rather than just making matches. It partnered with training firms to help freelancers build and certify skills, created private talent clouds for customers and developed algorithms to create better engagements.

The strategy was a resounding success and the company later merged with oDesk to form Upwork, the world's largest freelance platform. Elance is no exception either. From Netflix to Amazon to just about everything in between, it seems that eventually platform businesses eventually need to go beyond merely making matches and create a product or service.

Delivering Value

One industry that's been absolutely ravaged by the platform economy is retail. With digital commerce platforms offering better prices, selection and convenience, how can brick and mortar retailers ever compete? After all, who goes into a store anymore?

Apparently, just about everybody. According to the most recent data from the US Census more than 90% of sales still go to traditional retail outlets. While clearly automation and e-commerce have depressed margins and sent many companies reeling, there's still a lot to be said for an in-person, in-store experience.

Take a closer look and you'll find that digital commerce has its limitations. For example, AirBnB's estimated revenues of $2.8 billion are impressive, but represent less than 1% of the $500 billion hospitality industry. That shouldn't be surprising. Many travellers — especially business travellers — are looking for more than just a hotel room, but also the service that comes with it.

That's why Apple has invested so much time, effort and money into its stores and why successful platforms like Amazon and Warby

Parker are opening up retail locations. An online purchase is only a mere transaction, but in a retail environment, well trained salespeople can build relationships, cater to a particular customer's needs, service purchases and upsell.

Capturing Value

One of the most attractive aspects of platform businesses is how easy they are to start. Pretty much anyone can build a website, aggregate disparate information and offer it as a solution to customers.

You don't need to rent expensive commercial space or even develop particularly sophisticated software.

You just collect data, make it accessible and you're in business.

Yet that is also the platform model's achilles heel. Low barriers to entry lead to aggressive competition, which makes an expensive marketing war almost inevitable. That's why becoming a successful platform so often depends on how much of a war chest you can attract from venture capital funds and, because platforms tend to be "winner take all" propositions, there are far more losers than winners.

To see how this often plays out, take the time to read Timothy B. Lee's profile of Uber. Yes, Uber has driven down the cost of taxis, but it has lost billions in the process. It's not at all clear whether it has actually built a sustainable business model or is just in a predatory race to drive competitors out of business so that it can use its monopoly power to drive up prices.

Sure, it's possible that Uber may eventually become profitable, but is it really the paragon of the new economy that its advocates make it out to be, or a throwback to the robber baron days of Vanderbilt, Rockefeller and Carnegie?

Harnessing The True Power of Platforms

None of this to say that platforms are all hype and no substance. As I've written before, platforms allow us to access ecosystems of talent, technology and information in an incredibly powerful way. That, in turn, is changing how we need to compete, shifting the basis of competition from optimizing efficiency to widening and deepening connections.

To understand why, let's return to Elance. As a freelance matching service, it offered little benefit. Most companies have their own networks of contractors they like to work with. It was only when it started to create value above and beyond a simple search function that it became a profitable business. There's no free lunch. Value creation is simply not something you can run a successful business without.

In a similar vein, Amazon allows you to access ecosystems of retailers and that's incredibly helpful and powerful, but its competitive advantage is its distribution system. If all it was doing was showing you offers, anybody could compete with it on an even playing field and that would make it very hard for the company to make money.

So, don't be fooled. Leveraging the power of platforms can be an excellent way to extend and improve a strong business model, but it cannot replace one.

About the Author

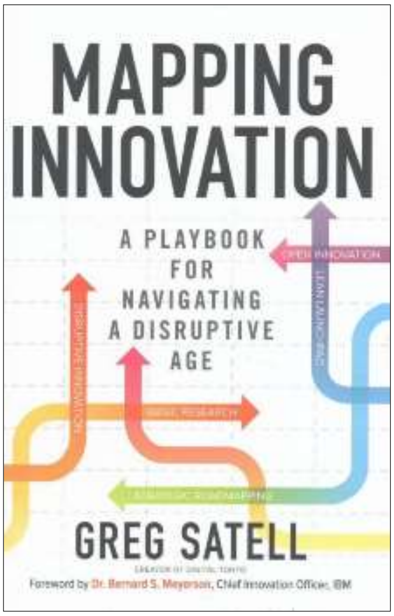
Greg Satell is a popular author, speaker and innovation advisor, whose work has appeared in Harvard Business Review, Forbes, Fast Company, Inc. and other A-list publications. Over the last 20 years he has managed market leading businesses and overseen the development of dozens of path-breaking products.

Greg helps organizations to grow through bringing "big ideas into practice." He applies rigorous frameworks to identify the right strategies for the right problems, helps build an "innovation playbook" to tackle the challenges of the future and drive transformative change.

His first book, *Mapping Innovation: A Playbook For Navigating A Disruptive Age* was published by McGraw-Hill in 2017. In November 2017 Greg's book made the long list for 'The 2017 800-CEO-READ Business Book Awards Longlist': http://inthebooks.800ceoread.com/news/articles/the-2017-800-ceo-read-business-book-awards-longlist

Co-ordinates

LinkedIn: LinkedIn profile
Twitter: @DigitalTonto
Website: www.digitaltonto.com/ and www.GregSatell.com



Yoram Solomon

Three behaviours that will grow innovative teamwork

Innovative teamwork depends first and foremost on the team's ability to hold constructive conflict. That ability, in turn, depends on each team member having these 3 behaviours.

There are three types of arguments you may be using:

First is the politically correct argument, in which the biggest issues are not discussed. There is the meeting before the meeting and the meeting after the meeting, but no meeting during the meeting. You focus more on what not to say than on the outcome you want to achieve.

Second is the destructive conflict. The one in which everything is personal and emotional. Team members don't listen to one another. The focus is on winning and being right, more than on reaching a better solution.

The third type, constructive conflict, supports effective and creative teamwork. Nothing is personal. What happens (and is said) here stays here. Everything is on the table. Everyone participates. Agreement is not a mandatory outcome. Aristotle said, "It is the mark of an educated mind to be able to entertain a thought without accepting it."

To conduct this type of conflict, each team member must exhibit these three behaviours:

1. Be vulnerable. Ask stupid questions

You must allow yourself to ask stupid questions and propose stupid ideas. For that, you obviously have to trust that others won't make fun of you and, even worse–share your stupid ideas and questions outside the team and the meeting. You never know when a stupid idea or question would give someone else a great idea or, God forbid, would actually not be stupid to start with. Great ideas come from the fringes of knowledge. That, however, is also where the majority of stupid ideas exist.

2. Be comfortable challenging the others

When you hear a stupid idea or question, you must feel comfortable enough to challenge it. To state that it was stupid. To criticize it, and to provide direct and honest feedback, without the intention of hurting the recipient, but at the same time without having to worry too much about offending them. Your willingness to provide such feedback would allow that person to improve the idea and to improve themselves.

3. Be confident enough to accept feedback

At the same time, you must feel confident enough to accept such criticism without taking it personally or emotionally and attacking back. You must listen to the feedback. You must remember that maybe only 10 percent of it is true, but that 100 percent of it is true in perception. You have to see the other side's perspective, and you must focus on building on that feedback, rather than letting it destroy you.

There are two main prerequisites for those three behaviours: trust between team members and the willingness of each member to exercise those behaviours.

About the Author

Yoram can often be found speaking in different venues, from University Graduate business schools to Rotary Clubs, the Association for Strategic Planning National Conference, DEMO, and many more. He is an engaging speaker who was said to make people think afterwards. He is a professional member of the National Speakers Association.

Dr. Solomon published 7 books: "Un-Kill Creativity", "Blueprints for the Next Big Thing", "Bowling with a Crystal Ball (two editions)," "Business Plan through Investors' Eyes", "From Startup to Maturity," and "Worst Diet Ever." He authored numerous articles, many of them published at Inc. Magazine, Innovation Excellence, and his blog on this website.

Co-ordinates

Twitter: @yoram
Web: www.yoramsolomon.com/

Paul Sloane

How do you get the world to adopt your great idea?

Sometimes the idea is simple and obvious but getting it adopted is very tricky. Containerisation was a massively important innovation which powered the expansion of global trade but it was a difficult idea to implement.

Before containerisation goods were physically manhandled as break bulk cargo. At the factory or warehouse goods were loaded onto a truck, driven to a port and then offloaded to await the next suitable ship. The dockers (aka longshoremen) piled boxes, barrels and sacks onto wooden pallets secured with ropes. The pallets were then hoisted onto the ship where more dockers would carry each item and fit it snugly into the ship's hold. This was difficult, time-consuming and dangerous work – many dockers were injured or killed at work.

When the vessel was eventually fully loaded it would set off. It might easily have over 1000 different loads on board – each with its own paperwork. If the ship had to visit more than one port to deliver goods then dockers had to find and pick the items to be offloaded and then reposition the remaining cargo. Once delivered the goods were loaded onto trucks and sent to their destinations.

Multiple handling and delays made transport costly, time consuming and unreliable. Each day in port is expensive for ship owners and fractious dockers would use strikes and go-slows in order to secure better terms.

The idea for a better way of doing things had been around for some time. It was simple – put things in big boxes and move the boxes. In 1766 in England, James Brindley designed a box boat with wooden containers to transport coal by canal to Manchester. As early as the 1830s, railroads such as the Liverpool and Manchester Railway were using containers.

But there was opposition. Trucking companies, shipping companies and ports could not agree on a standard. Some wanted large containers and others small. The dockers unions were strongly opposed to the idea as they correctly saw it as a direct threat to their levels of control and employment. The freight sector was highly regulated and regulators were happy with the status quo.

The man who changed all this was Malcom McLean. He was born in 1913 in North Carolina. His family was poor. They could not afford to send him to college but they could afford a second-hand truck. Together with his brother and sister he founded the McLean Trucking Company.

In the 1950s McLean foresaw the great potential of containers and he used his commercial expertise and political shrewdness to make things happen. He was an expert in trucking but could not persuade shipping companies to adapt their ships for containers. He borrowed $22 million from the bank and bought two World War II tankers which he converted to carry containers on and under deck. On April 26, 1956, with 100 invited dignitaries present, one of the converted tankers was loaded and sailed from New Jersey to Houston Texas, carrying fifty-eight 35-foot containers, along with a regular load of liquid tank cargo. As the ship left the port, Freddy Fields, an officer of the International Longshoremen's Union, was asked what he thought of the new container ship. Fields replied, "I'd like to sink that son of a bitch."

It is estimated that in 1956 hand-loading a ship cost $5.86 a ton. Using containers, it cost only 16 cents a ton, a 36-fold saving. Containeriszation also greatly reduced the time to load and unload ships. McLean designed and patented the standard container; 8 feet tall by 8 ft wide by 10 ft and made from thick corrugated steel. The design incorporated a twistlock mechanism at the corners, allowing the container to be easily secured and lifted using cranes. He then gave the patented designs to industry; thus enabling international standardization of shipping containers.

McLean achieved a huge breakthrough in the 1960s when he persuaded the US military to use his containers to ship equipment to Vietnam. They became a key part of one of the first integrated logistical systems – now common across the world. McLean shipped the empty containers from Vietnam to Japan where they were filled with consumer goods and then transported back to the USA.

Malcolm McLean at railing, Port Newark, 1957

Nowadays people across the globe enjoy the benefits of cheap products made far away – cars, toys, electronic goods, clothes and appliances. They are all shipped in containers and using the systems that Malcom McLean developed. McLean died in New York in 2001.

Forbes Magazine called him, "one of the few men who changed the world." On the morning of McLean's funeral, container ships around the world blew their whistles in his honour.

About the Author

Paul was part of the team which launched the IBM PC in the UK in 1981. He became MD of database company Ashton-Tate. In 1993 Paul joined MathSoft, publishers of mathematical software as VP International. He became CEO of Monactive, a British software company which publishes software asset management tools. In 2002 he founded his own company, Destination Innovation, which helps organisations improve innovation. He writes and speaks on lateral thinking and innovation. His latest book is The Leader's Guide to Lateral Thinking Skills published by Kogan-Page.

Co-ordinates

Web: www.destination-innovation.com
E-mail: psloane@destination-innovation.com
Tel: +44 (0)7831 112321

Michael Graber

Belly button meeting tips

We get hired to moderate and facilitate a lot of meetings. Sometimes they are annual strategic workshops. Sometimes they are customer co-creations. They range from strategy to innovation and every combination between the two poles.

Some of the most telling is the meetings that explore a potential growth area for a business. Many organizations cannot summon the objectivity to lead a growth-centered meeting without it devolving into a morass of recycled pet agendas, painful ghosts of history, and some thick biases. At least they hire out to maintain focus.

You can tell a lot about an organisation about how they approach the concept of new growth.

The real litmus tests: do they look backward or forward? Internally focused or market focused? Asset focused or focused on how they are solving problems for customers? How does the conversation pivot on its own volition?

Do they apply hindsight and tell you why it hasn't worked in the past? Or, do they apply foresight with a sense of possibility?

While some looking back and discussing what worked in the past and why is natural, spending half a day or more reliving history can be demoralizing, even crippling. We call these Belly Button Meetings because they are simply navel-gazing at the corporate level. Luckily, we have some tips on how to focus on the

moderate against this destructive tendency:

1. **Start fresh**. Begin with a Throat Clearing Exercise. Have them create an entirely new business that goes after the same target but freed from the corporate constraints and history.
2. **Lessons learned and necessary changes**. Then, have them map what lessons they can apply to a new opportunity. What changes must be made to succeed? What barriers will prevent them from winning in the market?
3. **Rank the actions as priorities**. Have the team rank the priorities of actions distilled from the lessons exposed above.
4. **Have them rank this particular opportunity**. Smart companies like to think of a portfolio of growth opportunities, option value if you will. Given their array of options, have them rank this one according to both the growth potential if they can seize the moment and also according to the stated corporate strategy.
5. **Redirect**. If every response starts with a history lesson and an explanation of how-we-got-to-here, be gentle but firm. Redirect the team into thinking of growth opportunity with a growth mindset, an adaptive and attractive option.
6. **Logical extreme**. If multiple redirects do not break the curse of the past—the Belly Button fixation—then have

address all of the reasons why the organization will never be able to lead in that category. This strong medicine tends to awaken even the most dazed dwellers of yesteryear and snap them into the present. No one wants to lose.

Once you have their full presence, the group will be in a mindset to think about creating new value in new ways.

About the Author:

Michael is Co-Founder and Managing Partner at Southern Growth Studio. Michael leads the qualitative team with a particular focus on innovation, to deliver high-impact go-to-market strategies and product launches.

Michael has more than twenty years of experience leading marketing and innovation efforts.

A published poet and musician, Michael is the creative force that compliments the analytical side of the house. Michael speaks and publishes frequently on best practices in marketing, business strategy, and innovation.

Michael holds a M.F.A from the University of Memphis.

Co-ordinates:

Web: southerngrowthstudio.com/
Email: aquavita@southerngrowthstudio.com
Twitter: twitter.com/SouthernGrowth

Tom Koulopoulos

The most important decision you will ever make

"It isn't the mountains ahead to climb that wear you out, it's the pebble in your shoe." – Muhammad Ali

In business and in life there's a short game and a long game; never confuse the two!

You make dozens of decisions every day. Some are quick and nearly irrelevant to your success. Others are crucial to it. So, how do you decide which is which and what do you use as a compass setting to pull off those crucial decisions?

In building my own businesses and in working with hundreds of entrepreneurs who have built theirs, one question is always foremost in my mind, how to determine which decisions are critical to the long game versus the short game.

A short game decision is one that impacts only the immediate future. It rarely, if ever, has implications that will carry forward beyond a few days, weeks, or months. Perhaps you're deciding on the terms for a relatively small customer engagement, bringing on board a staff member, or even the colour of the walls in your new office space. You can obsess over these but in the end you know that whatever you decide it's not going to make much difference in the long run. In these cases even the worst decision is one that can be brushed aside.

The advice on short game decisions is easy, don't waste time on them. Every minute you spend debating the colour scheme of the lunch room is a minute you could spend on things that are much more important. But it can get a lot worse! If you start to focus too much on the short game you will not only undermine but potential derail your long game. Muhammad Ali once said, "It isn't the mountains ahead to climb that wear you out, it's the pebble in your shoe." In my experience, leaders who are not effective and rifling through the short game, and who are easily distracted by it, don't stand a change with reaching the mountains in the next category–the long game decisions.

A long game decision is one that either supports your long-term ambition and vision or potentially can sink it. But here's the rub. In order to make a long game decision you need to have a "long game." And it's amazing how many people I talk to do not!

They get wrapped up in the short game, in fact obsessed with it, while ignoring the long game. It would be like deciding on the flower arrangements, bridal party, and menu for your wedding before you've decided who you want to marry! What? Did I cut it too close to home with that one? But you get the picture, right?

"If you're willing to settle for what you've got just keep doing what you've been doing!"

Of course, that's not you. You know your long game, right? So, try answering this simple question. What constitutes success for you and your business? Sum it up it in a sentence. Can you do that? If you're having trouble, then use these three criteria:

1. It needs to line up with your ambitions.

For example, if you are set on building a company that can be acquired then every long game decision needs to support that goal. You're going for escape velocity, which means investing in momentum and revenue growth. On the other hand if you want a lifestyle company, that will pay you dividends for decades to come, then you need to align your long game decisions with that goal and focus on sustainable margins.

2. The long game is a bet on uncertainty.

Most people won't get it. If they did it would have already been done. What you're doing won't make sense, even to those closest to you. They may support you, but they won't get you. So, your answer has to describe a new vision of the future, not just a modified version of the past.

3. The long game has a definitive payback.

This may be quantitative or qualitative, or both. But you need to know what that payback is because you'll be taking on significant risk to realize it and you will need to describe it to others who come along for the ride.

This all sounds incredibly easy, doesn't it?

Then why do so few entrepreneurs do it?

Would you be surprised if I told you that roughly 10% of the people I talk to have a well-defined long game? The rest just sort of muddle through without it. Why? Because long games involve an abundance of risk. They are terrifying. You're unlikely to get much agreement that your long game is a worthwhile venture from colleagues, friends, and even family. And long games require a deep commitment to not letting yourself off the hook for significant short-term pain and sacrifice. Simply put, the long game is full of uncertainty that nobody in their right mind likes to venture into. But, and let's face it, if you were of the "right mind" you would never have taken the gamble in the first place.

That's why in most conventional small business situations playing the short game is entirely appropriate.

In fact, trying to play a long game in an established business with a rigid set of parameters is the last thing you want to do since it can easily disrupt the business to the point of fatal distraction. That's why so many entrepreneurs I talk to confuse the importance of the short game with a good long game. They believe that by mitigating all near term risk they are also laying the foundation for long term success. Yes, but only if your objective is to maintain the status quo of your business. If you're willing to settle for what you've got just keep doing what you've been doing!

"You are not shooting for the moon, you are shooting for the stars!"

The risk of entrepreneurship is embraced only by a unique breed of individual whose ambitions and vision go far beyond sustaining the status quo of an established business. You are not shooting for the moon, you are shooting for the stars! Or to be blunt, go big or go home.

So, have you figured out the most important decision yet? It's deciding in every choice that you make if you are playing a short or long game. The surest path to failure and unhappiness is to get those two confused. I don't care if it's your business or your life, knowing the difference between those things that are just distractions from those that are core to your success and happiness, and then being mindful of how your choices support your own long game, is simply the most important decision you can ever make.

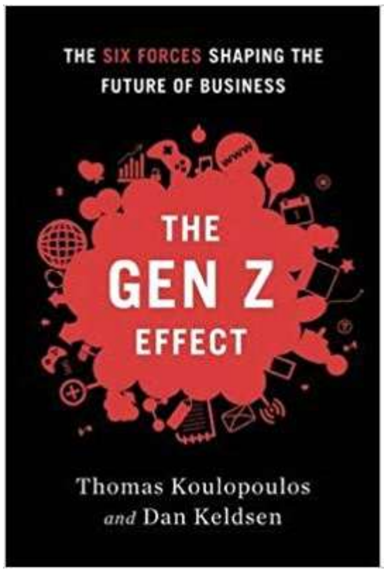
Game on!

About the Author

Tom Koulopoulos is the author of 10 books and founder of the Delphi Group, a 25-year-old Boston-based think tank and a past Inc. 500 company that focuses on innovation and the future of business.

Co-ordinates

Web: Delphi Group
Twitter: @tkspeaks



Kevin Stansfield

Sales – it's not all about the price!

These days, thanks to the wonders of the internet, it is easy for people to become professional buyers of just about anything.

All the information and opinions you could ever need are available if you just Google for them. You can even spec and price a new car without going anywhere near a car showroom! And through some simple online comparisons, you can probably buy many products cheaper than if you went to the usual retail suppliers. This obviously can create challenges if you are in the business of sales!

In this environment, it can be tempting for businesses to slash their prices in order to maintain their market share. But that is a no-win situation, and as a Coach, I always steer my clients away from competing on price, because here's the thing – **sales is not all about the price!** If it were, Waitrose would have to close its supermarkets, Harrods would be converted to a pound shop and unwanted BMWs would be stacking up at the docks.

The truth is that **people don't buy purely on logic** – it's more complicated than that and is all down to human psychology. In very broad terms, the human brain has two separate parts, the right and left hemispheres. We probably all know that the right side of the brain controls the left side of the body and vice versa. However, the right side of the brain also deals with **emotions,** while the left side deals with **logic**.

All decisions are made using both sides of the brain, using a combination of both logic and emotion. But years of study have shown that **emotion always takes precedence when people make a buying decision.** (A great source of information on the topic, for those of you who like to research issues, is Robert Cialdini's book, "Influence: the Art of Persuasion.")

So, how does this fact help us when we are trying to sell to customers in a price-competitive market? Well, if price is our primary focus, we end up with giving the client nothing else to base their buying decision on. If we are not satisfying their emotional needs, we should not be surprised if they go off price hunting. If we are to compete and yet keep prices up, we have to focus on the emotional factors of why people buy what we are selling. In order to do this, we need to go through 5 steps:

Find your niche

You can't be everything to everyone, so **focus on the segment of the market that you are ideally suited to serve.** Be totally clear about the specific customers that you are looking for and focus on being the leader in that market.

Find out all you can about your target market:

- where are they located?
- why do they buy your products?
- what emotions do they base their buying decisions on – what needs are they fulfilling or what problems are they solving?

Once you have this information, you need to ensure that your marketing is focused on your target market and their specific needs. Let them know that you understand and can solve their particular problems.

Define your uniqueness

If I didn't know anything about your business and lined you up with two of your closest competitors, **what would make me choose to buy from you?** You could all be telling me the same thing, in which case my only point of differentiation would be price – the very thing you are trying to avoid competing on!

If there is really no difference in the end product or service, then you must focus on differentiating the way you deliver the product or service. This could be through the people you hire, your location, or something else that sets you apart from your competition.

Sell for the relationship

People buy from people they like – so make your customers like you! Show them that you are interested in them, ask them relevant questions and be helpful by making suggestions, without putting them under pressure to buy.

Remember, **people love to buy but they hate being sold to.**

If you pay a visit to some of the top performing businesses in the country, you will see that their customer service stands out a mile. Businesses such as Richer Sounds, Harrods and John Lewis invest heavily in their staff training, and they have the best customer relationships on the high street.

Add value, don't discount

If you have no option but to come closer to a competitor's pricing, then **add value to the purchase rather than discount the price**. If you give a 10% discount on £100, that will be £10 straight off your bottom line profit.

But if instead you give away extra goods or services with the purchase, it will cost you far less.

For example, I had a client who gave away a scarf with a retail price of £10 with every sale over £50 – i.e. 20% of the value of the sale, from the customer's point of view.

But in fact, the scarf only cost her £1.00 to buy (2% of the value). From this small investment, her overall sales were boosted, as customers loved the idea of getting a free scarf! What could you offer your clients that has a high value to them, but a low cost to you?

Create the WOW factor

If you really want to stand out from the crowd and get your customers to come back again and again, you have to go the extra mile. **Do something that makes your customers think, "WOW, I was not expecting that!"**

The ultra-successful online shoe retailer Zappos.com's motto is, "Delivering happiness." Their customer service team are trained to do whatever it takes to make their customers happy, proving that even in an online business, it is possible to give outstanding customer service. If you make the buying process a wonderful experience, why would your customers want to go anywhere else?

So now you know how to get over price competition, there is no excuse for not maintaining or even increasing your prices whilst growing your market share. If you tap into your customers' emotions strongly enough, you can charge whatever you like. All it takes is a bit of imagination! So, go on take ACTION, and see your sales and profits grow!

And if you'd like to learn more about the psychology of sales and how to use it to grow your business, why not come along to our Sales Mastery workshop? You can book your place HERE using promo code **SALES75** to get a 75% discount on the full workshop price!

About the Author

Kevin is the MD and founder of ActionCOACH Solent the leading business coaching and training firm in Southampton, Hampshire, where his team work with owner run businesses, helping them create better lives through Business Improvement and Growth. Kevin has attained numerous Regional, European and Global awards. He is also a global speaker and trainer and has qualifications in areas as varied as an MBA, NLP, ECi and DISC. His life prior to coaching started as a Chartered Accountant which soon led to becoming a freelance FD of various fast growth companies. As a keen sportsman he believes whole heartedly that nobody achieves their full potential without appropriate training and coaching.

Co-ordinates

Mail: ActionCOACH
1st Floor, Boyatt Wood District Centre
Eastleigh, Hampshire, SO55 4QP
United Kingdom
Tel: +44 (0) 2380 560833
Mob: +44 (0) 7720 292032
Email:
kevinstansfield@actioncoach.com

August J. Aquila

How can managing partners truly make a difference?

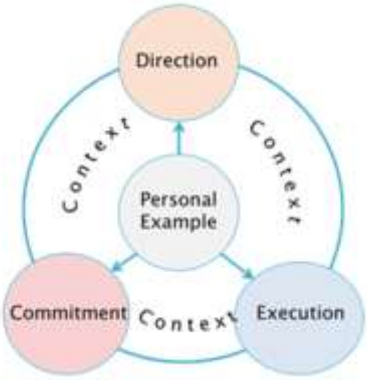
There are many reasons why too many managing partners fail to truly engage their partners, especially as no managing partner really ever sets out to fail. Indeed, almost every managing partner tries to do his job to the best of his ability. The problem is that, in the majority of firms, there isn't any clarity around what the job actually entails and, consequently, how success can be achieved.

We recently interviewed 150 practicing and managing partners in a cross section of professional services firms across Europe and the US to ascertain what they believe successful managing partners do and, specifically, what they do to create and sustain their partners' commitment to actively participating in delivering the firm's future.

Our model of what successful managing partners do (see Figure 1 below) is adapted from the leadership model in When Professionals Have to Lead. We have used the same overarching dimensions of direction, commitment, execution and personal example, and added context to reflect its impact on what firm leaders need to do.

Figure 1

Authors: Rob Lees and Derek Klyhn are founding partners of Møller PSF Group and consultants to PSF leaders worldwide (www.mollerpsfgroupcambridge.com). August Aquila is an international consultant, speak and writer to PSFs (www.aquilaadvisors.com).



Adapted from the Leadership Model in When Professionals Have To Lead: A New Model For High Performance.
Thomas J. Delong, John J. Gabarro, Robert J. Lees, Harvard Business School Press, 2007

So, what is it that successful managing partners do that differentiates them from their peers?

Setting direction

In our research, partners noted the need to have a clear sense of direction that they can coalesce around. But what they considered even more important is the translation of that direction into a compelling vision and the strategies for achieving it. If the vision isn't compelling, then their willingness to take on board the managing partner's ideas is greatly reduced, and so is the firm's momentum.

Maintaining momentum is key: successful managing partners always focus people's energies and attention on a small number of key priorities. By doing that, they ensure everyone is concentrating on the same things, rather than losing valuable time on less important initiatives. Sustaining momentum also means that partners must own the firm's direction and strategies, as they are the ones who will implement them.

The managing partner has a major role to play in helping partners to sustain their enthusiasm and commitment. But, he can never get too far in front of their partners.

All of the partners we spoke to talked about how truly successful managing partners always have great antennae. They know where the firm is, what the mood of the partners is and can sense what's possible (and, critically, what's not).

One of the other things the successful managing partners have done to engage their partners is to keep reinforcing the vision by sharing stories of the things that are working or have worked. The stories are also shared rapidly across the firm, to help clarify what people would be doing to clearly demonstrate that the direction in which the firm is travelling is the correct one.

Gaining commitment

It is important for partners to walk together, to share a common vision. But, if the partners are to share that vision, they have to play an active part in determining the firm's direction - and, critically, how it's going to get there.

In the very best firms, the partners debate the options and, while it is incredibly rare for every partner to agree with every single aspect of the firm's vision and strategy, the partners agree to line up behind the ultimate decisions.

One of the other things successful things partners have done is to keep repeating the message about why and how. Constantly repeating the message is time consuming and, at times, deeply frustrating, but it's absolutely key to sustaining commitment.

Smart managing partners find ways to ensure everyone has the change to share their views and feel that they are involved. Successful managing partners understand that the only way to get real, sustained commitment is through creating a culture of trust and empowerment, underpinned by a shared belief in what are now sometimes considered the old-fashioned values of partnership.

Without doubt, the most emotive element in our discussions was the loss of values in partnerships. Nearly every practicing partner spoke passionately about the loss of partnership values and the nearly unanimous focus on individual billings and profits per equity partner.

Successful managing partners manage the delicate balancing act of being corporate at the top and practice-based below. The trick is to understand when moving away from being practice-based will result in increased operational efficiencies.

Another key task is focusing on the people who want to go with you, rather than those who don't. It's an easy mistake to make, but it is a mistake. As previously mentioned, not every partner will agree with every decision and, when momentum is key, the best way to achieve and maintain it is to engage the people who are enthusiastic and want to be a part of what you are trying to achieve.

Execution

Momentum is critical in driving change which makes it critical to keep the partners focused. Partners find it all too easy to focus solely on client work; successful managing partners recognized this reality and keep their partners' up with a combination of focused-activities, the incessant repetition of the message of why and how, and rapidly sharing successes across the firm.

Every firm understands the need to deliver outstanding client service. However, not all firms make the direct connection between outstanding client service and having the development processes in place that enable their people to deliver the necessary level of service.

But, with differentiation through delivery, a firm's ability to make its professional engagement ready faster and more effectively than its competitors is a clear source of competitive advantage - and, critically, economic advantage. In our discussions, every practicing and managing partner remarked that successful managing partners invested their time and energy in helping their partners to become effective leaders. After all, the partners are the culture in a professional service firm; what they do, how they do it and what they reward determines how the firm's professionals behave.

Personal example

Not every firm can be the market leader, but every firm can strive to be the best at everything it does. Continually seeking the opinions of others is important, but the key is knowing when to act.

This is another application of judgment that successful managing partners have in abundance. The ability to take the firm's temperature, to know where the partners are and to act accordingly is a core skill that feeds into many of the judgments that successful managing partners make.

Asking the partners to sustain high levels of performance is impossible if you don't do it yourself, so being an exemplar of high performance is an absolute prerequisite for all successful managing partners.

One of the things that great role models do is to avoid the minutiae of management. Without exception, the practicing partners want their managing partner to be an effective leader: someone who has done all of the things required of them and carried them out in an authentic manner; someone who has earned their partners' respect not just for what they have done but also for the way they did it.

Successful managing partners also take tough people decisions. Dealing with underperforming partners who don't want to embrace the firm's changing needs is a difficult and complex task, but, in every instance, the partners want their managing partners to deal with them.

Asking for help is the final behaviour that helps managing partners who are struggling to make sense of their role. In the best firms, this already happens with the successful managing partners asking for help when they need it.

Context is critical

There is a universal agreement that the role of managing partner is just too important and too complex, given the scale of the challenges firms are facing, to leave the selection of the appropriate candidate to chance. But, it is naive to assume every potential candidate will be able to operate effectively, no matter what the circumstances. Firms need to select the right candidate for the circumstances they face. The link between partner engagement and firm performance must be at the core of every managing partner's thinking and actions.

Partners are the culture in a professional services firm - what they do, what they say and what they reward determines what other people do. And, unless they are engaged and committed, no one else will be. The challenge for all managing partners is to ensure they are.

About the Author

August Aquila is the founder and CEO of AQUILA Global Advisors, LLC and is a key thought leader for professional service firms (PSFs). He has worked with various types of PSFs in the US, Canada, India and England.
August brings a wealth of hands-on experience to his clients and presentations. He was a partner in a Top50 US CPA firm and a senior executive with American Express Tax & Business Services, Inc., For 30 years he has advised PSFs in the areas of succession planning, mergers and acquisitions, compensation plan designs and partnership issues.

In 2004, 2007, 2009 to 2016 he was selected as one of the "Top 100 Most Influential People in The US Accounting Profession" by Accounting Today. His articles have appeared in MP (Managing Partner), Journal of Accountancy, CA Magazine, Accounting Today, Of Counsel and other major publications.

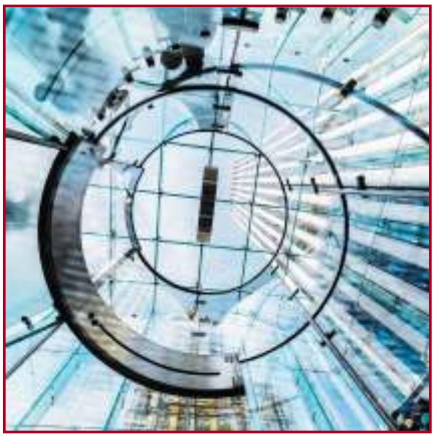
Recent books include How to Become the Firm of Choice, What Makes a Great Partnership, Client at the Core: Marketing and Managing Today's Professional Services Firm; Performance Is Everything – The Why, What and How of Designing Compensation Plans; Compensation as a Strategic Asset: The New Paradigm; What Successful Managing Partner Do and Engaging Partners in the Firm's Future. August holds an MBA from DePaul University (Chicago) and a PhD from Indiana University (Bloomington).

Co-ordinates

August J. Aquila, PhD, Aquila Global Advisors, LLC, 4732 Chantrey Place Minnetonka, MN 55345, USA
Email: aaquila@aquilaadvisors.com
Web: www.aquilaadvisors.com

Anthony Mills

The twelve disciplines of consistently innovative organisations



Ever notice that some organisations seem to be far more consistent at delivering new innovation than most? I have. Ever wonder why this is… what they do differently? I certainly have.

Indeed, like so many others before me, I've spent my entire adult life working in and around organisations that were trying constantly to deliver better value to their markets. Some – like Ford, GSK, and Whirlpool – have been relatively successful at this. Others less so.

After observing these organisations – and hundreds of others like them from all over the world – what I have to come to understand is that there are certain common disciplines that seem to mark the most consistently – and successfully – innovative among them.

Examples of organizations that would fall into this camp today would include Amazon, Google, Apple, IBM, Tesla, Netflix, Spotify, Tencent, Patagonia, and Corning, among others. Of course, none of these are 100% perfect in this regard, but they are about as close any organization has come so far.

In particular, I have identified twelve disciplines that businesses – if they are to be consistently successful at innovation and market leadership like these businesses – must develop and use persistently. I will explore each of these in turn, from 1 – 12.

No 1 – They are constantly hungry!

No organization ever got to the top its game without being hungry. The market leaders in most all industries got to where they are because they wanted it badly, and because they worked their butts off to get there. They were hungry.

The opposite of hungry is complacent. Complacency leads to distant follower status and ultimately to irrelevance. Market leaders know this, and so they know that they can never resign themselves to comfort and complacency. They know – just like Steve Jobs did when he infamously exhorted businesses to "stay hungry" – that doing so was the only way to stay on top.

It is out of this constant, unrelenting hunger that leaders deliver the sort of innovation to their markets that let them remain leaders in their markets for years and decades on end. You will never find a market leader that was not first hungry to be there, and you will never find a persistent market leader that was not persistently hungry to stay there.

To be the market leader, you must be constantly hungry.

No 2 – They have a clear plan for where they want to go, and a sound strategy for how they intend to get there.

No market leader ever got to where they are by being unfocused and throwing its energies around haphazardly. They got to where they are by having a clear plan for where they wanted to go, and a clear strategy for how they intended to get there. The plan focuses everything they do toward this aim, while the strategy lets them know what to say "yes" to and what to say "no" to.

Today we codify these in the form of a formal Innovation Strategy. Such a strategy will lay out – in detail – the specific areas the business intends to go after, as well as the specific types and scopes of innovation it intends to deliver for each of those areas. It will also lay out the specific innovation vehicles the business intends to leverage to deliver those innovations.

By defining, articulating, documenting, and religiously pursuing this strategy, the business is able to – bit by bit, and piece by piece – claw its way up into the market leader position. All of its investments and energies – on account of this strategy – will be funnelled down this path; none will be wasted and squandered on things that do not contribute to this goal. This ensures they remain highly focused on achieving this key objective.

No 3 – Their radar is perpetually on.

In consistently innovative organizations, their radar is always on. What this means is that they are constantly out doing need finding work – eagerly looking at every turn to connect new dots and find new opportunities to deliver breakthrough innovation and value to their markets.

Like a wild beast guarding its lair, nothing gets past their gaze. If a new emerging (unmet) need begins to surface, then they are the first ones there… the first on the scene responding with a well-considered solution.

Being able to do this requires a very sharp sense of "market acuity", a skill that engages the business' five "discovery senses"…

- Feeling for their customers – making customer-centric thinking their constant way of life.
- Tasting engagement – working hard to turn their customers into a true community.
- Listening acutely – hearing all the voices around them to find persistent pain & friction points.
- Seeing the world differently – reframing every situation into its most fundamental needs.
- Sniffing out nascent opportunities – always asking themselves "What's next?"

To make this a reality, these organisations maintain staffs of professional "need finders" – individuals and teams whose full-time jobs are to be "out there" engaged with the market, scouring it to uncover current and emerging opportunities to deliver new innovation. Such teams – often part of a Core Innovation Group or perhaps a Strategic Marketing Group, and sometimes stationed at various "listening posts" around the world – need not necessarily be large, but they must be skilled at this task, and they must have access to the right decision-makers in the business so that when they do bring new insights back into the organization that represent significant new opportunities, they have the right people to listen to them and take appropriate action.

This discipline is very important for helping the business to remain "fresh" and "relevant" to its markets, and for ensuring the business continues to evolve over time as its markets and their needs evolve – or come and go altogether. That in turn helps the business to ensure its long-term resilience in the face of the inevitable changes and market shifts it will face.

No 4 – They source their insights and capabilities far and wide.

It used to be that organizations believed everything could – and should – be done entirely in-house… organically. That allowed them to play their cards close to the vest, thus avoiding the risk of competitors knowing what they were up to.

But consistently innovative organisations know that any more of this cat & mouse game with competitors is simply a losing race of incrementalism for the "me-toos" of the world. It does not produce the quantum leaps needed to claim true market leadership. For that, the organisation must leapfrog their competition by moving the needle substantially forward for their customers.

One very important way this is done is by sourcing both insights about the market and its needs, and the capabilities needed to address those needs, from the outside. In the twist we now know as Open Innovation, there have come to be all manner of crowdsourcing campaigns, tournaments, and other venues by which businesses can tap into the "wisdom of the crowd" to uncover significant new opportunities – opportunities they otherwise had been overlooking, largely on account of industry myopia. Similarly, there have to come to be a broad range of platforms and venues by which new relationships can be brokered between those who need access to certain capabilities (technologies, service methods, market channels, and so on), and those who supply such capabilities (often very niche capabilities).

Consistently innovative organizations understand that looking outside can be a very lucrative source of fertile new opportunities and fertile new capabilities. They are therefore extremely open-minded about where they go in search of these things. They are not concerned with the old-school "not invented here" mentality (NIH) – a tired and decrepit remnant of the Industrial Age. They've moved on. And they have the results to show for it – they tend to launch far more and far better innovations than do their competitors who are stuck in the last century.

No 5 – They go both organic and inorganic!

Consistently innovative organizations understand that in order to produce the greatest possible impact on their business and its markets, they must simultaneously pursue innovation through multiple different innovation vehicles:

- Organic – centres of excellence / roadmap R&D + NPD / X-works R&D + NPD
- Extended Organic (partnerships) – contracted R&D / technology transfer / strategic suppliers / cross branding + marketing + selling / open innovation
- Inorganic – corporate venturing / innovation-synergy M&As.

They understand that none of these vehicles are mutually exclusive, and that no one of them in isolation will be able to meet their needs… that at times any or all of them will have to be called upon if they are to succeed. And so they develop centers within the business that have the capabilities needed to leverage each one of these in their own appropriate way. This allows the business overall to execute a very large, bold, and ambitious Innovation Strategy – the sort that ensures its ongoing market leadership, as well as its long-term resilience in the market.

No 6 – They use the 5 Discovery Skills to carry out Design Thinking.

Consistently innovative organisations employ both Design Thinking and the five Discovery Skills. They use these together to study new opportunities and to reframe and re-scope them so that they can conceive optimal solutions to real "problems worth solving".

The five Discovery Skills derive from a six-year study undertaken by Dyer, Gregersen, and Christensen, and are well documented in their follow-on book The Innovator's DNA. Specifically, these skills are Observing, Questioning, Experimenting, Networking, and Associating. When organizations can teach and cultivate these skills within their business, and in so doing get their workers to use them routinely, then the organization starts to become much more adept at finding, studying, and understanding new innovation opportunities. Consistently innovative organizations understand this and work hard to inculcate these five skills into their work – particularly in those teams explicitly charged with pursuing innovation.

Design Thinking encompasses three elements:

1. The Human Centered Design philosophy (HCD) – this emphasizes the need to cultivate deep empathy for the customer, and thus an empathic understanding of them and their situation within a given context.
2. The Design Thinking process – a series of diverging and converging steps for exploring both the problem space and the solution space, and in between defining a compelling Point of View and relevant Design Principles against which to work.
3. The immense collection of Design Methods – an extremely broad array of practices that are used to observe, question, experiment, and study the situation of interest.

Consistently innovative organisations embrace the HCD philosophy, practice the Design Thinking process where appropriate, and teach and use an extensive array of Design Methods so as to fully explore and characterize the problems and solutions in their domain. This gives them assurance that they are solving for the right problem at the right level (a properly reframed problem) and that the solutions they conceive for it are in fact optimal solutions for the right problem. As a consequence this de-risks their innovation process by vastly increasing the chances of delivering a new innovation that will resonate with a real need in the market.

The best organizations layer these two together… using the five Discovery Skills to undertake the Design Thinking process. This yields the highest possible calibre results.

No 7 – They experiment relentlessly!

Consistently innovative organisations are relentless in their desire and willingness to experiment over and over and over again… trying, trying, trying, over and over again, until at last they finally get it right!

This is so often what separates the winners from the losers. The losers run out of interest, or their leadership lacks the patience needed to sustain constant experimentation, and so they walk away before learning anything of any real value. The winners on the other hand, while equally pragmatic, understand that in this case the race goes to those who persevere, and so their leadership strives to embed into the culture itself the patient willingness needed to pursue constant and relentless experimentation. It simply becomes a part of their DNA… a part of how they operate. The pragmatic side of them will ensure that with each iteration of an experiment they are learning something useful, but the determined side of them will ensure they continue applying these learnings to each subsequent iteration until at last they find what they are looking for. This usually produces the insights they ultimately need to then develop and launch new innovations that are fully on mark.

Consistently innovative organisations get this, and so they experiment relentlessly to find the right paths forward for sustained market leadership.

No 8 – They are liberal in their use of enablers and reinforcements.

Consistently innovative organizations are very liberal in their provision of innovation enablers and equally or more liberal in their use of innovation reinforcements – both needed to drive and sustain ongoing engagement in their innovation program. In these organizations, there are no excuses for workers not being able to innovate!

<u>Enablers</u> include such things as innovation training, general resources, technology tools (e.g. design software), infrastructure (e.g. innovation or R&D labs), access to discovery opportunities and insights resources (e.g. field research and syndicated research reports), the opportunity to engage their networks in helping to evolve new ideas, and access to a broad ecosystem of partners to help execute new ideas. These are all necessary for giving workers the skills they need to think and act like innovators, and the resources they need to actually go out and do high-quality innovation work for the business.

<u>Reinforcements</u> include such things as incentives (to kick start engagement), recognition and rewards (to sustain engagement), and PR campaigns targeted at customers, workers, and investors (to maintain ongoing support for the innovation program).

Together, these serve to reinforce within the business its innovation efforts so that its workers remain engaged in its innovation program indefinitely. By using these liberally, the organization will ensure a healthy and sustainable innovation program that is constantly feeding a strong and vibrant Innovation Pipeline.

By combining the right enablers with the right reinforcements, organisations can develop strong, healthy, and vibrant innovation programs that produce significant results for the business. They remove all barriers and excuses for people not being able to innovate, which in turn tends to maximize overall engagement in the program, thereby maximizing the business' return on its investments in these enablers and reinforcements.

No 9 – They have a disciplined and focused innovation investment process, allowing them to choose their investments wisely.

Consistently innovative organizations have a well-defined and highly disciplined and focused process for making their innovation investment decisions. Starting with a defined Innovation Strategy (which serves to focus them and point them in the right direction), they carefully consider all of the innovation investment options available to them at any point in time, and after conducting appropriate research and justification on each one (i.e. is it really a "problem worth solving"… does it impact enough customers that delivering a solution to it will scale and pay back for us?), they thereafter make their innovation investment choices. This ensures they are selecting the best possible options for realizing their strategy.

To put it simply, this disciplined and focused process allows them to choose their investments wisely – ensuring they are not wasting resources and efforts on pursuits that do not align with their strategy. This maximizes their strategy's chances of succeeding.

No 10 – They execute "steel bar" solid!

Consistently innovative organisations execute. Period. In fact, they execute – technically and commercially – "steel bar" solid!

This requires their having developed tremendous skill and discipline on the Back End of Innovation, so that they can take all of the novel solution concepts that Front End teams have conceived, and then actually turn those into real offerings the organization can deliver consistently day in and day out. This ensures their investment in the Front End pays back for them.

This is very important, because otherwise if an organization cannot execute the things they are defining on the Front End, then they are essentially wasting their time, energy, and money on that Front End work. The only way to recoup their Front End investment, as fun and warm and fuzzy as it may be, is to be 100% fully capable of taking those Front End concepts and turning them into real new offerings the business can sell and monetize in the marketplace.

Consistently innovative organizations get this, and so they build as much capability and muscle on the Back End as they do on the Front End. It takes one to serve the other; neither in isolation will let them succeed. They must have both.

No 11 – They operate innovation as an ongoing, never-ending cycle.

Consistently innovative organizations operate innovation – including all of the preceding disciplines – as an ongoing cyclical process. It never ends!

They realise that it's all about running their "engine of innovation" (their innovation program) so that their "innovation factory" (the people championing new ideas) can produce a constant and steady flow of new innovations coming out of their Innovation Pipeline and into the light of the world. They understand that this constant and steady flow will not happen by running the engine on and off again intermittently, or by occasionally idling their innovation factory. They understand that the only way in which they can ensure a constant and steady flow of innovations is by operating these full-time, all the time, in an on ongoing cyclical process.
This means that every time they finish one cycle through their pipeline / portfolio loop, they start all over again and initiate a new cohort of projects to keep their portfolio refreshed and their pipeline filled. Depending on the speed of their markets and their development cycles, this innovation cycle may occur monthly, quarterly, bi-annually, or otherwise, but whichever it is, it constantly repeats. Over and over. Never ending.

Consistently innovative organisations understand that this is the only way by which they will continue to remain innovative and thus relevant to the world.

No 12 – They wrap it all up with the right sponsorship and leadership – creating and sustaining the right culture in the business.

Consistently innovative organisations wrap up all of these disciplines with the right types of sponsorship and leadership. This enables them to create and sustain within the business a true culture of "hunger", and thus of ongoing relevance. This includes issuing a mandate for innovation within and across the business.

Sponsorship refers to the individual(s) who will "sponsor" the business' innovation program, and thus give it the executive "air cover" it needs to ensure it can overcome the various obstacles and hurdles it will inevitably encounter (including potentially entrenched "corporate antibodies"). In most cases, the Sponsor is the business' CEO or a similar top-level executive – someone with the authority and clout to back the program and ensure that it thrives over time.

Leadership refers to those individuals who will actually lead and guide the business' innovation program. These are the persons who will oversee both the content of the innovation program (setting the Innovation Strategy and green-lighting new projects for development and implementation (the Innovation Pipeline), thus establishing the business' Innovation Portfolio) and the operation of the innovation program (its structure, roles, responsibilities, processes, and so forth). These individuals will often report up to one person – typically the Chief Innovation Officer or an equivalent role – and that person will set the vision and agenda for what each section is to do.

Strong leadership is crucial to having a healthy and well-functioning innovation programme.

It is equally crucial that the individuals who fill these roles "get" innovation. They must understand the "round peg in a square hole" nature of innovation and that innovation often requires us to go against the status quo.

For this reason, they must have the street smarts to know how to "tackle & block" their way through the obstacles they will have to clear along the way. Consistently innovative organizations understand this, and therefore work hard to ensure they are placing the right individuals into these roles.

The mandate for innovation is both a documented and articulated requirement – typically issued jointly by the sponsor and leader of the program – dictating very specific requirements for each portion of the business (business units, sections, departments, and so forth) concerning the extent to which, and in some cases the ways in which, they will pursue and deliver new innovations for the business.

Examples of this might include:

"each year, 20% of the projects you undertake will relate to innovation, and 5% of the projects you conclude must have originated from within our Core Innovation Group.",

or "20% of the revenues your unit generates each year must originate from new innovations launched within the past three years."

Such mandates create within the business a certain level of "pull" for innovation, ensuring that each portion of the business is doing its part in helping the business realize its larger innovation goals. Consistently innovative organizations understand this, and therefore issue and repeatedly reinforce these mandates.

And so there we have it… the twelve disciplines of consistently innovative organizations.

Any organization that wishes to become like this will emulate these disciplines and find their own variations of them. This – and understanding all the nitty gritty details that fill in between them – is what enables organizations to have healthy and well-functioning Innovation Pipelines that ultimately pave the way to market leadership.

About the Author

Anthony Mills is one of the world's foremost authorities on strategic innovation and hyper-growth strategies. He has taught, consulted, written, and lectured on these all over the world.

Anthony is the Founder and Chief Executive Officer of Legacy Innovation Group, a strategic innovation consulting firm serving clients from all over the world. Legacy Innovation helps companies tackle their biggest and most pressing growth challenges and become relentless innovators.

Anthony also serves as the Executive Director of the Global Innovation Institute (GInI), the world's foremost accreditation and standards body in the field of business innovation. GInI provides certifications globally to individuals and businesses whose lives depend on making innovation work in the real world.

Anthony's work builds on 30 years of leadership in business, design, product development, marketing, engineering, and manufacturing.

He remains deeply embedded in each of these worlds, giving him a broad and holistic perspective that is rare among business leaders. He knows how to bridge these disciplines to deliver innovations that have a lasting impact on the business and its markets.

Anthony also knows how to build and drive winning innovation strategies. In his work, he uses strategic innovation to ensure the ongoing relevance and long-term resilience of businesses. Equally important, he knows how to transform businesses into human-centred networks capable of constantly delivering new value to their markets. His methods for strategy, culture, and process have enabled business leaders all over the world to make lasting transformations in their businesses.

Co-ordinates

Anthony Mills
Chief Executive Officer
Legacy Innovation Group, LLC
Tel: +(001) 844 534 2294 x700
Web: www.legacyinnova.com/

Kevin McFarthing

When it's time to think inside the box

It's a common call – we want more innovation, disruptive innovation, new options. We need to think outside the box.

It often makes sense to think outside the box. When the usual thinking hasn't solved the problem, new approaches are needed. After all, if the same people are sat at the same table trying to solve the same problem in the same way, they are likely to get the same result.

But there are times when thinking outside the box is the wrong thing to do.

I've had experience of several examples of this. I was managing a large R&D group, and the divisional head challenged us to come up with viable options for new products in new areas of business. There were, of course, limits to this. We weren't about to move from consumer healthcare to construction or aviation. But that was it.

We took on the challenge with great enthusiasm and we did a great job. The plan we came up with was costed; we had credible estimates for the potential revenue; we had outline implementation plans. Our proposals beat the target. My boss was very pleased.

Then – nothing. The rest of the leadership hadn't been engaged in the challenge. The most common response was that most of the options were off strategy. And they were right. That's because there was no part of the strategy that said we would search for new options. What my boss had really wanted was an à la carte menu that other parts of the business could peruse and pick out what they liked.

This exercise actually had a negative effect. It diminished enthusiasm; it made some people just that bit more cynical; it damaged efforts to be creative. Suffice to say I learnt a lot.

Another company I knew very well established a very well-funded and talented team to explore new options outside of the current strategy. They did indeed create such options. The idea then was to transfer the projects to the mainstream businesses. It failed. The business groups rejected the opportunity because it was – wait for it – off strategy. They were judged on what they did in the current year and what they projected for the next three. They weren't targeted on anything beyond that.

I also have experience of a medium sized company with a number of very capable and creative scientists, who again were challenged to come up with outside the box options. They responded, but the potential products were not received well. "That wasn't what we wanted". Well, what did you want? If you knew what you wanted, why didn't you tell the team in the first place?

And here is the point. The cases above are very good examples of when thinking inside the box is required. The business leadership should create the box within which people can be creative and produce ideas, options, prototypes etc. The box is defined in a way that makes sense for each business. It should specify the areas of business that are on and off limits. If there are particular performance requirements, they should be articulated. Occasionally there are timelines involved – "we need products to launch in five years' time".

It's often important to define what is NOT inside the box; which areas are off limits, which business areas will not be considered.

If you're on the receiving end in the R&D labs, you should be wary of responding without question to an open call for disruptive, "outside the box" innovation. Ensure that other parts of the business are fully on board. Get as much clarity on the shape and boundaries of the box. If it isn't clear, then go back and check on the acceptability of the options at a very early stage, before too much time, money and energy has been invested.

Don't be fooled by the terminology; thinking inside the box doesn't have to mean conventional and the same as before. It should mean being creative, novel and original within specified boundaries.

About the Author

Kevin has leading edge senior experience in Open Innovation, Strategic Alliances and R&D. He has led product development in many areas, including consumer healthcare, household products, prescription medicines, diagnostics and molecular biology.

A noted blogger, he was voted #1 in the Top 40 innovation bloggers of 2015 by Innovation Excellence. His passion for innovation includes exploiting it no matter what the source, using resources efficiently and delivering fantastic products and services.

Co-ordinates

Tel: +44 (0)7802 256184
Email:
kevin.mcfarthing@innovationfixer.com
Web:
innovationfixer.co.uk/content/about

Linda Everett

Don't whinge. Win!

How often do you hear people around you whinging? In the office? At home? On the train? Maybe you do it yourself? We all share our personal and professional experiences with someone, to a greater or lesser degree and talking about the bad ones can be a great bonding exercise. A good rant is easy, it's free and it can help us let off steam. All it requires is our time, mental energy and a captive audience and these days, if you post your rant on Linkedin, the chances are it will get plenty of 'likes'.

But if the whinging continues and nothing changes, it becomes a turn-off. Anyone on the listening end of a perpetual whinger knows that regular, pointless rants can drain the life out of any relationship and have a negative impact on the energy around. It's not healthy. It does nothing for performance – yours or anyone else's – and it's unlikely to be part of your vision of success!

So how do you change from having a whinging mindset to one that thinks like a winner? Well, first you need a clear sense of your own self-image – How you see yourself matters! If you identify as one of life's victims, whinging will become a habit … **unless you take control**!

On the other hand, if you believe in yourself – your capabilities, your strengths and the future you want – use your dissatisfaction to motivate change. **Draw on that self-belief and take action!**

Think of it like this …

Imagine you and your family are driving to an important event. It's quite a journey.

Along the route, diversion signs take you off course and somehow, you end up going in the wrong direction.

What do you do?

You either whinge and keep on going, hoping that by some miracle, you'll end up where you want to be …

Or you stop, take ownership of the situation and get back on course!

Your mindset is a choice. You don't need to have all the answers from the outset, but if you're up against a challenge and you don't own it, *who* will pay the price?

Taking ownership!

- If you want things to change, you have to take action. That means when things go wrong, you need to speak up, stand out or put yourself on the line. It can be daunting at first, but the more you do it, the easier it gets.
- You have to be willing to face opposition. You may get knocked back or have to fight for what you want – not literally but against the accepted norm – but that isn't a reason to give up. In my experience, when other people realise you mean business, they take notice!
- You may have to give up some time, or put your money where your mouth is, to get the outcome you want. If it doesn't matter enough to you, why would it matter to anyone else?
- You will probably need to develop your skills, like learning how to communicate more effectively and with a clear outcome in mind. Ineffective communication is the biggest cause of unnecessary frustration.
- You may have to challenge your own limiting beliefs about what is possible and approach the outcome you want with fresh eyes. Trust me. I've lost count of the number of times a client has said that something cannot be done … before they tried and pulled it off!

Remember:

Anyone who has ever changed things for the better in business or their personal life, began by taking ownership of a problem and seeing it as a challenge they were determined to overcome!

… and if you need a little help to win, or you'd like to chat in confidence, just ask!

About the Author

Linda Everett is an experienced Business and Executive Coach, and the author of '*Game Changer: How to take control and increase your confidence, personal power and business success.'*
http://amzn.to/2fqUMhA

Specializing in performance, she helps business owners and senior professionals become more confident, more effective and more empowered to do what they do best!
www.inner-power.co.uk/about/testimonials/

Co-ordinates

Web: inner-power.co.uk/
Email: linda@inner-power.co.uk

Debra Murphy

8 hot summer marketing tips to combat summer slowdown

"Summertime and the livin' is easy…" – The lyrics from George Gershwin's Summertime remind us that we should kick back and take some time off, enjoy our family and friends, golf, go to the beach and basically just have fun.

But should we take time off from continuing our inbound marketing efforts during these hot summer months?

Of course, the answer is no. Remember that marketing is an investment in your business. You need to invest time and resources to keep your marketing activities going throughout the hot summer months. Taking a break could be the kiss of death for your small business. Even if you are busy now, being consistent with your marketing is essential to keep your pipeline full of prospects.

But for many businesses, summer tends to slow down and revenues decrease.

Rather than panic, take advantage of the slower pace in your business and get some things done you normally would not have time for. There are a lot of marketing activities you can do that don't cost a lot and can help you gain visibility.

Whether you are on vacation or find yourself with a bit more time on your hands, here are some summer marketing tips that can help you stay on track.

Plan Ahead

The content marketing component of inbound marketing is important to do regularly and consistently.

- If you have a content plan, create your content for a month in advance.
- If you have old blog posts that would benefit from an update, work those into the content plan to ease the burden of coming up with a lot of new content.
- Since people have even less time to read in the summer, add a few pieces of content on the lighter side. Not all your content has to be in-depth articles.

Knowing your business is maintaining visibility even while you are on vacation can make your time off much more enjoyable.

Automate

There are many tools to help you automate your marketing including:

- **Lead generation** – Use email auto-responders to create a sequence of emails to those who sign up for your lead magnet. These email sequences can keep a new subscriber engaged with your content.
- **Blog post publication** – Write a month's worth of blog posts and schedule them to publish while you are away. WordPress enables this quite easily.
- **Social media posts** – Use automation tools like Buffer or HootSuite to schedule post to go out at the most appropriate times for your target audience. I use Buffer and love the ability to set different schedules for each social media platform, to easily share content using the Buffer extension for Chrome and finding useful content for my audience through the Content Inbox.

Knowing that you have your content written, lead generation funnels automated and posts scheduled can get you through your vacation and make that vacation much more relaxing.

Get Temporary Help

Offload tasks to others by outsourcing to freelancers who can help you with your marketing. There are many marketing virtual assistants available who may be better executing your marketing activities than someone internal who doesn't do this regularly.

When looking to outsource, do your homework. Check your LinkedIn network for freelance marketing or virtual assistants. Depending on what you need, you could use LinkedIn ProFinder to help you find local freelancers.

I use external resources to write content so I can spend more time doing the work I need to do for my clients and for my business.

Evaluate your web presence

Do a web presence analysis and determine where it needs work. If your business is not visible for your top keywords, put a plan in place to update the third component of inbound marketing, your search engine optimization. Include a review of your web content, looking for content that needs optimizing for specific keywords. This is a good time to focus your marketing on the things that can increase your visibility and expert reputation.

Review and update your local citation sites for consistency of your name, address and phone number. A local citation is any reference to your business that can be found online. These include Google My Business, Bing, Facebook, Yelp, Yellowpages, Better Business Bureau (BBB) or other authoritative websites that may provide an online directory to businesses in your industry. Inconsistent listings with out of date information or different spellings of your business name can lower your visibility.

Optimise your Google My Business listing

Having a well optimized and accurate Google My Business listing can increase your visibility in the search engine results. You can control how your business is seen in Google's search engine results pages and other Google applications. Updating your entry will increase the accuracy of your business's information in Google and any application that relies on Google for their data.

There is a lot to creating and managing your listing with all the new features Google has recently added such as posts, question and answers, bookings and of course, reviews.

Review your service offerings

Are your service offerings appealing to your target audience? As your business evolves, your services need to evolve with it. Update and enhance your current service offerings to provide more value or add a new service entirely. Make sure your services are priced based on the value you provide. Kick back on your deck with your tablet and use Evernote to start jotting down ideas.

Create or update your marketing systems

Identify marketing systems that need to be created or updated. A marketing system creates a repeatable, step by step routine to help you efficiently execute your marketing plan. If you have systems in place to take the guesswork out of what needs to be done and when, your marketing will flow more smoothly while you are on vacation.

Make sure your marketing supports mobile

Your customers and prospects are also taking time off but that doesn't mean they are disconnected. Make sure your email marketing and website supports mobile devices. While on vacation, I see many people on their tablets, checking email and staying in touch. If your website isn't easy to use with a tablet or smartphone, you could be driving your prospects and customers to your competition. Make sure your marketing campaigns are mobile friendly.

I will admit that it is very difficult to stay focused on your business when so many other things are calling your name! For us in the northeast, this great weather doesn't last all year so we want to take advantage of every sunny day while we can. I would love to golf more, head to the beach or just lay on my deck and relax. But I owe it to myself and my clients to stay visible and active during these lazy, hazy, crazy days of summer!

But if you plan ahead and build in some down time to re-energize, you can be ready for September's increase in activity.

What are your plans for inbound marketing while you are enjoying your summer vacation?

About the Author

Debra is a marketing coach and mentor passionate about helping small business owners take control of a critical business asset – their online digital footprint – and use it to increase visibility and generate inbound leads. Through expert guidance and support, they achieve success by learning, incorporating and executing marketing activities that take their business from mediocre to marvellous.

Although experienced across all traditional marketing channels, Debra specializes in inbound marketing, a combination of search, social media and content marketing, enabling small businesses to create a larger digital footprint that increases their visibility and generates more quality inbound leads.

Co-ordinates

Web: masterful-marketing.com/
Twitter: @masterfulmktg
LinkedIn: linkedin.com/in/debramurphy
Facebook: MasterfulMarketing

Justin Bariso

Here's the single interview question to end all interview questions

You'll learn more from this one question than most others combined.

How would you like someone using a snapshot of a few minutes to judge your personality, skills, and ability to do a job?

Unfortunately, that's the reality of hiring. You can collect lots of data about people who want to work for you: information about their accomplishments, their experience, their performance on tests you design. But face time with candidates is always going to be limited.

A good interview question, though, can help you learn as much as possible in the shortest amount of time. Which is why I love the following question, which I learned from fellow author Suzy Welch:
What did you do to prepare for this interview?

"I myself have used this query for years," says Welch. "And, oh, the answers I've heard--the good, the bad, and the ugly--and always so revealing."

For example, how about the woman interviewing to be Welch's executive assistant?

"I've been stalking you for three days," she replied.

But that "stalking" turned out to be impressive; it included reading Welch's two books and everything else she could find online, so the candidate could get a better sense of Welch's personality and discover ways she could add value.

"As a result," says Welch, "she came to the interview ready to talk not just about her fit for the requirements of the job--but my interests, values, and, perhaps most impressive, the intellectual content of my life's work."

Another candidate had prepared an extensive analysis of Welch's profiles on social media, along with a critique recommending what Welch should change or refine. This candidate even evaluated the apparent marketing plans for Welch's new book's launch, which led her to form a list of questions for Welch--enough to fill a full page.

Of course, the answers aren't always so extraordinary. ("I read your Wikipedia page," replied one particularly underwhelming candidate.)

But that's what makes this interview device so great. With a single question, you can:

- Find out whether the candidate has a learning mindset
- Get an idea of how the person approaches problem solving
- Gain insight into the individual's personality
- See how important this job is to the person

Best of all, you'll see a real-life example of the level of preparation the candidate is willing to put forth for an important project.

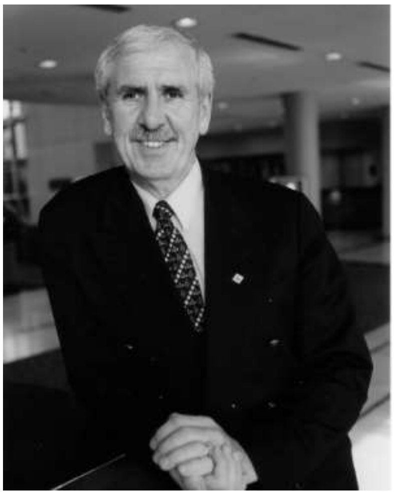
Because, let's be honest: If someone didn't prepare well for the interview, can you expect the person to prepare for anything else?

About the Author

Justin Bariso is an author and consultant who helps organizations think differently and communicate with impact. In 2016, LinkedIn named him the "Top Voice" in "Management and Culture." His forthcoming book, *EQ, Applied,* shares fascinating research, modern examples, and personal stories that illustrate how emotional intelligence works in the real world.

Co-ordinates

Web: www.eqapplied.com/
Twitter: twitter.com/JustinJBariso



Barry Urquhart

Media newsbrief (wisdom from down under)

"Many of the key contributing issues are cultural and systemic.

The customers have spoken: Australian customer services are consistently falling short of expectations.

It is costing businesses pedestrian traffic, sales enquiries, revenue, profits, repeat business and customer loyalty.

Many of the key contributing issues are cultural and systemic.

On the road to "redemption" there are no shortcuts. However, the potential rewards are bountiful.

Do read, study and share the newsbrief below, and if we can assist, do not hesitate to make contact.

Australian Service Standards Costing Businesses – Big Time

Recent experiences with, and expectations of poor customer service are the primary reasons for decreasing consumer traffic counts to specific Australian shopping centres, precincts and stores.

Poor service was also nominated by a majority of consumers as the dominating factor of declining purchases from select outlets, indifferent responses to mass media and on-line advertising, and to a fall-off in the appeal and effectiveness of loyalty cards.

A significant majority of participants in 18 focus groups conducted in six state capital cities during the period 1-14 July, contended that service standards in 2018 were lower than those experienced in 2017 and 2016.

Consumers identified the sectors which most consistently fell short of expectations were:

- Department stores
- Banks
- Telecommunication companies
- Electricity/power/energy utilities
- Insurance:
  - household
  - motor vehicle
  - health
- Supermarkets
- Home building maintenance:
  - electrical
  - plumbing
  - construction
- Government departments

Three sectors were nominated to consistently provide service excellence, being:

- Motor vehicle service
- Veterinary clinics
- Retail pharmacy

Key Findings:

- Inadequate numbers of parking bays was a greater influence than poor in-store service experiences in decisions to not visit specific shopping centres, precincts and city business districts.
- Poor in-store service experiences were major influences for consumers to consider and to undertake on-line purchases.
- Poor, slow and complex purchase-return policies and procedures were identified as the major concerns about on-line purchases.
- Most sectors suffer from a widespread perception that access to, and responses to initial contacts (by phone, on-line and personal visits) are poor, annoying and frustrating.
- Professional services, including accounting, law, medicine and financial planning were not among the 20 most nominated

sectors which were of concern when participants related to poor and low falling customer service standards.

- Energy, health insurance and public utility were the most commonly referred sectors in relation to pricing, cost increases, and value.

Background Information:

Researchers did not nominate, or prompt focus group participants in the nomination of specific issues, sectors or entities in this series of focus groups, which studied customer service standards in general.

Analysis

Lead researcher, Barry Urquhart of Marketing Focus, said:

It is evident from the research findings that expectations of poor customer service are keeping Australian consumers away from shopping centres, retail precincts and stores. They are staying at home, going on-line to scan and to buy, with expectations of better service, cheaper prices and convenient home deliveries.

Pedestrian monitoring systems at prime retail locations throughout Australia are consistently reporting traffic counts of consumers are down between 4 and 5%.

Poor customer service is costing business volume sales and profits, compounding the prevailing economic circumstances, and contributing to low levels of consumer confidence.

It needs to be addressed and redressed.

About the Author:

Barry Urquhart, Managing Director, Marketing Focus, Perth, is an inspiring speaker, author of Australia's top two selling books on customer service and an international consultant on dynamic innovation and creativity. Barry is author of six books, including the two largest selling publications on service excellence in Australasia. He is a regular commentator of consumer issues on ABC radio, is featured on a series of interview topics on "Today Tonight" and contributes articles to 47 magazines throughout the world. He is one of Australia's most active keynote speakers and is an internationally recognised authority on quality customer service, consumer behaviour and creative visual merchandising. Marketing Focus is a Perth based market research and strategic planning practice. The firm and Barry consult to multinational, national and local entities in the private sector and the public sector. He is a former lecturer in Marketing and Management at the Curtin University of Technology and has degrees in marketing, political science and sociology.

Co-ordinates

Mail: 26 Central Road, Kalamunda, Western Australia 6076
Tel - Office: 006 1089 257 1777
Tel - Mobile: 006 1041 983 5555
E-mail: Urquhart@marketingfocus.net.au
Website: www.marketingfocus.net.au

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