



Adapt or Be Left Behind

by Jeff Davidson, MBA CMC

"Wouldn't it be nice," as goes the Beach Boys song, if things stayed relatively the same in your company, while allowing you to look forward to raises, advances and promotions? Wouldn't it be nice if you could read a couple of books and take one or two courses every couple of years to gain the information and skills you needed to continue to be successful in your career?

Wouldn't It Be Nice?

Wouldn't it be nice if you had a totally stable environment in which you reported to experienced, effective bosses? And a work environment in which you could count on your staff showing up on time, being energetic and enthusiastic, doing the job and then going home?

Wouldn't it be nice if customers or clients weren't becoming increasingly demanding? If you could count on their loyalty for years, instead of having them switch alliances with the click of a mouse?

Wouldn't it be nice if the technology you work with today continues to improve, but in bite size increments that you could easily master? Wouldn't a host of other developments be nice – all of which protects you from having to confront major, challenging or disruptive events?

Back to Reality

None of the above is going to happen. In all likelihood, the opposite will be the case. Then what? As the future unfolds, you will find yourself in a broad array of work situations in which the players keep changing, the situations get more challenging, you are asked to do more with fewer resources, your staff is temporary or non-existent and customer loyalty nearly becomes an antiquated concept.

At times, it seems as if everything is up for grabs. Industry waits for no one. All businesses, organizations, industries and professions are subject to constant disruption. Time after time, we witness organizations, particularly large organizations with heavy investments in equipment, industry or marketing positions, that seem unwilling, unable or perhaps totally unaware of the need to alter their direction. Are you employed in such an industry? Do you lead such a firm?

A Better Widget?

Drawing upon the graduate business school mythological product – the widget – suppose your company has a long and proud history of selling the A-1 widget. Then you discover that the A-1 widget is no longer in demand. Other products offered by competing companies have replaced it, the manufacturing process for producing it is too costly, or emerging factors in the external environment have all but rendered the product a relic of the past.

Suppose that every member of the management team recognizes that much of the organization's history and identity, not to mention sales revenue, is tied to the A-1 widget. So, they resolve to undergo a dramatic shift. They decide to upgrade the raw materials used in producing the A-1 widget. Now it's "new and improved," but somehow it doesn't help to alleviate the problem. So, they employ a variety of other strategies:

- They rearrange factories that produce the widget.
- They beseech the sales staff to increase their effectiveness.

- They convene a task force to study the widget.
- They undertake research to see if the widget can be used in other ways.
- They increase advertising to induce customers to re-embrace the new widget.
- They hire an advertising agency to give it a new image.
- They design a training course for widget users (which no one signs up for).
- They rename the widget, calling it a wudget.
- They disseminate articles on the value of the wudget.
- They make a bigger, more versatile model wudget.
- They install wudgets in social and charitable organizations.
- They increase the R&D budget to further enhance the wudget's performance.
- They assemble a focus group to learn how people are using the wudget.
- They design wudget add-ons to enhance the overall product.
- They retool their factory to produce the new, improved wudget.
- They initiate quality circles to discuss how to produce more wudgets per day.
- They invite the press to the main plant to view wudget production in person.
- They decide to return to the original product name, the A-1 widget.
- When sales continue to falter, they hire a lobbyist in Washington to push for easing regulations that would result in lower costs of widget production.
- They study foreign markets where widgets might prove to be popular.
- They lure away the product development vice president from a rival widget maker.
- The new vice president announces that he is committed to reviving widget sales.

Eager and Unprepared

The above example is a bit dramatic, but leaves no doubt that this is an organization not prepared to embrace reality. You may scoff and say that no group would act like this; think again...

How often have certain companies and entire industries in our society lingered long after visible signs of market disapproval, social condemnation, government intervention, lawsuits and, perhaps most tellingly, the rise of considerably superior alternatives? The tobacco industry, music record producers, camera film manufacturers and scores of others hang on to how they do things when all signs around them say "move on."

So, to what product and services are you attached and how easily can you move on to what will keep you profitable and productive?

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About the Author



Jeff Davidson, MBA, CMC, is the internationally recognized expert on work-life balance and holds the registered trademark from the USPTO as the "Work-Life Balance Expert"®. Delivered with passion, Jeff has offered his cutting edge, hands-on strategies for a balanced career and a balanced life to audiences worldwide. He is a five-time state winner of the U.S. Small Business Administration's "media advocate of the year" award. Jeff's breakthrough books and articles have made him a favorite, repeat interview subject of USA Today, the New York Times, Washington Post, Los Angeles Times, Chicago Tribune, Christian Science Monitor, and the Career Weekly of the Wall Street Journal. Jeff can be reached via his web site at www.BreathingSpace.com (<http://www.BreathingSpace.com>)