

SMALL BUSINESS

The secret to survival is adapting to change

"It is not the strongest of the species that survive, nor the most intelligent, but the one most responsive to change."

— Charles Darwin



IN THE LEAD

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It is not strength nor how smart a leader or an organization might be, but rather how effectively the leader and organization can be in recognizing and responding to changing conditions and demands.

Many smart people have sidelined their careers and damaged their organizations — Ted Kowalski at Tyco and Hank Greenburg at AIG to name two — by failing to overcome the obstacles of changing conditions and challenges.

Every leader faces the challenge of identifying changing conditions, sizing up obstacles and overcoming them. There are many kinds of barriers that must be navigated: changing financial markets, shifts in consumer sentiment, new competition, revitalized old competitors, loss of key talent, discontinuities in technology, new legislation, outmoded processes and procedures — to mention just a few.

Leaders also are faced with significant obstacles such as entrenched work cultures that are resistant to change, group doubt, fear, resistance and old ways of thinking.

A core ability found in the most resilient leaders (those not only surviving but actually thriving

in change) is that of overcoming any obstacles that stand between them and the desired effect they wish to achieve. How do the most resilient of leaders — those that are most "responsive" in Darwin's language — do it? There are a number of pathways that can be pursued in increasing resiliency and responsiveness in dealing with challenges and obstacles. The most fruitful of these, proven empirically, follows:

The first step is to get crystal clear on your "intent" — what it is you want to achieve or accomplish. There is something very powerful and compelling about putting in writing the end-result you wish to achieve; in fact, your intent creates a "future pull" that aids in generating energy to overcome obstacles. As part of this process define what "success" will look like and how you and others will measure the result.

Second, outline the core barriers to achieving the desired future state. Label all potential obstacles and then prioritize them in order of severity and

challenge. Ask yourself, "What is the level of commitment, of energy and time that it will take to overcome the most serious of these obstacles?"

Third, identify all of the strengths, talents and assets you have at your disposal that you can leverage to overcome specific obstacles and move towards your intent or desired result. Ask, "What abilities or strengths might I be overlooking that I can access and/or leverage to assist in this?"

Fourth, round up all of your energy, focus and attention and bring them to bear on moving through or beyond the most significant obstacle in front of you. Dig down deep into the bedrock of your soul to feel into the level of energy and commitment you will need to access in order to deal with the degree of "resistance" or the size of the obstacle you face.

Then, with all the energy and force required, take action — move on what you want and move through the barrier, or over it, or around it — let your commitment be greater than that of the resistance or blockage in front of you.

In personal situations, such as persuasion or dealing with nay-sayers or addressing outdated ways of thinking or overcoming doubt, fear or resistance in others, it is important to take the time to highlight the points of resistance so you know where the most critical leverage points are. Also, identify the key people you need to make a shift.

Then paint a compelling picture of your intent and desired effect and ask them to imagine, "What if." Round up your personal energy by breathing, centering yourself and focusing on the positive outcome you wish to create and then speak and act from that place to invite others to step up and out while encouraging creative problem solving around how to move forward in spite of any and all significant barriers.

A simple way to describe it is: Spell out intent — outline barriers, leverage resources, round up personal energy, take action. Are you doing what it takes to address the challenges in front of you?

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