



Change is in the air...

By Chanon Collins

New businesses are arriving in town, educational reforms have taken place, and people are recognizing the presence of change. It has been said that “[we] must not let our past, however glorious, get in the way of our future.” Charles Handy makes this simple statement to illustrate that business owners must step outside their comfort zone to make sure that their businesses continue to prosper.

It is this thought that has sparked many business owners to re-examine the way in which they operate their businesses. Many create stunning marketing plans, only to fall short in the implementation phases. Others venture out into new markets with little knowledge of this new territory and are overwhelmed by the unknown. The success or failure of a business is determined during this pivotal moment. Business owners are faced with two paths: continue forth, blindly searching for answers or acknowledge their need for change and seek additional guidance. This is the moment of truth for most business owners – will they change the way they do business or will it continue to be business as usual?

The success of every business is determined by its vision. C. Patrick Lewis, author of *Building a Shared Vision*, identifies a vision as “a statement that captures an ideal, unique, and attractive image of an organization’s future.” This vision is a picture of the company’s promised land created to excite the members of the company to strive toward the established goal. Without a vision, people will wander aimlessly through the workday, in countless directions, inadvertently causing the company to remain stagnant.

While the necessity of a vision statement cannot be ignored, the vision is worthless unless it is shared. Every member of an organization must embrace the company’s vision and adopt it as his or her own. It is imperative that the shared vision be created by everyone in the organization. It is human nature to resist a forced change, but people are more open to change when they help create the reason, or vision, for change. And with this new sight, benchmarks must be established for the future.

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Goals and performance benchmarks are essential to the success of any business undergoing change. The goals established by the business must be translated into performance objectives that can be measured and managed. These objectives must be strategic ones, not something crafted to impress the board of directors, but something tangible that can be used to measure the progress of the business's journey. Objectives are tools used for the implementation of change, not the rationalization of a vision. Goals should have a major focus – establishing value.

So, how do you establish value? Take a hint from Disney – they are masters at establishing value for their guests and cast members. Every night the hitching posts lining Main Street are stripped and painted. Initially, this appears to be an exorbitant waste of energy and money. Would you as a guest in the Magic Kingdom really notice this maintenance detail? Probably not, and Disney doesn't intend for you to notice. This act of extreme beautification is completed every night for the sake of the cast members. This task of stripping and painting create a strong bond between the company, the cast members, and the work environment. Stripping and painting these hitching posts is an outward and visible sign to the cast members that their work environment is just as important as the experience they create for the guests of Disney.

Accepting and responding to change is time-consuming, exhausting, and ultimately rewarding. The mere fact that one is searching speaks volumes for change. John Kotter, author of **Leading Change**, recognizes that “the rate of change is not going to slow down anytime soon. If anything, competition in most industries will probably speed up even more in the next few decades.” Recognizing the power of change and pursuing a new future are inseparable. Theory without practice falls to mere words on a page.

The power of theory and practice are poignantly identified by the immortal bard, William Shakespeare – “There are more things in heaven and on earth than are dreamt of in your philosophy.” Take his advice and let your actions of change speak more loudly than your words.

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