

TOM

Get Unstuck!

ASACKER

“You have to stop in order to change direction.”

- Erich Fromm

Have you noticed how quiet it is? You can almost hear your 401(k) drop. The phones aren't ringing. Networkers have stopped networking. Bloggers aren't blogging. Spammers have even cut back on their spamming. The last time I sensed this type of collective pause was in the weeks following 9/11. But this time is very different. Our leaders are acting confused. The President hasn't come on TV to implore us to shop. And the forecast for the foreseeable future looks grim. These are indeed extraordinary times.

For some businesses, the current economic downturn will be their undoing. For others, it will be the vampire that sucks the lifeblood from the veins of their organizations and turns them into the living dead. I've seen it more times than I care to remember: smart people sitting on their hands waiting for the “right” information, or for new marching orders, while their bus sinks slowly into the mud. In fact, I was once a passenger on such a bus and it was a very depressing and distressing experience. So much so, that I eventually hopped off.

Inevitably, some companies will panic and push the accelerator to the floor, which will sink them even deeper and create a much bigger mess. Most, however, will simply go about their work, doodling on foggy windows while praying to preserve their dry seats and myopic views. But there is another option, and that's to get *everyone* off of the bus, *seize* the moment, discover new insights, and renew a sense of organizational purpose and passion. In fact, that is precisely what tomorrow's market leaders will do today.

A Simple Prescription

So what's the best way to get out of ones personal and organizational rut? How can you overcome the disconcerting level of indifference that has reared its ugly head, and revitalize your business and your life? I believe the solution lies in something the great English portrait and fashion photographer Cecil Beaton once wrote (In fact, I close every one of my keynote presentations with this quote):

“Be daring, be different, be impractical, be anything that will assert integrity of purpose and imaginative vision against the play-it-safers, the creatures of the commonplace, the slaves of the ordinary.”

Stripped from its context, Beaton's words sound like the vapid pronouncements of many “motivational” speakers: “Be daring! Have purpose! Go for it!” But taken as a whole, his passionate sentiment is a prescription for business

transformation and success in our extremely competitive 21st century marketplace: Assert integrity of purpose (why you do what you do) and imaginative vision (how you go about it), against the play-it-safers (just about everyone else). Translation: Be a bold and creative force in the lives of your customers, community and people.

It's That Simple

It really *is* that simple. You have the talent, the ability and the contacts. But do you have the vision and courage? Vision and courage are what leadership is all about: Making sure that *everyone* viscerally understands your purpose (and it should *not* be to produce and sell things. It's should be to add value to people's lives), and then orchestrating, empowering and inspiring people to bring that purpose to life with daring and imaginative vision. The leaders at AIG lost sight of that simple insight. So did the folks at GM, and sadly, at Starbucks. So have most organizations.

So stop and ask yourself, and your people: Are we asserting integrity of purpose in everything that we do? Does our desire to improve our customers' lives shine through in each and every action that we take? If it doesn't, then stop it! Change it! For example, when was the last time that you picked up the phone, called your customers, and asked them how you can help? (That's what I thought.) Instead, like most, you probably spend a lot of time and money on clever and irrelevant marketing communications that attempt to *persuade* people to *buy* stuff or *do business* with you.

Wake Up!

Do you see? Your true, self-serving purpose—to gain attention, sell stuff and make money—comes across so loudly and clearly—in your advertising, emails, viral videos, social networks, NLP techniques, etc.—that people can't hear what you're saying. So they've tuned you out. And why do you persist in these commonplace activities, in being a slave to the ordinary? I'll tell you why: You've deluded yourself into believing that it's "effective and efficient," when, truth be told, it's because it's much easier for you. It's what everyone else is doing, and you can maintain your seat on the bus; your relationships and standing with analysts, consultants, suppliers, peers, and coworkers.

Now is *not* the time to "go along to get along." Rather, it's the time to make waves. To shake the bus! It's the time to think very practically about how to uniquely add value to people's lives, and then to pursue it with daring! Your core business theory should be fanatical pragmatism: figuring out what works by doing *with*, not doing *to*, people, and striving to be audacious in your execution. Because boldness is scarce, and scarcity is what drives marketplace value. Be an enemy of the ordinary, and be secure in the knowledge that the creatures of the commonplace will continue to sit passively and wait for things to change. Don't you wait. The time is now.

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Tom Asacker writes, teaches, and speaks about radically new practices and ideas for marketplace success in chaotic times. He is an independent brand adviser and author of critically acclaimed books including *A Clear Eye for Branding* and *Sandbox Wisdom*, and his latest, *A Little Less Conversation*. Visit www.acleareye.com to learn more.