



Times are still a-changin' - especially in business

Companies must avoid complacency; Marketplace is littered with those that didn't take relentless tide into account

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One thing we know for sure about the new year, ushered in so tragically by deadly tsunamis in Asia, is that it will bring change.

Social change is quixotic and more shocking than ever. Who would have imagined a decade ago a television show in which men and women compete to have their bodies surgically rearranged?

But nowhere is change more a factor than in business, where competition is global and fierce. The marketplace is littered with companies that didn't take into account the relentless tide of change, consultant Stephen Goldberg says.

To succeed in business today, companies have got to be looking forward constantly.

Remember Melita, once the favoured brand of custom coffee? Look at how many coffee brands are now in the marketplace, Goldberg pointed out.

We're in trouble, he said, "if we don't continually question things."

Sometimes, change can be led by demographics or the buying habits of the public.

"Look at Krispy Kreme doughnuts," he said.

"They were the flavour of the month last year. Now, they're closing stores because people are becoming more health conscious."

Companies can never fall into complacency because of the so-called power of their brand, he said, because others are innovating all the time.

"That's how giants fall," said Goldberg, whose Pierrefonds-based consulting firm, Optimus Performance, offers organizational planning, training and leadership development to Canadian companies.

"They stop looking outside at who's coming up and what the threats are."



CREDIT: MARIE-FRANCE COALLIER, THE GAZETTE
Stephen Goldberg, (standing) president of Optimus Performance, speaks with colleagues Benoit Jacques (behind), Kenneth Ingram (right) and Linda Constant.

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For companies faced with change, as the majority are, there is a challenge beyond staying alert and ahead of the curve. They must be able to manage change within their own companies.

While the nature of an entrepreneur is to think about change and growth, most employees want stability. These types of people are more prone to resist change, especially when a company has been doing things the same way for a long time.

"Any company that has people who are still resisting change faces a huge threat for survival in the future," he said.

This is where sound management comes in, from people who are able to lead change rather than manage it.

"Managing is controlling," Goldberg said. "Leading is about looking at why we need change, and leading that process by communicating continually with people."

If employees feel that the leaders in a company are communicating what's going on, they'll feel more secure in their job.

"They'll feel that it's part of their contribution to the organization that we go in this direction; they become stakeholders in the company."

Simply put, a company's leaders must step back with their key people and look at what's happening to the company, then communicate those changes on a continuous basis.

"That way, they set the stage for having people become less resistant," Goldberg said, because they understand what's going on.

Unfortunately, managers and supervisors often ignore this crucial task of taking the time to talk to and connect with employees; to find out how they feel about things. The result is the huge cost of training new staff, and a thriving head-hunting business sector.

"We can treat people as numbers, required to carry out tasks and ignore how they feel about the company," he said, "then we wonder why they get up and leave without saying anything to us."

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