

# IT IS NEVER TOO LATE TO LEARN

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Charles Darwin said, "It is not the strongest of the species that survives, nor the most intelligent that survives. It is the one most adaptable to change." If ever in the past fifty years a business owner must learn to adapt to change, it is today! In working with many industry members for almost twenty years, I have learned that the largest barrier to growth and improvement are the blinders that are worn by many and not removed.

If this year were 1909 and not 2009 and you were the best wagon maker who ever produced a wagon, and someone wanted to speak to you about the "horseless carriage" and you were too busy making sure that the delivery of three wagons were not delayed, by 1919 you would be out of business. Almost everyone reading this article would say, "that's not me."

My experience is that it might be you. For instance, how many hours in the last ninety days have you spent trying to understand the future of the next two years and what that or those futures would be like? At the Army War College in Carlisle, Pennsylvania that's what is done regularly. There is no sense trying to deal with another Pearl Harbor. If you're so busy being busy, you can become that 1909 buggy manufacturer.

Basic questions you might ask are...WHAT DO OUR CUSTOMERS VALUE? WHAT ARE WE PROVIDING? DO WE KNOW HOW WHAT THEY VALUE IS BASED ON FACTS OR IS IT BEST GUESS? DO WE KNOW WHAT KEY COMPETITORS ARE LIKELY TO DO? LASTLY, WHAT ARE WE DOING TO GET EVEN BETTER AT KNOWING AND PROVIDING WHAT MAJOR CUSTOMERS WANT? If the only thing being done is trying to offer the lowest quote, then you can be sure you will die a slow, sure, marginless death.

The Baldrige National Quality Program lists LEADERSHIP...STRATEGIC PLANNING...CUSTOMER & MARKET FOCUS...MEASUREMENT, ANALYSIS, AND KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT...WORKFORCE FOCUS...PROCESS MANAGEMENT...RESULTS as the basic criteria for Performance Excellence. Some industries and the companies in those industries work very hard on these listed areas. Other industries, steeped in the habits of yesterday, ignore investing time and dollars in any form of improvement.

There are three areas I would be working on, if I owned your firm:

- CYCLE TIME REDUCTION
- SALES DEVELOPMENT
- MANAGER TRAINING & DEVELOPMENT

Improvement in the areas listed above would add to revenue, reduce costs, improve cash flow, and insure survival during rough times. One example: A company that went through the CYCLE TIME REDUCTION process reported a 71% reduction in the time it took to complete jobs...a 30% reduction in labor costs...a 31% reduction in total job costs.

Interested?

For more details, please contact Mike Sleppin at Paradigm Associates LLC. (908) 812-2327. Paradigm is a firm that works with about sixty industry members helping them to achieve even better business results.