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People First

Logic for irrational times

Stay focused and nimble to overcome the recession's toughest challenges

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The year 2009 has presented its challenges — but that's no excuse. We need to be able to sift through the wreckage, find opportunities and get on with business. The key to picking up speed is to quicken our ability to think and widen our view; this is our greatest means of survival.

With that single thought in mind, over the next four months we will explore the risks and rewards of developing an independent and quick-thinking mind. Further, we will analyze how authenticity, diversity and collaboration provide us the viewpoint to see around the corner and into 2010.

Have we lost focus?

How do you get people to move out of their own way? Great marketers have some answers.

“People are losing the ability to think for themselves. They are spending precious energy worrying about issues that may or may not affect their business. They don't stay focused on the big picture long enough to really figure anything out,” says Danny Sanchez, president of Proterra Advertising of Addison.

Angelo Antoline, CEO of mundayMorning Creative Group adds, “Call it stubbornness, pride or arrogance. People in business cannot afford the luxury of delusion. It's easy to assume that ‘reality’ in this economic wonderland means something negative. Facing reality — whatever the reality is — and then dealing with it as reality puts you ahead of the game.”

Antoline and Sanchez agree that people need to stop waiting for the other person's shoe to drop — and focus on where they want their shoes to land. Business owners who recognize challenges and plan with a wide eye will be the ones driving the train.

Avoid negativity

Reasoning not based on individual reality can afford us a place to hide — false comfort. That often translates into a wait-and-watch stance. When people are unsure, they instinctively make themselves as small as possible (small targets are harder to hit). If you don't move, the problem is you will eventually perish — think road kill.

Weighing reality, and looking directly at what's likely as it pertains to your circumstances, opens one's options and eliminates wasteful activity of rethinking every issue.

Know the difference between what you can control and what you can't. Remember the only thing you can definitely control is your own behavior — and thinking is a behavior. You choose how you think, and once you've done that, work through:

- Your reality: What do you want, and why do you want it?
- What's a rational conclusion based on your reality?
- What are the needed resources — be specific — for dealing with your reality?
- Resolution: What am I willing to invest? What action makes sense for me to take?

The Rewards

Mike McKool, managing partner of Dallas-based McKool Smith, has a rule: Focus, and then focus harder.

McKool has an amazing capability to wrap his attention around one objective. The result is powerful. In 1999, he saw an opportunity to build the firm into a world-class authority in the booming area of patent litigation. Realizing that competition would be large national firms and that McKool Smith was only a midsize North Texas litigation firm with no technical patent capability didn't stop him. Fast-forward 10 years, and his firm now ranks in the top tier nationally as lead counsel in patent cases. In fact, McKool Smith was named by the National Law Journal as having the most top 100 verdicts in the nation in 2008.

What's around the corner for McKool Smith? "We intend to build a world-class capability in bankruptcy, white-collar crime and pharmaceutical patent litigation,"

McKool says. No doubt, the power of intended thought is the force that drives smart into hyperspace.

How about those Rangers?

In 2008, the reality for the Texas Rangers was dismal. So team members balanced their reality with the rational thought (positive) of how they could become a better team. They evaluated their resources and made some decisions. (Never let anyone else's opinion of you be more important than your own.)

The result: they have increased their ticket sales 133,627 over the last season. It is one of the largest percentage increases in major league baseball. They have increased their viewing audience by 59%.

Business relies on rational people. Progress and success come from fully utilizing an independent mind. No matter how hard the battle, it can be won through a constant focus on reality, avoiding delusion, fully empowering the individual to engage his strengths and never losing sight of responsibility to the community.