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Are You in Action?

The most admired management sage today is without a doubt Jim Collins, author of *Built to Last* and *Good to Great*, and interviewee in this month's *Inc.* While revealing an idea-rich landscape Collins mentions three important concepts, which I am taking the liberty of linking together: Corporate success - regardless of the size of the company - rests on entrepreneurship; Entrepreneurship is a life concept reflecting the choices we make; Successful entrepreneurs choose to take action.

Our Take

Today, many companies are frozen. Stuck. Incapable of moving forward or lacking the fortitude to do so. Or, worse yet, they are freezing budgets, laying off workers and canceling growth projects. In other words, moving backwards and using the economy as an excuse. My conclusion is that executives are not clear on what positive action to take while they are vigilantly protecting cash reserves amidst a hailstorm of bad news.

Here, therefore, are five actions you can take immediately which require little-to-no cash outlay and which will deliver virtually immediate positive impact on your business:

1. **Temporarily Suspend Your Corporate Culture** - The world around you has changed dramatically and your corporate culture - the organization's every day behavior - needs a wakeup call. We have found that suspending corporate culture for 10 weeks opens the door for savings of 10% of your SG&A. For AEP, as an example, that translated into \$300 million annual saving. Not a bad haul for a 10 week effort.
2. **Change Your Concept and Management of Risk** - FDR's inaugural words need to become your mantra: "The only thing we have to fear is fear itself." The real issue facing businesses today is

how to deal with unprecedented uncertainty. If you view risk as downside exposure and are beefing up your contracts to squeeze out as much risk as possible, you are missing the boat. We are actually paying some of our clients for the opportunity to do projects (in exchange for a bigger share of the gains we give them) because companies have become afraid of ambiguity and will pay dollars to eliminate pennies worth of uncertainty. You too can capitalize on the fear paralyzing your competition, your vendors and your customers.

3. **Improve Your Customers' Experience** - Customers are still buying. They may be buying less in many markets, but that simply means you need to grab a bigger share of the shrinking pie by relentlessly improving your Net Preference (the attributes which, collectively, drive choice) and Customer Experience. Net Preference is covered many other places (see [this podcast](#), [this article](#), and [this booklet](#)). Two ways you can quickly improve your customer's experience are by humanizing your web-presence and by codifying then implementing the ideal customer experience. On the web-front, we have found that adding human-centered video to the otherwise sterile online environment conveys superior, stickier message. More broadly, it takes only six weeks to precisely define the customer experience which will lead to action and the standards you must have in place across the company to make that experience a reality.
4. **Upgrade Your Sales Managers** - First line and second line sales managers - those in charge of areas, districts, divisions and so forth - are the weak link in every sales force. This level has the least interaction with customers despite being promoted because of their selling prowess, and they devote the most time to administrivia and ineffective time with subordinates. Here's a counterintuitive reality: the deviation in your sales reps' performance is not, primarily, a function of their ability. It is a function of their manager's competency. In other words, it is your middle managers' directions which are causing the largest disparity in your salespeople's performance. If you want a quick improvement in your results, take action with the neglected middle ranks. (For more information on how to do this, [please click here](#) to "pre-order" an upcoming, free whitepaper on Mastering Sales Management)
5. **Jump on Social Media** - You can either stand there, scratching your head in puzzlement at Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn and other new social media or you can jump in and reap rewards while your competition is doing the scalp massage. The market is wide open for innovators. Iphone applications are expanding at a rate which would put the most reproductive of rabbits to shame. Yet how many of the top Iphone apps are put out by the bastions of

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