

Preparing For Success

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Five Skills That Can Help You Succeed

What will it take to be a successful business owner or manager in the years ahead? As surprising as it may seem, it won't be such popular prerequisites as having the right connections, a proven track record or good financial relationships.

Being able to choose and manage the right people and projects won't be near the top of the list, either. It would be naive to suggest that these qualities will become inconsequential, but they certainly will be far less important than in the past.

What will cause the key business skills of the past two decades to become almost irrelevant? One factor stands out—a factor most of us have immense difficulty dealing with: progress.

Since the start of the Industrial Revolution in the late 18th century, Western society had been dominated by the idea of progress. In fact, progress has fired the engine of free enterprise more than any other factor. We have always assumed that if we apply our knowledge, talents and resources properly, we will enjoy the benefits of an improving standard of living.

Christopher Lasch, author of "The True and Only Heaven," writes: "Luxury for all: Such was the noble dream of progress." The attitude that there is no "ceiling" on progress has always dominated the Western mind and driven the free-enterprise system—until now.

A new idea is emerging—one that many will quickly label as subversive. Fewer and fewer people will dream of driving a Mercedes, reaching the top of the corporate ladder, or owning a home or a vacation home. In other words, for consumers, "better" will quickly replace "bigger" as the primary goal. For business, this means "the art of the deal" is dead, along with all the big-time wheeler-dealers.

What skills will you need to be effective in this new business environ-

ment? While there are several to consider, the following five are essential:

You must be able to put your ideas on paper. Thirty years ago, a middle-aged, Harley Davidson-riding professor at the University of Wyoming said, "Those who say, 'I know what I mean; I just can't express it,' don't know what they mean." He was correct.

Many employees have been able to survive in the expanding business world by virtue of their personalities or technical expertise. What many of these people are discovering now, as they approach middle age, is that they lack the communication skills needed to get ahead. As a result, there's no place for them in tomorrow's business world. They are history.

Most business people are in trouble because they can't express their thoughts in writing. Most likely, they have been getting by on "fuzzy thinking" for a long time. Today's standards are changing. You need to use solid thinking to survive in the business world. If you can't put it down on paper, you're out of business.

You must be able to make effective group presentations. For some reason, we have erroneously concluded that working with people on a one-to-one basis is more important than working with groups. In fact, one survey reveals that most people would rather die than speak before a group.

In a sense, making an oral presentation is the one "no-excuses" act in our life. If we fail a test, we can say we didn't have time to study. If we don't get a promotion, we can blame it on the boss. "He's always had it in for me." But when we stand before a group of people, we're like the emperor without clothes. We're all alone on a stage. We have no one else to blame for our mistakes.

The ability to get people on your team, to get them to express their aspirations and to verbally "put your arms around them" is a skill that

really makes things happen.

You must be able to develop original ideas. For centuries, analytical thinking has been considered a fundamental precept of education. In fact, it still is considered to be the antithesis of, and the best defense against, propaganda.

Over the years, we have criticized Soviet speakers for mouthing "the party line." Yet, "the party line" prevails in just about every American business. We avoid certain issues, describe competitors in derisive ways and still consider yesterday's ways of doing things as almost sacred.

Business and ideas seem to have an oil-and-water relationship. Business people see themselves as "doers," not "thinkers." Therefore, they value action-oriented people and treat thoughtful individuals with disdain.

Original ideas will be essential in the future. The ability to analyze issues and conceptualize our thoughts will make the difference between failure and success. We can no longer afford to make mistakes.

You must possess the power of persuasion. Persuasion is often equated with getting people to act in ways that may not be in their best interests—like convincing Eskimos to buy Hawaiian shirts.

Actually, persuasion involves the ability to think from the other side's viewpoint. From a marketing perspective, persuasion involves understanding what the customer wants to buy, not what the business owner wants to sell.

Why do some people find Lee Iacocca so captivating and George Bush so dull? The fiery chairman of The Chrysler Corp. ignites a group and elicits a response. President Bush, on the other hand, seems cool and aloof. Consider this: US troops in the Persian Gulf were ready to fight for Gen. H. Norman "Stormin' Norman" Schwarzkopf but not for "Preppy"

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PGRs—

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benefits they offer.”

Hanson says today's new generation of PGRs has an average effectiveness period of six weeks, “but that does not mean you can stop mowing for six weeks. It means you may be able to skip every other mowing or mow every three weeks.”

Hanson warns that use of a turf-grass plant growth regulator puts the plants under a certain amount of stress, and inappropriate sequential applications could well have an adverse effect. “It's critical to know the product and site you are working with. “The cardinal sin in using these compounds is applying them when a plant is under stress. One of the problems we had in the early days in using PGRs on bluegrass in the San Francisco Bay area was that when you used a PGR on stressed turf, it resulted in a rust infestation, and the grass turned orange.”

While the new chemistry offers more hope for a widely adaptable PGR, Hanson says they still should be used “only at the right place at the right time.”

“And, evaluation must include costs. There must be cost-benefit study on each side. It may not be financially feasible to use PGRs on some sites. It may be cheaper to mow more often.”

—Harry Cline,
Western Turf Management,
February 1993

Kimm Named Acting Head

Victor Kimm has been named to replace Linda Fisher, former assistant administrator for EPA's Office of Pesticides and Toxic Substances, on an interim basis until a permanent replacement is named.

Kimm was deputy assistant administrator under Fisher, who left the post shortly after the election of President Clinton. The position requires presidential appointment and Senate confirmation.

Fisher currently is acting as a consultant for the agency.

MEMBERSHIP REPORT

JUNE 14, 1993
LAFAYETTE CLUB

NEW MEMBERS—JUNE 14, 1993

Steve Huff	University of Minnesota	Class C
Jerry Holman	Designer Soils	F
Jim Kaufman	MTI Distributing	F
Thomas Schmidt	Anoka Technical College	C
Tim Nelson	Anoka Technical College	C
Robert Porter	Anoka Technical College	C

RECLASSIFICATIONS—JUNE 14, 1993

Michael Brual	Hazeltine National	D to B
David Kohlbray	Northland Country Club	B to A

John Granholt, Membership Chairman

Success—

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George.

Old adages, such as “just find their weak spot,” or “hold a gun to his head,” or “play hardball if you have to,” are history. These ideas only left waste and wreckage scattered along the wayside! Now, and in the future, everyone will be important. We're finding out that the supply of customers and prospects is anything but endless. Intimidation is out; persuasion is in.

You must be able to stay on track. Many so-called “business leaders” possess little or no vision. In fact, the 1980s will serve as a memorial to the megalomania of certain “captains of industry” whose goals (which were invariably short-term) were far more personal than corporate. Their wants took precedence over everything else. Perhaps they got off the track because they had no vision for the future.

Fortunately, the '90s seem to be shaping up quite differently. There will be few opportunities for megalomaniacs. Today's times require business leaders who possess such personal qualities as inner trust, determination and self-confidence—

quite a change from the “knock 'em dead” types of the recent past who believed they had the extraordinary capabilities to do anything and everything well.

The ability to stay on track indicates you are comfortable with your vision of the future and have the stamina needed to stick with it. The people who build businesses don't deal them like cards at a Las Vegas gambling table. They aren't looking for a royal flush; they don't want a pile of chips. They are not seduced by their own fantasies.

These five leadership skills are indicative of what it will take to be successful in tomorrow's business world. Without question, some people who don't fit this profile will still rise to the top. In fact, there may be many of them.

But before accepting what they represent as truth, just think of what happened to Donald “The Donald” Trump and the guy who flew off the handle at Eastern Airlines. What was his name?

—John Graham,
American Nurseryman