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Change habits and boost your output

by Mary Bruce

Does it seem as if everything about running your business is just more difficult than it used to be? If so, you aren't alone. To ensure that their organizations survive this "economic tsunami," most business leaders have had to make more than one round of challenging adaptations. It's like rebuilding the airplane in flight – both scary and exhausting. Weary executives find themselves yearning for relief in a better economy. If things don't return to their previous state, at least they hope for the chance to regain their rhythm in some form of "new normal."

The further we get into this downturn, the more often I hear CEOs wishing they had done things differently when times were better. Expansionary economic cycles often support enterprise success in spite of weak management practices. Enjoying good results in good times, business leaders may become less vigilant about the basics of sound management. Then, when the cycle turns, those same executives face a double challenge. In addition to initiating quick and effective responses to new conditions, they need to change a culture filled with poor business habits.

Does your organization have business habits that optimize performance in any type of economic cycle? Find out with the following quiz. Check the box to the right of each item that is a constant priority or "business habit" within your organization:

1. Strategic clarity on why we are in business, what we offer, who we target and how we compete.
2. Market intelligence on industry trends and the competitive landscape within our served markets.
3. Relentless efforts to provide value to our customers and find win-win ways to improve service.
4. An insistence on bringing in new customers – even when we are busy serving existing ones.
5. Reinvention or replacement of products/services that no longer support strategic business goals.
6. A passion for productivity that focuses on streamlining processes and producing quality results.
7. Emphasis on wise resource use that includes buying smart and minimizing waste in all areas.
8. Thoughtful application of technology and automation to generate improved business impacts.
9. Talent development focused on careful selection and meaningful performance consequences.
10. Financial reporting and projection systems that preclude surprises for shareholders and lenders.

Give yourself one point for every check above, and then see how well your current business habits should support optimal performance, regardless of business cycle.

- 8 to 10 Excellent.
- 5 to 7 Good start.
- 0 to 4 Poor.

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