

LeaderPerfect Newsletter

July 15, 2011

The Three R's of Today's Business Leadership

by Dr. Mike Armour

One-room schools of our frontier past taught the so-called "three R's" of reading, writing, and arithmetic. Now, living on the new frontier of the global economy, we must master another set of three R's.

Rapid Response

Customers are unapologetic about their demands. They want swift service, prompt delivery, and instant access to information.

And empowered by the internet, they are quite discriminating in where they buy and what they pay. If you don't cater to their whims, they seek out someone who does. Even someone continents away.

Rapid Recalibration

Market forces and competitive environments are in constant flux. Today's dynamite idea quickly becomes tomorrow's disaster. And this principle holds true whether we are talking about products, services, organizational design, production techniques, logistics systems, or marketing campaigns.

In order to thrive, companies must make constant mid-course corrections based on accurate feedback from open, unhampered, and multi-lateral communication.

Rapid Realignment

Sometimes mere recalibration is not enough. Complete transformation is necessary. And when such moments come, companies must be able to repackage themselves quickly, almost instinctively, in the face of new realities.

Otherwise, they are likely to be left in the dust by more innovative peers.

Management Advice from a Nursery Rhyme

In effect, the new "three R's" are returning us to the sage advice of an age-old nursery rhyme: "Jack be nimble, Jack be quick."

It's hardly a new message, of course. We've designed organizations for decades to be faster, more flexible, more adept at change. But the pace is becoming relentless.

Development cycles are now compressed to the extreme. Lead times have evaporated. Customer expectations stand at all-time highs, customer patience at all-time lows.

Under the weight of this unyielding pressure, leaders and managers are squeezing every possible ounce of performance from their companies. Even incremental enhancements, they know, hold the promise of competitive leverage.

Wasted time, whether in decision-making or implementation, means lost momentum, missed opportunities, and sacrificed profits. And it can cost the race, as well.

Can Your Organization Pass the Speed Test?

Picking up on this theme, *Business Week* blazoned a pivotal question across the cover of its March 27, 2006 issue, asking in huge block letters, "Is your company fast enough?" The cover article zeroed in on innovations that have cut time-to-market in half since the turn of the millennium, reducing development cycles by months and even years.

The article concluded by quoting Bruce Richardson of AMR Research Inc., who tersely observed, "There are two kinds of businesses: the quick and the dead." Richardson, too, apparently subscribes to the "Jack-be-nimble" philosophy of leadership.

While the authors acknowledged that Richardson may have overstated the urgency of being quick, they nonetheless conceded, "In an era when once-mighty dinosaurs are struggling to survive, the alternative to fast and lean may soon be . . . gone."

Adapted from Mike Armour's book Leadership and the Power of Trust: Creating a High-Trust, Peak-Performance Organization, available at [LifeThemes Press](#).

This article may be posted to a web site so long as all copyright notices are preserved, along with an associated link to www.leaderperfect.com. You are also free to circulate this document in hard-copy form so long as the copyright statement and this notice remain attached.