

Plug Into Your Future by Unplugging From the Present

By Daniel Burrus

Posted on: November 16, 2009

What if there were a way to predict the challenges your organization will face and stop them from ever happening? Short of having a reliable crystal ball, most people believe such a concept is impossible. In reality, you can solve tomorrow's problems today -- you simply need to give yourself time to do so.

The fact is that in today's marketplace, change is coming at us fast, and it's only getting faster. That means organizations will be facing more problems than ever before. One thing we know for sure is that most problems or changes come from the outside in -- external factors affect the organization. This causes people to react, manage crises and continually put out fires. Therefore, the only way to gain control of your future and avoid the increasing number of problems is to ensure that some of the changes come from the inside out -- that both you and the organization make a change before the marketplace dictates a major shift or change in direction.

Changes that come from the inside out are far more controllable. Changes that come from the outside in are often out of our control. Crisis managers live in an uncontrollable world, while opportunity managers have a handle on their future.

The key to becoming an opportunity manager is to have the discipline to unplug from the present at least once a week and instead plug into the future. It's about taking an hour without looking at the economy, the stock market, the balance sheet, the sales numbers, and all the things that are part of today's world. Rather, it's a time to plug into the future, because that's where you're going to spend the rest of your life. It's where you're going to make all your money from this moment forward, and it's also where you can lose everything in an instant. Since you'll be living in the future, doesn't it make sense to give the future some thought every now and then?

If you're ready to solve tomorrow's problems before they occur and see the new opportunities change brings, take the following steps.

Mark the Opportunity Hour in Your Calendar.

In order to make sure you take the time to plan, you need to put the time in your calendar. Make an appointment with yourself just as you would for any other important business meeting. If you don't put it in your calendar, you'll never take time to plan. You'll be so busy putting out fires that you'll never get to it. If you think you don't have time to do this, that's because you're in a habitual crisis management mode. The only way to get

time back is to spend the time to stop those problems from happening.

Know Whether You're Dealing With a Cycle or a Permanent Change.

The good news is that most changes are cyclical rather than permanent. For example, home values will always rise and fall, the stock market will always fluctuate between bull and bear, and a company's sales will continually ebb and flow with the seasons. Those are all cyclical changes that are a bit easier to deal with -- provided you know how long the cycle will last.

Sometimes, though, changes are permanent. For example, someone gets an iPod and starts listening to music on that device rather than buying CDs. That person now has all her music with her at all times. That's a permanent change, because she's not going back to music on CDs. Permanent changes, even those that are small, can have devastating effects on a business.

Here's another example to consider: Today, cable and satellite companies need to take a look at what the young college graduates are doing when they get an apartment. Many of them are opting not to get cable or satellite and instead watch their favorite TV programs on their computer. If you're a cable or satellite company just dealing with changes as they happen, you're going to be in big trouble in the future. While it's a new trend that is primarily in the younger demographic, those kids are going to grow up and be the main demographic in the country very soon. Therefore, it's a potentially permanent change that needs to be on the cable and satellite companies' radar.

What permanent marketplace changes are on your organization's radar?

Solve Predictable Problems Before They Happen.

During your hour, ask yourself, "Based on the direction I see things going, the trends I see happening and the market cycles of which I'm aware, what are the problems I'm about to have? And, equally important, what are my customers' predictable future problems?" Then determine a strategy to solve those problems before they occur. Keep in mind that a future problem represents a future opportunity.

For example, if you're implementing a new strategic plan, predict the problems the plan will create and solve them before they start. If you're launching a new product, figure out the problems associated with that product and solve them before the launch. If you're implementing a companywide change, identify those who are likely to fight the change and why -- and then develop solutions for their concerns beforehand.

It's about becoming more anticipatory. If you don't take an hour a week to look at what's about to occur, you're going to keep doing what you've always done until you inadvertently go off a cliff. Rather than be a crisis manager and only react to problems as they occur, you want to be anticipatory, identify opportunities and capitalize on them.

Look at the Future of Your Profession.

In addition to looking at your industry and organization's future, whatever profession

you're in or whatever your career happens to be, you also need to look at the future of your employment. Based on all the things you're seeing with your organization and all the technologic changes out there, how are you going to be doing your job or career in the next few years? If you can start to see the future of your career, you can chart your own course, identify problems before they occur and solve them proactively so you end up ahead rather than behind the curve.

Your Future Awaits.

No matter who you are or what you do, an hour a week is doable. Before long, you'll become addicted to that hour and will expand it. And when that happens, you open yourself up to a whole new world of possibilities. So don't wait for your future to unfold randomly, only to end up in a place you don't want to be. Instead, invest an hour a week into your company and yourself and watch your success grow.

Dan Burrus is the founder and CEO of Burrus Research, a research and consulting firm that monitors global advancements in technology-driven trends to help clients better understand how technologic, social and business forces are converging to create enormous, untapped opportunities. Burrus has developed the first cell phone business application that allows the user to generate a business plan: the "Competitive Advantage Business Strategy Builder." For more information, visit www.burrus.com.