

MANAGING UNCERTAINTY

Managing uncertainty is a different exercise than managing *in* uncertainty.

Today's successful owner-managers will use uncertainty without thought of surrendering to it, or viewing it as a convenient excuse for strategic failure. Surely, the specter of unforeseen events can be a crippling pre-occupation, but it can *also* be the reason for establishing previously unimagined depth in the nature and quality of vendor-customer relationships. Both parties share the same apprehension about the uncertain climate in which they both must operate. Making the time investment to share perspectives on the new global landscape and its potential impact upon their businesses is the first step toward managing uncertainty.

Because this new environment is foreign to the experience of every senior executive, it obsoletes traditional approaches to planning and implementing. The potential for surprise now hangs over every strategic decision when, heretofore, it indicted any CEO found guilty of it. Managing surprise *must* be rehearsed like a fire drill if the new age CEO is to control its impact and envision its opportunities. Owner-managers, for example, might pilot regularly scheduled meetings with selected customer counterparts, the *opportunities* of uncertainty being the primary agenda. Mutual address to strategic execution can emerge to define the nature of behavioral change necessary for each to survive and thrive.

It is not the execution of *strategy* that hurts ... it is the "execution" of *behavior* that pains, whether personal or corporate. Every successful CEO is identified with a particular managerial style ... a kind of personality trademark and badge of personal pride. But the new world of uncertainty obsoletes all managerial habits accustomed to addressing reasonably predictable market parameters. Even seasoned executives can find themselves increasingly tentative about their decisions, fearful of surprise from some unknown quarter. Certain owner-managers react with fresh pre-occupation about capturing their company value now, leaving the opportunities of change to different leadership. Their inability to change results in their becoming *victims* of uncertainty, and exposes their enterprise to a premature surrender of value.

Others ask "How do I get traction now?" A beginning might include viewing customer CEO's as partners in addressing the "uncertain" landscape, finding in their togetherness, opportunities for mutual growth previously unimagined. This process would include meeting one-on-one with several CEO / partners to identify those with equal sensitivity to the uncertainty challenge and enthusiasm for mutual address. Involving the talent pool of "participating companies" will augment the quality of input in meeting the challenge of behavioral change. There is a vital difference between traditional ways of working together *and* brainstorming possible responses to unforeseen events (potentially of cataclysmic dimension). Each participant can derive a caliber of strategic perspective, impossible to separately attain. Mutual address to uncertainty becomes the catalyst for the addition of a survival capability to each organization, and a jump start on competition.

Tomorrow's most successful companies will have accepted uncertainty as a manageable challenge. They will have summoned the courage to abandon ineffective management behavior, made obsolete by a working environment infected with quandary. They will seize the initiative to explore new strategies when even uncertainty gave them the chance.