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Surviving And Thriving In Tough Times Resilience In Chaos Is Key

by Linda Nash

I remember the scene in the movie "Forrest Gump," where every shrimp boat but Forrest's had been disabled in a major storm. His dumb luck, having been at sea, saved him. Even though he wasn't a great fisherman, with no competition he was wildly successful. Don't count on *luck* in this storm.

Economic recession was upon us before September 11, but now, in addition, there is a massive realignment going on. Exotic travel destinations are out, local and regional tourism is in. Market segments providing protective equipment, drugs, and supplies to the military are working feverishly, while others are suddenly idle. Realignment brings chaos. If your business is being negatively impacted, this is a time for clarity, courage and commitment.

Why is it that some people and businesses seem to succeed no matter what happens? Luck may help, but resilience is the key.

Resilience is more than surviving—it is thriving. Even in the most visionary organizations unforeseen obstacles or setbacks occur. This sudden, massive economic realignment is a major test. The resilient organization, the one with fundamental strength and flexibility, will take stock, let go of what no longer works, identify new opportunities, and adapt rapidly.

There are three distinct stages to resilience. Strength in all three is necessary in order to thrive. Each stage is dependent on the previous one. If your business is deficient in stage one, the "Core," attempts in stages two and three may fall flat or take years to accomplish.

Like the core of a golf ball, your core helps determine the trajectory, the speed and the distance you will go. It's your basic strength—without it you may not survive, much less thrive.

Core Issues

Review your mission, your purpose. Is it just

writing on a piece of paper, or is everything you do aligned with it? This creates your direction. Of course you can change it, but do it consciously. Businesses get in trouble when they don't know who they are and what they do. Here, focus is important. Who are you? What are you selling and to whom? What is your niche? Then comes the most difficult question: Why? I'll leave you to ponder this one.

People who offer a commodity, that is, something similar to what others are offering, simply dilute the market. Specialize within your segment and you'll save time, money and increase your bottom line with less effort.

Communication is key to any successful business. From big budget advertising to networking opportunities, the marketplace needs to know who you are and what you provide. Here's where branding comes in. Oversimplified, branding is communicating your mission. Do you have a plan? And are you implementing it?

Speed Issues

This second stage of resilience determines how quickly you can respond, adapt and take advantage of new opportunities. Risk is required. Your core may be solid, but it is easy to bog down here. Do you regularly re-examine the way you do things and look for better ways? Are you willing to try new ideas, and as the great mythologist Joseph Campbell says, "leap?" Safe can mean sorry—the road not taken.

Rethink how your business can prosper in this time of realignment and focus your efforts there. It may mean drastic changes, tweaking, or this may be your shining hour—you're in the right business at the right time. Saying NO to a piece of business or letting go of the way you have operated in the past can be scary. Your ability to use Limit Theory™ to discard the nonuseful and determine clearly what you will not do in the future will define your business.

The important thing is not to stagnate. Growth means change, and change means growing pains. Rapid growth is often as painful as downsizing.

Be vigilant and open to new opportunities. Then, be willing to take the risk to let go of the past and seize them.

How High Will You Go?

The third stage of resilience determines your ultimate success. Your core may be solid; you may be willing to change and take risks, but if you don't commit and implement—nothing happens.

I have consulted with many businesses that share this problem: the inability to "pull the trigger." If you are forever stuck in the planning stage saying, "as soon as..." you will either be too late and behind the market, or you won't do it at all. In either case, you may keep on keeping on, but that's about it. Don't settle—don't let your business become mediocre when it could be great.

Most businesses aren't clear about where to put their efforts. I find that almost all are trying to implement, to make sales, to keep moving. That's important, that's the third stage. However, if your business is not performing at optimum, the problem is in one of the eight dimensions of stages one and two.

Resilience is both measurable and changeable. Think about your business, and which stage really needs some work. Fix that and you can be successful despite economic shifts and realignment.

Challenges are inevitable. Defeat is optional. Don't just survive—thrive!

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