

ARE YOU READY FOR THE FUTURE?

BY MARK RICHARDSON

What are you and your company doing to prepare for the future?

Yogi Berra said “the future ain’t what it used to be.” While this may be a clever play on words or he was the master of the obvious, it really is truer than ever.

We all see the changes in life and the world. We see advances in technologies, the changing client demographic and scarcity in labor. However, what is really different today compared to 10 or 20 years ago is the pace and speed at which things are changing.

In the 1980s, we had 10 years to adjust to the changes. In the 1990s, this may have been reduced to five years, and then in the early 2000s this was reduced to two to three years to change and adjust.

Today and moving forward the waves of change are happening even faster. This is forcing us to adjust and change in six to 12 months. We don’t even have time to think and implement properly. I can back all this up by using obvious examples such as Apple or Amazon or Uber or Houzz or Tesla, but we all know it is happening. The more important question, however, is, “Are you ready?” (And unfortunately even the best of the best aren’t ready).

THE FUTURE IS COMING ... FAST

So, while I don’t have a crystal ball, I do know the future is coming. I do know it is coming at light speed. I do know those that are prepared for the future will be better off than those who are not.

The following are a few preparation thoughts and insights:

1) Invest time. What percentage of your week is spent focusing and thinking about the future? Most spend 95 percent of their time on the short term (the here and now) and almost no time on the future. Try to adjust your blend so you are spending 5 to 10 percent of your time on the future. This should be quantified. If you have a 50-hour work week then three to five



hours a week should be focusing on the future. You might have a one-hour lunch per week with someone that is a forward thinker. Maybe have a weekly 30- to 60-minute demo on some of the future technology. You might listen to a podcast that will force you to reflect on the future. After attending a recent sales summit, a friend of mine set up a “future” committee in his business to discuss the future. This all just needs to start with time (just a few hours per week).

2) Find other business models that are future/forward thinking. There are many other models that you can learn and potentially emulate. They could be in retail, service or the media. Selling speed (not price) in business may be one of the bigger differentiators in the future. For example, I had an amazing experience with Tesla. Using Tesla as a case study on the client experience helps show you how to think about your product of the future, your people of the future, and your buying and client experience of the future.

Car buying historically has been an unpleasant experience. Many consumers even put off the purchase because of the fear or

hassle factor of buying a new vehicle. Tesla makes you smile. Tesla creates cool memories. Tesla hits both the emotional and intellectual cords. If you can just find business models that give you insights, then your path to the future will be straighter.

3) Get alignment on the importance of the future.

As I spend time with many businesses, one fundamental difference between the good and the great businesses is alignment. The good ones may be talented or competent, but the great ones have alignment within the business. Alignment requires strong leadership. Alignment requires the right people and mindset. Alignment takes time, but as it improves it can expedite you getting to the future. Like the other tips above it takes a little time but more importantly it takes commitment and focus. In your management/sales/production meetings begin getting aligned on the future.

Try to map out and visualize the future. What are your three key future priorities? How is everyone contributing or moving the ball forward on these? Think about alignment like rowing in sync or pulling a rope in the same direction at the cadence and pace. This alignment process is not only important for success but also refreshing and motivated.

While these three tips are more food for thought than action items, it is most important to make the future a priority. The ultimate insult would be to become irrelevant. The risks of falling behind the wave are very high, and the potential rewards of being in the wave might take you and your business to a whole new level. ■

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