

in this issue

Strategic Thinking

New Skills for a New World

Strategic Action

Acquiring New Skills

Industry Snapshot

The ROI of "On-boarding"
New Hires

Reading List

*A Whole New Mind:
Moving from the Information Age
to the Conceptual Age*
By Daniel Pink

Announcements

About Trek

trekking

a newsletter on practical strategic thinking and action
issue #21: is this going to be a new year?

editor's message

We all start the New Year with firm resolve to make new beginnings and improvements for the future. To help you in your own quest for self improvement, we review *A Whole New Mind* by Daniel Pink and make the case for adding to your skill-set to better face the New Year. Strategic Thinking addresses the changes in our economy that are driving the need for new skills, and Strategic Action gives you some ideas for acquiring new skills through training. Finally, this month's Industry Snapshot examines "on-boarding" to train new hires.

strategic thinking

New Skills for a New World

We all know that the economy has changed as technology has created a smaller world. Pink advances three reasons why U.S. workers have no choice but to adapt and improve their skills:

- **Abundance:** Over the holidays, you probably visited at least one retail website, a mall or a "big box" store. It doesn't take long to realize that we have an overwhelming abundance of material goods in our society. In this environment, competition has moved beyond just price and production quality—people are looking for quality of design, for good service, and for something "special." *To succeed in this competitive environment, businesses need to increase their ability to communicate and connect with consumers in a much more meaningful way.*
- **Asia** – The undersea cables that connect our virtual world have put pressure on white collar workers of all kinds. Asia can now produce not only things, but also services. All kinds of repetitive knowledge work is being outsourced. Just as our economy had to find ways to replace outsourced manufacturing, so must we find ways to replace knowledge work. *To succeed in this environment, businesses need to increase their creativity and solve new problems.*
- **Automation** – The final factor influencing our changing world is technology. Computers can do many kinds of "mental" tasks much more efficiently than humans. This trend will continue. *To succeed in this environment, businesses need to continually innovate in order to take advantage of the remaining opportunities for automation but also move beyond to find creative new ways to solve their customers' problems.*

These forces demand that we all add to our skill sets. What are some of the words used above to describe how to meet the challenges of today's economy? Creativity, problem-solving, communication and connection. Read Strategic Action for some ideas on how to get new skills.

-Mary Adams (adams@trekconsulting.com)

trekconsulting
fresh information. smarter decisions. great results.

strategic action

Acquiring New Skills

These days, it's every man and woman for him (and her) self. Your company will employ you as long as their needs are in line with what you have to offer. In order to make yourself as attractive as possible to your employer, as well as other potential employers, you must constantly improve and expand your skills.

With the New Year comes the opportunity to make a few changes. Today, you can improve your skills by formal classroom training, conferences, seminars or online training, whether paid by your employer or not. If your firm does allow time off for training or offer training in-house, take advantage of it.

A brief look into corporate training offerings reveals courses in computer skills, finance, sales, marketing, management, languages (Mandarin?), customer service, project management, human resources, speed reading, stress management, vocabulary, and overall self-improvement. There's something there for everyone. These aren't classes that will lead to an MBA or CFA, but they could result in knowledge that will have practical applications to your day-to-day business and interactions. Doing so will also improve your outlook and attitude, knowing that you are getting better in an ever-changing world.

If your own firm doesn't offer training, consider the many programs offered by local universities and training companies. Here in the Boston area, for example, most of the big name universities offer professional education programs that are excellent. Often, you can take just one course—or a whole series—to qualify for a certificate in a certain area.

- Michael Oleksak (oleksak@trekconsulting.com)

industry snapshot

The ROI of "On-boarding" New Hires

Here is a simple example of how training can jumpstart action. One of our clients recently hired a new salesperson. The new hire had received a significant compensation package and the client had aggressive goals for the year, which meant that they needed him to be productive from the start. He was hired from a bigger company and had good selling skills—he was able to understand the basics of our client's business quickly. But, in order for him to become truly productive as soon as possible, he needed intensive immersion. We suggested to our client that we spend several days with him to transfer the knowledge he would need to be successful in short order.

continued on next page...



As a result, before he even arrived at the company's offices for his first day of work, he understood his target market segments, his buyers within the companies, his value proposition, success stories to tell, and the right questions to ask to uncover whether the target needed our client's services. The new salesperson became an important contributor to the company much faster because of the intense training and introduction. The moral of the story is to never underestimate or under-value the ROI on time you spend with new hires.

reading list

A Whole New Mind:

Moving from the Information Age to the Conceptual Age

By Daniel Pink

Broad pronouncements like the title of this book can try one's patience with their oversimplification. We had avoided this book when it first came out but picked it up after we began working with the International Storytelling Center (www.storytellingcenter.org) in Jonesborough, TN (www.storytellingcenter.org). Pink references the Center as a resource for new skills.

The truth is that this book is worth a quick read. His core point is that our society overemphasizes left brain detail, sequential and analytical skills. We neglect right brain big picture, simultaneous and contextual skills. His summary of the left and right brains is helpful, as are his points about our over-reliance on tests of left brain skills in our country, (citing the "tollbooths" through which we pass on our road to success such as the PSAT, SAT, GMAT, LSAT and MCAT, etc.).

Pink takes a stab at identifying the six right brain "senses" that we should build to win in the Abundance, Asia and Automation scenarios discussed in Strategic Thinking above. These senses are:

- Design
- Story
- Symphony
- Empathy
- Play
- Meaning

The discussion of each sense includes interesting suggestions on expanding our minds through experiences as diverse as drawing lessons, storytelling and playing with Legos. He doesn't try to make a direct connection between these skills and business. However, in past Trekking issues, we have addressed some of these

continued on next page...



trekking

skills more directly in a business context (see “What Planet are You From?” and “What’s So Special About Your Mission?”).

For more information on Pink’s work, visit <http://www.danpink.com/aboutwnm.php>.

announcements

Mary Adams and Mike Oleksak will be teaching a session on Critical Thinking as part of the Northeastern University High-Performance Management Certificate Program (<http://www.ace.neu.edu/professional/evening/high.php>).

Executive Insights recently published an article by Trek principals called “Strategic Momentum.” Click here to read the article (<http://www.trekconsulting.com/Publications/Articles/ExecutiveInsights-StrategicMomentum.pdf>).

In next month’s issue, we will address the “new” idea being put forth by Kaplan and Norton for an Office of Strategy Management.

about trek consulting

Trek Consulting LLC helps companies to face the challenges of growth, building value and dealing with change. Since 1999, we have been a valued partner to business owners and leaders on their arduous journey to business success. We know that we cannot make this journey for our clients, but we can make it easier and more successful. We focus on getting you the best information available, facilitating sound planning and decision-making, making sure you have the right skills and resources to face your challenge, and coaching you through the road-blocks that invariably arise along the way.

Our clients report improved market focus, greater revenues, better margins and increased profits. To learn more about Trek Consulting and how we can help you improve your company’s results, visit us on the web at www.trekconsulting.com or call us at 781-729-1008.