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# trekking

a newsletter on practical strategic thinking and action  
issue #44: a new year—are you ready or are you stuck?

## editor's message

One of the ways that we describe our business is that we help companies that are stuck. It's a great shorthand way of describing a predicament that most companies face at one moment or another.

As we enter the final month of the year, it is a good time to think about whether or not you are stuck. In Strategic Thinking, we examine how you get stuck; and in Strategic Action, we consider how you can get un-stuck. In Industry Snapshot, we tell the story of how one company used customer feedback as a catalyst to get un-stuck and have a great year. And the final Reading List of the year looks at *The Future of Management* by Gary Hamel.

## strategic thinking

*Are You Stuck?*

We've seen it too many times to count. A successful business loses key customers and can't seem to replace them. The market turns on the company, and the sales pipeline turns to a trickle. The spark goes out on your strategy, and everyone just seems to be going through the motions.

Being stuck can sneak up on you. A long time ago (or so it may seem), you figured out how to make your business hum. You focused on execution. The formula worked. So you kept doing what you had always done. You were doing "it" well.

But then, somehow, the results stop coming through. Sales stagnate or decline. You lose a few customers. You lose a few employees. Morale goes down. Enough things happen and you realize that what worked in the past doesn't work any more. Whatever "it" was that you were doing before isn't working now.

Being stuck can be a scary thing. But like any challenge, being stuck can be an opportunity to revisit where you are and jumpstart a new chapter—or, if you do it now, a new year of growth for your company. Read on for ideas how to get un-stuck.

-Mary Adams ([adams@trekconsulting.com](mailto:adams@trekconsulting.com))

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fresh information. smarter decisions. great results.

## strategic action

### *Getting Un-Stuck*

The first step is recognizing that you have a problem—that you're stuck—or worse, regressing. Once you gain this perspective, you can begin the process of turning things around. Because we believe that fresh information leads to better decisions and great results, we recommend a systematic harvesting of knowledge from those around you.

Your employees, customers, and prospects are in the market every day, talking to one another, meeting with your competition, and measuring the market players. They know what companies are doing and who's doing it best. They are great sources of information about industry trends as well as your own firm's strengths and weaknesses.

When added to your own knowledge and experience about your company, you can analyze, synthesize, and plan your action steps to implement the changes in 2008 that your company needs to get it back on track and growing profitably.

Gathering this information may be both illuminating and painful, but it likely will help you to face the challenges for the coming year.

- Michael Oleksak ([oleksak@trekconsulting.com](mailto:oleksak@trekconsulting.com))

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## industry snapshot

### *Your Customers Can Show You the Way*

This company was a textbook case of "stuck." They had slowly exited a large account. The relationship with the customer had been draining for everyone on the staff. Even though the company had been a key part of the customer's meteoric growth, the spark was gone. In many ways, the company was relieved to have it end.

Feeling a little scared, senior management took a step back. They considered a number of new initiatives. They weren't sure what to do next. As part of the process, we helped them perform some strategic conversations with key customers. The feedback that was gathered brought home the strengths that the company had (and a few weaknesses). It helped them understand their worth to a whole array of new and potential clients. The plan of action seemed almost obvious.

With new energy and clarity, the management team made a few changes in the substance and appearance of their business. They tightened up their marketing message and took it to some new audiences. Today, they are glad that they lost the old client and have taken on many new ones. They are adding people and moving to a new office. Being stuck was an opportunity that this company exploited to great advantage.

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## reading list

### *The Future of Management*

By Gary Hamel, with Bill Breen

Hamel makes a good case for why modern management is a mature technology. He explains that most of the approaches and tools that we use today were designed to ensure efficient mass production. Our approaches to management reflect this goal—with hierarchical organizations, where strategy is formed at the top and systems are in place to ensure compliance with the edicts of the corporation's leaders. He says the ghosts of the creators of modern management haunt the halls of all corporations today.

His solution is what he calls "management innovation," a way of breaking out of old thinking and trying new things. The heart of the book reads like so many innovation books today—challenge current thinking, put in place a process to nurture innovation, and learn from new sources. He includes many stories of managers and leaders that have broken out of the industrial paradigm, but the result is somehow unsatisfying.

Hamel declined to offer suggestions on what the future of management really looks like. While he is right that it is hard to see into the future, all his thinking about how to break out of the old approaches surely gave him some hints about the future. It would have been nice for him to show us his hand.

He is also blogging about the book ([http://discussionleader.hbsp.com/hamel/management\\_20/](http://discussionleader.hbsp.com/hamel/management_20/)). Too often, these kinds of blogs just contain excerpts, but in this one, there are some fun contributions by other writers.



## announcements

Mary Adams was featured in a recent issue of Lead-Zine in a piece entitled, "The Best Leaders Leave Something Behind":

*American business culture values strong leadership. We tend to assume that it is the vision and force of personality of strong leaders that creates truly breakthrough performance. This ethos is reinforced by current practices of astronomical CEO pay in many companies—which basically assumes that leaders are miracle workers that alone make all the difference and do work hundreds of times more valuable than that of the average worker.*

*But the best leader, and this is the ultimate metric of leadership, is just the opposite...*

Read the full article ([http://www.leadingandlearninginc.com/productgraphics/Lead-Zine\\_Oct\\_07.pdf](http://www.leadingandlearninginc.com/productgraphics/Lead-Zine_Oct_07.pdf)).

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## 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](http://www.trekconsulting.com) or call us at 781-729-1008.