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a newsletter on practical strategic thinking and action
issue #50: switching cars on a moving train

editor's message

A few months ago at a client site, we ended up explaining a change initiative as “switching cars on a moving train.” It has turned out to be a good metaphor for change initiatives so we thought that we would share it with you.

In Strategic Thinking we talk about what we mean by “switching cars”, and in Strategic Action we talk about what it means to “keep the train moving.” Our Industry Snapshot tells a story about LinkedIn, and our Reading List reviews *I'm On LinkedIn – Now What???* by Jason Alba.

strategic thinking

Switching the Cars

This particular assignment involved a company that had grown rapidly. Its tangible and intangible infrastructure was maxed out—they had outgrown both their facility and their systems. Tensions were running high and some people had reached the breaking point and left the company.

The physical challenges were the easiest. The search and move to a new site took, from beginning to end, seven months. With more space, they had room to do what they needed to do. There wasn't a lot of adjustment needed.

But the intangible infrastructure was harder to change. Even though the systems (software, hardware and business processes) did not meet the needs of the business, they were familiar. And nobody wanted to change when the company continued to operate (thankfully) at higher and higher revenue levels—certainly not an over-taxed staff that already had too much to do. But it was the correct decision.

It was only later, after we had nearly reached the end of the assignment, when we came up with the train analogy. But in retrospect, we realized that it was a good description of what we had helped them do—replace their systems bit by bit, one car at a time. It was never a drastic enough change to necessitate stopping the train, but significant enough that (when it was all over) there were new buildings, software and processes to replace the old ones. The new changes meant the train was prepared to handle an even faster speed going forward.

-Mary Adams (adams@trekconsulting.com)

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strategic action

Keeping the Train Moving

Whenever you take on a new project within your company, it is worth taking the time to think through its potential for “stopping your train” and interfering with your on-going operations. Try asking these questions about your next project:

- How is the business at risk from this project? Determine which of your activities have the potential for “stopping the train,” and interfering with the growth and/or operations of the company?
- How do you mitigate these risks? Focus on the key risks in the project and devise a plan that will outline how the work can be done with minimal disruption to the underlying business
- What is driving your deadlines? Sometimes the goals for finishing a big project are top down and the “let’s just get it done” mentality prevails. Make sure you allow for bottoms-up planning. Understand what it will take to “get the job done right.”
- Can the job be broken down into phases? If you take things in steps, the risk and the results can be more carefully controlled. This will enable you to switch one car at a time.

Change can occur without interrupting your business. Think through the process beforehand and keep the train moving.

- *Michael Oleksak (oleksak@trekconsulting.com)*

industry snapshot

LinkedIn

Over lunch last year, Michael recommended to a former colleague that she sign up for LinkedIn, and he invited her to join his network.

He ran into her recently at a professional association meeting. As it turns out, her employer had reduced their staff, and she had gotten a pink slip. Michael suggested that in addition to traditional avenues for finding her next position (executive recruiters, employment websites, and networking), that she use LinkedIn as part of her job search.

She found a position that had only been listed on Linked In. Why? The employer used LinkedIn as a real-life test of whether their candidates were networked using modern-day technology and tools.

Finding a job on LinkedIn is yet another way to combine the power of today’s technology and your personal and professional networks.



reading list

I'm On LinkedIn – Now What???

By Jason Alba

Following on the theme of Linked In, this month's book is entitled *I'm On LinkedIn – Now What???* written by career management counselor Jason Alba.

The Forward to this book traces the process by which most of us learned about LinkedIn. The first step for most was to receive an unsolicited invitation to join someone's LinkedIn network. Next, you posted your profile, but you probably did not do much beyond that. Occasionally you would connect with people who reached out to you.

Now you have more connections but feel LinkedIn could be a more effective tool. You know it's not a strategy unto itself, but you'd like to have it do more for you. That's how Alba's book helps, with many practical steps and the sharing of successes and experiences of others.

With over 13 million people on LinkedIn, it's worth looking more closely at how it can work for you, whether by using its advanced features for a price, or by better using the free features on the site.

announcements

Mary Adams' recent webinar on "Leveraging Intellectual Capital for Growth and Profits" for IT Decisions Coaching is now available on the web (<http://itdecision-coaching.com/webinars.html> - scroll halfway down the page to see the replay screen).

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 roadblocks 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.