

City waits for 'Big Bang' 3E

Where did all those promises go? • Top firms lacking good leaders

The Challenge for the Future

Last month I was invited to speak at a conference about the challenge for the twenty first century. I was coming off a major change project and the research from our teambuilding programmes. The conclusion was - quite a challenge, for most companies. The rate of change is growing continually, and from what I can see many companies are asleep at the wheel.

My first message was a sense of urgency, chaos to be more exact. People seem to expect there to be periods of calm interspersed with other periods of excitement as their company embarks on another crisis change initiative. This will no longer be the case. The 'do it now' mentality has arrived in the fast moving successful companies. Systems will have to be one of the 'givens' for change. No longer will executives have to tolerate loads of data processed on the back of a Neanderthal financial system. Real performance based information systems will be needed - do it now.

Secondly effective teamwork at the top will be a prerequisite for success. However, most companies will have to rid themselves of snakes and the big swinging dicks. Sadly these two species still manage to populate many of the top positions in some large corporations. Getting rid of them will be difficult, for they will not leave without a fight. There are some good signs that things are changing and many are now being exposed; for example 360 degree appraisal systems are weeding some of them out.

This brings me onto the next essential quality for the successful company in the next century - leadership. Companies will have to invest in leadership if they are to succeed. Controlling companies simply destroy leadership by not allowing people to grow, to test themselves or to blossom. Wasting talent will become increasingly costly in a world of rapid change and vigorous competition. Take for example the high tech industries or the professional service firms - they have to have dynamic leadership at the top

who allow their professionals to get on with the job in hand. Just remember that if you keep someone down you have to be down there with them. Sadly risk averse cultures and micromanaging bosses are too much the norm in far too many places. The best companies today are run by leaders who spend their time communicating the vision and strategies and who leave the managing of the business to others.

Celebrating short term wins will be an essential barometer to measure success. Too often we sit back and wait for the big bang' - which never happens, simply because the cynics have plenty of space to take over and destroy innovations and initiatives before they have a chance go gain any momentum. Small wins are essential to ensure the vision and strategies are on track, and they represent excellent opportunities for leaders to reward the success of their teams and recognise individual commitments. Reward and recognition are essential qualities for ensuring high levels of motivation amongst the people. Highly inspired and motivated people when hooked up to a dynamic reward strategy can achieve almost anything. However, remember that people do not work for 'just the money'. Work is where they spend most of their waking hours and they want to enjoy it and be part of the success. Management style has a large part to play in that equation.

The challenges for the twenty first century will be considerable, and more than we could ever imagine. In the words of Peter Drucker, 'we shall have to be prepared to abandon everything we do'.

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