



Take Charge of Change

By Jeff Zakaryan

Last fall my wife Barbara and I attended the circus in Moscow. One act in particular grabbed my attention because of its similarities to the business world.

The lion tamers were obviously at the top of their game. They were skilled, experienced and confident. At the precise moment they got the three lions doing exactly what they wanted, a chain link gate swung open and two more ferocious beasts burst into the ring.

The lion tamers were now challenged with keeping the first three lions on course while simultaneously dealing with the fast charging newcomers that just barged into their act.

Sound familiar?

Today's business world is every bit as treacherous and changeable as the world of the lion tamers.

Whether it's an abrupt change in market conditions, a surprising new competitor, a merger, acquisition or organizational shake-up, most changes serve little notice and can have dramatic impact.

The message from the lion tamers is clear: never get so absorbed by what you're doing that you get caught totally off-guard when change does come your way.

I recognize that the role of change in business isn't exactly late breaking news, but taking time out to ask yourself how effectively you deal with it is a fair question. Little changes or big are often announced by a simple ring of your cell phone, an email from the head office or a tiny news item buried in the Wall Street Journal.

To become and remain the leader in your field you need to do better than just "deal" with the omnipresent specter of change. You must take charge of it!

HERE ARE THREE IDEAS TO HELP YOU DO THAT:

1. BECOME A CATALYST FOR CHANGE

Change results from action and the people and businesses that make things happen are the architects of the future. Those that don't are destined to be the bricklayers for the architects. In other words you need to create an environment where launching goal-achieving change is high on your list of expectations. You should be constantly looking for ways (large and small) to seize opportunities before your competitors even see them.

2. ANTICIPATE CHANGE

Even if you are a prolific agent of change you aren't immune from unexpected events. It is extremely important that you regularly devote time to survey your horizons to identify and evaluate potential changes that could impact your business. Scenario planning is a thought-provoking technique that lets you explore a variety of what ifs and to prepare accordingly.

3. RESPOND, DON'T REACT

When change does come...never react in knee jerk fashion. Despite today's whirlwind pace and heightened pressure for results, it's critical that you don't succumb to the temptation of the quick fix. Take ample time to carefully assess its implications and formulate a thoughtful and effective response that best serves your long term interests.

Obviously the lion tamers of the Moscow Circus have performed their act hundreds of times. They are well aware of what's "scripted" to happen next. If taking charge of change becomes your daily M.O. you won't be shocked or unprepared the next time the gate to your business swings open.

Jeff Zakaryan works with CEOs to optimize their effectiveness as leaders.