

Tough Times Strategies

If I were asked to pick a theme song for today's business leaders, I'd choose the classic Elton John tune, "I'm Still Standing." That's how many of us feel today. We've cut costs, laid off staff, eliminated waste and overhead, and have basically been the stars of a real life "Survivors" series.

Well, friends, it's time to move on. It's time to quit whining or complaining. Now is the time to recast our eyes toward the future. Now is the time to pick ourselves up, stop looking only at today and to prepare ourselves for what the future. Now is the time to think big again - to look up and out rather than down and in.

Here are three powerful ways for you and your team to think big again:

1. Throw the box out of the window.

"For too many years my well-meaning consulting colleagues have so overused the now trite and rather pedantic expression, "we've got to think outside the box," that today it is has little meaning. As my mentor likes to say, "Don't think outside the box - throw the box out of the window!"

For example, do you think the idea for the phenomenally successful iPod came out of a staff meeting where the boss said, "OK, let's think outside the box."



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Dr. Jim Harris teaches thousands of professionals every year how to crystallize their goals, leverage their strengths, energize their teams, and realize their significance as a professional and as a leader. From keynotes and workshops to 1-on-1 coaching and digital learning products, Dr. Jim helps transform your potential into productivity, and your passion into results. An author of eight books, Dr. Jim offers you, your team and your audience a unique combination of perspective, insight, passion and integrity.



Eighteen months ago our 11-year old son got an iPod Nano for his 4th grade graduation gift. Just this morning at breakfast, he informed me that his iPod model is "ancient," that there are several better versions, and that he feels somewhat slighted by not having music video playback capability. This is the speed of business today. When in just 18 months, what was leading edge is now ancient - and then learning this from our kids!

Now is the time for radical thinking, for exploring new, fresh, never before heard of possibilities for yourself and your team. Trying to "think" outside an existing "box" is often merely a nice way for managers to say, "Yeah, we need some new ideas...but don't bet we'll do anything with them." By refusing to stretch your brain and the brains of your team, you will forever be in a survival mode. By embracing truly dynamic and innovative thinking, you will always be in a thrive mode.

2. Sponsor a Growth Engine Summit (GES).

Perhaps the best thing you could ever do for your company is to sponsor an off-site GES with key employees, vendors, and customers. Through a combination of progressive brainstorming techniques including mind mapping, attribute listing, idea manipulation, and more, a GES can generate between 300-600 unique ideas and potential areas of growth for your company.

Properly facilitated, a GES will generate a minimum of 8-10 highly profitable short-term growth concepts with another 8-15 additional growth concepts that

are designated "Ready to Implement" (RTI) at a later time.

There are three critical keys to a successful GES. First, after years of leading off-site retreats (strategic planning, leadership development, team building, etc.), I've learned that the greater the breadth, depth, and range of participants, the more dynamic and powerful the outcomes. Second, a short-term (30-day), aggressive action plan for each idea is essential for success. Finally, accountability for execution and results must be clearly communicated and enforced.

3. Ramp up Your Public Relations.

In today's market, free publicity is great. To complement your current advertising and marketing strategy, generate realistic and meaningful community alliances that can generate for you positive press.

For example, consider instigating a quarterly "Community Touch" activity where you choose a reputable not-for-profit agency in your community that could use your services or expertise. Ask your employees to choose the group and to participate. Invite local newspapers to cover the event.

This is a win-win-win for your community, your employees, and your company. And with the right attitude of service first, you'll receive free public relations that reinforces your brand as an active part of your community.

Consider the power of these three concepts together.

Throw your convention thinking out of the window.

Generate 15-30 new ways to grow business.

Revive team spirit and connection to your community through strategic service.

In combination, these concepts will jump-start your team to move on into the future.