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The WorkLife Journey: HALLOWEEN EDITION

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Are You Ready for the Future?



“The Future ain’t what it used to be.” – Yogi Berra
“Preidiction is very difficult, especially about the future” – Niels Bohr

Are you and your organization looking forward, or are you focused on the problems of the present and immediate short-term competition? What occupies your senior management team? Are they issues of the present, or are you getting ready for a changing future?

How will your organization create new rules of competition in the future? Is it imagining new ways of doing business, building new capabilities, and setting new standards of customer satisfaction? Is it alert to possible risks from unconventional rivals, new business models, changing demographics, and global uncertainties?

It is no longer only a question of being able to operate lean and mean. Trimming jobs and cutting costs, while important tasks, will not put you and your company into a front running position for industry leadership of the future.

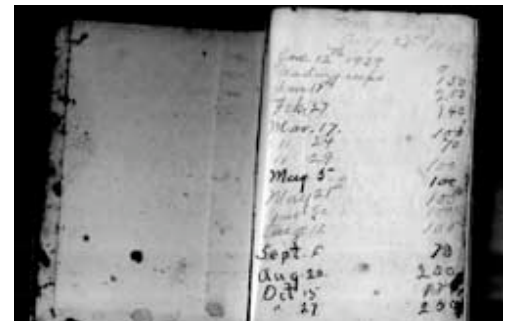
Here are three questions for senior management to evaluate readiness for the future:

1. What percentage of your time do we spend on external, rather than internal, issues? Do we understand the implications of new technology that is affecting our industry or are we just debating corporate overhead allocations?
2. When we are spending time looking outward, do we consider how the world could be different in five or ten years or are we more concerned with landing the next big



As a highly regarded Performance Coach, **David Butler** combines his initial career as a professional actor and stage director with his extensive experience in personal and corporate transformation initiatives. He is an authority in leadership development, executive coaching, teaming and communication skills. Mr. Butler frequently appears as a guest speaker on these subjects, and his client list includes many Fortune 100 companies.

READING CUPS



contract or responding to competitors' pricing?

3. How much of our time is devoted to looking outward and forward? Are we consulting with colleagues to create a shared vision of the future based on risk evaluations as opposed to a personal and pessimistic view?

These questions were posed by Gary Hamel and C. K. Prahalad in their book *Competing for the Future* over ten years ago. The book merits re-reading as it is even more relevant today.

Why Leaders Don't Look Ahead

Most leaders of organizations do not spend sufficient time considering the future. It may be in part because the answers are not easy—nobody can know for sure what the future will bring. Globalization and rapidly changing technologies are only part of the uncertain future. One must also consider fluctuations in world politics, natural resources, and industry regulations.

Many leaders don't want to look into the future because to do so is unsettling to them personally. They must admit that what they know today may be irrelevant and obsolete for the future. The knowledge and experience that brought them this far in their careers may not be sufficient to continue.

When this happens, according to Hamel and Prahalad, "...the urgent drives out the important; the future goes largely unexplored; and the capacity to act, rather than the capacity to think and imagine, becomes the sole measure of leadership."

Looking at the Wrong Things

This urgency leads to focusing attention solely on internal issues of restructuring and reengineering to shore up present day business rather than creating the future.

In 1989 there was a survey of U.S. managers who believed that quality would be a fundamental source of competitive advantage in the year 2000. On the other hand, barely half of Japanese managers predicted quality to be a source of advantage in the year 2000. The Japanese managers rated first as a source of competitive advantage in the year 2000 the capacity to create fundamentally new products and businesses. We now see the quest for innovation as the key strategic principle for success. Creating advantage through quality, time-to-market, and customer responsiveness are prerequisites for survival, not competitive advantages for the future.

The history of unsuccessful futures thinking is vast and littered with juicy examples (see the attached slideshow link). The point is to ask how we can learn to see more clearly and to avoid the traps in our thinking process. Some common pitfalls include "Eureka! This is it!" thinking (the Silver Bullet), Paradigm Blindness (the Earth is Flat), Trend Belief (aka Domino Theory) and Cultural Contempt (Not Invented Here)

Great leaders have not always had great vision into the future. Check out [The Graveyard of BAD PREDICTIONS Here](#)



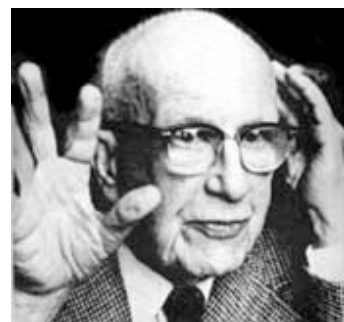
Years ago when my maternal grandmother passed on, I received her old cookbook as a memento from the personal effects at the farm. Everyone knew that I loved her kitchen and the old fashioned cooking I would help with as a young boy. As I perused the ancient volume recently, I noticed her shaky hand written notes on the inside front cover – "READING CUPS". At first confusing, it was followed by notations of "Jan 12th 1939 - \$1.50" and "Jan 17th – \$2.50" and "Feb 27 – \$1.40" and so on through Oct 27th. I recalled seeing her by the window chatting with a visitor. I realized what "reading cups" meant. She would make a cup of tea and then interpret the designs the tea leaves left in the bottom of the cup. The art in this is in having the drinker notice forms and symbols that are reflective of something in their lives and then counseling them on how to better resolve or approach their challenges. The "inkblot" or Rorschach test is based on a similar principle – you just don't get a cup of tea with it!

In my coaching work I focus on making sense out of the tea leaves of our modern day challenges. Work and life choices as well as leadership decisions in a world of increasing change requires each of us to be better at reading the signs and signals as they come into view. From the Delphic Oracle priestesses at the Temple of Apollo to Nostradamus, the Druids, and even the "Oracle of Omaha" – Warren Buffet, we yearn for the ability to see a little behind the curtain of today in order to better prepare for tomorrow. We use historical trends, research and demographics all in a relentless pursuit of a glimmer of what might lie ahead so we won't be left behind.

The uniquely challenging phenomenon of our time is the ever increasing rate of change. In the second half of the 20th century, technological breakthroughs – computers, Internet, lasers, digital, Google – impact each other to produce an increasing frequency and speed for change across all disciplines. This compounding is noted by visionary/engineer Bucky Fuller as "accelerating acceleration". This white water rapids effect challenges our paradigm of reality as controllable and predictable and, it also has a hidden benefit to it. As we approach some multiple convergence point, we have more ability to not only predict what is next but also to have a greater hand in creating that next moment. We have the ability to dip our oar at the right moment and actually witness the impact on the unfolding moment rather waiting years or decades. What a profound opportunity!



The next time you look into the tea leaves in your cup (or the grounds of your Starbucks) take a moment to ponder what you want that future to be – you may just help to create it!



Bucky Fuller

Keys to Creating Success for the Future

“I could never convince the financiers that Disneyland was feasible because dreams offer too little collateral!” – Walt Disney

Taking the time to creatively evaluate potential risks and identify new opportunities is the key to creating and maintaining a successful future. In “How to Think Like Leonardo da Vinci”, author/juggler Michael Gelb identifies da Vinci’s genius thinking steps as **Questioning Curiosity, Testing, Refining, Embracing Paradox, Balancing Imagination with Logic and Recognizing Interconnectedness.**

A hidden key is in the growth of custom measurement tools. Financial readings used to be done annually, then quarterly, and now monthly. In 1990 Cisco Systems began measuring daily in order to close its worldwide financial books daily and in one hour’s notice by 2000. This continual measurement means that accounting is no longer a historical ledger but an operating tool that can be used to respond to threats and opportunities in real time. It can be implemented to cause outcomes rather than react to them. Databases give us unprecedented abilities to look into patterns affecting our business and to research and more comprehensively. This in turn allows for more anticipatory streams of activity and decision making

The ability to think in terms of life cycles of driving influences will help you see the possibilities and open up your thinking to create new perspectives rather than just new products and services.

In closing, let’s ponder futurist Buckminster Fuller’s thoughtful insight –

“We can never learn less, we can only learn more; therefore wealth of any kind grows as we increase our understanding of the world, ourselves and the universe”

Movie	Book	Website
Forbidden Planet	Future Edge by Joel Barker	About Reading Tea Leaves Interpreting the Symbols

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