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Insights On Brand Development From The Marketing Front

Sunday, January 31, 2010

“UP YOUR GAME” TO ACHIEVE STRETCH OBJECTIVES

This economic recession is taking its toll on virtually every organization and everyone in it. Our companies are no longer safe, nor are our brands, or marketing budgets, or even our positions within these organizations. And if we are one of the lucky ones left standing from personnel cutbacks we are being tasked with doing much more with less, much less. Our budgets have been slashed so that they are a fraction of what was called for in the marketing plan yet the business objectives of sales and profitability have remained unchanged and, in some instances, have been increased (particularly as it relates to market share objectives). Additionally, we may even have been assigned increased responsibilities to offset the personnel cutbacks. How can we possibly do more, more, more, with so much less in material, funding and personnel?

This reminds us of a pointed question that one of our clients poses to his direct reports, “If we need to increase the business by 8 – 10%, and resources for achieving this have been reduced by 10-, 20-, 30-percent or more then what % do your people’s (or more pointedly your individual) competencies need to be increased to achieve it, and how are you going to get them (you) there?” Part of the answer is we have to “up our game.” Another part is “training” that is practical and immediately applicable.

You’ve heard the expression before, “up your game.” It means to take your game to a new, higher level that encompasses both intensity and performance. It’s about increasing productivity. “Up your game.” It’s the only way we at BDNI know how to play at the game of life, brand building and marketing. “Up” is not a noun but a verb to indicate what it is that we are going to do – raise the bar of individual and collective performance. The bar has been set very high and, in some cases, seemingly impossibly high. We are being tasked with “stretch” objectives. “Stretch” objectives go well beyond what the marketplace would naturally provide. These are objectives that appear beyond reach. But in this economic climate we are being confronted with the need to achieve stretch objectives if we are going to ensure our organizations, brands and careers remain viable. However, few managers will be successful in upping their game to achieve the elevated goals demanded of them - growing brands in declining markets utilizing fewer (versus more) resources.

This difficult market environment coupled with the need to achieve stretch business objectives is a real test of who are the truly outstanding managers. During periods of market expansion where growth comes easy everyone looks like a hero. But when times are tough as the saying goes, “the cream rises to the top.” Conceptually, raising the bar and demanding the achievement of stretch business objectives is not a bad thing. It gives rise to new and more productive thinking and practices. High performance companies and managers understand that goals should require us to stretch. And when they achieve their goals they raise them yet again. They raise the bar for

performance again and again because they realize that the marketplace, customers and the competition are not static elements. Things change and so should we. What was perceived as winning performance yesterday may be perceived as merely average or also-ran performance today. As they (and we) stretch to a new goal they bolster the performance of their brands and themselves in the marketplace.

This brings to mind a story about a European sculler who wins an Olympic gold medal. After the race his coach runs up to the champion, locks him in a hearty embrace, kisses both of the sculler's cheeks, slaps him powerfully on his back and magnanimously proclaims, "Take the rest of the day off. Tomorrow we begin training." Startled and confused the sculler stammers, "But coach I've been training like a dog for years for this event and I just won the gold medal, which makes me the best in the world. I've been expecting to take a month or so off from training." The coach frowns and replies, "Your winning time for this race won't be fast enough to even qualify you for the next Olympics. If you want to repeat with another gold medal you will have to begin new training tomorrow!" Now, that's about really upping your game.

But this is not about the conceptual side of performance. It's about the reality. The reality of the situation is you can never achieve your full potential without appropriate training and creatively applying what we learn. Training is the basis for enhancing personal and organizational competencies, which are essential for achieving stretch objectives and gaining (or maintaining) a competitive advantage in this or any market environment. It is a vehicle for raising the performance of the individual manager and the entire marketing team (i.e., agency, MRD, promotion group, R&D, etc.).

Like everything else we are not talking about training for the sake of just doing something. That will not bring on outstanding performance. Instead, we are referring to training core competencies, both individual and organizational, that will have a direct influence enabling the achievement of stretch objectives, doing more with less. Just as the champion sculler needs to harness his power to cross the finish line first we need to be able to apply what we learn in a way that clearly demonstrates we have "upped our game" – getting results!

BOATS & HELICOPTERS:

This will answer questions about getting training to help you "up your game," and your organization's, in: a) achieving stretch objectives; b) doing more with less; and c) gaining and maintaining a competitive advantage (both personally and for your brand!).

1. ***Who needs training?*** This is a question that really and truly baffles us at BDNI. EVERYBODY needs training to nurture personal development and continue to build skill mastery. Professional athletes undergo rigorous training and retraining daily in the basics of their sport. Who is it that believes s/he cannot benefit from training and benefit the organization as a result of it? Just because one has an MBA or has been in the business for some "umpteens" years does not mean that one knows and can do it all. (Try sitting-in on a copy meeting for a taste of what many marketers do not know and, more importantly, cannot do to add value to the agency's creative submissions.) To see Richard Czerniawski address the question ["who needs training?" click here.](#)

The most frequent culprits of ignoring a personal need for training are senior marketing managers. Some of them truly believe they know and can do it (all?). These folks unwittingly sabotage the development of their direct reports by failing to recognize and institutionalize quality processes and tools (like The “Essential” Creative Brief or Brand Positioning Strategy Statement) designed to enhance competitive thinking and performance. Moreover, they sap morale by thwarting the progress and enhanced capabilities of their direct reports by speaking another, outdated language (one which is not built upon principles essential for success, quality processes that lead to more predictable outcomes and tools that increase productivity).

Also, the most “frequent” excuse for not getting training, regardless of level in the organization, is a lack of time. It seems the lack of time is the most frequent excuse for many of the important things we fail to do in, and with, our lives. But if we do not take the time for training each of us, and our organizations, will experience opportunity losses. While we may not be able to quantify them they are nonetheless there. (Perhaps the most grievous errors are ones of omission and not knowing what we don’t know.) The opportunity losses grow evident through: a slip in quality; increased dependence on price promotion; slowdown in growth; failure to get that promotion; loss of brand loyalty; competitive inroads into our business – among others.

2. ***What training should I pursue?*** We need to train for what we will need to do to achieve stretch objectives, do more with less, grow our brands and ourselves, and gain and maintain a competitive advantage. We are talking about the core competencies for ***brand*** marketers. It is amazing how organizations will take years to identify the core competencies their marketers must possess. (And, by the time it takes to complete the study a new management team is injected and, you guessed it, the study is either dropped or renewed (as in reinventing the wheel). All the while marketers wallow in doing things the same things the same way without getting the results they need. There is no secret to what competencies are important if we are interested in building brands, and not merely selling products. Some of the most important competencies that we must train and retrain ourselves include:

- Developing a competitive, ownable and enduring Brand Positioning Strategy Statement;
- Identifying and analyzing competitive positionings and identifying the implications for your Brand Positioning Strategy;
- Segmenting the market;
- Choosing the Customer Target and defining it completely and clearly;
- Discovering Customer Insights;
- Developing SMART objectives (i.e., specific, measurable, achievable, relevant and time bound);
- Providing clear, strategically appropriate direction to the brand’s support groups to achieve SMART objectives;
- Developing an actionable Creative Brief;
- Creating quality processes that contribute to enhancing the likelihood for success in any marketing endeavor;

- Assessing and coaching work from others (peers, support groups, direct reports) that adds value to the ultimate product;
- Doing a thoughtful and actionable SWOT analysis (which is one thing everyone believe s/he knows how to do but we see very few that are done well);
- Identifying critical success factors and actions steps for gaining a competitive advantage and achieving stretch business objectives;
- Conducting a “whole” product performance analysis in the absolute and relative to competition;
- Developing a marketing plan that marries business and brand building; etc.

3. ***What kinds of training programs are best?*** The best training programs are those that don't tell you “what” to think but, instead, teach you “how” to think. The first type of program, those that stress “what” to think, tend to be dogmatic. Keep away from them. They make robots not competitive marketers. The second type, that focuses on “how” to think, leverage your experiences and unique talents. They help you realize all that you can be. In an “age of sameness,” where products and services competing in the same category are basically indistinguishable from each other, how you think is your strategic advantage in gaining a competitive edge.

Another consideration is about building skills. One does not really know, despite one's assertions, unless one can actually do. It amazes us to hear managers say that they know all about brand positioning yet they lack a Brand Positioning Strategy Statement for their product. Or they have written many Creative Briefs but they fail to achieve leadership communications. The goal of the training program should be to actually develop the requisite skill to perform the required tasks in an exceptional way. Interactive programs that blend proven principles with hands-on application work best.

Also, it is best that these programs be designed and taught by practitioners with significant levels of experiences and track records of success in doing what you hope to learn. They appreciate your needs and will be able to relate their experiences to you in a meaningful way. It also helps if they are teachers and not merely trainers so they can help you learn how to learn.

Everything about your training should be practical and immediately applicable!

4. ***Where can I find training programs that are appropriate for me?*** The first place to look is in-house. Check with your training manager (if you have one) or human resources personnel (if you don't have a training manager). Another action is to check with professional associations. Search the web (and, please, make it a point to see what we are offering at www.bdn-intl.com). And, ask around. Find out what training others in your marketing department have gone to, where they received it, what they learned and what they think of their training.
5. ***How can I participate in BDNI training programs?*** There are two ways. The first way is to have a customized client program for your company. Go to *BDN Institute* and click “ “ for a listing of programs, or just give us a call. The second is to attend one of our Open programs. We will be conducting a 3-day Brand Positioning & Marketing Communication College (BP&MC) in Kansas City, Missouri April 27-29, 2010. It is the

only Open BP&MC program for the year. If you are interested [click for program specs](#). It will also enable you to navigate to an agenda and, if you are still interested, directly to registration. Or, if you would like to speak with someone, please don't hesitate to call Lori Vandervoort at 800 255-9831 (in the U.S.) or 620 431-0780 (outside of the U.S.). But please don't delay. Class size is limited and will be closed once it is filled. You can afford, and owe it to yourself and organization, to invest 3-days in your professional and brand development. You need it to meet the performance demands of today's marketplace.

If you want to achieve the stretch objectives demanded of you, do more with less, and gain and sustain a competitive advantage (for yourself, organization and/or brand) consider training as one key component to "up your game." [Consider registering](#) for the BDNI Open Brand Positioning & Marketing Communication College in Kansas City on April 27-29, 2010. We hope to see you there!

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