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Do You OODA?

The whole world it seems, even the United States, is caught up with the World Cup competition in Brazil. We read about and see on the screen amazing feats of athletic performance by participating teams and their star performers. These stars have exceptional athletic abilities and drive to win, but they also have something else that puts them in the superstar category. Andres Iniesta of Spain, Cristiano Ronaldo of Portugal and Lionel Messi (The Atomic Flea) of Argentina, all have exceptional situational awareness (SA). They can predict how and where a play will unfold. They have the mental map of the game around them and they stay one step ahead of their opponents. They can assess what to do with the ball before they get it and set up a play based on the unfolding positions of their teammates and opponents.

Broadly, SA involves being aware of what is happening around you in order to understand how information, events, and one's own actions will impact goals and objectives, both immediately and in the near future (Wikipedia). Quite simply, it is knowing what is going on so you can figure out what to do. The term came into use when human factors scientists evaluated fighter air crews returning from war in Korea and Vietnam and found that good SA was the decisive factor in air combat engagements. It was the "ace factor" among the military's top guns. SA has also been found to be critical for successful decision making in air traffic control, ship navigation, healthcare, emergency response, and military command and control.

It can be applied to a broad range of complex and dynamic systems with limited information, critical decision requirements and significant consequences. Sounds a lot like management! In fact, SA has direct application to management and leadership.

Fortunately, SA can be learned by practicing OODA. OODA stands for Observe, Orient, Decide, and Act. Observe includes outside information, unfolding circumstances, interactions with the environment and other data-gathering activities. Orient involves building a mental model to process information from observation in a fast, meaningful way. With insights gained from Orienting, faster, more effective decisions can be made and better actions taken.

Now, think about using and developing your OODA skills and applying them at work. In the next newsletter, we will consider applying OODA to your job search and career management.

Rebuilding Confidence

Sooner or later, virtually every executive gets thrown off the career horse. It may be an unwanted separation from a company, a career sidetrack, corporate bankruptcy, failure to deliver a major deliverable or other major career crisis. Very rarely are you completely to blame for this career crisis. There are usually external factors—company culture, business sale, new boss, market changes, and personalities involved.

What you do after the career crisis is what is really important. What you do to take stock and rebuild confidence will determine your future career trajectory.

For those who have what I call “Wizard of Oz” syndrome, rebuilding confidence can be particularly difficult. If you have always thought that your career success was a façade or due to luck, rebuilding can be particularly difficult.

Here are a few tips on how to rebuild your career confidence after a fall.

- Look at the big picture. Realize that virtually everyone has a setback (or two or three or four) and that most people recover and move forward with their careers. Realize that extraneous factors are almost always involved and determine what they might be.
- Analyze what happened from a “lessons learned” perspective and tuck these lessons away for future reference as you move forward.
- Nothing rebuilds confidence as quickly as getting back on the horse. Refocus on your work if you have it available, start projects with a high probability of success and if necessary, charge forward in your search for a new position. Focus on taking action and moving forward.
- Look at your career history. It is probably one of multiple accomplishments and successes. Spend some time building a list of accomplishments then read them regularly for motivation.
- Focus on your strengths. Determine from your list of accomplishments and your experience the underlying strengths you bring to the table. If necessary, solicit and listen to feedback on your strengths from people who know you.
- As you are doing the above, work to refresh and expand your network, particularly people whom you think will provide moral support and networking connections.
- Learn something new. Identify skills or knowledge that you would like to develop, set a plan and get to work. If this new skill is marketable, so much the better.
- Behave confidently, watch your body language, maintain your appearance through exercise and dress for success, and record your voice to make sure it expresses energy and enthusiasm.
- Listen for, identify, and isolate negative thinking.

If none of this helps and you are still bedeviled by a lack of confidence, it may be wise to seek career professional help. However, if you do all of the above, and do it diligently, you will be back on the horse and charging forward in record time.

Observations and Opportunities...from Silicon Valley

Robert A. Gough, Jr., Ph.D.

For years, Silicon Valley has been a barometer of life-to-come not only in the US but worldwide – from new technologies and business opportunities to the changing scope of jobs and skill requirements up ahead. While Boston, New York, Atlanta, and LA hold their own for new venture activities and opportunities, Silicon Valley remains the beacon.

In a recent trip to this coveted innovation hub where I visited not only household names of contemporary technological success – Google, Apple, and Samsung – but also several early-stage candidates for future Hall of Fame notoriety, it was clear that the glass is half full of exciting and real new opportunities. And most of these opportunities are not a promise...they are here and they are now!

- Hampton Creek, whose mission it is to make food healthier and tastier, already has their first product “Just Mayo” in Safeway, Whole Foods, and Costco. Plant extracts nutritionally replace the egg as a key ingredient in this new mayonnaise, and a jar sells for about \$1 less than current popular brands.
- ApartmentList.com is now the fastest-growing on-line rental marketplace in the world with over 2.5 million visits a month, and over 70% of their traffic is mobile! Their mission – turn the renter-landlord relationship into one of trust and transparency.
- Practice Fusion is a free web-based electronic health record company providing physicians and medical professionals with free, advertising-supported EHR and medical practice management technology. As of last month, 81 million patient records are now on-line, and the company has attracted \$149 million in private equity capital.

The common threads of these and other such companies? Simple ideas that have BIG potential and BIG impact, created and developed by ordinary people with an idea and a passion to make a difference.

Traditional is out – as are improvements at the margin. Thinking BIG is now the norm, and the tag line of an “absurd idea” lobbed by doubters is embraced with excitement, not fear. Maybe, just maybe, “this new absurd idea will be the next BIG THING” is a comment I heard more than once. Remember, Thomas Edison was referred to for a long time as the guy who had this “alternative to gas lamps.”

Thinking of such bold statements historically helps to put them in easier-to-digest perspective, and gives them even more credibility. Twenty years ago, what was a data center is now held in the palm of your hand. The shopping mall is now in your pocket. Cars park themselves and computers now respond to voice commands as well as “finger pointing,” known as “leap motion.” And this hurricane of accelerated capabilities and now taken-for-granted conveniences will not slow down. In fact, it will increase as Moore’s Law attests – the capability of technology doubles every 18 months. We are now in a “steady state of disruption.” Samsung is the largest technology company in the world – and it will double in size in the next six years. The technological advances of the last 50 years will be eclipsed in the next five. One of the key reasons is that our interactions with machines are quickly becoming more human-like, and not just in speech recognition but also in reasoning power. Siri, for example, is simply an introduction. Chapter One is just beginning. The role of computers is quickly moving from being programmed for rapid and complex computations to interactive assistants that learn as they do. We will accomplish more, produce more, and understand more in increasingly shorter time frames. Don’t believe it? IBM is betting

the ranch on their new generation Watson project. The humanization of technology is coming, and we are accommodating it.

Technology-driven areas that will see the greatest change and fastest expansion of new opportunities in the next five years are:

- Mobile health
- Privacy and security needs
- The “Internet of things”
- Cloud-based applications
- Cognitive computing

See a traditional industry-based taxonomy here? No way! That’s because technology is rapidly shifting the landscape of business as well as life in general. Industries, products, and services that will benefit from new technologies in these areas will be those whose leaders, designers, and developers not only understand the new technologies and implications of their new dynamics, and understand them quickly, but also embrace and adopt them into their strategies as quickly as possible.

What does all this mean for the changing nature of jobs? Three things...

1. Change, in fact rapid change in the labor markets is a given. The Internet and digital technology have guaranteed that life will never be the same as it was when Baby Boomers looked for their first job, and probably their second and third. Companies now are less interested in what you did, and far more interested in what you can do in this new and rapidly changing landscape of “people matching” with technology, devices, and new job paradigms.
2. Increasing comfort with numbers and technology is a mandate. Big Data – an increasingly large and rich amount of timely, diversified, and unstructured information – is now a natural component of business life. It is here to stay and the analytics required to navigate it will increase in both importance and sophistication. While we all don’t have to be statisticians, we have to be increasingly savvy with analytics and technology in a world that is now driven by facts, more facts, and real time communication.
3. In the end, though, it is still the individual that matters most. Individuals make the difference and always will. From innovation to basic job contribution, it is still about the human element. Our passion, our knowledge, our creativity, and our interpersonal skills – not our job history – will determine what each of us will do, contribute, and be rewarded for in this exciting landscape of new possibilities and opportunities.

Be Unique!

You are not alone. There are literally millions of job hunters out there, many applying for the same positions you see posted on the internet. To make matters worse, an estimated 75% of the 155 million people employed in the United States are actively or passively considering changing jobs. That is well over 100 million competitors.

It would be virtually impossible to be totally unique. It is possible however to clearly differentiate yourself as you do a search for a new position. Here are a few steps you can take.

First, start from the core. If possible, review, clarify and tap into your personal passion, mission and values. The two most important days of your life are the day you were born and the day you figure out why you were born, not the day you pay back your student loan or mortgage. Spend time connecting with your purpose in life.

Then decide what you are excellent at. Use your past experiences and successes to create a picture of your core skills. Aggregate the top skills into a simple, clear picture.

If you have an interesting combination of skills and experience (years in the military and civilian data center operation for example) create your own personal Venn diagram showing this unusual combination and use it to focus your search on the intersecting, overlapping sections of the circles. You can create a brand—the “Atomic Flea” brand (see first article) has already been taken, so create your own. Become known for one main thing. There is so much noise out there that people will remember you for only one or two things—“the turnaround expert,” “the retail revenue generator,” “the marketer for SAAS,” etc.

Build an exceptional network. Become a networking hub and act as a source of information and contacts for others. You will quickly discover that those you help will reciprocate.

Fortunately every resume and many cover letters have typos or grammatical mistakes. The job hunting world is filled with poor quality work including these errors, forgotten follow-up, late appointments, phone calls or emails. Establish a disciplined level of excellence for your search efforts and you will clearly be differentiated from other job seekers.

Lastly, develop a differentiated search strategy. In our action plan workshop, I point out that if a job posting says to “send a resume and salary history to Human Resources, no phone calls please,” I suggest that you do the opposite on all these instructions. Don’t send a resume (use a two-column letter), don’t send a salary history, avoid HR, and call people you know for an introduction.

At MDL Partners, we can work with you through each of the above steps to help you stand out from the crowd.

Selected Success Stories

Adam Kaufman has joined YASSO Frozen Greek Yogurt, a hot new cold food company, as Chief Financial Officer.

Robert Haynes is now with Diamond Auto Group as a Sales Consultant.

Charles Booth is Vice President Business Development at Niksun, Inc., a leader in network monitoring solutions.

Bill Collins is Director of Operations for the Metropolitan Washington division of Calder Associates, a M&A firm that helps business owners sell their businesses and/or raise additional capital.

Todd Kokoszka has accepted a position as Vice President for PI Worldwide.

Mark Bouchea is now one of the first 25 employees of Financial Recovery Technologies, a Boston-based startup serving the financial services industry.

Michael Knorr is now Head of Payment and Liquidity Risk Management at Wells Fargo Bank NA.

John Rinald is now Account Manager, Medical Products at Linde Corp.

Dave DeAngelis is Program Manager at DC-based Gryphon Technologies, LC, an engineering and technical services firm providing support to national security and coalition forces.

John Donaldson is Regional Sales Manager with MRV Communications, where he manages all the Sales and Business Relationships around the Infrastructure Products Line in the DC area.

Kristi Helton is now working with Lockheed Martin, Information Systems & Global Solutions in Vienna, VA as multi-functional Human Resources Representative, Senior Staff.

John Kramer is now Senior Manager, School Financial Services at K12, serving as an executive liaison and internal/external business partner their southern region.

Christopher Ogilvie is Director, Strategy and Insights at NetSpend, where he leads marketing strategy and marketing research for NetSpend's direct to consumer channel.

George Parks is the CEO/Owner of Securis MDO1 Baltimore, an industry-leading provider of information technology asset disposal (ITAD), ultra-secure recycling, auditing and destruction services for PCs, hard drives, servers, smart phones and other electronics.

Sam Sacco is Regional Vice President at Tower Resource Management in Hanover, MD. Tower Resource Management has been helping telecommunication carriers develop their networks to deliver communication services to the world since 1994.

Quote for the Day

If you are the smartest person in the room, you are in the wrong room.

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