



## BOARDROOM STRATEGY

## MIKE DESJARDINS

*Ten tips for leading businesses in turbulent times*

**T**here's no denying these are turbulent times. But there *are* things that you can do to lead your team and your company to success against the odds.

Here are the top 10 things that you can start doing today to adapt past approaches and lead through to success.

**Simplify the strategic message.** The easier your strategy is to understand and communicate, the greater the likelihood that it will be executed successfully. The idea is to have people understand what the top three to five goals are for the year. **Stephen Covey** took this idea one step further in his book *The Eighth Habit*, in which he describes the concept of a "Wildly Important Goal" – the most important goal for the company this year, which everyone in the company must be able to understand, feel compelled by and repeat. Simplify to make the message easy to spread.

**Use a reverse one-, three-, five-year approach.** Short-term thinking can drive organizations to make decisions that are not in the best interest of stakeholders long term. This situation is exacerbated in turbulent times. View decisions from three unique perspectives: one, three, five years in the future. Ask your (future) self what decisions you wish you would have made. What do you regret? What advice do you have for yourself?

**Drive revenue, reduce costs and monitor cash flow tightly.** Drive revenue by getting in front of the market while your competitors are inwardly focused. Reduce costs by looking at each major expenditure in its own light, not based on a sweeping percentage. Educate your top people on how to monitor cash flow. Cash is like oxygen to a business; without it, it's game over. It

astounds me how many executives are able to rise through to the senior ranks without understanding cash flow.

**Stand out while everyone else is standing down.** One thing that you can count on in turbulent times is a decline in ad sales.

Not only does this mean less clutter and a higher probability of reaching your audience, but when ad sales go down marketing mediums get hungry and drop prices. Lock in long-term contracts now at the lower rates.

**"Confront the brutal facts but move forward with healthy optimism anyway."** In *Good to Great*, **Jim Collins** writes about being realistic about where you're at, while at the same time putting together a positive plan to move forward.

Think of it as realistic optimism with three steps:

- be clear about what the situation is today – pretending things are better than they are is ludicrous;
- explain what the changing conditions mean for the organization or for your division; and
- share what the strategy is to move the company forward in the right direction and what each person can do to contribute to the plan's success.

**Operate based on a one-page strategic plan.** Distil your strategic plan into one page that encompasses values, goals, relevant financial data, key performance indicators and actions for three to five years, one year and the next quarter.

This is far easier for people to digest than a 50-page diatribe. (For a sample format visit my blog at [www.mikedesjardins.com](http://www.mikedesjardins.com)).

**Keep your strategic plan**

**dynamic.** The most successful companies we work with review, evaluate and revise their strategic plans each quarter.

Adapting your strategic plan to meet changes in the market, industry or company creates a document from which decisions can be made rather than another dusty binder for your shelf.

**Be candid and speak authentically.** Whether things are good or bad, the rumour mill has a way of spinning them into whatever is easy to pass on. By focusing on the candid facts and how people are being affected by what's happening, a sense of community and camaraderie can be built around finding a solution.

**Cut fast and cut early:** Multistage layoffs are far more damaging to corporate culture than one large downsizing. The death of a thousand cuts leaves people constantly re-aligning priorities each time there's a layoff and wondering if they're next. Lead people back to engagement and productivity by listening to what they're experiencing and helping them regain focus.

**Start doing, stop doing, keep doing.** When fear sets into an organization it can lead people to the point of inaction or what we call "analysis paralysis." Have people ask and answer three simple questions: What should I start doing? Stop doing? Keep doing?

If this is a topic that you are interested to know more about, visit this link for a recorded webinar that goes into more detail and examples: [www.virtusinc.com/webinars](http://www.virtusinc.com/webinars). ■

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