



Moving swiftly with focus & flexibility

Are You a Rule Fool?

By Holly G. Green

Wait your turn. No pushing in line. Yield to pedestrians. Treat others the way you would like to be treated.

Certain timeless rules are better obeyed than broken. But in today's topsy-turvy business world, many of the rules that informed and guided previous generations of business leaders no longer apply. If you're not breaking rules on a regular basis, your customers and markets have probably already left you behind.

Most business leaders intuitively know that they need to do things differently. But they struggle when it comes to determining which rules to hold onto and which rules to cast aside for newer ways of thinking.

In working with clients around the world, I have found two areas in particular where throwing out the old rulebook is essential for keeping up with today's frenetic pace of change. One involves the skills, attitudes, and mindsets required to manage people and work processes. The other has to do with how you go about analyzing and assessing your competitors and your markets. In these two areas, I highly recommend forgetting most (or all) of what you think you know.

For example, from a people/process perspective:

Old rule: Strive to maintain the status quo, but react quickly when change happens.

New rule: Don't wait for change to hit you. Anticipate it, plan for it, and make it happen on *your* terms.

Old rule: Management's job is to make decisions.

New rule: Management's job is to facilitate decisions made by those closest to the customer.

Old rule: Avoid conflict.

New rule: Rock the boat! Purposefully create conflict and manage it in a constructive manner.

Old rule: Tell employees what to do, when to do it, and how to do it.

New rule: Give employees the resources and support they need. Then stand back and let them do their jobs.

From a competitive analysis perspective:

Old rule: Focus your research on competitors inside your industry.

New rule: Stretch your horizons. The next competitor that causes your world to implode may well come from outside your industry.

Old rule: Markets have predictable life spans and earnings curves.

New rule: Today's markets can (and do) disappear overnight.

Old rule: Strategic planning involves creating a five-year plan.

New rule: Look 12 to 24 months (at most) into the future. It's almost impossible to accurately predict what will happen after that.

Perhaps the most important new rule for today's chaotic market realities is to constantly challenge what you think you know about your business and the world in general. Don't allow yourself to get comfortable with the status quo. Don't allow yourself to get stuck thinking that what has made you successful so far will continue to make you successful in the future. And if you haven't reevaluated your customers' wants and needs within the past six months to a year, do so now!

Letting go of rules that have served you well in the past can be difficult, but holding on to them can be fatal. What rules are you holding onto that you should be letting go?



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