

MISSION-Does your company review theirs?

By Roger Bostdorff

One day while working at IBM I was asked to participate in a planning session. We started the meeting by discussing and contemplating IBM's mission. I sat there thinking about all the work I needed to get done rather than wasting my time in this stupid planning session. In addition, my son was in a track meet that afternoon in Ohio and I was stuck in New York contemplating my navel. For crying out loud, if IBM did not understand its mission, or wanted to confirm its mission, then maybe I was working for the wrong company. I have thought back to that meeting many times. When I started working for IBM, we sold almost entirely computers and peripherals connected to computers. Today, IBM gets less than 40% of its revenue from computer hardware. Why mess up a good thing and change that?

Consider the railroad, when the railroad started they were in the business to move things and people from point A to point B as long as these two points were connected by rail. This was a very successful industry, making lots of \$\$\$. Then Henry Ford invented the car/truck. The country subsequently followed that with huge investments in our highway infrastructure. Customers now had a choice. They could ride the rail or move merchandise from point A to point B. Or, if their final destination or the final destination of the merchandise was point C, which was not on the rail, they could make another choice and drive from A directly to C or truck the merchandise from A to C. The railroads were in the railroad business back then but should have been in the transportation business.

Just like IBM, the railroad's market changed. IBM made that change in some markets but was slow to change in others. But until recently, the railroads never made the change. Imagine if you will what shape the railroad companies would be in had they bought or created trucking companies that took the merchandise from the railroad car to the final destination. What would they look like today had they bused or provided limousines for people to get from the railroad station to their final destination?

Markets have always changed, so what is the new news? The market leaving my company behind cannot happen to my company, not in NW Ohio or SE Michigan! The world is getting smaller due to new technology in transportation and communication. Markets are changing at a much higher frequency thus driving the demand of a review of a company's situation more frequently.

You may own or work at a business that has been quite successful. However, each year your company needs to review YOUR MISSION and relate that Mission to what is taking place in your market or industry. Has the market changed? Are you changing with it? Who is your competitor? Is he down the street, across the state or across the world? Can you continue to be successful and not change? Are you in the Railroad business or the transportation business? The time to make a necessary change, if change is needed, is before the market has left you in the dust thus necessitating your company to have a huge hill to climb to catch up.

Your navel is fine, what is the shape of the future of your company?

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