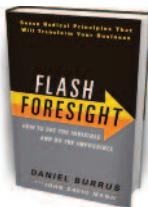




NOT A PARLOR TRICK: A “PREEACTIVE” APPROACH TO PROBLEM SOLVING

BY JAMES T. BROWN



I read a lot of leadership books, and you sometimes have to wade through a lot of mediocre ones to get to a jewel. *Flash Foresight: How to See the Invisible and Do the Impossible* (HarperBusiness, 2011) is definitely a jewel, so good that I have sent it to clients, and I will read it again.

This book makes you think in the same manner as the essays in Malcolm Gladwell's *What the Dog Saw: And Other Adventures*. More important, it provides a systematic approach to conquering organizational challenges.

One phrase that communicates the book's essence is what the author describes as the new golden rule of business: "If it can be done, it will be done . . . If you don't do it, someone else will." The question that remains unanswered is, "Are you or your company that someone who will do it?" Will you have and act on "flash foresight," which Burrus defines as "a blinding flash of the future obvious"?

Foresight Triggers

Burrus identifies seven "foresight triggers" that we can use to enhance our intuition:

1. Start with certainty (identify and verify hard trends)
2. Anticipate (determine the degree of probability)
3. Transform (leverage technology-driven change)
4. Skip what you think is your biggest problem (it actually isn't)
5. Go opposite (look where no one else does, do what no one else does)
6. Redefine and reinvent (leverage your unique strengths)
7. Direct your future (or you will be directed by others)

In order to gain "flash foresight," the author advocates that you spend an hour each week looking at questions such as, What are you certain about? What

are the hard trends of your future versus the soft trends? What are the permanent, linear changes and what are the cyclical changes? What problems are you going to have tomorrow, next week, next month, a few years down the road? What problems will your kids, your spouse, your employees, your associates, your customers have? Even better, what are the future problems of those people who are not yet your customers but will be if you have solutions to their problems by the time those problems happen?

Interesting Points

Here are a few excerpts that resonated with me:

1. "'Either/or' thinking assumes a zero-sum game, in which the pie is fixed size and emerging technologies—or emerging markets—must necessarily threaten the existence of the old. But that's not reality . . . The principle of 'both/and' tells us that the new and the old will continue to coexist side by side."
2. "One clear dependable strategy for staying ahead of the curve is to create in yourself and in your company or organization a habit of continuously decommoditizing. Anything and everything can become a commodity; and any product or service can be decommoditized." (Author's Note: Yes, he does provide examples.)
3. "There will be no recovery, no going back—only a surge forward into a very different world."
4. "Not long ago, a CEO of a large company told me he was reluctant to spend the money to upgrade his people's skills. 'What if I do,' he said, 'and then they leave?' . . . 'I see your point,' I responded. 'But what if you don't—and then they stay?'"
5. "The organizations that are succeeding today are those that have learned how to fail fast—and who do not fail to learn."
6. "Here is the question you need to ask yourself: 'In order to speed up, am I willing to slow down?'"

Conclusion

Burrus concludes the book with a powerful example of how he used the process to create a successful product from a blank slate to launch with a minimum of overhead. Not only will this book reframe your thinking but you can use it as a tool to shift the think-



ing of those around you. More than an academic theory, it is a practitioner's framework that you can build on to drive personal and business success. □

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