



call to battle

When times are hard, companies need strong leaders who can positively take on the challenges of the marketplace. **Patricia Wheatley Burt**, of management consultancy Trafalgar-The People Business, explains to *CEO* how companies should mould their management teams.

Businesses are involved in many battles. These can be against apathy, misleading opinions, incompetence at the top, jobs for the boys, and a general state of paralysis. Of course, the battle that all companies are currently facing is against the downturn.

To win battles in business you need to attract clients by offering flexible, affordable and pragmatic services. This strategy requires the right leadership and now is the time to review how those structures are operating.

Solid foundations

Innovative and responsible leadership have been watchwords for organisations for the last 15 years. Some have pursued progressive business strategies, developing their management teams and addressing both global and national issues. These organisations developed strong management bases from which to change, survive and thrive, but this is not the case for everyone.

The companies that took remedial action three, six or 12 months ago are likely to be in a stronger position to start 'bottom lining' the market and benefit from the opportunities that are out there. Have you done enough in the past and challenged your executive team sufficiently? Below are three questions to determine the state of your management:

- Have your leaders reacted with purpose to the current financial crisis?
- Have your management executives demonstrated an appetite for change?
- Who will challenge your management team, especially if there is no obvious alternative leader?

If your answers have been negative, it may be that one of the directors could be out of step with the needs of the company and at this point be the one person to remove from the board or management team.

Transitional leadership

Current business wisdom states that, in the unlikely event a company fails to change how it operates, it will go backwards and lose its competitive edge. Survival in today's economy does not allow for static posturing. Companies inhabit one of four transitional phases over a period of time:

- start-up and growth
- status quo
- crisis management (if needed)
- continuous momentum

To identify these transitional phases, an organisation needs to be aware of:

- its clients, their environment and economic circumstances
- its ability to respond to the peaks and troughs of trading
- its appetite and approach to marketing
- the knowledge, skills and abilities of its staff
- the robustness of infrastructure and support service teams
- its financial security and ambition

Businesses should not allow themselves to be held ransom to the choice they appear to have, but should headhunt the right resources, if need be. Be mindful of your 'blind spot'; leaders may need external help to gain a better perspective. It is time for realism and for honesty about who is best placed to lead the charge into battle. ■

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