

Floor Focus

**BEST Practices**  
**Dealing with Change and Communicating Effectively**

My business is like organizational anthropology.

I have clients in a wide range of businesses, including healthcare, communications, manufacturing, services, and government. I am often made privy to their current status, the steps that brought them to this point, and where it is they want to go in the future. I share insight about their opportunities and obstacles to success.

I have discovered that the nature of the most difficult issues across the spectrum are startlingly similar, and almost always involve either dealing with **change** or achieving effective **communications**. Or both.

So it may be useful to know what leaders in the most successful organizations do different from those whose business is shaky or failing.

**The Ever-Changing Business Landscape**

The one constant in modern business is change. In 1970, futurist Alvin Toffler published his best selling book **Future Shock** in which he predicted change would be coming at us at such an alarming rate that those unprepared to deal with it would experience the stress of “medical shock syndrome.” After almost four decades, Toffler’s predictions are coming true and shaking some organizations to their core.

Change is neither inherently good nor bad, but it cannot be long ignored. New technology, often in computing or telecommunications, can offer improvements in quality or productivity. Will selecting the right new technology give your company a competitive advantage? Will avoiding it give the edge to your competitor?

Technology can also change your customers’ expectations. How many modern businesses can exist today without an effective website? Consumers have direct access to essentially every business in the world and compare yours to the best, not only in your field but in every area of commerce. They compare your products, prices, selections, customer service, and return policies to Zappos, Amazon.com, Ebay, and Google.

More and more people want to get their information online when they want it rather than reading a printed newspaper or watching commercials on television. People get medical advice from the Mayo Clinic online and do not tend to hold their doctor’s opinion as the final word.

Such changes have caught some of my clients a bit flatfooted. They weren't prepared and are having to make drastic changes to deal with the new realities. Their success and maybe their survival depend on it.

The bottom line is that successful businesses anticipate change as a matter of course. Management cannot afford to become so absorbed with day-to-day operational issues that they neglect to consider where the organization is going long term, what competitors are doing, and what new technologies offer significant advantages.

Leaders in modern organizations must be willing to:

1. Change how they feel about change itself.
2. Change their approach to the future and be willing to reinvent themselves.
3. Reconsider their business model or how they do business.

### **Breaking Through the Sound Barrier**

Today's workplace and marketplace are more diverse than ever before and that diversity will increase. The U.S. Census Bureau projects that in the U.S. the Hispanic and Asian populations will triple in the next half century and that non-Hispanic whites may drop to half of the total population. That diversity will carry over into the workplace.

Add to that the fact that today's workforce is composed of four generations of workers, each of whom have different values and are motivated by different incentives.

Consider also that 48% of the workforce will be composed of women in 2008 according to the U.S. Department of Labor, and that the decision-making process and communication style of women differs significantly from those used by men. In U.S. society, those women are fulfilling more of a leadership role in business and civic organizations. In fact, fully a third of the women working in two-paycheck families earn more than their husbands, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics. It is no wonder that women in the marketplace do not respond favorably to salesmen or servicemen who are condescending or impatient with them as they were with women a generation ago.

Finally, individuals have personality tendencies that are often categorized into types that describe how they respond to situations and other people. Psychologists have long suggested that being aware of one's own personality type and tendencies as well as those with whom you interact is important in communicating effectively.

Given this diversity in the workplace, how can an organization develop a cohesive team that communicates effectively? How does an organization successfully reach out to such a diverse marketplace and effectively market and deliver products and services?

Successful businesses embrace diversity in the workplace and understand that the various groups and individuals have valuable viewpoints and capabilities. Management

and employees are taught to be aware of ethnic, generational, gender, and individual styles and to be tolerant of differences in the interest of developing a cohesive team.

In the marketplace, effective retailers must cater to the interests and tendencies of their various constituent customers. A salesperson can no longer ignore or trivialize the detailed questions and concerns of a woman or condescend to a non-native American and hope to engender confidence and make the sale.

Consider the situation of potential customers from this immensely diverse marketplace entering a floor-covering showroom. There are few situations in which a salesperson will be faced with more of a challenge in helping the customer consider the options. Possible selections include carpet, tile, hardwood, sheet flooring, and laminate flooring, and there are countless choices within each category. Plus, it is possible that all the customer knows about the options are what they saw in a television or magazine ad, found online, or heard from a neighbor.

Successful floor-covering businesses train their sales staff to recognize the communication preferences of the diverse groups and to be prepared to meet their needs in demonstrating flooring options.

### **In Summary**

Anticipate change and take advantage of it rather than being blindsided by it. And deliver your communications to your employees and customers in a way that meets their needs and accomplishes your objectives.