

Have you picked the wrong competitor to worry about?

MARCH 27, 2012

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Recently during one of our Elevation Forum meetings, we asked the question: which competitors do you worry about the most?

Many of the leaders in the room listed either the largest or the fastest growing competitors they compete against. But one honest executive shared a provocative reflection. He said we are not as worried about who's outside, but more focused on the enemy in the mirror.

His comment reminded me that dominant companies lose their leadership position two-thirds of the time because they pick the wrong competitor to worry about. Many times the competitor is an emerging outlier, or an agile entrepreneur seizing a white space, but more times than not, we become the enemy when we overstate our own assets and the value we bring to others.

According to a piece of research called Silence Fails, the vast majority of product launches, reorganizations, mergers and improvement initiatives either fail or grossly disappoint, with roughly 90% of all major projects violating their own schedule, budgets or quality standards. And what's even more disappointing is that 88% of those surveyed were currently working on projects that they predict will fail, but only 1-in-10 shared their comments due to internal politics.

Often times the enemy is within, not outside the walls of your own building. Personal and corporate success often hinders evaluation and new ideas, creating serious blind spots. As executive coach Marshall Goldsmith often states, sometimes you can be successful despite yourself.

The behaviors many of the top companies embrace are different than the rest of

the pack. Instead of focusing solely on their competitors, they set the rules of engagement, and honestly evaluate who's in the mirror. Here are eight behaviors that set them apart from their competitors:

1. They love to create and utilize fast prototyping to test ideas with their retail partners. And when they fail, they fail fast cutting their losses.
2. They obsessively listen to the customer, and experiment with them fearlessly. They understand the boardroom agenda of their customers and respond accordingly.
3. Their customer engagements are higher level discussions, centered on ideas — not products. They don't bury their retail partners with long presentations, rather facilitate larger discovery meetings.
4. They don't believe in luck, rather they disrupt categories and attempt to change the game. They are not guilty of introducing items that just cut up the pie; instead they focus on baking new pies.
5. They aren't looking for new products; they are looking to create inventions that solve real problems and improve, simplify or invigorate how people live their lives.
6. The winners operate from an outward vantage point, always listening, diagnosing and looking for opportunities to create the future within their category and with their top customers.
7. They prioritize hanging out on the fringe in their business, understanding emerging trends, and have developed a competency in becoming the company that understands — what's next?
8. Their leadership allows their members



to discover their greatness. They do not control their associates; rather they commission them to be advocates of the organization.

The companies that spend time looking in the mirror don't allow blind spots to get in the way of unleashing growth and deeper retailer alignment. These organizations bring meaningful value to their consumers, and their retail partners are happy to serve as advocates of their brands.

Are you spending too much time benchmarking competitors and not enough time honestly looking in the mirror?

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