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YEAR IN REVIEW

POWERPOINTS: THE BEST OF 2009

'Do something that scares you at least once a year,' Burlington, Ont.-based consultant George Torok counselled earlier this year. For many business leaders, the economic downturn raised more scares than they might have preferred. But Mr. Torok's advice, which appeared in his Motivational Speaker blog, makes you stop and think - as should many other nuggets of wisdom on leadership, strategy, execution, meetings and marketing that were dispensed over the year. Here's a review of some of the most illuminating ideas that appeared in 2009:

Leadership

Your leadership mantra should be "Make more decisions," according to consultant Seth Godin. They don't have to be perfect decisions. Just make them, and move on. You may find it more effective to make decisions if you address one issue at a time, advises consultant Monica Enand. Don't lump several decisions into one. Break them apart and isolate them for discussion. That narrows the focus of any objections, making discussion more manageable. Ms. Enand also recommends offering a crisp, clear request in your initial proposal, so that people understand what they would be agreeing to. And don't forget to record the decision, which is often omitted in e-mail discussions. *Seth's Blog/Zen Habits*

Think of management as if it were like a global positioning system. The GPS keeps the same pleasant tone no matter how many times the driver

veers off course. Recalculating the route is a normal, daily routine for management and should not be a source of frustration. Indeed, it is why managers are needed. *Management Craft blog*

Caledon, Ont.-based consultant Lance Secretan says that, in corporate life, we are infrequently required to display physical courage "but we are required to display moral courage daily." *Executive Excellence*

Try this four-step, team-building approach from consultant Bruce Tulgan at your first meeting or retreat of the year: In round one, everybody goes around the table and offers one thing they appreciate about every member of the team. In round two, everyone offers something about each individual that they think that person should improve. In round three, everyone offers one thing they think they can improve on. In the final round, everyone cites one thing about the team that could be better and pledges how they will contribute to that improvement.

RainmakerThinking.com Within two years of taking over at the helm, 40 per cent of transitioning leaders fall short, according to research by Mark Van Buren and Todd Safferstone of the Corporate Executive Board. Those leaders, in the rush for quick wins, succumb to five traps: They focus too heavily on details, react negatively to criticism, intimidate others, jump to conclusions, or micromanage. *Harvard Business Review*

Strategy, change and execution

Business celebrates goal setting, but there can be a negative side to that, as discussed in an entertainingly titled research paper - Goals Gone Wild - by the University of Arizona's Lisa Ordonez, the University of Pennsylvania's Maurice Schweitzer, Northwestern University's Adam Galinsky, and Harvard Business School's Max Bazerman. They point out that problems occur if goals are too specific and narrow; if there are too many goals; if the time horizons for attaining them are inappropriate; if goals become perceived as ceilings - the maximum that must be reached - rather than floors; if risk taking increases in an unhealthy fashion because of the goals; if the goal setting promotes unethical behaviour; if, in the quest to achieve the goals, people don't try alternative methods that might increase their learning and ultimate performance; or the goals create a culture of competition. "Just as doctors prescribe drugs selectively, mindful of interactions and adverse reactions, so, too, should managers carefully prescribe goals," they conclude. *Goals Gone Wild working paper*

These days, the most entrenched companies can plunge into financial distress with dizzying speed. Your strategic planning, therefore, should include monitoring the performance of suppliers, customers and competitors. Leading indicators of distress include delinquent accounts payable, downgraded debt ratings, large share-price declines, late inventory deliveries, and lower-quality goods.

The McKinsey Quarterly

When we stop a project, we need to prepare a disengagement plan, just as when we start a business we prepare a business plan. Columbia University professor Rita Gunther McGrath urges you to prepare a short disengagement plan that deals with the emotional and practical effects of the end-of-project announcement. *Strategy + Business*

The five elements of a successful vision, says Thomas Nelson Inc. CEO Michael Hyatt, are visualization - coming up with a visual representation of a different future; articulation - verbalizing that future so others may accept it; implementation; opposition by others who resist that future; and attainment of the vision. He stresses that every vision ultimately encounters opposition: "If it doesn't, it probably means the vision isn't big enough."

Meetings

Capture every action delineated in a meeting, and don't adjourn it until you have assigned each of the actions to someone with a completion date. Make sure minutes of meetings are circulated within 48 hours, with the agreed-upon action points. Start meetings by reviewing the action items on your list. *Kevin's Remarkable Learning Blog/ Great Management blog*

Marketing consultant Jay Lipe remembers the time that he politely declined to go over a major presentation with his boss and instead played golf. The next day, his presentation went well, but colleagues who practised had jumbled, poorly organized presentations, with even some upside-down slides, evidence of too much last-minute editing. The lesson: Institute a 48-hour lockdown on your presentations, and instead focus in those final hours on how best to tell your story. *The Marketing Minute*

Many offices, according to software programmer Paul Graham, have two types of people: Managers and makers. The managers, who call the meetings, have a schedule in which the day is cut into one-hour slots, ideal for meetings. The makers - programmers, writers, research scientists - prefer to use time in units of half a day at least, since they can't get much done in slices of one hour. If you're a manager, consider the makers' schedule, since one wrongly timed meeting can blow their day. Best time for a meeting: Late afternoon.

Marketing

Consultant David Miller suggests building a communication calendar that outlines the 24 "touches" you will make in a year with your top clients, whether through e-mails, letters, calls, meeting, or invitations to special events. Don't leave it to chance: Outline the contacts you expect to make for at least the next quarter and preferably the next year. *Sales Caffeine newsletter*

A test found that 11 per cent more people took part in an online survey when invited to take part in "a five-minute survey" rather than a "brief survey." Being specific - offering a clear limit - helps. *Emma Email Marketing Blog*

To get more referrals, sales coach Paul McCord urges you to really ask for them. Don't be mealy-mouthed but instead make a direct request for referrals. Also, don't expect an immediate answer: Give the customer time to think of who fits the parameters you are looking for. Make the request and then let them know when you'll get back to them for the referrals. *AllBusiness.com*

When giving direction to a customer, use an open-hand gesture rather than pointing with an index finger or thumb. Open hands are inviting while pointed fingers can seem dismissive.