

Business Perspectives on Managing World-Class Training

Training Industry

Q U A R T E R L Y

A TRAINING INDUSTRY, INC. EZINE

Summer 2008

Games & Simulations

Playing to Learn



The Ecstasy of Defeat: Learning from Failure
Business Impact: The True Value of Learning

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ONE OF THE MOST FATAL BUSINESS MISTAKES IS TO UNDERESTIMATE THE IMPORTANCE OF A STRONG, VIBRANT CULTURE

THE MODEL FOR TOTAL BUSINESS SUCCESS

In my April 2008 column, I outlined a model for success that puts the creation of organizational culture as a top priority for sustained success. This is a re-education process for some learning leaders, who've been professionally raised to put strategy, processes and people before culture.

I call this culture-first phenomenon Total Business Success. From my own work with organizations, that of many colleagues, and my own research (formal as well as applied), I have developed a model with both a practical road map and actions for replicating it in any organization that wants to build and sustain high performance over the long term.

Think about it: Even the most successful companies can find ways to improve, for example, if they understand how to leverage the fundamental dynamics between their people and the processes used for the products or services produced. Many organizations get it partially right, but very, very few approach this productivity challenge with anything close to this practical, and yet comprehensive, reality-based business management and development approach.

One of the the most fatal business mistakes an owner, board member, executive or manager can make is to ignore, trivialize or otherwise underestimate the importance of a strong, vibrant culture to the long-term success of an organization. Companies may be able to achieve short bursts of productivity without paying much attention to their culture and people, but a track record of sustained success over the long-term is founded upon these two fundamental areas.

Most people are aware of such living business culture legends as Johnson & Johnson, SAS, USAA and Southwest Airlines. In addition to these classic models of strong, high-performing cultures are other emerging new players.

One such organization is Steve Jobs' Pixar Animation Studios. Pixar is an excellent example of a company that puts its culture and people first, then reaps the rewards of their dedication and loyalty. Many companies operate either as independent to competing silos or like Hollywood studios, where groups of talent are pieced together to execute specific projects, then disbands and re-group with a new team for the next project.

Pixar, on the other hand, has operated by putting together a loyal, dedicated team of artists in the past 10 years – a group that sticks together from project to project, learns from its mistakes, and improves its strategies and processes as its collective knowledge about movie-making grows. Jobs bought Pixar for \$10 million in 1985; it is now valued at more than \$7 billion, and was recently purchased by Walt Disney Co., yet another company with a historically strong culture.

How's the culture creation coming along in your organization? Are you involving your people as a way to build their loyalty? Are you ensuring the future of your brand, respecting and supporting your talent? Today's learning leader is at the frontline of culture creation, with training being one of the key elements in ensuring long-term relationships with the workforce. Culture may be a starting point under the Total Business Success model, but the people are still a key ingredient.

Dr. Michael O'Connor is a recognized thought leader, executive coach and founder of Life Associates, Inc. Michael is the co-author of "The Leadership Bridge Program (Situational Leadership II & DISC)" and the book, "The Leader Within." Email Michael at droconnor@lifeassociatesinc.com.