

'The 7 most expensive words in business are: "We have always done it that way!"' CDV

by Catherine DeVrye

How often do you hear those words around your organization? Wasn't it only last month that a senior manager blocked a new employee's suggestion with that exact phrase, adding: "You just don't understand how we do things around here.' Or, worse still: 'We tried it that way once and the guy who suggested it is no longer here.'

If all this sounds overly familiar, it's time to seriously examine the way in which your organization operates in today's rapidly changing environment. Certainly, it's important to build on your past successes and not simply change for the sake of change, which is a costly exercise in itself. But, never forget that, even if you don't change, your competitors and customers may.

Too often, people confuse necessary change with change for the sake of change. That is not to say that you throw out the baby with the bath water, but any organization-regardless of its past success-should always remain open to new ideas. It's a recipe for disaster to continue to do things the same old way without at least occasionally assessing if that mode of operation is actually working or you simply *think* it's working for you.

Past success is no guarantee of future success. Of the Fortune 500 companies at the turn of the century, only three exist in their present format today. And, since 1986, only 46% of the Fortune 500 companies are still in business. When Tom Peters wrote *In Search of Excellence* in 1982, he applauded companies that were innovative, quality focused, and growing exponentially. Today, many are no longer in business, when only a few years ago, they were considered invincible!

Take a look at a computer company that dominated the world for generations. IBM had incredible market share, rising stock prices and amongst the highest paid employees in the world. When I did my sales training with them in 1982, we were told that only three computer companies would be in existence by the turn of the century. Never was it considered even a remote possibility that IBM might not be one of them.

It was widely agreed that personal computers were only a fad and wouldn't be a serious contender in the market of the future. And, customers would always buy IBM because they'd always bought IBM! Yet, in the mid-1980s, the share price fell from \$US142 to \$US42 and over 200,000 employees left the business of the once invincible company.

Meanwhile, a little backyard company-Apple- was on the rise and seemed to be the new force in the PC business of the early 1990s. Yet, Apple's share performance has also fluctuated. Both Apple and IBM are excellent organizations but change happens particularly quickly in information technology. Fortunately, IBM adapted and, at the time of writing, I'm pleased, as a shareholder, to report their shares are performing well. But, no high-tech organization will even have a parking place on the super highway (or super hypeway) of the future unless they constantly look at new ways of doing things.

This applies not just to computer companies, but to every organization, as technology-among other factors- continues to have an ever-increasing influence on the way business is conducted, both domestically and internationally. Can you afford to be complacent that the Internet will have no impact on *your* business?

To succeed, enlightened managers will always look at better ways to run their organizations, and hopefully will always remember:

The 7 most expensive words in business today are: 'We have always done it that way.'

Catherine DeVrye, Australian Executive Woman of the Year, is a #1 best selling author and global speaker on service quality and change. This is an extract from her book *'Hot Lemon & Honey-Reflections for Success in Times of Change.*