



CLIMB THE LADDER OF SUCCESS

Follow these 10 tips to success for your organization.

BY PAUL LEMBERG

Many nonprofit executives are talking about one thing only: survival. They are hunkered down trying to weather the storm, but they're doing it at the expense of building their organizations. Many are unwittingly sacrificing their organizations' future.

Here's the typical survival scenario: Cut marketing. Lay off marginal employees. Cut travel expenses. Lay off good employees. Fire ineffective management. Reduce your prices hoping to attract customers. Lay off effective management. Wait for things to get better. Hope for anything. Pray.

Does this sound familiar?

Of course survival isn't all bad—not by a long shot. The good side of survival makes you “lean and mean,” scavenging the landscape for sharp opportunities and playing for keeps.

But there's a dark side of survival, too. With a survival mentality, you avoid risk, play things too safe, put off decisions, and delay action.

Of course, you may still be around when “things get better,” but will you be in a position to take advantage of your opportunities? Perhaps—if you've conserved cash and preserved your ability to generate new customers. But if you've let your programs languish, are you going to be viable? Will you be able to compete? Will you be ready to grow during the next expansion?

We are entering what may be the greatest organization-building opportunity of the decade. While most of your competitors are still in the warm sleep of survival, it's time for you to prepare for bold action.

Here are tips to help you move beyond survival and climb back up the ladder of success. Note that this is not a tip list on “how to survive”; you've already done that. This is about transcending survival and thriving again.

1

Recognize that survival isn't a real goal. It's a staging zone, a holding pattern. A commitment to survival is a commitment to a low level of existence. Your real commitment must be to prosperity.

2

Create a vision of life beyond survival. Ask yourself: What are you surviving for? What will you do when the survival period is over—when you decide it's all right to start thriving again? What will you accomplish then? What do you want it to look and feel like next year and the year after that? If your vision is simply one of staying in business, you really should think twice about why you do all that hard work.

3

Increase your level of action. You may have slowed down during this survival period—reducing your marketing and promotional efforts, retarding program development. Now it's time to rev up the engines and get moving again.

4

Revisit your strategic plan. How much effort does it call for? If you don't know, or if your plan is no longer relevant, freshen it up or create a new one. It doesn't have to be a perfect plan, but don't just lurch into action. Don't move forward without a plan!

5

Detail the measures of activity and performance for your organization. These measures might include, for example, leads generated, relationship and networking conversations, Web hits, funds generated, and cash in the bank. Make a list of these key measures.

6

Establish a performance goal for each key measure, by week, month or quarter—whatever is most appropriate. Then, up the ante—you've most

likely slowed down, and the point here is to increase your activity. So take whatever your goal is for these items and stretch it. Reawaken the action habit.

7

Set up a system for measuring and reporting on each of these keys. Analyze the results and devise tactics to close any shortfalls.

8

If your spending needs are greater than the cash coming in, cut back everything that isn't revenue related, but don't hurt your current—or future—revenue streams. Look for ways to reduce overhead—but not marketing expenses. Here's a special word

about marketing: Most likely you have cut back. Mistakenly, this is often the first area cut when people think their survival is threatened. Now is the time to bump it back up. If you don't have cash available, there are many guerilla marketing strategies that call for limited spending.

9

Get a coach or mentor. You need someone to be an unbiased and insightful sounding board, someone who can critique your plans and give objective advice.

10

Now—envision your next growth spurt. Picture your organization growing and thriving. Figure out what it's going to take, and get busy. ■

Resources

Adams, Tom, "Do You Need a Coach?", *Nonprofit World*, Vol. 17, No. 5.

Eadie, Douglas, "Master Change, Or Change Will Master You," *Nonprofit World*, Vol 14, No. 4.

Lemberg, Paul, "Seven Ways to Be Unreasonable," *Nonprofit World*, Vol. 20, No. 5.

Muehrcke, Jill, ed., *Management and Planning, Leadership Series*.

These resources are available from the Society's Resource Center, www.snpo.org.

Paul Lemberg (paul@lemborg.com) is the director of Stratamax Research, a strategic consulting and coaching firm (www.lemborg.com). Paul is available for consulting, keynote speeches, and workshops, and working directly with high-performing executives. You can get a copy of Paul's book Faster Than the Speed of Change at <http://www.lemborg.com/faster.html>.

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