

Transformation Through Adversity

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Recently, I had the pleasure of conducting an opening keynote focused on The Agency of the Future: Empathy, Innovation, Execution. As I was being introduced, a colleague shared a story that she had read earlier that morning. It went something like this...

*Take a pot of water and bring it to a boil.
Add an egg to the water, and it will become hard and firm.
Add carrots to the water, and they will turn to mush.
Add coffee grounds, and it will transform the water.*

Like the book "Who Moved My Cheese," I believe that the above parable provides important insight into the current state of the home care industry. The moral of the story centers on how one handles adversity. When placed in the boiling water, some of us may become permanently altered – either becoming "hardened" or turning to "mush."

Others, however, become transformed. When exposed to harsh conditions, these individuals and/or organizations do not wait for the environment to define them; rather, they recognize that the landscape is changing and they make empowered choices to proactively position for a prosperous future. They lean into the discomfort and hardship, knowing that the challenge will eventually subside...and when it does, it will be today's actions that define their future reality.

TRANSFORMERS, OR HOPELESS OPTIMISTS?

Am I describing the hopeless optimist? Quite the contrary! There is a significant difference between looking at life through rose colored glasses and making informed decisions designed to yield maximum benefit. The key lies in one's willingness to truly notice the world around them as a foundation for establishing a vision for the future.

The hopeless optimist may have a tendency to minimize the danger posed by adversity, believing that it will all eventually get better. Like carrots, these folks will probably turn to mush.

The pessimist recognizes that danger is looming, and may believe that there is no way out. Like the egg, these individuals eventually become hardened and inflexible.

The individual I am describing – a Transformer – is a realist; nimble; vibrant; and highly aware of the world around. Like the coffee, Transformers are both defined by the evolving environment, just as they define the environment itself.

ATTITUDE – THE DEFINING TRAIT

Above all else, transformers are defined by their attitude. It begins with a quiet acknowledgement of that which is outside of their control. In this way, they immediately remove the propensity to become overburdened by continuously pushing against the immovable wall of reality. This exercise in futility is the downfall of many, as it is both frustrating and exhausting. Needless to say, this is the quickest way to create a pessimist.

Once acceptance is in place, Transformers begin to focus on the things that they can control in the midst of a challenging environment: their perspective, attitude, vision and strategy to arrive at the desired end result. They direct their attention toward opportunities for disruptive innovation and initiate the process of Transformative Business Development.

TRANSFORMATIVE BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT

A term coined by Heather L. Rooney Strategy and Marketing, Transformative Business Development is a process of organizational metamorphosis. For some, it builds upon an existing foundation to ensure that the company is positioned for a successful future in the midst of a changing environment. For others, it requires a complete re-evaluation of the organization's entire reason for existence. How do you know where you fall on this continuum?

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It starts with vision. Each organization must begin by describing – in detail – the ideal future that they wish to achieve. Taking a lesson from Jim Collins and Jerry Porras in *Built to Last*, I often encourage executives to begin with a Big Hairy Audacious Goal (BHAG). Keep it simple – Write a single sentence that captures the essence of your organization in 15 – 20 years. In this way, organizations set forth a stake in the future that is completely independent of today’s operating environment, thereby increasing the likelihood that they will tap into their inherent ability to participate in the creation of their future. From the BHAG, I then encourage executives to cast an incremental vision (18 months to 3 years), with a specific listing of the business of their dreams.

Once the ideal vision is in place, it is then time to evaluate success obstacles. Transformers will evaluate everything that potentially stands in their way of being successful, as it provides exceptional insight into the gaps that exist between today’s reality and their vision for the future. After looking potential problems in the eye, Transformers make an informed decision as to whether or not they believe that their vision is achievable. In my experience, the answer is most often YES.

With the vision and obstacles in place, Transformers will then begin the process of creating a strategy designed to turn today’s challenges into tomorrow’s opportunities. They will have a strong plan to guide efforts across all aspects of the organization – clinical, finance, operations, marketing and more – with systems in place to ensure that everyone is marching in the same direction. After all, Transformers think ahead to recognize that they need to avoid the tendency to “get in their own way.”

But a plan is just the beginning. Transformers recognize that they must remain nimble with the ability to take advantage of trends as they emerge. They recognize that their growth strategy is simply a guiding light, designed to map an initial path to the desired end result with the maximum likelihood of success. Once the strategy enters the realm of day to day operations, Transformers understand that their course will unfold in unexpected ways.

Anticipating that this imperfect process is a natural aspect of unbridled innovation, Transformers consistently re-evaluate their strategy to ensure that it remains the optimal means of achieving the vision. They become “liquid,” in that they are able to stay purely in the present moment as they make conscious decisions each and every day. Note that this does not mean wavering back and forth; rather, it means ensuring that the strategies invoked continue to be the best means of achieving the organization’s goals. And if an aspect of the strategy is no longer relevant, a Transformer is able to adjust and execute.

This level of adaptability requires that transformative organizations possess a bendable infrastructure, with financial and human resources capable of twisting and turning while remaining steadfast through the winds of change.

DEFINITELY SIMPLE – FAR FROM EASY

Although this may sound simple, it is far from easy. There exists a substantial difference between something that is “basic” and that which is “simple.” The latter can often be the most difficult to implement in practice, hence the reason why disruptive innovation is so successful. While the masses are stuck in the fight against change, Transformers lean into it. They focus all of their attention on the longitudinal path that will move their organization through the pain and into prosperity. They possess the leadership required to maintain a collective attitude of “What CAN I do?” They have the energy and perseverance necessary to maintain momentum even when it is difficult. Ultimately, Transformers are those that win not through force, but through consistent and calm persistence.

When thinking of Transformers and Transformative Business Development, it is therefore useful to remember the Robert Frost Poem:

*“Two roads diverged in a wood.
And I...I took the one less travelled by
And that has made all the difference.”*

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Heather is the President and CEO of Heather L. Rooney Strategy and Marketing, a national marketing and strategic planning firm. With an innate ability to forecast future trends, Ms. Rooney is among the most respected growth strategists in the home care industry.

Having been a member of the home care community for more than 10 years, and with nearly 18 years of sales and marketing experience, Ms. Rooney is accustomed to guiding a diverse cadre of home health, hospice, private duty organizations in their quest to transcend performance plateaus. From small agencies to large national chains, she is known for infusing clients with energy and empowering companies to achieve unprecedented growth.

Ms. Rooney has served on the Board of Directors for the Community Health Accreditation Program (CHAP) and the Distinguished Board of Judges for the Stevie Awards. She is a nationally respected keynote presenter and published author on topics related to emerging market trends, sales, marketing, business development, business intelligence, leadership, strategic planning, growth, and more. Amidst her diverse content expertise is one essential thread: she is consistently recognized for her ability to cultivate vision, build unity of purpose, offer practical guidance and inspire change.

Ms. Rooney is also an award-winning CEO - She was named the 2008 Entrepreneur of the Year by the Stevie Awards for Women in Business, and she won the 2006 Stevie Award for Best New Business.

Prior to founding Heather L. Rooney, Heather built and directed all aspects of Sales, Marketing, and Business Development for a leading provider of business intelligence in home health, hospice and private duty. Her background includes real estate investment, franchise businesses, international pharmaceuticals, cultural diversity, non-profit juvenile delinquency prevention, community policing, and federal grant management. She is a trained conflict mediator and professional facilitator.

Heather graduated Magna Cum Laude and Phi Beta Kappa from the University of Washington with a focus on Criminology, Sociology and Criminal Justice. She resides in Seattle with her husband and young daughter.



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