

The Value of a Fresh View

When is the last time you had someone look at your business with a completely open and unbiased approach? Sometimes we get so involved in running our business and managing our board that we neglect to challenge some of our basic assumptions or business practices.

Failure to periodically take an open, honest and challenging self-assessment of your business can block growth opportunities and lead to incremental improvements at best or possibly stagnation. The opportunity to innovate and create competitive advantage through new products or business model may be lost.

Recently, I witnessed the value of taking a fresh view of a business in 3 separate settings.

New CEO Perspective

First, I watched a new CEO provide her view of her first 100 days in his new job. While being respectful, she challenged many of the assumptions and processes that had become core to a highly successful company. Her challenge to the status quo through new eyes immediately raised the bar for both performance and innovation. She and her team seem prepared to accelerate innovation and creativity, refine the business model and significantly improve operational performance.

New Director Skills and Experience

In the second instance, HP replaced 5 board directors simultaneously. This is an unprecedented move by a board except in the case of real dire financial emergency or exceptionally poor business performance.

HP has been through a difficult time but has strong current performance. Their broader concern is about the future. Each new director adds a specific skill or experience to the HP board that is critical for future success. Many boards are adding expertise in technology and social media as their business and customers evolve.

Senior Advisor

Third, in my role as a senior advisor, I've seen firsthand the value and influence that an outsider can have to improve performance. By respectfully but forcefully asking questions, challenging assumptions and providing ideas from my experience, I have caused a management team to rethink what they do and how they do it. I offered options they had not considered and got them to focus on the really important things. The result was immediate performance improvement and a re-energizing of the leadership team.

New Eyes See Things Differently

Why would a board re-create? Why hire an outside senior executive or use a consultant to provide an independent view? Why add some new director skills?

In today's challenging environment, most companies have streamlined operations, focused their product portfolio, concentrated on a select group of customers and made other choices to achieve the best business performance possible. Sometimes in our effort to succeed in the present, we are not positioned properly for the future. We can lose sight of the bigger picture. Our business model becomes stagnant. We under invest in new products and innovation.

The value of having a new set of eyes from a new CEO, senior advisor or in the case of HP, 5 sets of new eyes, is to look at the business differently and to help management create increased shareholder value.