



Skill Needs in Today's "Flat" New World

BY RAVI P. THOMAS

The Age of Technology in which we are living has brought a major challenge to us. As leaders and managers, we have to move from our comfort zone and acquire new skills, to be successful in the new "Flat" world of the 21st Century.

For instance, we need to become visionary leaders with stronger communication skills and also the ability to bring about rapid innovation and adaptation. We need to be able to think out-of-the-box and adapt to this still-in-transition world.

As managers, we need more CLASS: compassion, leadership, affection, sensitivity, and success at team building.

Creativity in the workplace has to be respected, appreciated, and utilized. Each of us has to become able to make rapid decisions and accept varied inputs from his or her team without compromising the quality of the decision.

An important characteristic of the new age manager and leader is the ability to create an environment that encourages full employee participation, from sharing ideas to assuming the leadership role in time of crisis. After all, our staff members will also be adapting to the technological upheavals in the workplace and that will impact our expectations of them.

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Make Your Strategy a Reality

Why do organizations consistently fail to execute their competitive strategies? Mark Morgan, Raymond Levitt, and William Malek offer some reasons for the problem and, more important, suggest six imperatives toward strategy execution in their book aptly entitled *Executing Your Strategy: How to Break It Down and Get It Done*.

In an interview, Mark Morgan, former chief learning officer at IPSolutions, Inc., and practice director at the Stanford Advanced Project Management Program, and now chief strategy officer of StratEX Advisors LLC, explained the authors' six-step solution, as well as the nature of the problem.

In Morgan's opinion, a major problem is that many organizations fail to articulate their strategies in a manner that their staff can understand. "Typically, strategies are presented in the form of generalities that talk about better customer focus, improved operational efficiency, and product excellence or service excellence," he said. "So, the strategy becomes a statement that covers so much that it doesn't specify anything."

Another problem is that the strategy is poorly aligned to the realities of the organizational culture, the organizational structure, its goals, and the like. "The result is that the strategies become incoherent, inconsistent, and in many cases overloaded statements of initiatives and programs that are very difficult, if not



impossible, to make happen, let alone trace back to what value they deliver strategically."

Also, said Morgan, "There's a tendency of executive teams to get very focused on one or two big, shiny objectives in the marketplace or get too preoccupied with the quarterly analyst game of expecta-

tions management. As a consequence, they lose sight of the goals set for the organization and likely obstacles in the way—from alignment to culture, to financial problems. They fail to reconcile organizational capacity and capability with what they are trying to drive the organization toward."

Morgan shared with *Executive Matters* the six imperatives identified by him, Levitt, and Malek that are described in their book and can make strategies a reality. Together, the six imperatives create the acronym INVEST.

According to Morgan, the I in INVEST stands for *ideation*. "Ideation is the bedrock or the foundation of the organization based on its purpose—that is why the organization exists, where it intends to go in the very long term—and what its identity is, what type of a business it is, and what its brand stands for.

The second imperative—the N—is *nature* and reflects what the company is doing in terms of culture, structure, and strategy alignment in keeping with that ideation.

The V in INVEST stands for *vision*

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Seeing the Mighty Oak in the Acorn

What makes some people optimistic in the face of difficulties, and others so discouraged that they are unable to devise a course of action? Professor Tojo Thatchenkery of George Mason University and Carol Metzker, a communications specialist, offer the answer in the book, aptly titled *Appreciative Intelligence*.

The subtitle of the book, and the title of this article, describe what “appreciative intelligence” is. As the authors point out, it “enables successful people to reframe reality to reveal the hidden possibilities within even the most apparently unpromising situation.” In an interview, the authors noted how the myriad interviews they conducted with leaders and innovators revealed that the ability to reframe situations, accentuate the positive, and see how the future unfolds from the present consistently led to four qualities:

1. Persistence
2. Conviction that one’s actions matter
3. Tolerance for uncertainty
4. Irrepressible resilience

All of these qualities, in turn, lead to awareness that an end goal was possible to accomplish. This led to “a willingness to persist and to believe that their actions and abilities would take them to a successful conclusion,” said Thatchenkery. Metzker pointed to real-world examples like Asa Candler who looked at a failing headache remedy called Coca-Cola and recognized a best-selling soda drink, and Charles Pellerin helped NASA bounce back from the Hubble telescope debacle. “Leaders with appreciative intelligence,” Metzker added, “are also able to spread it through their organizations, thereby creating thriving businesses.”

Thatchenkery described these three steps in detail.

Reframing

The first component is the ability to perceive—to see, to interpret, to frame or reframe. “Framing is the psychological process whereby a person intentionally views or puts into a certain perspective



any object, person, context, or scenario,” said Thatchenkery. “One of the most common examples of framing is that of calling a glass half empty or half full. Regardless of how the glass is described, the amount of water is the same—it is only the perspective that is different.”

Appreciating the Positive

According to the authors, the second component of appreciative intelligence is accentuating the positive value or worth of something. In their research, they found that successful people have a conscious or unconscious ability to view everyday reality positively, whether it is events, situations, obstacles, products, or people. “Because they are reframing to see the positive, they often see talents or potential that others might miss,” said Thatchenkery.

Seeing How the Future Unfolds from the Present

The implication of appreciating the positive is that it ties the present to a positive outcome, according to Thatchenkery and Metzker.

Although appreciative intelligence is an individual ability, it significantly affects groups and organizations because they are composed of individuals. For businesses, applying it can lead to a competitive advantage: creative solutions, new products, ability to achieve goals, and a better work environment that leads to productive and satisfied organization members, and higher member retention, all which eventually affect the financial bottom line.

All individuals have some element of appreciative intelligence, according to the authors.

How can we build our outlook and thereby reframe our mind for better outcomes? The authors suggest a simple way to start. At the end of each day, ask yourself whether you asked questions or jumped to negative conclusions. Thatchenkery added, “Don’t omit incremental progress or undervalue small successes in assessing your day.” Remember to take an appreciative approach to your thinking, focusing on what worked rather than what didn’t. According to Metzker, such an attitude can influence how you approach events throughout your organization, thus contributing to “creation of a culture of appreciative intelligence that leads to innovation, employee retention, long-term resilience, and quality of leadership, all drivers of organizational well being.”

Make Your Strategy a Reality

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and is the combination of goals and metrics with strategy which links the combination of nature and vision.

The fourth imperative is *engagement*—the E in INVEST—and entails the creation of a portfolio of projects and programs that execute the strategy

as it relates to the nature and vision of the organization.

The fifth imperative is *synthesis*—S—for the need to synthesize projects and programs in keeping with the plans set. In other words, the right projects need to be completed efficiently and effectively.

Finally, said Morgan, the T is for *transition*. “Once the project or program work has created the new system, the new product, or whatever change is called for, it needs to transition into the mainstream of the organization in as seamless of a fashion as possible.”

Solid Values Build a Growing Business

INTERVIEW BY FLORENCE STONE

Apple-Metro's rise to success is no accident. The growth of this franchise of casual dining restaurants in New York State is due to its extraordinary CEO and chairman: Zane Tankel. Throughout his career, the hands-on entrepreneur has demonstrated his business acumen, but Apple-Metro has enabled him to show his strong leadership and management skills as well. Not only have they enabled Apple-Metro to grow from one restaurant to 30 in just 14 years but also to successfully operate two Chevy's Fresh Mex and create and run their own concept, an Italian restaurant called Zanaro's.

"Our philosophy at Apple-Metro is to create a dynamic, rewarding environment where dedicated and engaged associates will work, treating each other with mutual respect," said Tankel.

24/7 Commitment

Tankel expects all support-office staff to be accessible to all the chains' associates as well as all associates to have access to him 24/7.

His goal is to create a warm environment that feels more like an extended family than a large restaurant management group. This is essential given the chain's mission: "to guarantee each and every guest the ultimate casual dining experience through extraordinary service and exceptional food and drink in a fun-filled, friendly atmosphere."

Early in his career, Tankel, a graduate of the University of Philadelphia's Wharton School, owned and operated a graphic arts company with four plants in the United States, doing short-run printing and color separations. He sold three of these plants to Potomac Graphic Industries and continued to operate plants in Detroit, Michigan and Cambridge, Massachusetts. Revenue from the sale of these plants gave him the funds to become an owner/operator of Cameos, a fine dining restaurant in Manhattan, and later become a partner with Regis Philbin, Jackie Mason, and Mikhail Baryshnikov in Columbus restaurants in Manhattan.

In 1994, Tankel, with business partner

Roy Raeburn, built the first Applebee's restaurant in Staten Island; five years later they identified a location on 42nd Street near Times Square, ignoring those who said that a mid-priced casual eatery in a metropolitan area, particularly in New York City, would not succeed. Today, Apple-Metro has restaurants in not only Staten Island, Manhattan, Queens, the Bronx, and Brooklyn but also Westchester and Rockland counties. Further, his experience has proven that such restaurants aren't limited to location on the first floor. Apple-Metro's portfolio includes two- and three-story restaurants.



Applebee's is a franchisor with over 2,000 restaurants operating system-wide in 49 states, 16 international countries, and one U.S. territory. In 2007, Apple-Metro received the company's Innovation Award for its many people programs. Success with Apple-Metro led to ownership of two Chevy's Fresh Mex restaurants and the team's own wholly developed and owned Zanaro's.

The People Philosophy

Tankel attributes the restaurants' success to their people philosophy. He told us how new managers undergo rigorous interviews before they are hired and even have to work as waiters and cooks at various restaurants. He can usually be found during the day at one of his restaurants, not to criticize but rather to compliment those at work.

Retention of good workers, he believes, is essential to the Apple-Metro restaurants' success. The food industry is one in which people change jobs often,

so we want to create a workplace where people want to stay. Pay isn't the primary reason people leave jobs. They can be dissatisfied for other reasons, so our company tries to be accommodating when special needs come up and give perks that help shore up morale. For instance, every three years, the company leases new cars for each of its general managers and kitchen managers. Managers also get another perk: an annual company cruise for them and their spouses.

"Apple-Metro Wow" letters are also sent to employees to thank them for doing something "beyond expectations." The letters are also posted on employee bulletin boards.

Most important, Apple-Metro has an aggressive Manager-in-Training Program aimed at identifying and nurturing existing talent at the restaurant level. "Success is all about having good people," said Tankel. "Good people will find you if you're good." How does Tankel believe his company will be known as a good place to work? "We have certain things we promote," he said. For one, according to Tankel, ethics are non-negotiable. "Truth," he observed, "is a premium in this industry, and telling the truth is our mantra." Good people want to work for a company whose culture reflects these values.

Apple-Metro has a three-part values statement that reflects Tankel's business philosophy—and the secret of its growth. Apple-Metro will:

1. Create a dynamic, rewarding environment where dedicated and engaged associates will work treating each other with mutual respect.
2. Support restaurant activity with best-in-industry innovation and passionate performance.
3. Maintain a fluid and nurturing environment offering individual development while keeping a keen focus on long-term bottom-line profitability.

Over the years, Tankel has been asked by workers at his restaurant for the secret of his success. The reply he gives them—and he gave us—was "hard work and plain luck."



Here's what you'll find on the
AMA Members-only Website www.amamember.org

PROFESIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Office Politics: How to Master the Game.

You may pride yourself as being "above" the pettiness of office politics. But if you completely ignore the political climate of your workplace, your career may be at risk.

MANAGEMENT

Top 10 Ways to Engage Your Employees.

A recent Gallup poll revealed that a staggering 70% of people feel "actively disengaged" at work. These 10 tips will help you improve your employees' energy, enthusiasm, and effectiveness.

LEADERSHIP

Face Your Fears (Don't Be Your Own Worst Enemy).

Dr. Albert Ellis passed away last year at the age of 93, but his legacy—how to achieve success and happiness by facing your fears—lives on.

HR/TRAINING

Using Part-Time Workers to Transform Your Business.

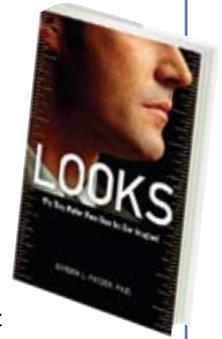
Many service companies are successfully applying just-in-time principles from the manufacturing industry—for example, using part-time workers to cover busy periods—to increase productivity and efficiency.

Book of the Month

Looks: Why They Matter More Than You Ever Imagined

by Dr. Gordon L. Patzer (AMACOM, 2008). Mom always told us that beauty is only skin deep—but is it really? According to Dr. Patzer, who has spent

30 years studying physical attractiveness, better looking people get all sorts of unfair advantages—from the moment they're born.



AMA Conferences/Special Events Calendar

FEB. 20, WEBCAST • Making the Transition from Selling to Sales Management.

Sales organizations are often compared to sports teams. As sales manager, your role is to arm your team with the tools and resources it needs to attain peak performance and stay in the game. This webcast explores the new skills, expectations, and characteristics associated with successful sales managers in addition to proven techniques for managing in, out, up, and down your organization to accelerate sales performance.

FEB. 27, WEBCAST • Beyond the Paycheck: Keeping Your Employees Inspired, Engaged, and Productive.

Research ranking the importance of 52 types of employee recognition has shown that at least 36 of them don't cost a penny. But it's not what

you spend, it is what you do that makes the difference. During this webcast Dr. Bob Nelson, "The Guru of Thank You!" will explore proven ways to motivate your staff and improve its overall performance.

MARCH 5, WEBCAST • How Ordinary People Become Extraordinary Leaders.

If you've ever wondered how some people break out of the pack and make it big, attend this webcast to find out how. Stephen Baum will share some of the business secrets of prominent CEOs and explain the life-shaping experiences they have in common that are the foundation for success in careers and life.

MARCH 12, WEBCAST • Business at the Crossroads: Aligning Commerce, Earth and Humanity.

Today's global companies

are at a crossroads—searching for new sources of profitable growth. This webcast features a lively conversation with Stuart Hart, author of the best-selling book, *Capitalism at the Crossroads*, who will discuss the integration of sustainable development and environmentalism in business strategy.

MARCH 19, WEBCAST • 10 Steps for Leading Productive Meetings.

All too often meetings become an aimless conversation that serves no purpose but to waste time. Good meeting skills are no longer optional—they are a core competency for every manager. In this webcast, you'll discover proven methods for leading your group through collaborative brainstorming, decision-making and problem-solving sessions.

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