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Steam
by Bob Manna & Matt Manna • 6AF9901D(R01)

"The only way to harness the steam that powers success it is to elevate the intelligence of an Unusual Mind above the tyranny of proof."

It's common for an organization that's running out of steam to try and get it back. Less common is the ability to discover what to do to get it back.

The usual attempt to regain steam is to store and evaluate data that not only suggests, but "proves," what to do. This effort is flawed because data, and the "proof" it advocates, are past happenings, and knowing what has happened in the past is irrelevant to knowing what *can* happen in the future. No organization would ever run out of steam if this was untrue.

Organizations run out of steam when the people running them stipulate that a course of action will be considered only if it is proven to achieve a predetermined, predictable, result. This tyranny of proof is literally unfortunate in that it destroys existing fortunes. Happily, the tyranny of proof can be avoided. The key is to acknowledge the proper meaning of intelligence.

It's very common (and very wrong) to think of intelligence as an ability to store, recall, and evaluate data. Of course the ability to store, recall, and evaluate data is impressive. We reward it in schools and on game shows. But storing, recalling, and evaluating data are retrospective acts, and retrospection is incapable of depicting what *can* happen in the future. This is not merely an academic statement.

Most organizations are well staffed with individuals capable of storing, recalling, and evaluating data. These folks can explain, in exquisite detail, why an organization is running (or has run) out of steam. Few can predict the event before it occurs, and none can offer *proof* of what will prevent it.

To transcend the tyranny of proof, intelligence must be held to a standard that begins where retrospection ends. We call this standard of intelligence Unusual Mind — the talent to achieve success in the absence of, and sometimes in opposition to, proof. Unusual Minds seek to answer a single question: What will it take to change the mind of a customer, voter, or philanthropist?

This is a scary question because one possible answer is that nothing is capable of occasioning such a change. In such circumstances the best thing to do is stop trying and save resources for another day. Happily, circumstances are not usually so dire. Most seemingly immutable situations are nothing more than myopia. The cure is to look beyond existing messages, products, candidates, and causes.

For instance, it is probably impossible to topple Heinz from the top of the market by offering a competitive brand of ketchup. But Heinz's dominance of the ketchup market does not make it impossible for a different condiment to supplant ketchup.

Also, most products, campaigns, and causes run out of steam gradually. There is usually time to react. Sadly, it is precisely during times of decline that proof's translucency is most pernicious.

The Unusual Mind is different. The Unusual Mind accepts that the existing state of affairs (that which is proven) is incapable of uncovering what must change in order to acquire, reacquire, and importantly, maintain success.

Whereas the tyranny of proof dictates that a course of action can be seriously considered only if it is proven to achieve a predetermined, predictable result, the Unusual Mind accepts that it's impossible to prove the future. This distinction is not hypothetical, it's real.

It's trivially easy to recall any number of once great organizations that gradually declined to a point of obscurity. We won't reveal our list in order to keep from appearing as though we stacked the deck in favor of our next two questions.

Do you believe organizations are ignorant of their decline? Do you believe proof of decline mitigates decline? Of course not. Organizations decline because no one knows what to do to reverse or avoid the decline! If you take one single thought from this article it should be this: *The fact that an organization stands in a place of dominance today, does not prove, or even suggest, the potential to maintain that position*.

There are only three elements that generate success, and every organization is in direct control of two of them. The first element is the product, service, candidate, or cause on offer. The second element is/are the message(s) used to promote the product, service, candidate, or cause. The third element, the public's reaction, is a direct result of the first two.

It is only by attempting to parlay with patrons through the development of products, candidates, causes, and their attendant messages, that proof can emerge. The attempt comes first, the proof comes second. The tyranny of proof demands the exact opposite order.

The tyranny of proof is not merely opposite from the intelligence of an Unusual Mind, it is often directly opposed to Unusual Mind intelligence. Worse yet, the opposition is, in some respect, correct. There are always aspects of the current environment that can be demonstrated to have some value. This does not, in any way, prove, or even suggest, future value.

The plain fact is that proof is subordinate to the existing convictions of patrons. The only question when it comes to acquiring or reacquiring success is: *Do current offerings, and their attendant messages, parlay with the existing convictions of customers, voters, and philanthropists?*

The fact that proof is subordinate to the convictions of customers, voters, and philanthropists can be an uncomfortable realization. But discomfort does not imply inaccuracy, or dismiss reality. The only way to harness the steam that powers success it is to elevate the intelligence of an Unusual Mind above the tyranny of proof.

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