ONE HUNDRED IDEAS *for* MANAGERS

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Corporate fitness requires both back-to-basics pragmatism and a leap of faith into the future. It requires a new focus on fundamentals, attention to the few things that really make a bottom-line difference, and a bold attitude to change.

Here are 100 things you can do to make your corporate future a matter of choice rather than chance. Share these ideas with your team, and talk about making them work. If you implement only one or two of them, that might be enough. If you act on all of them, you'll sail through the decade.

PEOPLE

1. People are your most valuable resource. However, if you've written that anywhere – on signs, posters, or wherever – be damned sure you act as though it were true. Better still, stop *talking* about it and just *do* it.
2. You've got to let them go to let them grow. The surest way to cripple performance is by treating people like children, showing them how to do everything, and leaning over their shoulders. If you want them to *act* responsibly, *give* them responsibility. Treat them like adults.
3. Trust is the most precious commodity in any organization. It begins when you give people challenging tasks – plus the information, resources, and support they need to perform
4. If you don't trust people they will never show that they *can* be trusted.
5. If there's a lack of trust in your organization, it probably starts in the CEO's office.
6. Keep your promises. Don't ever hide behind the policy manual or the need for the executive committee's OK. If you can't deliver, say so. When you *don't* deliver, own up immediately.
7. Most people can be trusted with highly sensitive information. When you share it, you almost always gain far more than you lose. So if you're going to err, err on the side of sharing *too much* rather than too little.
8. Hire the best. The cost of bringing an OK performer up to speed is always greater than you expect. "Magic people" give you a head start – and you're only as good as the people around you. What's more, talented, skilled, inspired individuals almost always bring something unexpected to an organization.
9. If an individual is clearly not going to make it, don't play Good Samaritan. Be frank about their shortcomings, then reassign them or get rid of them. If you can help them find another job, good. If you can't, remember it's not your responsibility.
10. Whatever you do, don't reassign duds where they can't (won't) add value.
11. Beware of hiring people who agree with everything you say. Dissenters and mavericks give an organization vitality, creativity, and a competitive advantage.
12. Your organization exists to leverage the talent of its people. The task of a leader is to create a climate in which that talent can grow.
13. Test your structure, systems, policies and procedures against a simple question: "Do they help people perform, or do they get in the way?" Anything that doesn't contribute to performance should be abolished immediately.
14. Over-train everyone and "cross-train" them to do their colleagues' jobs. Teams of competent people work miracles. When people understand each other's work, they are able to contribute ideas, help out, and provide support.

15. Pay is a great motivator, but it may not be the most important one or even the most powerful. If you treat people badly, you can never pay them enough. So before you launch a new incentive scheme, consider how you manage your people. Try to determine what's really getting in the way of performance. If your housekeeping is up to scratch, then think about money; if it's not, forget the money and fix your management style!

16. Give people plenty of pats on the back. "Thank you" and "Well done" are powerful motivators. Remember the *One Minute Manager's* advice to "Catch them doing something right!"

17. Pay people for *performance*, not for turning up. If you want to keep people turned on, you have to do something substantive for them. Your reward system should reinforce "what counts around here." Give them all a stake in your company's success. Stock options, bonuses, performance incentives, are all important. But so are exposure to customers and suppliers, participation in company conferences, and access to information.

18. Involve people in high-level discussions and in making important decisions. And give them responsibility for implementing decisions.

19. Learn the difference between dumping and delegation. Too many managers dump tasks on people's desks, then wonder why they fail. Delegation requires that you say, a) "This is my objective," b) "Let's talk about how you can help me get there," and c) "Now, what must I do to ensure you can make it?" It's hard work … but it pays.

MARKETING

20. Don't confuse marketing and selling. Theodore Levitt, former professor of marketing at the Harvard Business School, once said, "Selling is getting rid of what you've got; marketing is getting what you can get rid of." Be sure you know what you can get rid of – i.e., what the customer needs or wants – before you try to sell it.

21. To win in the marketplace, you have to get three things right: *target* your offerings at a specific market, *position* your company and your products clearly in customers' minds, and *persuade* them to buy from you. These are three distinct tasks, that all deserve a great deal of quality time and attention.

22. Most companies set their prices too low, or cut prices too fast. They often engage in price wars when it's not necessary. You can probably get much higher prices than you think by telling customer more about the value you offer. So "unbundle" your value proposition, and explain in detail what you will deliver, and why it's a great deal. Don't expect *customers* to decode your offering!

23. "Our prices are too high" is the salesman's favourite excuse for not closing a sale. The refrain is quickly echoed inside organizations – and becomes accepted as fact. In no time at all, everyone starts talking about the need to cut prices. Solution: teach sales people to explain your value proposition … to believe in it … and to sell customers *up*, not down.

24. Distributors should be your *partners*. Aim for win-win relationships by a) understanding their businesses, b) making life easy for them, and c) helping them make more profit.

25. Most market research is unnecessarily complicated and costly. The best managers have "a fingertip feel" for their markets. You can develop it by visiting customers, phoning them for a chat, or questioning them as they wander around your showroom.

26. the more time customers invest in your business, the harder it is for them to shop elsewhere. So involve them in your strategy meetings, or regularly invite them into your office for tea and biscuits,

and ask, "How are we doing? What can we do to serve you better?" You'll be surprised at the information, insights, and advice you get – and it's for free!

CUSTOMERS

27. Customers are your most important asset. Invest in them. Nurture them. Learn about them and from them. Help them succeed and grow. Make it hard – and expensive – for them to leave.
28. Define your target customers precisely – *one person at a time* (yes, even if you're aiming at organizations). Until you do, you'll be forced to use a shotgun instead of a rifle. You'll scatter your resources all over the place. And "spray and pray" strategies seldom work.
29. Customers are the lifeblood of business. Most people in most firms don't understand this. Make sure your people do. Make sure they understand that your "external" customers are important, but also that each of them has "internal" customers who depend upon them.
30. Customer service is lousy because most employees have had little experience of superior service. This means that just introducing the idea of better service takes special effort.
31. Your employees won't show they care until you show *you* care. The way they treat customers is a direct reflection of the way you treat them.
32. All customers aren't polite or understanding. Some are bloody-minded, some are rude, some are crooks. But to stay in business, you need to be adaptable enough to deal with all of them.
33. An adage for public speakers says, "Tell them what you're going to tell them ... tell them ... them tell them what you told them." Do the same for customers. You can't over-sell the value you offer. Make yourself clear. And repeat yourself even after you're bored with your own message. Some things take time to get through.
34. Today's key customers deserve special attention, but a continuous flow of new prospects is the best security any firm can have. Make sure you know who tomorrow's prospects are, and that you're calling on them today.
35. Satisfied customers tell three to five other people; unhappy ones complain to 11to 15. So it's worth keeping customers happy. And when you do slip up, it's worth extra effort to fix problems and win unhappy customers back.
36. Customers are always right. Even when they're not, they are.
37. Don't argue with customers. You can't win.

SUPPLIERS

38. Make them your partners, and they'll help make you rich.
39. Visit them often, so they know you're interested in them, their ambitions, their problems, and their performance.
40. Share information with them. Brief them on your strategy, on new projects, and on your performance.
41. Help them raise their own standards. Train their people. Train *their* suppliers.
42. Celebrate their efforts. Make them heroes.

QUALITY

43. Quality is a customer's perception of value. Your own view of it is irrelevant. The customer is the judge of all business performance.
44. Quality pays. It leads to lower costs, higher selling prices, more satisfied customers – and more repeat business.
45. Quality is vital, even if you aim to be the low-cost producer in your market. Don't ever try to trade off quality against price.
46. When you drive for quality, costs often fall. When you focus on cost-cutting, quality seldom improves.

COMPETITION

47. Do you know precisely who your competitors are? What value they offer? What they'll do tomorrow? They vision of the future? Their strategy for tomorrow? If you don't, find out fast.
48. While it's vital to know who your *direct* competitors are, and what they do, it's equally important to watch *indirect* competitors.
49. Always assume that competitors are smarter than you think. And take comfort from the fact that usually they're *not*!
50. The ability to learn faster than competitors is the #1 strategic weapon of the future. Make sure everyone in your company can contribute to your "corporate mind."
51. Staying ahead doesn't always require "big bang" changes. Continuous, small, incremental improvements over the long term are often far more impactful. Remember the Japanese notion of "the samurai's 1 000 tiny cuts."
52. Change before competitors do – and before they force you to. And don't just change the *rules* of the game; aim to change the whole darned game!
53. Life is not a level playing field. Choose the high ground. The view is better and you control the game.
54. Concentrate your resources. Choose the few things that will give you the best edge, and go at them with a vengeance. Winning always demands a certain critical mass of time, energy, money, or other resources. If you choose to compete, for goodness' sake compete to *win*. Don't dabble; you'll get killed. (Sometimes it pays to let competitors know what you intend doing. So be selective with your secrets.)
55. All competitors are not mortal enemies. Life is often easier when there's healthy rivalry. Beware of upsetting competitive balance; your strategy might backfire.
56. If you choose to compete on price, ask: "Can we afford it? Can we hold out? What happens afterwards?"

COSTS

57. Every employee should be involved in cost management. Budgeting should be pushed as far down the line as possible. Zero-base everything.
58. Costs rise uncontrollably when you a) do the wrong things, or b) do them wrong the first time.

59. The surest way to cut costs is to do everything faster. Cut 20% off them time it takes to everything, and see what it does to your budget.

STRESS

60. Most managers under terrible stress because they're *doers*, not leaders. They insist on handling everything themselves. But why keep a dog if you're going to do all the barking?
61. Effective stress management hinges largely on effective time management. Before you take on any task, ask yourself: "Will doing this get me closer to my objective?"
62. Know your objective. Have *few* objectives. You can't do everything. And in any event, everything doesn't matter.
63. Don't confuse busy-ness with effectiveness. Each of us has 86 400 seconds a day. Some of us succeed and some of us fail. Successful people use those precious seconds productively – i.e. *doing the right things*.
64. All work and no play doesn't necessarily make Jack a bad manager. Stress gets those who don't get a kick out of what they do.

STRUCTURE

65. The more layers in your organization structure, the worse communication will be. Each layer adds costs, and complexity, and makes constipation more likely.
66. People get to love their little boxes on organizational charts. So kick down doors, cross reporting lines, and insist that they talk to each other rather than rely on memos, letters, or e-mails. If you turn your chart upside down and put customers at the top, people get a startlingly different picture of their priorities. Now, the boss – i.e., the man at the *bottom* – has to support the next layer above him; they have to support those above them, etc. In other words, the task of people at each level is to empower those at the next level. And the whole team is there to support the customer.

TECHNOLOGY

67. Computers are there to enhance the talent of people and to set them free to fly. Don't let your IT manager become your firm's mind controller.
68. Treat technology suppliers as partners. Tell them what you're doing, and how you intend getting there. Assure them you'll stay with them – if they help you grow.
69. Information technology makes organizations transparent. If you can see right through your company – and into the inner workings of suppliers and customers – why do you need so many paper-pushers?

MOTIVATION

70. People get turned on when they're counted in.
71. When you treat them like eagles, they soar.
72. Assume that people can perform; give them the chance and the support they need. What you get hinges largely on what you expect.
73. Big challenges are far more exciting than small ones. Most people can and will take on far more than we think, if only they're given the chance.

COMMUNICATION

74. Poor communication is the single greatest cause of poor performance. It demands more effort than almost anything else.
75. The best way to become a better communicator is to become a better *listener*.
76. Memos don't protect you. They take time, cost money, don't get read – and make you ineffective. Ban them, or limit them to one page.
77. You can't over-communicate. But it's worth trying.
78. To improve performance, make sure all your people know a) what to do, (b) why to do it, (c) how to do it, (d) how well to do it, and (e) how well they're doing. Most people don't know these things.
79. Symbols and signals are vital tools for management. What you do you say is more important than what you say.

CULTURE

80. "Corporate culture" was an invention of the 1980s. Trouble is, no one knows how to define the "best" culture for a specific company, how to change it, or how to manage it. So don't waste your time trying.
81. If you want to change the way your company *thinks*, change the way your people *act*. Focus their attention on new things. Set new priorities. Encourage and reward new behaviours.
82. Culture does exist – but it's a product of yesterday's decisions and actions.

LEADERSHIP

83. If a fish is rotten, the head stinks, too.
84. The task of the leader is to create a context and a climate in which others can perform.
85. The context can be either nourishing or toxic. A nourishing context causes people to become *volunteers*. They perform because they want to, not because they have to.
86. Leaders are always prisoners of their environment. Be sensitive to what's going on around you because it dictates the moves you can make and how far and fast you can push things.
87. Describe your vision carefully – and explain it often. If people don't know where you're going, they can't help you get there.
88. Be accessible.

CHANGE

89. The first step to effective change is to create dissatisfaction with the status quo. This step deserves as much attention as the change itself. Change efforts fail when people aren't ready for them. So make haste slowly.
90. We're all prisoners of our past. To help people change, help them see why yesterday's ways are inappropriate, and how something new might make life better.
91. Change takes time; but quick fixes make it possible.
92. Change involves learning. So don't just talk about the future you want – start inventing it. Learn by doing.

93. In a turbulent, fast-changing, uncertain environment, you can't expect to get everything right. So expect mistakes; don't be paralysed by the possibility of making them.
94. If you wait until all the facts are in, they'll be useless.
95. The biggest risk is to avoid all risk.
96. Doing nothing causes death.
97. Organizations are change-averse. It takes deliberate, systematic, and sustained efforts to move them in new directions. The task is always harder than you think; and it always takes longer.
98. Don't fall into the trap of searching for a "sexy" change strategy. They don't exist.
99. The more people you involve in shaping the future, the easier you'll get there.
100. CHANGE! NOW!