

Do You Have What It Takes To Survive In Any Economy?

In 1949, thirteen (out of a highly skilled team of sixteen men) died battling a relatively small blaze that turned deadly in Mann Gulch, Montana. Upon investigating the circumstances of why thirteen of the “smoke jumpers” died while only three lived, Norman Maclean wrote a book entitled “*Young Men and Fire*”, which is the true story account of that fateful expedition of the “smoke jumpers” – fire fighters who parachute into the back country to fight fires.

Maclean found some startling and interesting facts. Mann Gulch is surrounded by steep canyon walls with the northern slope at a 75% incline. When the wind turned suddenly on the smoke jumpers, they found themselves in a race with the fire up those steep, treacherous walls. Unexpectedly, the fire also started to spread much faster than anticipated.

One of the amazing and notable things that Maclean discovered was that the thirteen who died had continued to carry their tools – heavy poleaxes, saws, shovels and heavy back packs – while attempting to out run the fire up those steep walls. In other words, the thirteen who perished had run as far as they could with all their equipment, even though that equipment was worse than useless in a race with the fire.

Their inability to drop their heavy tools and packs ultimately prevented them from being able to outrun the raging fire. Now you must understand, to these seasoned fire fighters, their tools were much more than just simple objects – they represented who they were, why they were there and what they were trained to do. They were educated to fight fires, not outrun them. Dropping their tools would have essentially meant abandoning their knowledge, beliefs, training and experience.

Now this might not seem like a hard choice to make to you, but because these specialized fire fighters hadn't been trained for such an unpredictable, deadly moment, they had no alternative models or maps for behaviour to guide them. What this true story highlights is that in moments of uncertainty and imminent danger, clinging to the old “right” way might seem like a good, safe idea... but more often than not, it may actually prove deadly.

The three survivors of the blaze were forced to think outside the box and develop alternative methods of escaping the fire. Once they figured out they were no longer “fighting the fire” but were instead “trying to outrun it”, they realized they had to drop all of their useless equipment.

One survivor used an innovative technique called the ‘escape fire’ where he took a match and lit a ring around himself so that the fire would “jump” over him. When he tried to suggest it to the other men, they ignored him and continued running up the steep slope because the ‘escape fire’ technique had not been part of their extensive training and preparation. Their inability to drop the tools and equipment that weren't working and seek new methods to escape is what ultimately led to them being engulfed by flames and smoke.

So some of you may be sitting there, reading this and thinking “but what does this have to do with you and your business?”

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Well nothing and yet... perhaps, EVERYTHING.

The global financial crisis of 2009 ripped through the financial markets and negatively impacted businesses (both large and small) around the world. In many ways it behaved exactly like the fire that engulfed Mann Gulch 60 years ago – it was fast, unpredictable, almost impossible to outrun it and it changed the way that most of us will choose to invest and run our businesses forever. And I'm sure most of you would agree, that many businesses are still reeling and recovering from it.

The biggest lesson that I learned personally as the aftermath that unfolded was this – “Change is inevitable – your ability to deal with and handle uncertainty is directly proportionate to the results that you will enjoy, personally and professionally.”

During the crisis, I was forced to take a good hard look at my business and the way that we had been operating. I asked myself “**What are the poleaxes, shovels and backpacks we're running with and how might they be holding us back?**”

At the time, I had been running a very successful coaching business working face to face with clients at around \$2000/month. However the small business market had been hit hard and I realized that we needed to change the way that we worked in order to survive and address the needs of our customers. I completely transformed the model we work under by developing innovative coaching products and online services that could be delivered online to business owners around the world for a fraction of the price. These services are highly unique, relevant, cost effective and targeted to the specific needs of each business owner. We are literally changing the way that business owners learn, measure results and improve their own performance.

Perhaps if it had not been for the global financial crisis, I would not have been forced to re-examine the business and innovate? In many ways, it has provided us all with an ultimatum - change and evolve, or die.

What existing beliefs and models of behaviour do you need to drop today in order for you to survive and prosper in these uncertain economic times? What training, attitudes, decisions or experience needs to be abandoned in favour of a new, innovative approach?

It has often been said that “the thinking that got you to here, won't get you to there”. Never has the simplicity and wisdom of this statement been more poignant, than it is today. Those of you who adopt and learn the critical skills, tools and mind-set necessary to survive and thrive in any economy, will be the winners in all of this.

But, this has always been true. Survivors and successful people triumph because they are flexible and willing to do whatever it takes to get the results they desire. New or changing circumstances always necessitate a new perspective or approach: The alternative, “doing the same thing over and over again and expecting a different result” is the definition of insanity and can only lead to suffering, disappointment, pain and even death.

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