

November 2008

Five Trends that are Transforming Organizations in a 24/7 World ...and what these trends will mean for leaders in the years ahead.

The 2008 Leadership Forum at Georgia Tech recently hosted Sally Helgesen, an internationally recognized leadership consultant and an accomplished author in the field of organizational transformation.



Sally Helgesen

Helgesen's new book, *Thriving in 24/7: Six Strategies for Taming the New World of Work*, served as the framework for her presentation. She addressed themes that highlight how individuals and organizational leaders must think in today's 'VUCA' environment-Volatile, Uncertain, Complex, and Ambiguous-if they are to successfully lead their organizations.

Below is a summary of Ms. Helgesen's presentation.

Radical social change is reshaping work and opportunity in today's global 24/7 environment. At the heart of this change is a revolution in human expectation. This revolution affects every kind of organization—global corporations, small businesses, nonprofit organizations, professional services firms, educational institutions, and even the military. To achieve success in this environment, leaders must understand the causes, impact, and implications of this revolution.

There are countless forces that are transforming organizations in the new world of work, including:

Diversity

In contrast to past trends of conformity or assimilation, today we view differences as beneficial.

Knowledge Economy

Human talent is our most valuable asset, and talent is now the most desirable resource within an organization. Employee knowledge, ideas and innovation define the value of products and services. Continuing to operate in an industrial mindset leaves leaders vulnerable to offering obsolete products and services that will certainly meet their demise upon the introduction of new and better ideas.

Technology

Information is portable, cheap, linked and diffused, which has resulted in diminishing hierarchies of power and an ever-expanding group of stakeholders. While this "ubiquitous connected transparency" stands to define our future, it is up to us as individuals to determine when to disconnect. Forward-thinking individuals recognize that technology overuse diminishes productivity.

Five Trends Born from this Confluence of Forces

Barriers are eroding.

The erosion of traditional barriers between work and home, public and private, boss and employee, etc., has compounded the tendency to constantly multi-task. This feeds an endless 'to-do' list, which creates an environment that diminishes spontaneity and impedes opportunities to refresh ourselves. To counter this, we must recognize this state of erosion and remember to take inventory on a regular basis.

Organizations must do more with less.

Companies are continually growing leaner, less hierarchical, and more competitive. As a result, we are forced to ask more of our people. To be effective, leaders must find ways to capitalize on the passions of individuals within the organization. Smart

businesses involve their workforce and their customers in the design and development of their products or services. By involving these groups, savvy organizations tap their internal motivators and passions.

Change is constant.

New technology is expensive to create but cheap and easy to replicate. As such, the barrier to entry for new competitors is virtually nonexistent. Advancement in technology mandates faster production cycles and new distribution channels. Companies must constantly upgrade, placing emphasis on their most valuable asset—their people.

The niche rules the market.

Our society operates within a mindset of quick delivery and refined customization. Broad-based, generic products and services will inevitably fail.

Balance is increasingly hard.

Eroding barriers, leaner organizational structures, pervasively linked technologies and constant change intersect to create an overarching sense of imbalance. To counter this, individuals and organizations must recognize that although lines between our professional and personal lives are becoming increasingly blurred, we must be careful and cautious in this integration.

In Conclusion

Cheap, fast and portable technologies have begun to free us from dependence upon large organizations while also invading our most private spaces and intensifying the demands on our time. Long-standing barriers between work and home, public and private, men and women, boss and employee, even adult and child, have begun to erode. The emphasis on meeting niche needs in the marketplace has led to an overabundance of options and choice—in many ways an advantage, but a situation that requires us to make decisions at every turn.

In Theory: Leadership in the New World

Today's solutions may be tomorrow's problems.



by Rick Brandt, Ph.D.

Sally Helgesen's presentation taught us that although the industrial world of work has vanished, many of us are still trying to live by its obsolete rules. Not recognizing that this is a losing battle, we struggle to work harder, faster and smarter to discipline ourselves and not waste time and to multi-task in an effort just to keep up.

There is no question that Helgesen is correct in her assertion that we are moving into uncharted territory—an exciting, yet daunting geography of change and opportunity. Unfortunately, many organizations are focusing exclusively on the here-and-now. In this economy, that translates to aggressive cost-cutting measures, which often come at the organization's long-term expense.

Though it may seem overstated in today's economy, the war for talent is a reality.

While layoffs and business failures have created a large pool of currently available talent, based on the demographics of today's workforce, this pool will undoubtedly be drained in the not-too-distant future.

With fewer well-educated and highly skilled individuals to employ, leaders will no longer be able to increase productivity simply by hiring more people. They will have to learn to extract more efficiency

THE WAR FOR TALENT IS HERE

- There are 76 million Baby Boomers in the U.S. and only 49 million younger workers to replace them.
- Even in today's tough economy, Baby Boomers are retiring at a rate of 6,000 per day.
- By 2010, there will be 10 million more jobs than workers in the United States.
- By 2010, the 30- to 44- year-old workforce will decline by 3 million.
- In the next five years, the nation's largest 500 companies will lose one-half of their senior leaders.
- In the next 10 years, the demand for college graduates will exceed supply by 7 million.

and value from existing employees while working to gain a competitive advantage over those who would seek to hire and retain what limited talent is available.

In the new world of work, organizational leaders will have to find ways to effectively relate to a wide-spectrum of workforce populations, from employees with different ethnic or socio-economic backgrounds to employees from different generations. These groups have widely varying values, expectations, motivations and ways of communicating. To be successful in this environment, leaders must embrace and learn how to motivate each of these group's values in ways that lead to collaboration and synergy.

In Practice: Leadership in the New World

Benjamin Franklin famously said that nothing was certain but death and taxes. We'd like to humbly amend his quote to include change. Change is certain. And with change, be it perceived positively or negatively, arises opportunities. The challenge is to recognize and capitalize on these opportunities.

The volatile economy has brought, and will continue to bring, significant change. Many organizations have been forced to take aggressive cost-cutting measures, including reducing their workforce. Unfortunately, little thought is generally given to what the organization will look like after the layoff and what key competencies—organizationally and individually—will be required for future success. Considering the impending talent crunch, letting talent go today may prove to be very costly tomorrow.

TalentQuest was recently approached by an organization facing a difficult situation. While they didn't need to reduce their workforce immediately, they recognized that business would likely continue to slow in the near-term. They also realized that their people whom had been carefully selected and extensively trained were their most valuable asset.

The company was especially concerned that its high-performers, in whom they had made significant investment and knew they would need in the future, may become restless.

Understanding that today's economic troubles are not going to disappear overnight,

TalentQuest developed a workforce plan that would help avoid the need for layoffs. The plan allowed for attrition and included several creative staffing solutions and options. Next, we assessed the company's peak performers and created competency models that can be used for future selection and performance management. Finally, we created a leadership development program specifically designed to prepare their leaders for the workforce challenges that are ahead of us.

In Conclusion

Are you prepared to meet tomorrow's leadership challenges? If not, this is a good time to get prepared.

Dr. Rick Brandt is president of TalentQuest's consulting services. He can be reached at (404)266-9368 or rbrandt@talentquest.com.

Required Competencies for Leaders in a the New Work World

Quality leadership development solutions help current and future leaders develop the skills and abilities that will be required in the new world of work, which include:

- Self-awareness.
- The ability to effectively give and receive feedback.
- The ability to effectively select and develop people.
- The ability to embrace and capitalize on workforce diversity .
- The ability to effectively manage teams remotely.
- The ability to establish trust and secure commitment from employees.