

The Hunt for Opportunities

Jay Forte

Ours is an unpredictable world. Many times, regardless of how effectively we plan, some things just fail. The dinner party that should have been great based on the planning, but the meal was a disaster. The meeting's presentation that was well prepared, but then the equipment failed. Or, a disciplined and diligent savings plan that lost nearly half of its value in today's recession. These challenging situations define our days. Some curse and yell; others see them for the opportunities they present. Inaugural Poet Maya Angelou writes, "I've learned that you can tell a lot about a person by the way he or she handles these three things: a rainy day, lost luggage and tangled Christmas tree lights." Failures, changes and unexpected events have the ability to either destroy or advance; it is in our outlook and response that allows us to turn these failures into opportunities.

Thomas Alva Edison experienced repeated failures. His true success was not his invention of the light bulb, but rather his tenacity and outlook that believed failures were a means to gain new information and new perspectives. Our most successful employees are not those who land on their feet after every project or event; instead, they are those who have the persistence and optimism to learn from difficulty and use what they learn to re-imagine, recreate and re-experiment. They are the ones who have learned to be positive and to constantly hunt for opportunities.

Organizations that constantly hunt for opportunities, perform better, innovate more and succeed in tough times because they possess the following qualities:

1. ***They create, support and live a culture that teaches, inspires and encourages employees to look for the opportunity in every event.*** Failures are unparalleled opportunities to reinvent success. These organizations "celebrate extraordinary failures and punish average successes." Effort, innovation and intent are celebrated; unusual, non-conventional and non-conformist perspectives are applauded. Occasional failures show that employees are pushing performance to the edge. As Tom Peters states, "A day without a screw-up is a day without enough reach." These workplaces encourage their employees to focus on the positive; they create a culture that is open, free-thinking, and believes "yes we can."
2. ***They commit the time and effort to help employees learn their strengths and use them to develop opportunity-thinking.*** Each of us has the potential to be great at certain things; we each have intrinsic talents and strengths. Successful employees know their talents and understand that these talents help them to be naturally perceptive in certain areas; they commit to deliberative practice in develop these areas. They focus their hunt for opportunities in their talent and strengths areas, areas in which they have the greatest insight.

3. ***They focus on learning and actively solicit input from everyone.*** Organizations that hunt for opportunities are always learning, asking great questions and are exceptional listeners. They listen to new perspectives, facts, ideas and dreams. They listen to customers, employees, vendors and strangers. They read books, blogs, periodicals, and newspapers. They read and listen to topics that may appear to be unrelated. They regularly ask, “how about,” or, “what if.” They assess what they hear; they consider everything. They then share what they hear with their teams to expand their hunt for opportunities.
4. ***They focus on exponential, not incremental, opportunities.*** All discussions of opportunities are directed to significant, not average, results; performance “lite” is unacceptable. They use the information they glean about the market, customer, strengths, and trends to consider opportunities that have the potential to be significant. Successful organizations know nothing lasts forever and they must continually reinvent themselves—each time more significantly than the last. These organizations constantly review what they do; they focus on the exponential in their hunt for exponential opportunities.
5. ***They share success with everyone.*** Today’s best ideas are not uniquely resident in management. Organizations that hunt for opportunities realize that opportunity-thinking must happen at every level. Therefore, all successes are openly shared and celebrated. Failures are communicated to inspire employees to rethink, redefine and reinvent. In an intellectual workplace, innovation, inventing and opportunity hunting must be core expectations of all employees; every employee must watch, listen and communicate more effectively to identify improvements and opportunities. The more successes are shared with everyone, and failures are seen as a way to improve, the more performance- and idea-risks employees will take—all in the hunt for opportunities.

In today’s uncertain recessionary period—where the regular, average or incremental approaches are not sufficient—successful organizations have mobilized their teams to be on the hunt for opportunities. It may be in a retail store that creates a new and more “hip” line of products that are less expensive to match today’s reductions in consumer spending. It may be a restaurant that now opens at lunch, creates a mobile delivery van or a special take-out section, to appeal to a changed demographic. It may be a financial services firm that sponsors savings, investing and retirement education to create more savvy and loyal investors who better appreciate and value the firm’s conservative and pragmatic approach.

Some people are distracted or discouraged by failure and change. Others see these as opportunities for greater success. This perspective comes is encouraged and supported in a culture that is on a constant hunt for ways to be better and to make a greater difference. Not only can the hunt for opportunities increase your success, but it may help you invent the next product, service or idea the rest of us cannot live without.

About the Author

Jay Forte is a speaker, consultant and nationally ranked thought leader. He applies years of research, along with his training as a CPA, working with organizations that want to successfully activate and inspire exceptional employee performance. Renowned for producing results, Jay's first book, *Fire Up Your Employees and Smoke Your Competition* was published in March 2009. For information on keynotes, speaking, consulting or to see the daily "BLOGucation," visit: www.humanetricsllc.com or www.FireUpYourEmployees.com or call: 401-338-3505.