

BUSINESS IN ACTION

DID YOU KNOW:

The magazine is typically displayed in the home for 3-4 weeks per issue. Half of recipients rank it as the most valuable branded product they receive from businesses.



A GLOWING SUCCESS STORY

PG. 16

EMBRACE THE QUIET-CLOSE TECHNIQUE

PG. 04



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THE IMPORTANCE OF CLIENT- HOSTING SPACES

PG. 48

ISSUE 27
COVER PRICE \$6.99



678

678

Front of Tear Out Card 1




HEAT UP YOUR SUMMER SALES

The sunny season is rife with conversion opportunities. Save this card for quick reminders on improving outreach, handling objections, and closing more deals during this time.



Stacey Shanner
Realtor®



SHANNER REALTY

57 percent of readers save these tear out cards to reference recipes and other helpful tips and pass along your contact info to referrals.

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Back of Tear Out Card 1

1

TIME YOUR CALLS:

Consumers are more receptive to cold calls on Wednesdays and Thursdays between 11:00 am and noon or toward the end of ordinary business hours.

2

LISTEN TO PAIN POINTS:

Ask at least one open-ended question early in the conversation and let the prospect fully explain their challenge before pitching.

3

TARGET COMMON OBJECTIONS:

Write three objection responses and add them directly to your shared sales script so the entire team uses consistent messaging.

4

RELY ON YOUR VALUE PROPOSITION:

Remember what gives your product or service value beyond its price. What does it solve, how can it improve your clients' way of life, etc.? Communicate it to address pricing objections.

5

GET BACK IN TOUCH:

Former clients are some of your warmest leads. To follow up with existing consumers organically, send seasonal greetings, request reviews and referrals, or simply call to check in.

Share these sales tips with your entire team to heat up your sales figures this summer.



Dear Bill and Judy,

Summer naturally brings a lighter rhythm to your days: fewer meetings, quieter offices, and room to think more strategically. This issue of Business in Action embraces that moment, showing how focus and intention can keep your business moving forward.

When competitors go on vacation, new opportunities may appear. One enclosed feature explores what to do during these times, outlining smart ways to strengthen relationships, refine operations, and remain visible when the market is less crowded. Staying engaged this season can be a meaningful advantage.

Strong leadership also depends on strong judgment. This issue examines decision audits, a practical method for reviewing how choices are made, not just their outcomes. By sharpening your decision-making process, you can lead with greater clarity and consistency.

You'll also find insights on shaping environments that support growth, from client-hosting spaces designed to build trust to leadership lessons drawn from an unexpected childhood source. Each guide reinforces the power of making small, intentional improvements.

How will you use this season to sharpen your strategy and sustain momentum? As always, it's a pleasure to send you this magazine.

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Add a personal letter to the front inside cover that speaks to your connections. This personalization leads 77 percent of recipients to better appreciate the sender.



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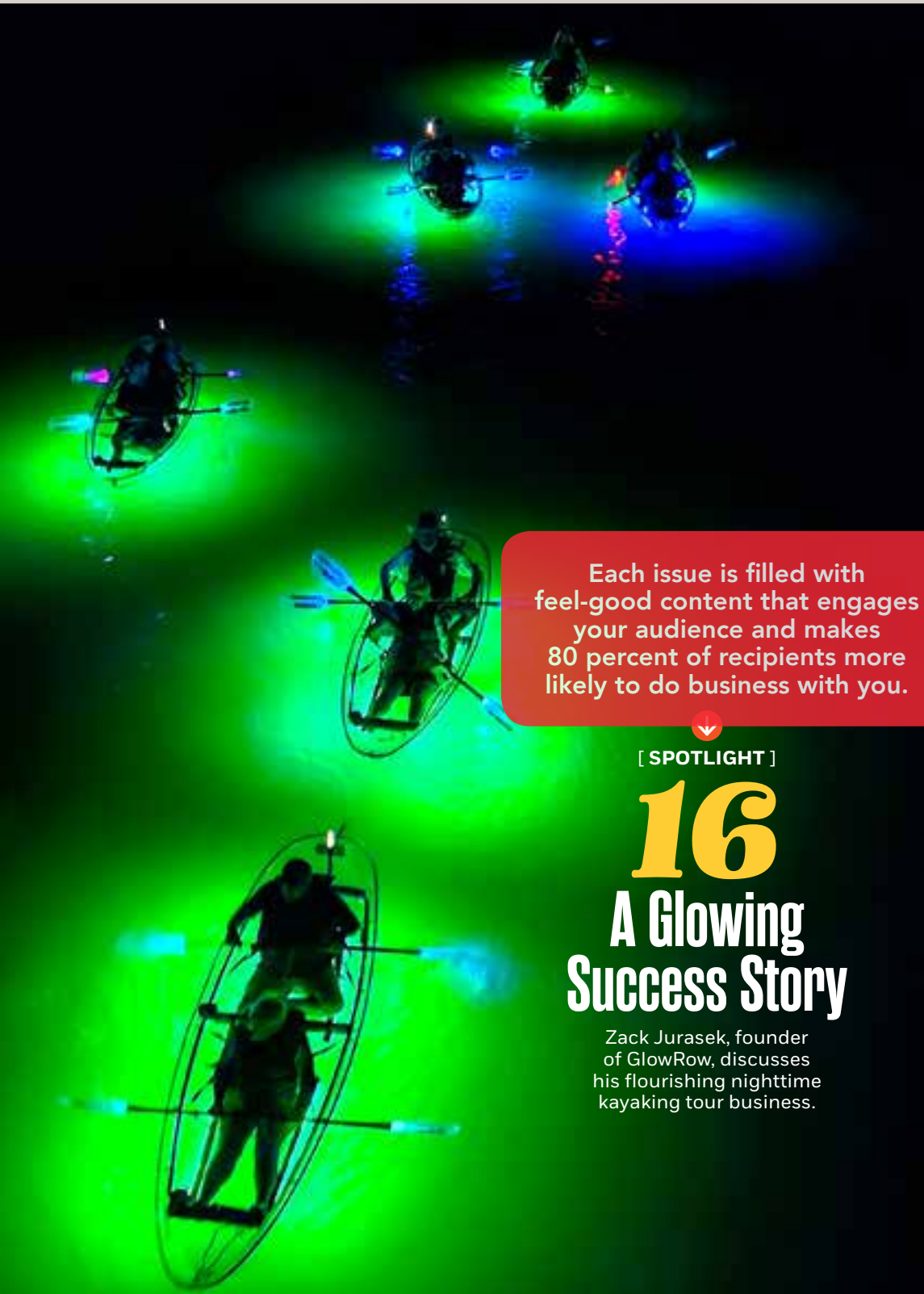
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Each issue is filled with feel-good content that engages your audience and makes 80 percent of recipients more likely to do business with you.

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What Summer Camp Can Teach You About Selling

If you're looking to refresh your sales approach, these camp-inspired lessons could help spark stronger results. BY ALLISON GOMES

YOU MAY HAVE fond memories of summer camp,

where you spent time playing games of capture the flag, competing in canoe races, or sitting by the bonfire. And though you have now swapped your late-night log cabin chats for boardrooms and client calls, the lessons you learned from camp can connect surprisingly well to sales success.

👉 **Practice teamwork**
At camp, you rarely did anything alone—winning a tug-of-war or paddling a canoe required everyone to be in sync. Sales is similar since success doesn't happen in isolation. It's built through collaboration with your marketing team, customer service reps, and fellow salespeople. Working together helps you better



understand clients' needs and how your products or services can meet them.

👉 **Learn by doing**
Not many people mastered fire-building by reading a manual. Instead, you struck matches, failed, and tried again until you finally lit a flame. Sales is just as hands-on. Yes, a script can help guide your interactions, but you'll learn more by doing. Each cold call, pitch, and negotiation is another opportunity to see what is and isn't working.

👉 **Make new friends**
When you shared a cabin with strangers for the summer, it was inevitable that some bunkmates would turn into lifelong friends. And these authentic relationships are just as important for salespeople since the best ones

don't just chase quick wins. You have to listen, empathize, and build trust so that clients will want to continue working with you in the future.

👉 **Stay resilient**
As you probably experienced, every camper faces setbacks, whether it's in the form of lost races, rained-out hikes, or burned marshmallows. But you kept going and learned from them. Sales has its own hurdles, such as missed quotas or deals that fall through, but the key is bouncing back quickly and pressing forward. ■



Reflect on your sales challenges, and apply one lesson from camp, whether it's collaborating across departments or connecting more deeply with clients.



SALES

EMBRACE THE QUIET-CLOSE TECHNIQUE

Forget aggressive sales; adopting a more personable approach to converting prospects could make your sellers silent assassins.

BY ANDRE RIOS



We've all experienced an overaggressive seller. Rather than giving you time to think, space to breathe, or consideration to your personal needs, they instead attempt to pressure you into making a purchase or signing a contract.

This sales tactic isn't just considered unprofessional by many people; it's potentially counterproductive. According to the consultation firm SBI, taking a "provoking" approach with customers can actually prolong the sales cycle by 22 percent. In other words, an overzealous salesperson can actually deter clients, or worse, paint your organization in a poor light, even discouraging warm, relevant leads from returning.

Instead of doing your competitors a favor with standoffish selling, have your sales team try a new tactic: the quiet close. Adopting this softer style for securing deals may not seem as exciting as the lionhearted shove into conversions, but it could very well win over potential customers more organically.

➔ The low-pitch powerhouse

The quiet closer is neither meek nor resistant to speaking with clients. They are strategic, customer-centric communicators who can coax prospects into trusting them and accepting their business. Their deft approach

instills sales with a charismatic and human touch, including a strong understanding of buyer psychology. Take a closer look at some of the key elements of this technique.

Resistance to pushiness

While most sellers are eager to address objections—everything from "Why are you calling me?" to "This is too expensive"—converting hesitant prospects should sometimes be a gentle process. Rather than demanding that customers need your business's product or service, the salesperson should offer to work with them as a solution. For example, an irrigation specialist may discuss with homeowners if they're having difficulty maintaining healthy, vibrant grass and then propose a free on-site consultation from one of their experts. Consumers will be far more likely to follow along when they feel that you aren't trying to take their money but, rather, helping them address a concern. When your value proposition is compatible with a client's needs, the sales will happen more naturally than they would when you resort to pressure.



An open ear

Sellers who use the quiet close take time to understand both buyers' specific current needs and future goals. To discover this info, they need to listen more than they speak. Task your sales team with asking open-ended questions (e.g., following the irrigation example, "How do you feel about the quality of your lawn?") and giving potential clients time to respond in detail while listening

intently to find threads they can pull at. Taking such an individually focused sales tactic will express to prospects that your business cares about what they care about—and what it sells is directly relevant to it.

Naturally, working off a sales script can help sellers feel informed and ready for each customer interaction, but rather than following this rubric by the book, it should prepare them

Rather than demanding that customers need your business's product or service, the salesperson should offer to work with them as a solution.

to pivot based on each customer's unique needs and goals. If they continue to ask questions and adjust according to the responses they receive, clients will eventually reveal what matters to them and how much they're willing to spend. As Micah Zimmerman writes on [entrepreneur.com](https://www.entrepreneur.com), this "fact-finding" process should account for a substantial 70 percent of every sales interaction.

Contact in moderation

If you've ever had a friend or family member blow up your phone with incessant messaging, then you



can imagine how unpleasant constant touchpoints could be for your prospects. Naturally, persistence is necessary to get responses—twelve to fifteen touchpoints, as Outward Media Inc. CEO Paula Chiocci notes on [forbes.com](https://www.forbes.com). But practice moderation in your outreach, never messaging more than once per twenty-four hours. Also consider this stepping-back approach courtesy of sales coach Amrutt Bhatt:

→ One of the most striking shifts came when we stopped trying to force a deal. Instead of chasing a stalled \$1M deal, we sent a simple message.

→ “We sense you might need space to evaluate all options thoroughly. We respect that. Here’s some additional ROI data you might find useful. Take the time you need.”

→ The result? The prospect called back within hours.

Each time a team member reaches out, be sure that their sales messaging is packaged within items of value, such as how-to guides or entertaining videos, rather than being outwardly promotional. Being subtle in this approach will make consumers more likely to engage with your company’s messaging.



Take Action

Review your sales playbook to identify areas where you could test the quiet-close method.

LINKEDIN/PEXELS

→ Holding your position

Granted, the quiet close is not a one-size-fits-all solution for every situation, nor is it prudent instruction for every seller on your team (e.g., shier or less motivated team members may need to be encouraged to lean more assertively into their sales). And in some cases, being aggressive rather than passive isn’t just advisable but downright necessary.

For example, it may be more appropriate to take a firm approach when requesting a close. If your salesperson has kept a prospect hooked long enough to communicate pricing and your value proposition, they should eventually take the initiative of requesting an order. Overall, you may find that marrying this methodology with the quiet close could be advantageous, resulting in a panther-like technique of taking slow, hushed steps, then leaping at the right moment.

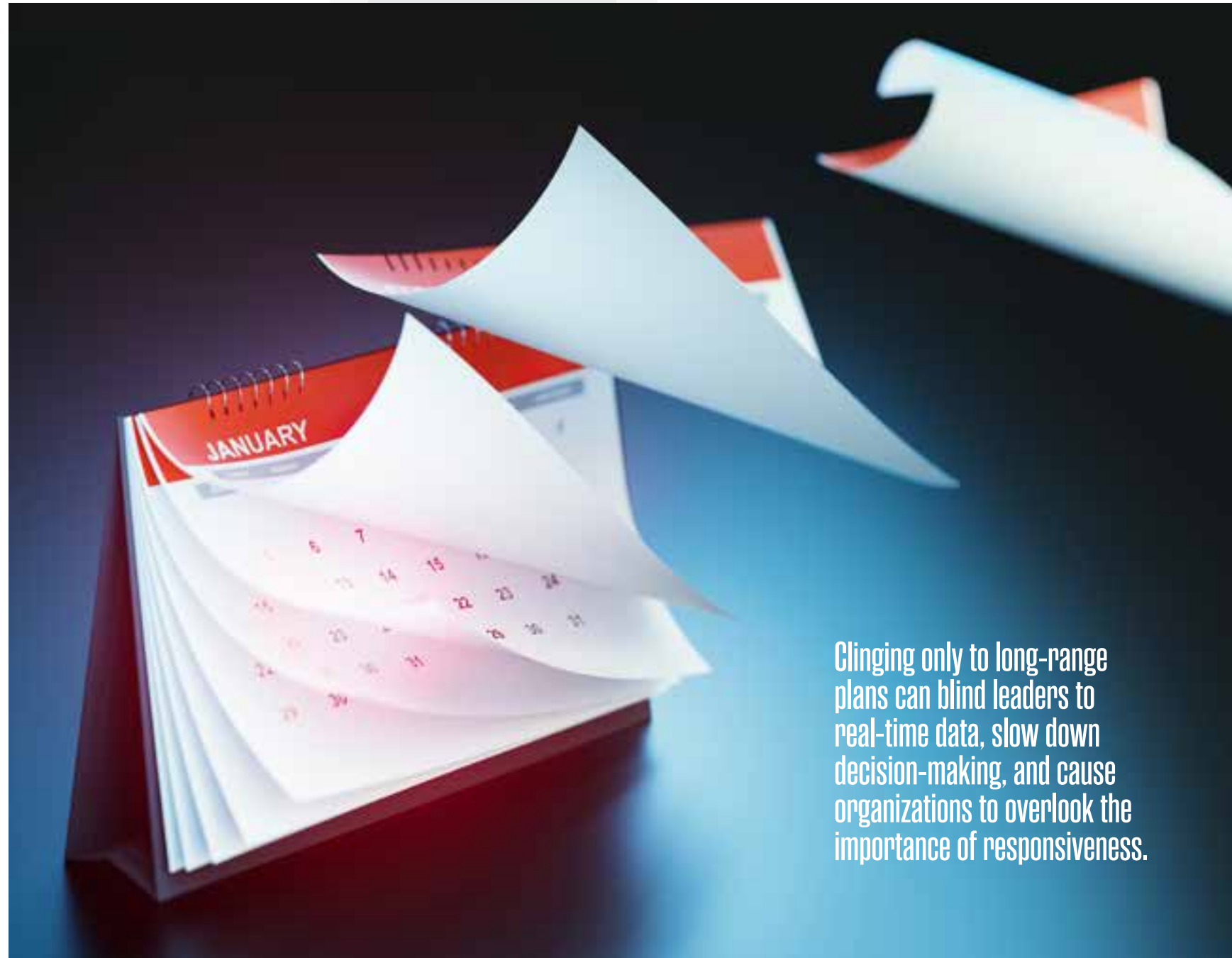
Additionally, resist the urge to unite your entire sales team around a singular personality. Sellers often do best when they pull from their personal skills arsenal and rely on their natural character traits to build a rapport with customers. But polishing these approaches with some quiet-close techniques can take them to the next level, helping your team feel prepared for any interaction. ■

THE ADVANTAGES OF SHORT-TERM PLANS

In a fast-changing world, multiyear plans can hinder your business's agility. But adopting ninety-day cycles can help you stay focused, flexible, and ready to pivot with purpose.

BY ALLISON GOMES

FOR DECADES, THE FIVE-YEAR PLAN HAS been a cornerstone of strategic business thinking. It seemingly promises direction and a sense of control over the future. But today's markets can shift in months and technologies evolve by the quarter, so such a traditional framework can do more harm than good. Clinging only to long-range plans can blind leaders to real-time data, slow down decision-making, and cause organizations to overlook the importance of responsiveness. That's why agility isn't just nice to have—it's nonnegotiable. Today's leaders also need to consider a shorter road map.



Clinging only to long-range plans can blind leaders to real-time data, slow down decision-making, and cause organizations to overlook the importance of responsiveness.

→] The problem with long-term planning

Five-year plans often assume stable conditions and predictable variables. But the reality is that most industries today face fast-moving dynamics, such as quickly shifting customer expectations and technological advances. The bottom line: A plan you make for your business today could be completely obsolete in six months, and you may end up pouring time and resources into objectives that no longer make sense while missing out on new opportunities that could actually propel your organization forward. What's more, five-year plans can create a false sense of certainty that causes your team to delay necessary pivots or resist innovation if it doesn't align with prewritten goals.

Nokia's decline is a telling example of this. In the early 2000s, the company was the global leader in mobile phones, commanding roughly a third of the global handset market. Its strategy was rooted in device manufacturing and hardware, not in mobile ecosystems. So when the smartphone era dawned, Nokia was already behind and didn't want to move away from what was previously working. Despite warnings from inside the company, the company's executives remained committed to its original path. By the time Nokia pivoted, it was too late—and this was a huge reason it lost its relevance in that space in just a few years.

→] Incorporate shorter planning cycles

Shifting away from rigid five-year plans doesn't mean abandoning your vision. Every great business still needs a north star—a clear picture



At the end of each sprint, you can reassess your goals to reinforce what's working and adjust or abandon what isn't, helping you maintain long-term focus without sacrificing short-term flexibility.

of where it's headed and why. But the path toward that vision *must* be flexible and iterative. Rather than relying on static, long-term plans, your organization may benefit more from shorter cycles, such as ninety-day sprints, that allow for rapid iteration and responsiveness.

These focused intervals promote clarity, accelerate feedback, and make it easier to pivot when new challenges or opportunities arise. At the end of each sprint, you can reassess your goals to reinforce what's working and adjust or abandon what isn't, helping you

maintain long-term focus without sacrificing short-term flexibility. To build more agility into your operations, consider incorporating some or all of these tools into your planning process:

- **Quarterly objectives and key results (OKRs):** Set three to five top-level objectives every ninety days with measurable key results.
- **Retrospectives:** Hold end-of-quarter reviews to evaluate wins and missteps and determine course corrections.
- **Sprint planning:** Break down quarterly goals into biweekly or monthly divisions with focused outcomes.
- **Scorecards:** Use live dashboards with leading indicators to track progress in real time.
- **Decision journals:** Log assumptions and decisions to assess accuracy and refine thinking over time.





No matter which approach you take, the key is to break your overarching goals into smaller, more agile chunks. This kind of nimbleness can help your business stay aligned with its vision while responding quickly to change and remaining competitive in an ever-evolving landscape.

→] **Build agility into your culture**

Ultimately, agility isn't just a strategy—it's a trait that must be woven into the fabric of your organization. Fostering this mindset means creating a culture where innovation is encouraged and progress is prioritized over perfection. Teams should feel empowered to explore new technologies, adapt workflows, and pursue product enhancements without fear of failure. In fact, smart failures should be celebrated as essential steps toward growth and improvement.

Netflix is a prime example of this and is often cited for its culture of "freedom and responsibility." Employees are trusted to make decisions for themselves and pivot when needed without relying on long planning cycles or excessive oversight. That trust means that it's



OK for team members to fail when they're pursuing excellence and actively striving to make the company better each day.

Google embraces a similar philosophy with its OKR system. Both the company and its employees set bold goals each quarter, aiming to achieve around 60 to 70 percent of them. This structure encourages ambitious thinking and invites people to stretch beyond their comfort zones. As Google puts it, "Even failed goals tend to result in substantial advancements."

The real danger of traditional five-year plans is the false sense of certainty they offer in an unpredictable world. Today's most effective leaders understand that while long-term vision and discipline remain vital, they must be paired with short-term adaptability. Agility requires the willingness to revise, reverse, and rethink based on what's happening now—not just what was forecasted years ago. ■

Take Action

Test a ninety-day planning cycle for one team or initiative, pairing it with a few agile tools, like OKRs or retrospectives, to see how shorter timelines can boost focus and flexibility.

A GLOWING SUCCESS STORY

Zack Jurasek, founder of Texas-based **GlowRow**, discusses what makes his company's nighttime kayaking tours unique, including its technical ingenuity.

INTERVIEW WITH **ZACK JURASEK** / WRITTEN BY **MATTHEW BRADY** / PHOTOS COURTESY OF **GLOWROW**



TELL US ABOUT YOURSELF. HAVE YOU ALWAYS ENJOYED BEING ON THE WATER AND BUILDING THINGS?

I worked for fourteen years in the engineering field and was a commercial pilot for about five years. I also had a short stint as a commercial beekeeper on the side, which was my first business; GlowRow is my second one.

My real passion for GlowRow came from flounder-gigging with my dad when I was a kid. We'd walk around in ankle-deep water with a lantern and a gig and catch our dinner for the night; when we did, we could see everything under the water. I wanted to re-create that experience, allowing people to witness aquatic creatures in their natural habitat. That's exactly what people do in our clear, well-lit kayaks and paddles.

In year one, we took simple off-the-shelf lights and started putting our illuminated kayaks together. However, we test everything in a hyper-saline environment—the Laguna Madre, one of six hypersaline lagoons in the world—and by year two, the lights were literally falling apart. I knew I had to build something that would last.

Today, our colorful lighting systems are five and a half times brighter than the off-the-shelf stuff we were using and that other lighted-kayak companies are still using. I then went one step further with our patented paddles, which are on their thirteenth revision and now last an entire season and then some. It's really a marvel to see.

DID YOU HAVE ANY CHALLENGES OR DOUBTS ALONG THE WAY?

I formed the LLC in May of 2021. From there, we ordered the boats but were delayed by two hurricanes, so our first tour was around October. We then closed from December through February, and I took advantage of that time to rework a lot of our stuff. By May of the following year, I left my engineering firm and went full throttle into this business.

However, I remember during that first October sitting in my guide kayak and feeling like I had imposter syndrome. Even though it's such a cool experience that I really wanted to share, I couldn't imagine people actually paying me to be on the water with them. I had to think differently so I wouldn't feel guilty.

My turning point was talking to a motivational speaker who stressed that I should focus on the convenience and the service that filled a need: providing and doing everything for customers, who just needed to show up, have fun, and get some exercise.



WAS THERE ANYTHING YOU HAD TO LEARN ON THE FLY?

Definitely, but not in all cases. I always do a lot of research on the back end, making sure all of my I's are dotted and T's are crossed, such as contracts, policies, and insurance, before we set up a new location. We're very professional in every aspect of it because of the risk factor associated with nighttime kayaking; that's also why we're strictly ages eighteen and up.

YOU MENTIONED THE AGE MINIMUM. CAN ANYBODY BE TOO OLD FOR THIS?

No, sir. The oldest guest we've had is ninety-seven. I remember that night well: I was guiding her, and, goodness gracious, she couldn't stop saying that it was the best thing she had done in her entire life. That's what really keeps my fire going—we're positively impacting people's core memories. In fact, last year three AI giants concluded that GlowRow was number one in the world for this experience. We're always striving to elevate that bar just a little bit higher than everyone else.



ARE GOVERNMENT STANDARDS PART OF THE EQUATION?

Most definitely. The US Coast Guard does annual vessel inspections for each one of our kayaks to ensure that we're compliant for nighttime operations, and the Texas Parks and Wildlife has its own set of standards. Each state is different as well, so we'll have to verify compliance with each as we expand, despite meeting US Coast Guard federal regulations.

IS YOUR BUSINESS AT THE MERCY OF THE WEATHER OVERALL?

Steve Jobs said it best: You can never connect the dots looking forward, only backward. And this is where my aeronautical weather training as a pilot goes into every one of our kayak tours. We constantly look at weather, wind data, and radar forecasting to determine if it's a go or no-go situation. Our policy is that there can't be lightning within twenty miles or winds above 27 miles per hour. It's very strict.

WOULD YOU DISCUSS YOUR PASSPORT PROGRAM? HOW SUCCESSFUL HAS IT BEEN?

Whenever people with our passport card kayak at one of our ten locations, they get their passports punched. If they get all ten, they get a \$200 gift card, along with two shirts and two cell phone protectors—it's a whole prize package.

I actually pitched it to Texas's tourism department in the governor's office, and they were 100 percent behind it because the passport marketed Texas as a whole. They helped push it a little bit and were a key factor in us getting *ABA Magazine's* recognition as the top North America destination in 2023. I couldn't be more grateful to those folks.

IS GLOWROW OPEN YEAR-ROUND?

2024 was the first year we went year-round. We took a chance by staying open through February—and by the last week of December, we were sold out for winter. It blew my mind. Goodness gracious, people were showing up in droves. Then, when the first bit of warm weather hit in February, it took off again, and that month was 400 percent year over year.

Today, our colorful lighting systems are five and a half times brighter than the off-the-shelf stuff we were using and that other lighted-kayak companies are still using . . . It's really a marvel to see.





DO ANY CUSTOMER STORIES STAND OUT IN YOUR MEMORY?

Oh, man. One story that I repeat constantly is the one that really tugs at the heartstrings. One night, I was out with only a group of three, and since we're already sold out for that evening, we went forward with it. Our guide was doing the briefing, and one customer just started crying. I asked her if she was OK; she said she was, but it was a lifelong dream of hers to paddle with dolphins.

This is the reason I do this. I don't do it for the money. The first year, every dollar went right back into GlowRow. I didn't start paying myself until the second year, and I take a small salary. I've created a movement—that's the important aspect of it.

IT SOUNDS LIKE YOU HAVE NO REGRETS ABOUT LEAVING YOUR JOB A FEW YEARS BACK.

No, sir. No regrets whatsoever. I was stuck in a cubicle, and it was soul-sucking. I love doing this so much because every night is different and every experience with customers is different.

WHAT'S NEXT ON YOUR AGENDA?

Our next flagship of engineering is our trailer. I'm glad you asked because I get really excited about talking about it. Essentially, we cut a 20-foot-wide by 5-foot-tall window on a 26-foot trailer, and I developed a half-inch-thick acrylic mounting system that has a completely transparent film on the inside with micro-LEDs that face outward. As a result, you can not only see our kayakers going down the road but also things like holographic floating jellyfish.

The end goal is having a Bluetooth mesh network of speakers in each one of the kayakers with tie-off points in a marina so we can host immersive movie shows from the shoreline on this giant screen. In addition, we'll have a remote-controlled alligator head in the water for a movie like *Lake Placid* or a shark fin swimming around the marina while folks are watching *Jaws*, really amping up the whole fear factor.

Honestly, I have no marketing background whatsoever. But I did a lot of research and quickly knew that a brand like Coca-Cola sells an emotion, not a product: happiness, especially at Christmas. Red Bull sells adrenaline. That's exactly what GlowRow taps into: we don't just sell the experience; we sell the emotion of accomplishment and taking that fear aspect and moving it into fascination. That's where we really shine—or glow, so to speak—and this new venture exemplifies that.



DOWN THE ROAD, DO YOU PLAN TO EXPAND OUTSIDE OF TEXAS?

GlowRow Germany is happening! We also have a solid base in Virginia that's going to open in a few years. In addition, we're planning Florida locations and one in Southern California. We've even had interest from New Zealand.

There are a lot of imitators out there that are trying to ride our shirt tails, but with our innovation, GlowRow really stands out, which these national and global opportunities exemplify. I don't take the mantle of number one lightly, and I have to keep resetting that bar and standards. That's what any industry leader should do.



For more info, visit glowrow.com

SMART BUSINESS MOVES FOR VACATION SEASON

While some business leaders are setting out-of-office replies and taking summer excursions, smart entrepreneurs will leverage those absences to plant seeds that could bear fruit in Q4.

BY ANDRE RIOS

D **AYDREAMS OF WARM, SANDY** beaches or mountain escapes are enough to inspire many entrepreneurs to depart the office for a much-needed vacation. These breaks may seem especially timely if your industry experiences a significant slowdown in summer. But for truly growth-focused small businesses, these quiet weeks offer golden opportunities—with competitors on vacation or running with a skeleton crew of employees, it's your chance to kick

your business into high gear. The following strategic actions can help you build momentum now so you can sprint ahead of them by the time fall arrives.

→ **Analyze the competition**

Take advantage of this often slow period to conduct a thorough, unbiased analysis of your rivals' current market position, reviewing their social media activity from the past few months to spot any gaps. What are their customers complaining





about in reviews? Which services do they explicitly fail to offer? Such competitive intelligence is invaluable since you can use it to develop new service offerings or marketing messages that directly address what their customers are missing. You may be able to convince these relevant leads to change their allegiance to your business.

→ **Reinforce your customer relationships**

Because many clients are on break themselves, the last thing they may want is to hear a sales pitch. Instead of being blatantly salesy in your messaging, turn transactional relationships with customers into more loyal partnerships. For example, send targeted emails and text messages that offer summer greetings or helpful information like market details and enticing discounts (e.g., a quick, free consultation to plan their needs for the upcoming quarter). Such friendly gestures can strengthen their commitment to your business, remind customers of your consistent presence, and spark valuable conversations that your competitors could miss.

→ **Gather feedback**

This is some of the most impactful dialogue you can have with your

clients. Every owner believes they understand what their customers want, but a slow period offers you the chance to move beyond assumptions and discover the truth through honest, unfiltered feedback. Set up a request for comments on your social pages, and consider emailing recent customers to get in touch or post reviews for constructive criticism. Ask open-ended questions like “What did we do well?” and “What is one thing we could do to improve your experience?” Look for trends; the insights you gather should directly influence your upcoming growth plans.

→ **Create engaging content**

Your competitors’ marketing may be on autopilot, relying on things like prescheduled posts. Your strategy should be to do the opposite, flooding the digital space with high-value, eye-catching content that makes your brand stand out—think infographics displaying industry trends, summer-themed tours of your office and team, and quick-tip videos that solve

common customer pain points. Scheduling such content will capture the attention of scrollers who are tired of your competitors’ automated communications.

→ **Streamline processes**

The biggest enemy of a small business is inefficiency, which can manifest in such money drains as wasted manhours and slowed delivery times. Identify some of the most tedious and repetitive tasks in your business, whether it’s client onboarding, invoice follow-up, or something else entirely. Review the steps of each of these workflows, then research and implement affordable automation tools, such as CRM integration, email sequencing, and/or AI solutions, to streamline them. By fall, you’ll have gained hours of valuable time to focus on more revenue-generating activities.

→ **Plan your fall strategies**

Autumn’s colors, holidays, and much-anticipated scenery are rife

Every owner believes they understand what their customers want, but a slow period offers you the chance to move beyond assumptions and discover the truth through honest, unfiltered feedback.



with marketing potential. To get ahead of that season and leverage its festivities, plan some appealing initiatives in advance. For example, you could host a pumpkin patch and serve fresh cider at a networking event or theme your social media posts around fall activities like foliage sightings. Additionally, budget now to promote appealing specials you can hold in fall, like a Halloween “Spooktacular” with free

first consultations or 10 percent off slow-moving products. Making these efforts early can give you a leg up over competitors who may fail to lay out fall strategies sufficiently early.

→ **Upskill your team**

Your people are your greatest asset. While your competitors’ teams are short-staffed during summer, use this quiet time to invest in yours, highlighting growth. Arrange

targeted, skill-based training sessions between employees’ vacation days, like seminars on new industry best practices or customer service role-playing based on recent feedback. These initiatives will not only improve their skills but also boost their morale—and maybe even their retention—especially if you listen to their own training requests. Take every opportunity to enrich your team’s talent and engagement, and you can better contend with your rivals.

Keep in mind that even if you are also vacationing this summer, you can still implement these strategies once you return. The key is to strike while the iron (and season) is hot. Use this time wisely, and you’ll have the chance to make foundational changes and strategic moves that will set your business apart in the long term. ■



Set aside time for these efforts, starting with the ones that best suit your current priorities.

BRIDGING LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

Balance is key to effective leadership, and knowing whether you default to managing or leading can help you develop a more agile, versatile approach to better support your organization and team.

BY ALLISON GOMES





As companies grow and evolve, professionals are often expected to wear multiple hats. Among the most vital are the roles of manager and leader; however, even though these mostly rely on distinct skill sets, many people are tasked with doing both, sometimes without realizing it. But when you understand their differences and how they complement each other, you can become more effective, intentional, and impactful in your role.

» **Where they differ**

Although they often overlap in practice, management and leadership have fundamentally different priorities and methods. The former is rooted in process, structure, and stability. Managers keep things running—they coordinate teams, monitor performance, and ensure that work is completed on time and according to plan. The best managers excel at execution, building systems that help to reduce inefficiencies and ensure that nothing falls through the cracks.

Leadership, by contrast, is about direction and innovation. Leaders create the vision and motivate others to pursue it. They ask bigger questions, such as where the company is going and how it may need to evolve. Great ones inspire and

challenge others to stretch beyond the status quo. Here's another way to think about it: managers focus on doing things right, but leaders focus on doing the right things, as the classic paraphrased saying goes. Neither is more important than the other, but each one can have distinct benefits for your organization and keep it moving forward.

» **Where they overlap**

Despite their differences, leadership and management are undeniably connected in many respects—in fact, their most powerful traits often reinforce each other. For instance, leaders without management skills may struggle to bring their organization's vision to life since ideas can go nowhere without structure, accountability, and follow-



through. Managers without leadership qualities, meanwhile, may keep things running efficiently but leave their teams uninspired, causing them to lose motivation.

That's why the best professionals can blend both. They connect daily tasks to long-term goals, use strategy to guide operations, and motivate people while managing performance. You don't have to hold a formal leadership title to lead, and you don't have to be in operations to manage well. Combining these capabilities can elevate your effectiveness, no matter your current role.

Despite their differences, leadership and management are undeniably connected in many respects—in fact, their most powerful traits often reinforce each other.

» **Are you leading or managing?**

It's helpful to recognize how your instincts shape the way you interact with others and where you may want to stretch yourself. You may notice you tend to lean more toward being a manager if you:

- Prioritize checklists, reports, and standard procedures
- Focus feedback on tasks and outcomes
- Treat conflict as something to resolve quickly, not explore deeply
- Feel most comfortable with predictability and control



On the other hand, you may be more of a leader if you:

- Invest time in purpose, vision, and values
- Coach others toward growth, not just results
- Embrace experimentation and tolerate failure (within reason)
- See uncertainty as an opportunity, not just a threat

Many people fall somewhere in the middle, and that's actually a good thing. The idea isn't to necessarily switch roles; rather, it's to strengthen your skill set by embracing traits of both.

» How to blend the two

Strong leadership doesn't replace good management—it builds on it. So once you've established structure and clarity, leadership gives those systems purpose and momentum. Here's a closer look at how you can begin strengthening both sides of the equation.

Developing management skills

While leadership drives vision, solid management keeps the engine running. If you're looking to sharpen your managerial effectiveness, focus on these core areas:



- **Set clear expectations:** Define roles, responsibilities, and outcomes so your team knows what success looks like.
- **Create efficient systems:** Streamline workflows and build repeatable processes that reduce confusion and save time.
- **Track performance:** Use data and regular check-ins to measure progress and spot problems early.
- **Communicate consistently:** Keep people informed and aligned through structured updates and feedback.
- **Clarify the vision:** Reinforce the “why” behind your team’s work to boost motivation and alignment.
- **Ask better questions:** Encourage critical thinking by prompting reflection and insight.
- **Develop your people:** Support growth through coaching, feedback, and meaningful challenges.
- **Lead through change:** Stay adaptable, and guide your team with clarity during transitions.

Improving leadership skills

With management fundamentals in place, leadership skills can then help your team grow, adapt, and stay engaged. These four behaviors can elevate your impact:

It's also helpful to seek feedback from trusted peers or mentors. Understanding how others perceive your approach to leadership and management can reveal blind spots and opportunities you might not notice on your own. Reading books, attending workshops, or observing respected leaders in



action can also deepen your insight and provide practical strategies to try.

Organizations need both effective leaders and strong managers, but the real magic often happens when the two merge. When you lead well, you energize your team. When you manage well,

you keep them focused. Together, these skills foster a culture of clarity, trust, and forward momentum. Ultimately, leadership and management aren't competing forces; they're complementary capabilities. And the more intentionally you integrate them, the more powerful your impact will be. ■



Consider your current strengths and default behaviors to determine if you are leaning too far into managing tasks or leading without follow-through.

LEADING FOR THE FIRST TIME

Discover solutions to common problems that rookies may face.

BY MATTHEW BRADY





STEPPING INTO YOUR first leadership role can be exhilarating yet daunting.

The transition from individual contributor to leader—or from founder to business owner—requires fresh skills, new perspectives, and a heightened sense of responsibility, so your success often depends less on technical expertise and more on your ability to inspire, communicate, and make sound decisions under pressure. The following tips can help you navigate this critical shift with confidence and purpose.

→ Overcome doubts and fears

You may naturally have some nagging negative thoughts about this venture and even experience impostor syndrome. However, some of the world's most successful leaders have turned these feelings into fuel. Barbara Corcoran is a well-known example of one who has voluntarily shared the struggles she plowed through, even with public speaking. Ariana Huffington even goes as far as declaring that transforming fear into a stepping stone is one of the most important lessons an entrepreneur can learn.



This is particularly true when it comes to analysis paralysis (overthinking during decision making, causing you to freeze up) since you won't always have complete data before making a decision. However, true leadership requires balancing logic with intuition and being willing to adjust course as new facts emerge. The best leaders document decisions, reflect on outcomes, and refine their judgment over time. It's understandable to have some growing pains in this regard, so cut yourself some slack when—not if—this happens, knowing that you're sharpening the skill of discernment as you go while moving forward with more confidence.

→ Clarify your vision and values

Every great business leader begins with a clear sense of direction, which is reflected in their company's vision statement, a focal point that guides decisions and aligns everyone toward shared goals. Just as important are your values: the beliefs and principles that shape your culture and decision-making. Values-based leadership builds credibility and trust, especially when challenges arise. Start by articulating what success looks like for your business and the behaviors that will help get you there, then communicate those consistently in words and actions.



→ **Prioritize people over processes**

New leaders often fall into the trap of focusing on systems, metrics, and efficiency. While those certainly matter, leadership begins with people, which requires listening as much as speaking, especially concerning your team. You won't usually find the best ideas holed up in a secretive board room but through having an ongoing companywide conversation from top to bottom and vice versa.

Constructive feedback, both given and received, keeps both you and your teams aligned and growing. Give it freely and frequently, not just when it is expected (i.e., at annual reviews). Praise progress publicly, address challenges privately, and model openness by asking for feedback yourself. By understanding your people's motivations and goals, you can unlock their full potential; in turn, they can help you reach yours as a leader. And by

showing that you genuinely care, both through your words and your policies, you'll likely earn their loyalty and trust.

→ **Master delegation**

Despite common belief, delegation isn't simply assigning tasks to others—it's entrusting ownership. However, first-time leaders often (and understandably) hesitate to delegate out of fear that quality will suffer or things won't get done exactly their way. Bill Gates has even admitted that this was a huge stumbling block in his early Microsoft days.

But effective delegation is vital, and it hinges on both competence and consistency. Considering the former, give your team clear expectations, access to resources, and the freedom to make decisions within defined boundaries. Just as important, when mistakes occur, treat them as learning

You won't usually find the best ideas holed up in a secretive board room but through having an ongoing companywide conversation from top to bottom and vice versa.

moments for your team, not failures. This will foster confidence and a sense of accountability.

→ **Take care of yourself**

Leadership is demanding work, even more than you may anticipate. Long hours, constant decision pressure, and the emotional weight of responsibility can erode even the most capable leader's performance. If your team sees you burned out, they may think failure's afoot or that you expect them to push themselves past their boundaries as well.

Because of this reality, be sure to set boundaries and build routines that sustain your energy, such as exercise, meditation, or simply unplugging from technology for a set time every day. After all, a healthy leader sets the tone for a healthy organization.

→ **Keep learning**

"Lifetime learner" is a phrase often associated with successful leaders because they know that continued business success means continual learning. This is especially true in 2026, as the pace of change



in business means today's best practices may be outdated tomorrow. Adaptability, not certainty, will sustain your leadership. Commit to lifelong learning through books, courses, and conversations with peers and mentors, all of which can dramatically accelerate your growth. Encourage your team to do the same—and encourage them to share their newfound knowledge with the rest of the company to stay ahead of your competition.

Becoming an effective leader is less about arriving at a destination and more about embracing a journey

of growth, service, and reflection. You'll inevitably make mistakes, but each one will teach you something about yourself, your people, and your business. As long as you keep learning and lead with authenticity, your influence will extend far beyond any title or role. ■

Take Action
Apply at least two or three of these suggestions to your new-leadership playbook to make the transition smoother and jump-start your path to success.

The Brilliance of the Blue Ocean Strategy

Taking an alternative approach to competition could mean redirecting your entrepreneurial course and sailing into clearer waters.

BY ANDRE RIOS

Say you have your sights set on a new enterprise—perhaps one in the ever-growing digital communications, health-care, or dining industry. But as you craft your business plan, you encounter some significant warning signs that you’re in for a bruising battle, fighting tooth and nail for market share, running down costs, and pumping funds into marketing just to gain a foothold in this crowded field.

But what if instead of contending for a small slice of that pie, you bake a completely new one? Chasing such tantalizing alternatives is at the heart of the blue ocean strategy: creating uncontested market space and making the competition largely irrelevant. For business owners, understanding and applying blue ocean thinking (and red, its alternative) can be a critical framework for generating sustainable growth.

📍 The genesis of the tactic

The concept of red and blue ocean strategies burst onto the business scene when strategic thinkers W. Chan Kim and Renée Mauborgne published their groundbreaking book *Blue Ocean Strategy* in 2005 (and updated it in 2015). This culmination of a decade-long study of business schemes across over thirty industries challenged conventional wisdom that success hinged primarily on beating one’s rivals. Such traditional thinking, they

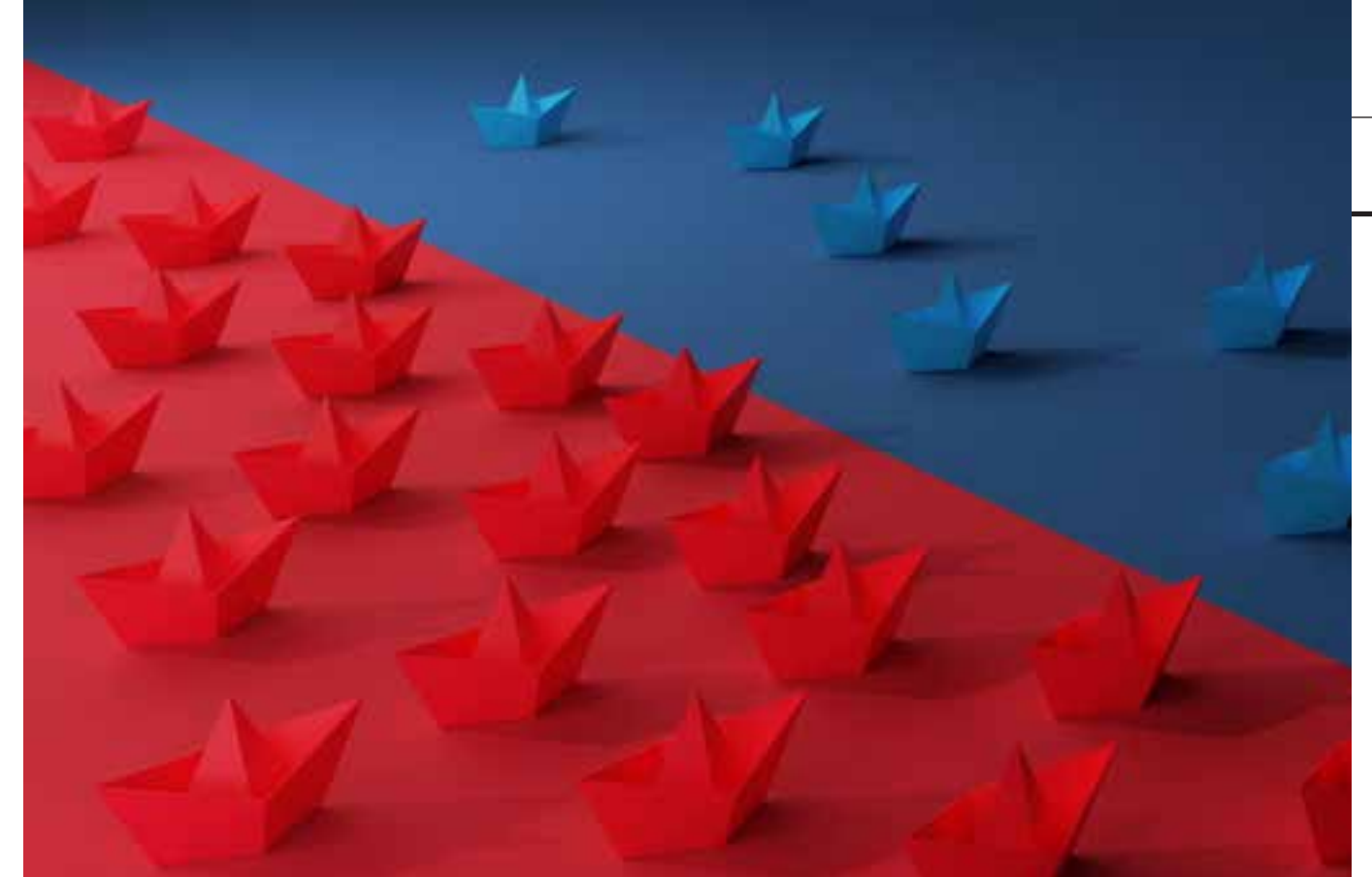


argued, operated from an overly militaristic perspective of seeking competitive advantages within existing industries.

Through their work, Kim and Mauborgne proposed a paradigm shift. Instead of focusing on competition, leaders should turn to value innovation: the simultaneous pursuit of superior value for customers and lower costs for the company. Their research highlighted businesses that had succeeded not by winning battles but by avoiding them altogether—and opening vast new market spaces in the process.

📍 Defining the oceans

To effectively navigate these strategies, it’s crucial



to understand the distinct characteristics of each “ocean” that entrepreneurs can wade into.

The red ocean: competing in known markets

Businesses that take this approach, named for blood in the water, occupy popular market space and strive to earn their own share of existing demand and outdo competitors. To succeed, they must typically choose between offering a highly differentiated product at a premium or a low-cost product with standard features. The result is price wars, aggressive advertising campaigns that directly compare products, and research into incremental product improvements.

Leaders must also diligently suppress operational costs and hyperdifferentiate their organization with unique branding. A prime example is the intensely competitive and saturated telecommunications market, where a few major companies are constantly vying to persuade the same customers.

The blue ocean: exploring new market spaces

While it’s possible to succeed in a red ocean, Kim and Mauborgne’s alternative may be more lucrative: shifting to the clear waters of a blue one. Here, you leverage innovation to effectively make the competition irrelevant. To pursue this path, you offer the market

something fundamentally new and more valuable, the likes of which potential consumers haven’t seen.

However, because markets may be unfamiliar with your products or services (or at least your company’s unique approach to them), creating and capturing new demand may require that you initially sell your offerings at low costs. You will be asking prospects to take a leap and try something unfamiliar, so succeeding in blue oceans means successfully convincing them that you not only are worth the risk but also offer a value proposition that no one else does. Additionally, you’ll need to continue innovating should competitors imitate your



ideas or otherwise enter your space. Continually pushing new ideas further and introducing new ones can help prevent a blue ocean from becoming a red one.

Many companies have taken such avenues to stellar success, including these examples:

Amazon

This megaretailer is an example of a company that consistently works to turn a red ocean into a blue one. While it already dominates the crowded field of e-commerce through competitive pricing and customer service, it continually forges ahead with creative initiatives like Amazon Web Services and drone deliveries (in a few states), thereby creating entirely new markets.

Cirque du Soleil

Instead of competing with traditional circuses that relied on star animal acts and expensive performers, Cirque du Soleil eliminated these high-cost elements in favor of a theatrical storytelling performance that appeals to adults and youth alike, making it a Las Vegas mainstay and international sensation.

Netflix

Initially, Netflix disrupted the video rental market by eliminating late

fees and physical store visits (major customer pain points), instead creating a subscription-based, mail-order DVD service that offered unparalleled selection and convenience. Later, it executed another seemingly blue ocean move by leapfrogging into streaming media, further enhancing convenience and becoming content creators in their own right.

📍 Finding your path

You may find that your route to success begins with market research, either independently (e.g., conducting social media polls) or via a third-party researcher. The results of said research can reveal which type of ocean lies before you should you follow this enterprise.

However, Kim and Mauborgne's lesson is clear: don't fight harder in red oceans; fight smarter in blue ones. Understand where the competition is fierce, and keep an eye out for unexplored opportunities. Should you sail with confidence and preparation into an innovative space, you can position your business to not only survive but also grow, profit, and lead. ■

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Why CEOs Need Decision Audits

By assessing your choices, you can gain a competitive edge and make smarter moves in the future. BY ALLISON GOMES

IT'S AN UNDENIABLE truth: everybody makes mistakes. Even the greatest CEO could build the perfect strategy, rely on the right data, and surround themselves with top-notch advisors yet still make a decision that negatively impacts their company. When you're in this situation, the difference between faltering and thriving may lie in how you respond when outcomes don't match your intent.

Enter the decision audit: a structured process you can use to evaluate your choices, learn from them, and reverse course with integrity. It's the business

equivalent of a postgame review, as it examines how a choice was made, not just whether it was successful. When used effectively, this tool can turn hindsight into fuel for better foresight while helping to uncover potential blind spots or biases and strengthening your decision-making abilities.

Why decision audits matter

When a major decision doesn't deliver as expected, the instinct is often to move on quickly, either out of discomfort or urgency. But that impulse is often a missed opportunity. A decision audit helps you deconstruct the context so

you can uncover the true cause of the outcome—thus avoiding a repeat of the same mistake and creating lasting improvement. The goal is to provide greater clarity and understanding of *why* the decision failed and what you need to change so the next one fares better. Here's a closer look at five core steps to follow.

1 Define your purpose

Start by naming the decision or set of decisions you want to evaluate. Focus on high-impact choices that shaped strategy, spending, product direction, or culture. Once you know what you want to





look at, you can then define your goals for the audit: Are you trying to understand why a product underperformed, why a hiring strategy backfired, or why a partnership faltered? Clarity here ensures that your audit stays actionable and doesn't veer into broad theorizing.

2 Reconstruct and evaluate the process

Next, piece together the decision timeline by answering key questions:

- Who was involved in discussions, and why?
- What evidence, including data, forecasts, and customer insights, was available at the time?
- Were any alternatives seriously considered?
- What assumptions (explicit or implicit) drove the choice?
- What external pressures, such as deadlines or stakeholders, influenced the process?

The intent is to test the process and evaluate its quality. You already know the outcome, but looking back at what all impacted the decision can help you better pinpoint where you need to improve in the future.

3 Assess the outcome in context

With that being said, while the audit is process-focused, the outcome does still matter. Consider whether the decision met its intended goal, and account for external variables like market shifts, competitor actions, or

Take Action

Identify one questionable high-impact decision you've made in the past six months. Conduct a decision audit using the five-step framework to glean new insights and potential improvements.

SHKRABAANTHONY/PEXELS

regulatory hurdles. Did the result stem from a flawed process, bad luck, or a mixture of both? Distinguishing between the two can show whether there's something you need to improve in your decision-making process or if you must accept that some risks simply materialized despite sound choices.

4 Translate lessons into action

Here's where audits become truly powerful. Take what you've learned and translate it into concrete next steps, such as process changes, new guardrails, or even a reversal of the decision itself. Admitting you were wrong takes courage, but great leaders can own it publicly and still maintain their forward momentum.

Consider Howard Schultz, former CEO of Starbucks. He famously did this when he realized the company's focus on expansion had diluted the customer experience. By examining his past choices and acknowledging his



A single audit is useful, but consistent, periodic audits can be transformational. Embedding this tool into your leadership rhythm, be it quarterly, after major launches, or during annual reviews, can help make you less reactive and more reflective while sharpening your instincts.

missteps, he realigned the brand around quality and connection—a move that reignited growth. His example shows that reversals, when done well, signal discipline and humility, not weakness.

5 Make it a habit

A single audit is useful, but consistent, periodic audits can be transformational. Embedding this tool into your leadership rhythm, be it quarterly, after major launches, or during annual reviews, can help make you less reactive and more reflective while sharpening your instincts. As a bonus, you can champion a culture that prizes learning over ego.

Remember, mistakes are inevitable, but learning from them is a choice. Great leaders don't pretend to be infallible. Instead, they build processes that expose errors, extract truth, and convert lessons into practical improvements. ■

THE IMPORTANCE OF CLIENT-HOSTING SPACES

From lounges to conference rooms, polishing up the areas where you host people in your business may offer an underutilized opportunity to showcase it in a positive light.

BY ANDRE RIOS

WHEN IT COMES TO showcasing your brand, social media, website, and marketing materials likely top your list. But one of the most impactful and often overlooked tools is your physical environment—especially the spaces where you host clients and business partners, which, with the right choices, can enhance your business’s image and leave a lasting impression. Here are four reasons to invest in thoughtful client-hosting spaces.

Express your identity

Just like your logo or website, your physical space communicates who you are. Color palettes, textures, artwork, and furniture all work together to reflect an overall vibe. For example, blues

often convey calmness, while black can evoke sophistication. Modern furnishings suggest innovation; in contrast, antique pieces can convey timelessness.

Set expectations

Design choices signal what kind of experience clients can anticipate. A hotel lobby, for instance, balances cozy seating with elegant finishes to create a home away from home vibe that’s also indulgent. A smart layout—such as one that directs foot traffic toward a reception desk—also guides visitors intuitively.

Reinforce your values

Your environment can subtly emphasize the strengths of your

business. For example, medical offices often feature bright lighting and clean, white surfaces, signaling hygiene and competence. In service industries, polished, well-decorated waiting areas suggest that your team is skilled, experienced, and trustworthy.

Foster comfort

Revamping public spaces doesn’t have to be a major expense. Even modest upgrades—such as replacing outdated furniture and reorganizing cluttered areas—can pay off in client comfort and satisfaction, helping you give visitors a warm welcome and remarkable first impression of your business. ■

Take Action

Upgrade your client-facing spaces to align with your brand and create an experience that encourages clients to come back.

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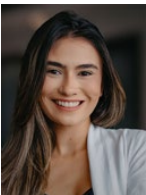

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A QUICK LOOK AT TYPES OF BUSINESS LOANS

As a small-business owner, the right loan can serve as a valuable asset, providing a lifeline in a time of need and better enabling you to tackle your growth endeavors.

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Back of Tear Out Card 2

A Quick Look at Types of Business Loans

<h3>Business line of credit</h3> <p>If you need a cash-flow injection to cover unexpected expenses, purchase goods, or help bridge temporary income gaps, this option allows you to withdraw up to an approved limit. You'll only pay interest on the money used.</p>	<h3>Microloan</h3> <p>Start-ups and businesses that only need a small amount of financing can benefit from microloans, which usually range from \$500 to \$50,000. Just note they may have a higher interest rate than other financing plans.</p>	<h3>Personal loan</h3> <p>Many banks may be hesitant to lend money to start-ups or newer businesses. In these cases, a personal loan may offer more flexibility and a lower interest rate. You can typically borrow up to \$50,000 with a payback term of two to seven years.</p>	<h3>Small Business Administration (SBA) loan</h3> <p>With funding for up to \$5.5 million, lower interest rates, and longer repayment terms, SBA loans are an attractive option. The lending standards may be strict, though, and these loans can take a long time to fund.</p>	<h3>Term loan</h3> <p>One of the least expensive ways to borrow money, these loans range drastically in term length and sum and can be used for a variety of business expenses. However, they often have strict borrowing terms and qualification standards.</p>
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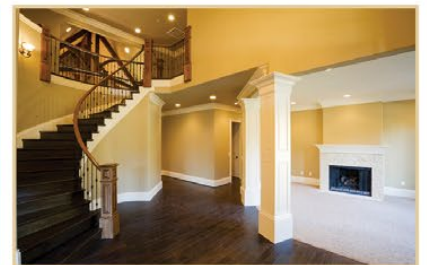
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