

# Corporate Survivors

## Corporate Performance through Individual Achievement

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Helping companies achieve business goals by ensuring:  
the leaders communicate a measurable vision;  
the sales team delivers the business;  
and the organisation is aligned to the common purpose.

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This article is based on a keynote speech given by Tony Latimer, Asia's Sales Coach, at the Singapore Mergers & Acquisitions Conference 2002 and was first published in The Straits Times 2002 and the Singapore Institute of Management Journal 2003.

## Motivation & Adaptation in Mergers & Acquisitions

**When the market gets tough, when layoffs abound, when reorganization is a regular event, when business is hard to come by...**

**You need a sharp team to stay committed to your organisation. A team that can think "out of the box" and be creative in finding ways to get business, a team that delivers top level service to customers. Most important, a team that remains motivated. So, what happens during Mergers and Acquisitions and how do you keep people motivated?**

Once Upon A Time, there was a chicken who made a reasonably good living out of supplying eggs for people to eat. Now this chicken was a wily bird and by no means satisfied with the living she was making. She had Ambitions! In the same village lived a number of pigs. She observed them carefully for some time, then one day approached one of the plumper pigs and engaged him in casual conversation. Gradually she brought the conversation around to the subject of making money and having a better lifestyle. Now the chicken, although she wouldn't have given the name to it, was quite skilled at NLP type conversations. In no time she had the pig agreeing that he would be very keen on an opportunity to expand his lifestyle and be part of a bigger business opportunity.

"Well I have thought long and hard about this" said the chicken "and I believe I have hit on the answer".

"Wow" exclaimed the pig "I want in. What is it?"

"A Merger!" declared the chicken proudly "People buy bacon, your specialty; and eggs, my specialty. Now, I have studied the market and noticed a growing usage of both bacon and eggs as a common early morning meal for humans. If we merge our specialty areas we could be the world's first provider of Complete Breakfasts! Just think of that. Imagine how it will feel when you have captured a whole new market and made a fortune! Hold that thought in mind as you sign this contract; and we'll start first thing tomorrow."

The pig, who wasn't the sharpest tool in the box, got very excited. After signing the contract he trotted around the village grinning stupidly to himself and mumbling "A Whole New Market! Complete Breakfasts!" over and over again. The chicken smiled gently to herself and went off to have her lunch.

Later in the afternoon, the pig began to look a bit troubled. He sought out the chicken and began hesitantly, "Chicken, I've been thinking about this merger thing. Now you get up every morning and lay eggs, right?"

"Right." Said the chicken impatiently.

"But you only get bacon by cutting a pig up, right?"

"Yes" said the chicken exasperatedly.

"So doesn't that mean I am going to die tomorrow morning?" said the pig worriedly.

"Hey! That's Mergers." exclaimed the chicken.

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**Let's start by looking at the two aspects.** The problems that occur and then how to keep people motivated. Over the years I have worked in several organisation that have been through mergers and acquisition. Some I survived. Some I didn't. But a common problem I noticed was the fear, uncertainty and doubt that comes into play immediately there is any talk of a merger. What is going on?

**Avoid Secrecy.** Management is often terrified of giving out information. Unfortunately in it's absence people assume the worst. Everyone feels in fear of losing their jobs. Mental wheels start spinning and what the company has done is guarantee lower morale and productivity. From everyone. If people will be affected, tell them fast and provide supportive services to help them find new opportunities. An increasing number of outplacement companies are now looking to provide coaching services to individuals rather than just Job Hunt services. This helps the individual widen their scope and evaluate more options.

**One Time Pain.** If possible, cut once. A company I worked for made retrenchments every quarter for three quarters in a row. And each time lied and said it was not going to happen again. Their staff morale never recovered. They retrenched the people they thought they could afford to lose and tried to keep the people they wanted, who then left anyway!

**Invest In The Rest.** Invest in the people who are still with you. Words don't count; actions do. Don't go the route of "Motivational Talks".

### **RULE 1: You cannot motivate Me. Only I can Motivate Me.**

I have found, however, that such talks can be "Inspirational". You could certainly make a case that being inspired by someone telling the story of how they overcame some great difficulty in their life and made some considerable achievement may inspire members of the audience to face their own difficulties and challenges with renewed vigour. But unfortunately the talk will not tell them HOW.

Why? Because the speaker is talking about themselves; not about you. And the company's words don't hold so much credibility right now. Any inspirational feeling tends to last for just a little longer than the talk. After that the pressures of life and your own problems come crowding back in.

So, what are people motivated by? Solutions to their own specific problems which help them achieve what they want to achieve.

I have read many articles and opinions on schemes for motivating people and retaining employees. The tendency is to assume that any one solution will work for a number of people. This approach misses the key point. To work a solution must be aimed at an acknowledged need/problem where the person concerned actually wants the problem solved.

**RULE 2: A Solution can only deliver Benefit when matched to an acknowledged Need.**

One of the tasks, and challenges, as a manager of people is to get them to be fully capable of doing the best for your organisation and to want to do the best for your organisation; then stand back and let them get on with it. For this to happen they must be both appropriately Skilled and Motivated. Think of that strange game which is played on an ice version of bowling lanes. One player shoves the puck down the lane. The rest of the team (the management?) influence it's speed by brushing the ice in front of it to either speed it up, or slow it down. But never interfere by touching it. Your role is to smooth the path in front of your people and direct the way things unfold.

You need to understand and resolve two things: Aspirations and Inhibitors. If you understand their Aspirations, you stand a chance of structuring a future with them that takes them where they want to go and which will be of value to you. You will be able to work with them to identify any skill areas for improvement or acquisition to get there. If by unfortunate chance their aspirations and the potential offered by your organisation do not match (and you have creatively explored whether adapting to take advantage of their aspirations could be a new opportunity for the organisation) then their future will probably lie elsewhere. Problem? No, better to know now and manage the situation to mutual benefit than have an unfulfilled employee who will under-perform (or worse be a negative influence). As experience has shown, a facilitated move outside an organisation does not preclude a return when you can match their aspirations in the future. And you benefit from a more experienced individual who has gained skill you now need, is known to you and knows your organisation. A much more productive hire.

**Inhibitors.**

Inhibitors are either fears or problems. Fears or concerns may be in regard to the organizational future, the individual's place in that future, their ability to perform. Just about everything I can think of including in this category can be solved by information. If you don't ask, you don't know. If you don't know, you can't solve. In today's world of uncertainty and change there is no mileage in keeping employees in the dark. Share information, get people to embrace change and take ownership of moving forward.

**Problems.**

Problems come in two flavours. Environmental problems and task problems. Environmental problems are the things around the organisation and it's systems, methods etc. that make getting the job done well and delivery of best service difficult. These things you can fix once you know they exist.

Task problems are those that relate to why the individual is not doing the best possible job. A skill is weak or missing. Again, once identified and agreed, you can fix it. Of course there are both individual skills and team skills. Developing team skill needs to be the subject of another article.

**RULE 3: Understand Aspirations and Inhibitors, then take action.**

But for now, think of the individual who now has all the skills to excel at her/his job and deliver results, they have no organisational hassles or obstructions to get in the way. Best of all they have an agreed longer term objective for their career; and an agreed roadmap for getting there...WITH YOU!!

**Motivated? I think so.**

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