

1 of 1 DOCUMENT

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Pitfalls of Copying Industry Leaders; Winning traits are found in non-conformists who blaze their own path and raise the bar.

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The title of an article I ran across recently, "Beware of Best Practices," was intriguing enough to get me to pick it up and read it. Authors Jimmy Vee and Travis Miller (who, with marketing guru Joel Bauer also penned *Gravitational Marketing*) are marketing experts and consultants. The fundamental premise of the article is that striving to emulate leaders in what has been termed "best practices" will only lead, at best, to match what someone else has already achieved. This does not give you a competitive edge; it merely allows you access to ground already gained by others.

They believe that most people, and companies, have a tendency to conform, while truly successful players strive *not* to conform or to adhere to ordinary traits. Becoming extraordinary, and achieving extraordinary results, results from a lack of adherence to normal thinking. Vee and Miller identify six traits through their research that typify what the ultra-successful do differently than the ordinary:

Exploit Your Uniqueness-Rather than trying to be everything for everyone, recognize what your competencies are and use them to drive success. Focusing on your strengths leads to success while trying to develop weaknesses merely dilutes your overall position.

Ask Better Questions-Success does not mean you have all the answers; quite possibly you just asked more, and tougher, questions. While it is simpler to avoid tough questions, successful companies develop a culture supporting aggressive problem-solving that includes digging into difficult areas.

Push Forward Thinking-That you're reading this is a good indication of a desire to learn. Successful people, and the companies they run, strive to constantly update and educate themselves. Research has consistently shown that profitable printers outspend on a percentage basis less-profitable competitors in the area of training. Education is constant. Use articles, books, seminars and other means.

Take Risks-Does your company punish failure or view it as a learning opportunity. Cultures based on tolerating

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informed risk-taking reap rewards and recognize that setbacks will occur but will also improve the ability of the company to compete going forward. Learning organizations strive to improve- and recognize some risk must be taken to do so.

Fight-People seem to naturally shy from confrontation. Successful people express passion for what they do and believe in and are willing to engage others to assure their success.

Leverage Time-Everyone has the same amount of time with which to work. Do you view time as a valuable resource, or as something there is always more of? Successful companies are masters of managing change and creating a sense of crisis to drive change. They view time the same way they view their cash: as a valuable asset to spend wisely on processes that deliver a positive return.

Applying to print

Economic reality in the print industry and difficult competitive conditions make it imperative that any printer striving for success is operating at its best. If your definition of best practices leads you striving only to be as good as others who are currently better positioned, then, arguably, you are aiming too low.

So ask yourself: Have you defined winning traits for your firm, or are you satisfying yourself with trying to emulate others?

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