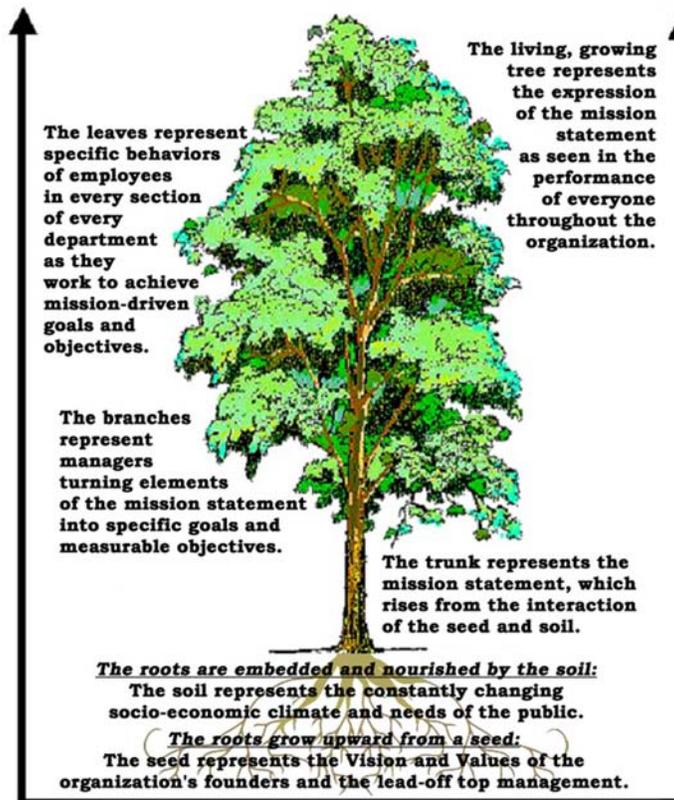


Look *Beneath* the Box¹

Arnie Dahlke
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Everybody (including me) talks about thinking *outside* the box—creating, innovating, and inventing new products and new ways of doing things. Several people even urge looking *inside* the box—looking at processes and people, realizing there are many potential opportunities and possibilities that we have missed. These both are good ideas.

However, in these economic times, we should start by looking *beneath* the box, focusing on the *vision* and values of an organization that started it all. An organization grows from them like a seed gives birth to a tree. The vision is shaped by the economy of the time and marketplace needs. It is then translated into a mission statement, which becomes the generic goal of the organization. Driven by the vision and mission statement, the organizational tree grows...



Some businesses are tempted to scrap or drastically alter their vision to deal with an economic crisis. Resist that temptation. You may destroy your organizational tree.

Instead, focus on the soil that represents the current cultural, socio-economic climate. What changes have resulted from the current crisis? What can you do to adjust to those changes? What

¹ From: <http://arniedahlke.com/timelytips.htm> —Please take a moment to look at Arnie's site: www.arniedahlke.com

strategies can you develop that will keep your business thriving and even lay the groundwork for future expansion after the economic storm has passed.

Begin by looking at three major conditions in today's climate.

First, consider the desire of customers to cut their own expenses by narrowing their purchases to those products and services they really need and finding where they can do so at a competitively low cost. People are trading down to buy cheaper private brand products instead of national brands. How does one adjust to this condition?

Wal-Mart is a great example. In March, responding to increasingly price-conscious customers, the company reshaped its *Great Value* private brand with more than 80 new products and distinctive packaging, including many new items such as double-stuffed sandwich cookies, frozen pizza and organic cage-free eggs. They redesigned their packaging, simplifying it to give it a consistent appearance across the store, making these products easier to find.

The second condition in today's climate is twofold: (1) the cluster of rapid technological changes that have occurred in our culture and (2) the dramatic increase in the immigrant population, especially Hispanics.

Technological advances have led to more people having direct access to and shopping on the Internet. Nutrition Geeks, a company that offers nutritional supplements online, has established a "pay-it-forward" program: when customers place an order, 5% of their order total (less shipping) is "banked in the customer's account." Then, the next time a customer places an order, the banked money is deducted from the new order. This program not only gives customers a discount on already competitive prices, it also builds repeat business and generates customer loyalty. In addition, Nutrition Geeks offers free shipping for orders of \$25 or more.

The growing immigrant population has led businesses to target them. In North Carolina, with a booming immigrant population, businesses are tailoring their products and tweaking their policies to reach newcomers from Mexico, Honduras, Guatemala, Colombia and other Latin American countries. Paid tax preparation chains, such as H&R Block Inc. and Liberty Tax Service, are attracting immigrants through greater marketing in their native languages. In an effort to appeal to the fast-growing Hispanic population, Wal-Mart is opening two supermarkets targeting Hispanic consumers in Arizona and Texas—the stores will be called Supermercado de Walmart.

The third condition in today's climate is emotional. People are anxious. They are longing to feel good like they felt during better times. What can you do to make your customers feel good?

The owner of a Deli in Ohio is a good example. He goes the extra mile to offer good food at a good price. And he makes a point of saying "hello" and "goodbye" and "thank you very much." He also has oldies music playing over the sound system and food and entertainment oriented collectibles scattered through the store. And, he has a menu of sandwiches named after the culinary personalities showcased on the Food Network. All of this produces a cheerful atmosphere that helps customers feel good when they come in to eat.

These are just a few examples to stimulate your thoughts about how to deal with today's economic crisis by *thinking beneath the box*—revisiting the "soil" that nurtured your company's growth. Focus on your vision in the context of the current crisis and develop strategies that will keep your business thriving—and even lay the groundwork for future expansion after the economic storm has passed.

The important point is to focus on things you can do to strengthen the long-term life of your company rather than totally reinvent your business.