

WHITE PAPER: *Leading in Times of Ambiguity*

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The article below was written specifically for leaders in the pharmaceutical industry; in reality, the strategies recommended here apply equally to a great many different industries. Businesses today are undergoing unprecedented change, and it's going to continue. Here's how effective leaders can take advantage of the ambiguity and come out on top.

While there is no easy roadmap for success in the pharmaceutical industry today, the executives who ultimately lead the pack will be those who leverage the current uncertainty to their advantage. Charles Darwin said, "It is not the strongest of the species that survives, nor the most intelligent that survives. It is the one that is most adaptable to change." To not only survive, but succeed, keep these three points in mind.

Don't let ambiguity overwhelm you.

The challenges that confront you as a pharmaceutical leader seem to grow with each passing day -- whether they involve adapting to a new CEO, parent company or organizational structure; dismantling a team you've spent time developing; walking the tightrope of working with sites in lower-cost locations; or finding yourself competing against your former global partners.

Regardless of the reasons, your strategy during this time of uncertainty should be the same: it's time for situational leadership. You'll have to decide whether it's appropriate to stand out right now or whether it's better to stand back (at least temporarily).

Keep in mind that there are no surefire strategies. Executives who spend their time seeking quick fixes will be disappointed with the results and ultimately unsuccessful in both their leadership strategy and career path.

Network – both internally and externally.

This should not be an afterthought; you cannot afford to be insular in a changing industry. It's a given that you need to network externally, within the pharmaceutical field, as well as in your social and professional circles. However, many executives tend to forget that networking *inside the company* is just as important, perhaps even more so, in times of change and ambiguity. Within your company, you should network in all directions -- up, down, and with your peers.

For instance, do you know . . .

- Who is your mentor?
- Who is your internal advocate? (This is not necessarily the same as a mentor.) Who will speak for you behind closed doors? In fact, do you even know what they say about you behind closed doors?
- How well do you “play in the sandbox” with your peers?
- Do people want to work with you -- and for you?

This is far more than having a sound business strategy. These are critically important soft people skills -- leadership, motivation, collaboration – that are never more valued than during times of crisis or change.

Don't be like that pharmaceutical executive we've all met...If you drive your colleagues crazy and find it difficult even to build a team, it's unlikely you will fare well when new projects are being assigned or when downsizing decisions are being made, no matter how business-smart you are.

Leverage the ambiguity.

Know what's around the corner. If you're not curious, you're dead. Look beyond your immediate area of expertise. Educate yourself on the competition, new markets and products, and the landscape of pending and potential acquisitions. The more you know, the better prepared you are to step up and lead when a new project, position or assignment opens up.

And don't confine your reading to *Pharmaceutical Executive*, *The Pink Sheet*, and *The Wall Street Journal*. All are important, but you need to go beyond your recognized area of expertise. Consider *The Financial Times* (www.ft.com), *Foreign Affairs* (www.foreignaffairs.com), *The New Republic* (www.tnr.com), and *The Economist* (www.economist.com). These additions to your regular reading will help you expand your horizons and open yourself up to new ideas, to concepts you can make use of as a leader.

When you consider an appropriate time, present your well-researched ideas. (I can't emphasize the “well-researched” enough.) Offer substance. Use your internal and external networks to think through and vet your ideas.

Keep these three points in mind, and you will be well prepared for what's ahead -- and more likely to come out ahead as a current or future leader.

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About the Author:

Marilyn Nyman is no stranger to issues of leadership and organizational effectiveness. For 25 years, she's watched executives rise and fall -- based on their ability to master the “soft skills” needed to lead others. More importantly, Marilyn is a veteran entrepreneur who has founded two ongoing, successful businesses – both built on the study and practice of communications – proof positive that she doesn't just talk about leadership, she lives it. One of her businesses, Nyman

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