

## The Right Time

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Every day there's a new challenge, a new problem, another issue. We spend so much time trying to "hold the line", that we forget to look after the improvement needs of our business. To remain competitive in today's rapidly evolving marketplace, it's essential that a business not only performs well at the outset, but also continues to develop its products, processes and infrastructure on an ongoing basis. In this scenario, improvement isn't an option; it's the choice between long term success and ultimate failure.

As we've witnessed recently in so many different industries, today's market leader can easily become tomorrow's market loser. All clichés aside, a business that fails to progress forward isn't merely standing still, it is moving backwards. If you don't improve, you're allowing your competition the opportunity to figure out a way to do things better. When this occurs, you've lost your distinction in the marketplace and likely, a fair amount of your customer base, assuming they haven't been acquired already. Distinction in the marketplace is what makes market leaders, and this distinction only lasts until the competition catches up, or comes up with a better way to do things.

It's easy to say that the timing may be better later; that the issue isn't important enough right now. Between fighting the fires of the day and dealing with whatever the crisis of the moment may be, it can be hard to distinguish between what really is important, urgent, what is both or what is neither. Waiting for the "right time" to address improvement is about the same as trying to improve your revenues by buying lottery tickets; the probability is there, but your chances are somewhere between unlikely and non-existent. There are two times we can safely bet on however; there is a time when improvement is beneficial (now), and there will be a time when improvement is too late. Unfortunately, the latter is risky gamble for planning purposes, as it's usually a date you won't see coming.

We mistakenly attempt to prioritize our need for improvement relative to internal factors (budgets, resources, scheduling, reject rates, etc.), as these influences are known to us and are within our control, hence the "right time" mentality. We ignore the myriad of external factors that exist, those that we have no control over. This allows us to view improvement as an activity that can be segregated from other core business processes, and that can be addressed on the basis of convenience and opportunity, rather than necessity. By focusing solely on these internal factors, we are often driven or forced to improve by the marketplace, rather than addressing improvement on our own terms.

The "right time" for improvement isn't something that can be planned or marked on a calendar, as the need for improvement is perpetual. While you are checking your calendar for the right time to focus on improvement, your customers are actively looking for better ways to do business and your competition is always looking to take away your customers.

Waiting for the "right time" may be waiting for an opportunity that never comes.



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