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Soaring With The Eagles: Rebounding Your Business From The Brink Of Extinction

By Dan Stockdale



Happily, our children may never know that the bald eagle, the proud symbol of the United States, was once nearly extinct. In the 1960s, there were fewer than 500 pairs in the United States, because of shootings, pesticides, habitat destruction and pollution.

Thanks to the endangered species and environmental protection laws and other conservation efforts, the bald eagle, though still considered "threatened," has been brought back from the edge of extinction.

As a business leader, what can you learn from the eagles about coming back from setbacks, big or small? Are you facing the total "extinction" of your organization or do you want to avoid that possibility before it gets any closer?

Consider what eagles can teach you about regaining or maintaining your company's status from your perch high atop the cliffs overlooking your vast corner of the world!

Develop an Eagle's Eye

Eagles are renowned for their excellent eyesight. They can scan thousands of acres as they soar up to 10,000 feet above the ground. Eagles actually have two centers of focus, which allows them to simultaneously see forward and to the side. An eagle can spot a single fish while flying several hundred feet up in the air.

Such keen vision could come in handy even if you never make it out to a lake. Honestly assess how observant you are: Are you able to look below the surface of an issue to see the source of conflict? What is your level of insight into the people and problems in your organization? If you have difficulty

are you willing to hire the professional resources you may need so that you can accurately visualize the situation?

You must develop the eagle's dual vision to recover from business difficulties. First, seek to see clearly in the present, observing honestly the current realities of your situation. Then simultaneously develop a positive vision of the organization's future. In other words, to get through setbacks, you must be in the present moment but also able to look beyond the moment. Do not allow yourself to get caught up in anxiety and self-pity about the obstacles you face.

To pull yourself out of a crisis you must make a realistic assessment of where you stand and determine how you got there as honestly as possible. Get as much information as you can from others. Determine both how you got off course and what strengths your organization has that may allow you to compete again. Gather those around you whom you believe can offer fresh insights and ideas for recovery and listen closely to what they have to say.

Adapt by Adopting an Action Plan

Eagles' nests are between five and ten feet in diameter - some can weigh up to a ton! They are built in trees or cliffs near coasts for easy access to fishing. If a natural disaster destroys the nest the eagle pair will not spend time arguing about who or what is to blame for their loss. Instead, they work together to rebuild the nest in time for breeding season.

Assess with your team what brought you to your current state of crisis.

Form a united vision for your future and get to work on building your nest.

Make your vision happen. Many organizations have vision statements that serve little purpose other than to adorn a plaque in the lobby. Others may have once lived by their stated vision and mission but got caught up in daily crises and have lost sight of their original goals and have no action plan to attain them.

Revisit your organization's existing vision and determine if it is applicable to the current realities. Can it be adapted? Or must you create a new vision of the future altogether, given the current state of affairs and the prospects for the future? Always keep in mind the necessity to move forward. Action is strength.

Sharpen Your Talons of Determination

When an eagle hunts, it swoops down to seize its prey with powerful, sharp talons that produce approximately 1,000 pounds of pressure per square inch in each foot.

Do you have the same degree of strength within yourself? You need that sort of determination to succeed even when you're not in a struggle to avoid extinction. When you are threatened you need it all the more.

When you can say with certainty that you have the desire to lead your organization to success, you then need to look at top managers and see whether they, too, share this strength and desire. Your key people must be fully invested in your efforts in order for the team and the organization as a whole to succeed.

Negative naysayers among your key players aren't likely to ever buy into your vision. You can still use your own strength to try to convey the message to them once you've determined how long you can wait for their buy-in. If your naysayers aren't on board within a reasonable amount of time you may have to use those talons to lift them up and deposit them on the farthest shore so you and your team can fly on to success.

Protect Your Fledglings and Your Nest

Eagles are very progressive by human standards in terms of their sex roles.

They mate for life and both parents share all hunting, egg incubation, nest watch, and eaglet feeding and brooding duties until their young can fly at about 12 weeks. In spite of their fierce protectiveness and tender attention to the eaglets' needs, only about 50% of eaglets hatched survive their first year.

That figure is reminiscent of an often-quoted statistic about business failure, isn't it? Consider the fledglings as analogous to your "new" organization which is emerging from your new attention to the vision, goals, and action plan to attain them. Just as the care, feeding, and training of eaglets is not a solo sport, nurturing and growing the organization after a crisis will require everybody to make it work.

Your protection must be diligent. Guard your organization fiercely from predators in the form of your competition. They may be looking to pick off a newly reorganized institution. You may find other businesses trying to recruit your top talent, for example, while your organization struggles to retain them. So tend to your talent with a careful eye on operations and resources.

Throughout this process, you must remain constantly vigilant in order to know everything - good and bad - that's happening so you can avoid being blindsided by a sudden storm or marauders bent on destroying your work.

Survive, and Thrive, the Eagle's Way

From the beginning of the history of the United States the bald eagle has faced struggles. Ben Franklin originally proposed the wild turkey as the nation's living symbol of Freedom, Spirit & Democracy. Fortunately, he didn't get his way and the rest of the founding fathers prevailed in naming the bald eagle as the national icon. "After all, a 'Nation of Eagles' has such a better ring to it than a 'Nation of Turkeys'", says Al Cecere, President of the American Eagle Foundation.

Then, after nearly wiping eagles from the face of the earth mankind turned its efforts to saving the noble birds. After four decades, this attention has paid off in a revived eagle population. Such patience and determination are yet another metaphor you need to follow if your organization is faced with "extinction." You shouldn't expect a complete, overnight change in the circumstances that caused your difficulties. You must have a strong sense of purpose even when prospects seem grim. You must also rely on a trusted team to help you accomplish the goals that support your vision for the revitalized organization. Although it may take awhile, you can soar in the thermals once again!

About the author:

Dan is the author of the book "Taming Tigers" and President of Adventures in Leadership, Inc., a speaking, consulting and educational firm that specializes in applying his Taming Tigers Techniques to improve organizational effectiveness, enhance sales performance and increase revenue. You can find out more about Dan Stockdale by visiting his website at: <http://www.AdventuresInLeadership.com>

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