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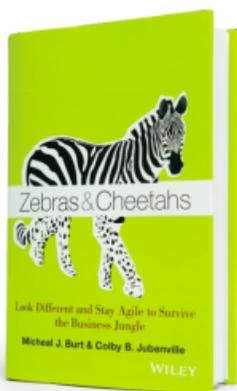
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Hearing the message

Setting the stage for innovation calls for clarity, coaching

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For more information on *Zebras & Cheetahs*, visit zebrasandcheetahs.com

Too often in the run-run world of business, new ideas are pushed away because they might be a threat to the status quo or get in the way of a to-do list of urgent items that may or may not be important to companies' strategies. In the newly published *Zebras & Cheetahs: Look Different and Stay Agile to Survive the Business Jungle*, local consultants Micheal Burt — a former basketball coach — and Colby Jubenville of Red Herring and Middle Tennessee State University have teamed up to delineate for leaders a strategy to (re)focus their team and spur growth and innovation.

Jubenville recently sat down with *Post* Editor Geert De Lombaerde to talk about *Zebras & Cheetahs* and detail some of the finer points that help organizations lay the basis for better understanding their customers and innovating their products and services to drive growth.

Give us a quick explanation of the zebras and cheetahs

model.

All companies are made up of people. People within any company want to know three things: Who is in charge? What are the rules? How will I be held accountable?

The model provides a series of tools that help companies clearly answer these questions and does it in a way that is engaging and fun.

The Z&C model is made up of five simple steps:

1. Equip with focus and emotion.
2. Empower with excellence.
3. Create the scoreboard.
4. Coach 'em up.
5. Throw in thunderbolts.

Does the concept work better with certain types of organizations or companies competing in specific industries?

The model was not built for a single industry. It was designed to help companies and people realize their potential, the energy that is stored until utilized. We believe that coaches, more than any other group, help release potential.

At the heart of the Z&C model is a coaching philosophy that doesn't rely simply on asking questions. Rather, it demands immediate action. We call that philosophy The Coaching Revolution. And the revolution is driven by a mindset that you either are a coach, have a coach or don't want to be coached. If you don't want to be coached, you will be left behind.

Coaches, in the model, help the company do three things. They make people have conversations that may not want to have. They make people do things that may not want to do. And they help

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leaders become something they didn't think they could become.

As we developed and implemented this model into companies, we knew we would be held responsible regardless of whether we were successful or not, but one thing was for certain: We wouldn't get positive results if we couldn't put together a model toward a successful future with a dominant focus. That is something all companies need in order to win today.

Your emphasis on being agile — and thus innovative —relies on getting a team focused on one goal. What do organizations that are able to do this get right day to day?

It's more than goal setting. It's about a dominant focus. Being agile is about seeing and seizing opportunity. Innovation is about creating and delivering unique value. Culture drives agility and innovation in any organization.

Being intentional about how people see and seize opportunity and how unique value is created and delivered separates one company from another. Companies that get it right provide clarity through a dominant focus so that everyone understands their role and expectations within the company and collectively, where the company sees its future.

And you're of the opinion that it very often takes outside actors to generate some changes and open the door to innovation — and then to sustain that innovation.

Not just outside actors, but inside actors as well. We believe thunderbolts are a necessary part of driving innovation within any company. A thunderbolt is an unexpected jolt of energy that is created to move people out of complacency and re-energize them.

Sustaining innovation requires a different, but just as important approach. We call it The Shift, which has four steps: Hear the message, internalize the message, let the message inspire you and teach the message to others.

The message, almost always, has an element of a desired level of performance or success. Innovation begins by hearing the message. It is sustained when it is internalized, begins to inspire new levels of performance and then is taught to others.

You say the key to a company's enduring success is answering why clients want to have a relationship with it. Doesn't that approach come with the risk of getting left behind by peers with a wider view of potential opportunities? People often cite Steve Jobs' philosophy of creating products people didn't know they wanted as a model to follow.

Jobs focused on simplicity above anything else. Companies that get it right today know what the customer wants from them and deliver on it every time. They don't get caught up in competing on commodity — which is what their competitors do. These companies believe that customers walk around with expectations in their head and know it's up to the company to understand those expectations and work from that in order to consistently deliver.

The first step toward becoming zebra different and cheetah fast is looking differently at your organization by asking, "Why does our customer choose to spend time or money with us?" and then building products or services that answer that question. That makes up a company's unique perspective.

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