

The Envelope, Please!

By:

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Envelopes!

Many of us remember watching the Johnny Carson Show when the “Great Karnack” would hold up an envelope to his turbaned head and gave the answer to questions still unseen on the inside. The questions always brought about anticipation, suspense and laughter when aligned with the already announced answer.

Envelopes are interesting. Envelopes come in different sizes, colors, and are often provocative in what they contain on the inside. Junk mail envelopes are a nuisance and we don’t even look inside of most of them prior to tossing them into the “round file”. But, there are certain envelopes that literally scream at us to open them as they promise to bring both satisfaction and excitement as we slit open the fold over and get at the contents!

Harvey Mackay, who built MackayMitchell Envelope Company, that produces four billion envelopes a year, started by purchasing an insolvent company with three old folding machines, one printing press and less than thirty employees. Their web-site says that “today, in three modern plants, MackayMitchell Envelope can produce over 25 million envelopes a day.” How do they do it? Observations are that it was through personal quality service. Knowing what their customers need and getting out in front of them in order to perform in such an extra-ordinary way that they exceeded their expectations.

The Leading Edge.

How many times have you heard that an organization is “on the leading edge”? A number of times I have even heard of organizations described as being “on the bleeding edge”! The latter must be referring to a company that is so strung out in keeping ahead of the game that it is being beat up on both its internal and external fronts!

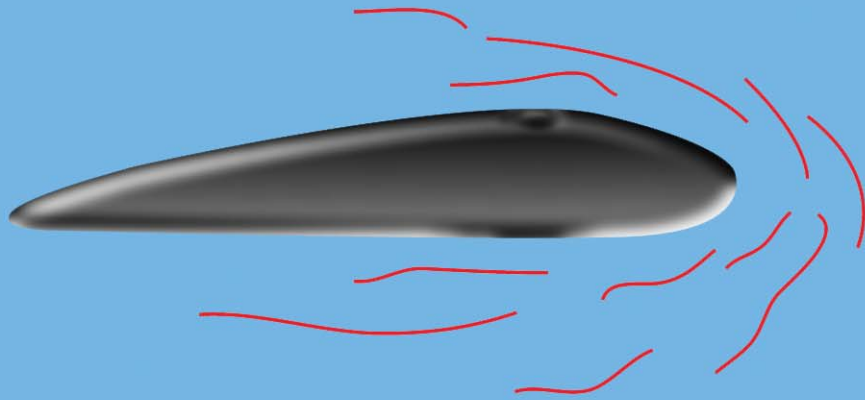
If truly someone or a company is on the leading edge you would expect that they are in an enviable position when compared to their competitors. Not true, in fact, the leading edge can be a trap that provides false security in a world of incredible change and intense competition.

Can We Do Better?

Yes, we can do better, and in fact, must do better than being on the proverbial “leading edge”. Where we need to intentionally be is out in front of the leading edge in the “**envelope of change.**” Being out front of the leading edge provides us the opportunity to prepare the way for the good things to happen!

We can illustrate the idea of the “envelope” in relation to the leading edge by taking a look at a silhouette of an airplane wing as it engages the atmosphere. We note that the front “edge” of the wing is the “leading edge”. However out in front of the tip of the wing is a special place called the “envelope” where the leading edge engages reality!

The Envelope of Change



It is No Longer Good Enough To
Be On The Leading Edge!

The envelope out in front of the leading edge is not a comfortable place as it is where all the heat, pressure, uncertainty, risk and ambiguity are coming at us all at the same time. Yet, as an individual or an organization, that is where we must be! We must be in the “envelope”, out in front of the “leading edge”, doing everything we can to prepare the engagement with the future to be as smooth as possible. The goal is to create such a terrific environment that our customers, as they engage tomorrow, will have the optimum conditions to do so.

Act, Rather Than React!

The late Harry Quadracci, CEO of Quad Graphics, Inc., is a great example of a business owner who understood the “envelope of change” concept. His statement that “change is our bread and butter, we see it as our job security”, puts into action a priceless corporate operational asset. Quadracci knew that to not change put both his company and his customers at risk.

The power of synergy!

Synergy occurs is when the “whole is greater than the sum of the parts”. This happens when inter-relationships foster opportunities that leverage elements that bring about conditions that exceed expectations. Hence, “synergy” has much to offer and is a great friend of the envelope of change.

The author recently had the privilege of providing the keynote address to dedicate the new Ariens Technology and Engineering Center at Brillion High School in Brillion, Wisconsin. The Brillion community, led by Steve Meyer of the Technology & Engineering Program at the High School and Dan Ariens, CEO of the Ariens Company, established an “envelope” to ensure both the success of the students who graduate from the program and potential future employees of the company.

The Technology and Engineering Program focuses on “creating innovative thinkers and doers for the 21st Century! The success of the program is evident as enrollment has tripled and lab space was tight. The Airens Company was so struck by the dynamics of the program that they built the new Center for the school by the tune of \$1.5 million! The students of the Technology and Engineering Program align their creativity and talent with the vision of the Ariens Company which states in their Creed that “we believe in passionate people and astounded customers”! The synergy that is emerging between the high school and the Airens Company is beyond imagination! The promise that this “envelope of change” is bringing to Brillion will be felt well into the years ahead as it fuels the economy and contributes to the “quality of life” in the community.

Seeing the horizon:

The late Sydney Harris once stated, “The horizon is a definite place when you are standing still. But, it always recedes as we approach it and we should keep this in mind when we think we have the future well at hand.” If we take the posture of the envelope of change, then when others are approaching the

horizon, they will look up and find us already there, well positioned, and welcoming them to a better tomorrow!

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