

KENNETH B. LERMAN

Business Growth Consultant

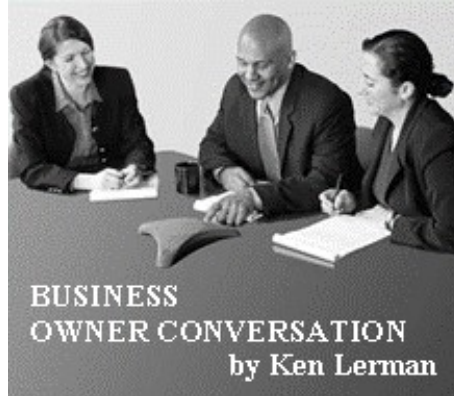
email: lermank@kenlerman.com • www.kenlerman.com

1668 N. Sagebrush • Wichita, Kansas 67230

Office (316) 733-5800 • Fax (316) 733-5077

2010 Positive Beginnings

My ongoing business commentary and advice remains positive as 2010 begins. This positive disposition is based on how well independent U.S. business owners have adjusted their attitude, thought process and competitive strategies throughout second-half 2009.



During last year's market downturns, owners wisely invested in internal self-disciplines. Owners shed the weight of excess spending, eliminated repeated errors, lax management and sloppy performance.

During 4th quarter 2009 while I surveyed and spoke with business owners and managers throughout the U.S., smart new business strategies were identified and their comparative (vs. competitive) advantages are being leveraged today. Becoming more and more uncomfortable with the "pity me" and false paralysis of fear, owners no longer remained stuck, frozen like a deer in the headlights of uncertainty. Facing market realities and challenges, many are now taking "strategic aim" on shorter term revenue generating opportunities revealed within a sporadic up and down "W Economy" that will continue for some time.

As owners leave their old landmarks, I'm seeing a growing respect and excitement for new business and market opportunities.

1. Strategic Advancement

Being preemptive (first) and aggressive with re-engineered solutions or services and efficiently stimulating increased niche demand is a business keynote as we enter the second decade of the 21st century.

Walmart.com, taking aim at Amazon's Achilles heel, is leveraging their physical advantage of thousands of store locations to become number one online.

Walmart.com is making it easier for shoppers to retrieve their online purchases by locating new service desks near the front of the store. Strategically advancing its business, through online purchase

convenience, Walmart is currently testing a drive-through window similar to those found at pharmacies and fast food restaurants, where shoppers can quickly pick up their internet orders.

2. Keeping Close(r) to the Customer

By carefully and intelligently speaking face-to-face with customers – current and potential – you keep your business current and relevant to customer need and want priorities. Saying you care about your customer doesn't mean you do.

2009 collaborations with customers and suppliers have yielded refreshed consolidated product lines, and more meaningful, substantial "value added" solutions that generate value and profit for both the seller and buyer.

Commercial customers are increasingly telling me, "I don't mind paying a little more for a product or service solution that really does perform better and lasts 2 or 3 times longer than brand 'x.'" To be successful here, participate in the customer's test criteria and evaluation of you vs. brand "x."

Building and retaining customers requires you to be the knowledgeable teacher, communicator and trusted resource throughout your customer's organization.

It's Not All Rosy

Ominous clouds are forming.

Throughout the industrial northeast disappointment among many levels of management and labor is openly and often mentioned. Many of the 30 and 40 year company employees who planned on retiring now can't or won't. Employee loyalties to the family- controlled public and private companies have faded with their sale to foreign investors. The new owners have placed selection and control of corporate senior management in the hands of Wall Street portfolio managers and equity investment firms.

Visiting the office of a Fortune 100 company, I walked through the very same doorway and plant entrance where I began my career. I reminisced with plant and quality managers who I worked alongside in 1976 on important product outcomes that you continue to enjoy today. "Those were exciting days," they said, then quickly shared, "It's not family any longer. I've worked here for 35 years, my owners and supervisors don't know me or what I've given for this company – and don't care to know. I've missed too many holidays with my family. Retirement won't be what I planned financially."

Younger workers don't know or care to know about employee loyalty. They expect to be replaced by a younger, lower paid worker during one of the next big economic meltdowns – regardless of their performance, experience or talent. "I give them time, they give me money – live for today."

My discussions with owners and managers throughout the U.S. will continue over the next four months. I expect – hope – there will be a difference in some findings and directions when compared to the northeast.

To the many who thanked me for last month's article, "The Business of a Christmas Carol," thank you – and to all a Happy and Prosperous 2010.

I am for business,

Ken Lerman

Copyright. © 2010. Kenneth B. Lerman. All Rights Reserved.

Ken Lerman is a national business growth consultant, a national speaker, management trainer and author for U.S. business across a diverse range of industries. He can be reached at 1668 N. Sagebrush, Wichita, KS 67230. Visit www.kenlerman.com. Email Ken at lermank@kenlerman.com or call 316-733-5800