

COMFORTABLY NUMB

“Hello, is there anybody in there? Just nod if you can hear me.
Is there anybody home?”—PINK FLOYD

D by Steve Harvill

damn the status quo and bless the status quo. This dichotomy of feelings may sound strange, but it plays a real role in what’s going on out there.

If you are an existing, successful company you should be damning the status quo because it’s killing you.

Every Monday I have regular strategic meetings with clients. Every Monday I see the status quo sucking the life out of their future. They are so mired in their daily existence, that they can find no time or energy to look forward, to focus on planning for a very different future, a future only marginally similar to their present. We launch strategic initiatives designed to do everything from increasing leverage with top customers to repositioning the visual impact to leave a stronger, more permanent impression. When it comes time to discuss these ideas the common answer is—we simply didn’t have enough time to deal with those issues. HUH???

You didn’t have enough time to look at your future; instead you focused all your energy on your present, a present that isn’t even there anymore. It is not a matter of how much time; it is a matter of how YOU choose to spend your time. The energy being focused on the status quo is staggering. It has made many organizations “comfortably numb”. Don’t believe me, try these examples:

- * Intel, the once dominate player in the computer chip market again lost market share to Advanced Micro Devices. Supply problems, stalled PC sales and so on were blamed.
- * India’s golden goose, the outsourcing industry, is already facing serious prob-

lems. A labor crunch and rising wages could erode as much as 45 percent of India’s market share by 2007.

- * GM and Ford continue to lose significant U.S. market share and predictions show that GM’s current 24 percent share will shrink to 18 percent within the next ten years.

Who is the culprit? You guessed it, too much focus on the status quo.

Now, who should bless the status quo? Entrepreneurs, that’s who! The status quo creates niche business opportunities faster than Mars can make M & M’s. Some are huge chasms of markets and others are tiny fissures of opportunity.

- * Costco dukes it out with Wal-Mart on a huge retail battlefield. They are the fourth largest retailer in the U.S. and the ninth largest in the world. They do \$52 billion in sales with over 120,000 employees. At that size you would think the status quo would create a huge case of entropy, but you would be surprised. They see opportunity everywhere. They are always looking for new products and new services. They recognized the high desire for natural food and double their commitment in that area. They shine in surprising places—they are number one in sales of Dom Perignon. They spend time on tomorrow.
- * With wine sales growing all the time is there really room for another concept? In Amsterdam, Grape District has found a niche. They simplified a process often swimming in terms such as tannins, mouthful (huh?) and appellations. Go in their clean,



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modern stores and you will find wines in color coded zones by flavor. They are a huge success and planning a U.S. opening in 2007. Even in a business of selling wine, there is profit to be made by bringing fresh, well designed ideas to the table.

So, what can you do to avoid the static crush of the status quo and grab an uncertain future by the creative horns? Try this:

- * After a success (big or small) call quick DGJ (darn good job) meeting. The purpose is two fold; one, to let people know what they do is appreciated and two to tap into the energy of success. Did you know the best time to leverage a success is at the point of success?
- * Allocate time for ideas. Have a real meeting with the purpose of discussing ideas. Provide some structure around initiatives and then allow the flood gates to open. Never allow these “noise” meetings to go more than an hour, but get them on the books, NOW.

As we develop a cruise control mentality through our daily lives, we stand the real chance of becoming, “comfortably numb”. ☺☺