



DESIGNING STRATEGIES®

Business Strategies for the Design Industry

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Terri L. Maurer, FASID

The 2007 Fortune 'Top 100 Best Companies to Work For' is out. Once again, several of our own have made that coveted list. Milliken ranked 92nd, Herman Miller ranked 96th and Sherwin Williams ranked 98th on the list.

Milliken was cited as providing extensive hours each year for professional training of its staff, having an on-site fitness center, allowing for telecommuting and its diverse workforce: 40% of their employees are minorities and 39% are women. They also have a strong nondiscrimination policy.

Herman Miller was cited for their job growth in 2007, an on-site fitness center and subsidized gym memberships for employees. They provide job sharing and a condensed work week, as well as allowing for telecommuting by employees. Their staff consists of 20% minorities, 40% women, and an impressive 23% of their workers have been with HM for more than 20 years. Like Milliken, Herman Miller has a strong nondiscriminatory policy in place.

Sherwin Williams ranked 98th, boasting of recruiting employees for the long term. Their CEO has been with the organization for 25 years. Of their staff, 10% have been with SW for 20 or more years, and another 30% of their staff have been with them for more than 10 years. Like the others, they have a fitness center on site and subsidize gym memberships for employees. Extensive professional training is provided for employees, of which 22% are minorities and 20% are women. SW also has a nondiscrimination policy.

Congratulations!

There was an article in the 1/27/08 issue of 'The Columbus Dispatch' concerning a growing number of furniture manufacturers and retail stores in the area either going into bankruptcy or completely out of business. While the much-discussed mortgage lending fiasco was certainly a contributing factor, this trend had been growing for some time.



Sofa Express was in the news a while ago announcing it would close its 41 stores and its headquarters. A number of traditional retail furniture stores, including long-time family-owned businesses have been slipping downward over the past several years. Nearly 400 retail outlets for The Bombay Company have closed. A number of well-known and respected residential furniture manufacturers are also feeling the pinch and seeing double-digit drops in sales figures.

Visualize

If not simply the fault of the mortgage lending crisis, then what is causing these tremors in the furniture manufacturing and retailing industries? Simply put, *change* is the problem. Change from a local or national economy to a global economy. Changing competition from overseas manufacturers where materials and labor come much cheaper than here in the US. Changes in the cost of gasoline and heating fuel are affecting bottom lines.

Changes in customer expectations are being felt. Customers who once looked for durable, long lasting products are now satisfied with products of lower quality with shorter life spans. Younger generations now want furnishings that can be replaced in five years. Changes in competition are having enormous effects. In the past, competition came from the other furniture stores or manufacturers in town. Now it is found on the Internet from all over the globe, in big box stores and specialty shops. Customers used to order customized furniture and wait excitedly for its arrival and installation in their home. Today's customers want it now, as is, preferably in their home today.

How can you prepare for this constant barrage of changes that can and do affect your business? One store owner in the 'Dispatch' article was quoted as saying: "Sometimes, you're a victim of the economy and of being caught with a business that's just not set up for that point in history." That one sentence explained his problem: his business had been set up for some specific point in history. He was unprepared for the outside influences on his business and being strategically poised to battle them. He had not looked to the future and planned scenarios for dealing with changes.

Analyze

Visualize - Analyze - Strategize Plan for success!

Maurer On The Move in `08

March 15th

ASID Interiors `08
New Orleans, LA

Topic: Recruiting, Retaining and Managing an Age-Diverse Workforce

April 28th

TFS Show
Navy Pier, Chicago, IL

Topic: Managing an Age-Diverse Workforce

April 30th

'Coverings' - Orlando, FL
Topic: Branding: It's Not Just for Cattle and Major Corporations

NOTE: If you have questions about an event or topic, please contact Terri at: tmaurer@maurerconsultinggroup.com



Too many struggling and failed businesses didn't think or act strategically to assure they were ready for variations affecting their marketplace. Factors like changes in technology, the economy, sociology, environmental issues, and the political arena all have profound effects on businesses. It is imperative to keep abreast of what is happening in the world around you and adapting to those changes. Like boxing champion Mohammed Ali, you need to be able to 'bob and weave' to avoid being blindsided. Look to the future now to see what changes might be coming as a result of trends just

beginning to surface today. Create a number of 'What if?' scenarios based on those trends becoming strong realities that can affect your business. Stay flexible and able to adapt quickly to changes that start affecting your bottom line. Don't sit back and just hope the economy will swing the other way, or that overseas markets and workers will all just suddenly go away. Stay on top of environmental influences on your organization and market, and then strategically plan to tactically embrace those changes.

Strategize



While you're planning your training and/or marketing calendar for 2008, don't forget to include Terri Maurer. Two of her most popular programs, "Managing An Age Diverse Workforce" and "The Changing Marketplace: Selling To The Generations," were presented to sold out crowds around the country this year. To bring one of Maurer's educational seminars or training sessions to your region or company, contact Terri directly at Maurer Consulting Group at 330.666.0802 or tmaurer@maurerconsultinggroup.com.

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