

# THE DONALD COOPER CORPORATION

Speaking and coaching internationally on management, marketing and profitability



## Management tool #B-7:©

### 13 QUESTIONS TO MAKE THIS, OR NEXT YEAR, YOUR BEST YEAR EVER:

Business success is not an accident. It's the result of being realistic about where we are now, clear about what we commit to become, and by when...and then being committed to the work of visualizing, planning, deciding and implementing required to create that more extraordinary future.

To help get us started, we will sit down with a few of the best minds and hearts in our business and invest a few hours to answer these 13 simple questions below (If you're a 1-person business, you're "it", so just sit with yourself and go to it).

**Note:** These questions are simple...but some of the answers will not be. Where necessary, allocate homework and research assignments to members of your team to gather more info and new innovative thoughts. Here are your 13 questions:

1. What bottom line profit do we commit to generate this year (or next year) that will keep us financially healthy and allow us to fairly reward everyone on our Team for their time, effort and investment in the business?
2. What are the 3 to 6 most important things we need to do to improve or grow our business this year, (or next year) so that we achieve our profit commitment? How will we implement these changes ...and by when? Who will be responsible for each of them?
3. What are 3 to 6 things that we do that tick off, stress or confuse our customers...and what will we do to eliminate them? How could we not just 'fix' these things but turn them around so wonderfully that they actually become a powerful competitive advantage? By when do we commit to do this? Who will be responsible for each of them?
4. What additional products or services would make us more helpful and more valuable to our customers? How can we profitably develop, add or implement these and add them to our offering? By when do we commit to do this? Who will be responsible for each of them?
5. We must be the 'wise choice' for our target customers. What are 3 to 6 important things that any of our competitors do better than we do? What will we do to fix them so that we're clearly better than our competitors? By when do we commit to determine what those things might be and what we'll do to either be better than our competitors at those things, or to counter with other more relevant value propositions? Who will be responsible for each of this project?
6. What 3 to 6 extraordinary things could we do to make doing business with us *not* all about price? What compelling functional or emotional value can we create, or what extraordinary service or amenities can we add that will 'grab' our target customers and fundamentally change the game? What has never been done before in our industry that would blow our customers away? By when do we commit to have some bold, innovative ideas about this possibility? Who will be responsible for analyzing each idea put forward, making decisions and implementing?
7. We are what we communicate. So, what 3 to 6 gutsy things will we do this year, or next year, to more effectively promote our business, 'grab' our target customers and communicate our total value offering? By when do we commit to have developed this bold and more effective way of communicating our compelling value story? Who will be responsible for analyzing each idea put forward, making decisions and implementing?

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## **13 questions to make this year, or next year, our best year ever....cont'd:**

8. What are our 6 biggest expense items on which we can save money this year (or next year)...and, specifically, how and by when will we achieve those savings? Who will be responsible for this project?
9. What are 3 to 6 things we can do to become 'greener' in the next year...and beyond? Who will be responsible for collecting and analyzing the ideas generated and supervising implementation of each idea that is approved? By when will we implement the approved ideas?
10. What are 3 to 6 things we can do to improve internal written and verbal communications so as to operate more effectively, improve employee engagement, reduce frustration and improve clarity about our commitments to customers, to each other and to our bottom line? Who will be responsible for collecting and analyzing the ideas generated and supervising implementation of each idea that is approved? By when will we implement the approved ideas?
11. What are the most important new technologies that we need to bring into our business in the next 12 months? As we look to technology to give us the operating efficiency and competitive advantage we need, it will be useful not to lump 'technology' into one big confusing mess, but rather to examine how technology can help us in each specific area and function of our business.

We'll sit down with some of the best minds in our business, or department, plus one or two technology experts and use the 9-point checklist below to explore the possibilities. Every business should have two trusted technology 'heroes' to keep them ahead of the pack. One for operational and systems technology and one for proactive marketing, website and social media technology.

Below is a checklist of where technology can help us. We'll put an X in the box beside each one that has possibilities for us. Then we'll investigate, make commitments and take action. Some of these 'possibilities' listed below may not apply to our particular business...but many will.

1. Technologies that will help us design and create new and better products and services.
2. Technologies that will help us produce or operate more efficiently and with higher and more consistent quality.
3. The technologies of logistics that will help us more quickly, efficiently and accurately deliver our products or services to existing customers...and perhaps to a wider customer base.
4. Technologies that will help us improve the speed, quality, depth, breadth, individuality and consistency of the customer service, value and experiences that we deliver.
5. Technologies that help us more efficiently communicate our compelling value message to customers and prospects as a group, and as individuals.
6. Technologies that allow us to listen to, understand, engage with and respond to our customers as a group, and as individuals.
7. The equipment, systems and process technologies that allow us to operate, control and manage every aspect of our business more effectively.
8. Technologies that help us operate in a more environmentally responsible, less wasteful and more sustainable way.
9. The technology of researching industry 'best practices' and emerging new business models. This one is easy...it's called Google searches through which we can study competitive websites and articles, discover who in our industry, worldwide, is doing innovative new things...and what disruptive new business models could become our new worst enemy.

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## **13 questions to make this year, or next year, our best year ever....cont'd:**

So, there it is. Nine ways to look at how technology can help us create a competitive advantage in every part of our business. What will we do with this...and by when? Do we have technology 'heros' for operations and for marketing who constantly coach and challenge us to get ahead ...and stay ahead?

- 12.** One of the biggest problems in most businesses today is the failure to effectively implement its ideas, promises, policies, processes and commitments. Effective and consistent implementation is key to being service-competitive, price-competitive and profitable. Looking at every part of our business, list at least 7 ideas, promises, policies, processes or commitments on which we must improve our implementation. Specifically, what must be done to make this happen and for each action that we commit to take, who will be responsible? By when will we see a significant improvement?
- 13.** We can't grow our business without growing our people....and without growing ourselves as leaders and managers. What training, development or mentoring does each person on our Team need to help them grow and to help us grow the business, serve customers more wonderfully and operate more effectively? By when will we have determined what that training, development or mentoring will be for each member of our Team? And how we will implement the 'growth plan' for each person? Who will be responsible for this important project?

**Note from Donald:** So, there you have it...13 important questions to get you thinking about how to make this, or next year, your best year ever. For each idea you come up with and commit to, be clear about what will be done, by whom, by when, at what cost, measured how and rewarded how, to make it happen. Remember, businesses do not die from a single shot to the head. They die, slowly but surely, from a thousand uncompleted tasks.

For additional help in creating a clear Vision for the future of your business, check out our transformational **Vision Critical Guide** at [donaldcooper.com](http://donaldcooper.com). For just \$24 you get a complete, step-by-step, 34-page Guide to creating a clear Vision, Mission and 'Commitment to Action' for your business that will inform, focus, challenge and inspire you and everyone on your team.

**Donald Cooper, MBA, CSP, HoF**, has been both a world-class manufacturer and an award-winning fashion retailer. Now, as a Toronto-based international management speaker and coach, he helps business owners and managers rethink, refocus and re-energize their business to sell more, manage smarter, grow their bottom line...and have a life.

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