

THE DONALD COOPER CORPORATION

Speaking and coaching internationally on management, marketing and profitability



Management tool #B-7:©

13 QUESTIONS TO MAKE THIS YEAR, OR NEXT YEAR, OUR 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 doing the work of visualizing, deciding, planning, communicating, implementing and following up required to create that more extraordinary future.

To get started on making this year, or next year your best year ever, sit down with a few of the best minds and hearts in your business and invest a few hours in answering 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 below 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 compensate all employees and shareholders for their time, effort and investment in the business?
2. What **additional products, services, systems, process or experiences** would make us more helpful and more valuable to our target customers while increasing sales and profitability? How will we develop, add and implement these?
3. What are 3 to 6 things we do that **tick off, stress or confuse our customers**...and what will we do to eliminate them? How can we not just 'fix' these negative things, but turn them around so wonderfully that they actually become a powerful competitive advantage?
4. To thrive, we must be the clear '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 those things in our business, so that we're clearly better than our competitors?
5. What 3 to 6 extraordinary things could we do to make doing business with us **not all about price**? What compelling, bold and innovative functional or emotional value can we create, or what extraordinary service or amenities can we add that will 'grab' our target customers, clearly differentiate us from our competitors, make us 'famous' and fundamentally change the game? What has never been done before in our industry that would blow our customers away?
6. We are what we communicate. So, what 3 to 6 innovative, gutsy things will we do this year, or next year, to **more effectively promote our business and communicate** our total value offering?
7. What are our 6 biggest **expense items** on which we can save money this year, or next year...and, specifically, how can we go about reducing those expenses?
8. Our employees know stuff and they hate it when we don't ask. What are 3 to 6 things we can do to **more effectively listen to our employees** in all parts of the business so that we learn from them and honour them? One of the best ways to do this is to have an 'Idea Fest' every 4 months where each employee is responsible for coming up with at least one idea to make the business better.

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

9. What are 3 to 6 things we can do to **become 'greener'** (more environmentally friendly) in the next year...and beyond?
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?
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.

In a separate meeting we'll sit down with some of the best minds in our business, or department, plus a few technology experts and, using the 9-point checklist below, we'll explore the possibilities. Every business should have at least 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 control inventory and more quickly, efficiently and accurately warehouse, receive, ship and deliver products or services to existing customers...and perhaps to a wider or different 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 and ongoing help and information 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. One of these 'technologies' 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.

How will we use these nine ways that technology can help us create a competitive advantage in every part of our business? Do we have at least two technology 'heros' for operations and for marketing who constantly coach and challenge us to get ahead...and stay ahead? And, do we listen to them?

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

- 12.** One of the biggest problems in most businesses today is the failure to **effectively implement** its ideas, decisions, 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 areas in which we need to improve our implementation...and how we'll do that.

- 13.** We can't grow our business without **growing our people....and without growing ourselves** as leaders and managers. What training, coaching 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 safely and effectively? Who will do that training and coaching? Do we need outside help?

Note from Donald: So, there you have it...13 important questions to get you thinking about how to make this year, 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, with what result, measured how, rewarded how and followed up by whom, 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 clarity about the future of your business, check out our transformational '**Vision Critical Guide**' at donaldcooper.com. For just \$24 you get a complete, step-by-step, 34-page Guide to creating a clear 'Statement of Purpose', 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 retailer. Now, as a Toronto-based international management speaker and coach, Donald 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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