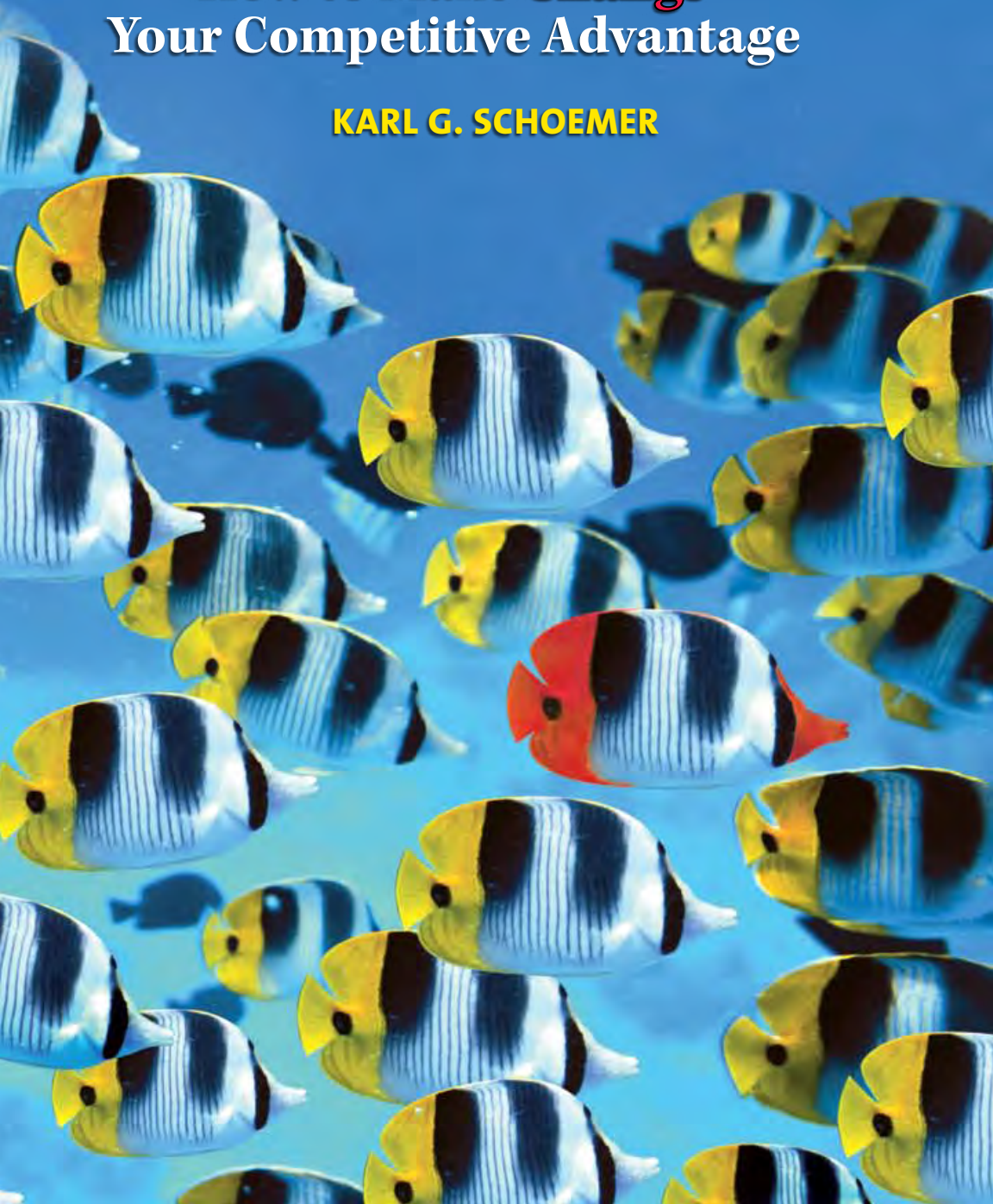


# *The New Reality*

How to Make **Change**  
Your Competitive Advantage

**KARL G. SCHOEMER**







# *They Is Us!*

**THINGS ARE DIFFERENT.** Change is all around us. It's continuous, relentless, and at times overwhelming. Just where is all this change coming from? Who is driving this? Higher expectations. Smaller, cheaper, faster, better, safer. Ridiculous. Unheard of. Unprecedented. Who do they think we are? What do they think we are? Robots? They are unrealistic. They can't be serious!

Hold on. Just who are they?

Who *is* raising the bar on us? Demanding more? Faster? Better? You don't know?

They are us! We are them!

You can't have it both ways. You can't have it one way as an employee and another as a consumer. You can't walk out the door and expect the latest, greatest, smallest, cheapest, and fastest...and not expect it to have the same impact on what you do. Regardless of what you do or how you do it. Regardless of your profession, industry, or job. You are them. *They is us!*



# *The New Reality*

Let's be clear. The opportunities are immense. The information and technology revolution is redefining our work: what it is, how it's done, where, who does it, and how long it takes. We're also reshaping our business organizations—from how they function to what they expect of employees and what employees can expect in return. All of these changes create a tremendously fertile environment for even more change, and change creates opportunities. Opportunities, of course, are either seized or missed. Whether you seize them or miss them is entirely up to you.





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# *Table of Contents*

They Is Us.....	3
Sink or Swim.....	8
Operating Instructions.....	11
1. Rewrite the Contract .....	12
2. Stalk the Truth.....	14
3. Try Different, Not Harder .....	16
4. Separate Loyalty From Performance .....	18
5. Embrace Openness .....	20
6. Deliver Quicker Quality.....	22
7. Move Your Mastery.....	24
8. Flex Your Flexibility.....	26
9. Stay in Motion .....	28
10. Minimize the Drop .....	30
11. Fill the Void .....	32
12. Care About Performance .....	34
13. Act Like a New Hire.....	36
14. Be Customer Centered .....	38
15. Take Charge of Your Happiness .....	40
Good News .....	42
Do's and Don'ts.....	44





# *Sink or Swim*

**CHANGE IS HERE TO STAY.** Those of us who understand this reality, who accept it and adapt quickly, will emerge profoundly the better for it. Better in terms of our market value and employability. Better because we don't squander precious time and energy resisting the inevitable. And certainly better when it comes to our health, happiness, and well-being.

Today the ability to manage change is as marketable a skill as any we can cultivate—individually or organizationally. It's rapidly becoming more so, as technology propels change around the globe at warp speed, with individuals and organizations struggling to cope. In fact, your goal must be to move yourself through the change process more quickly, easily, and effectively. In today's marketplace, managing change is every organization's single most vital challenge.

Change is impartial. It doesn't care about corporate reputation, size, previous successes, or prestige. It doesn't care about personal history, past potential, tenure, or willingness to try harder. It rewards only those who meet it head on. No organization can accomplish this unless employees can. Otherwise the organization is doomed—and, in the short term at least, many employees are doomed as well. American companies have been slashing more than 2,600 jobs every business day. Since 1979, 1 in 3 US households has seen a family member lose a job.

Okay. So it's clear we must manage change. But *managing* change is no longer enough. Today's exacting world imposes a new expectation: that we actively *seize* change and make it work for us. Recognize it as a force in its own right and harness it. Exploit it. *Master it.*

All change is about movement—individual movement, organizational movement. As individuals we must move away from danger and toward opportunity, consistently and quickly, to function at our highest level. The organization, in turn, must be filled with people doing the same—moving quickly and consistently toward opportunity, toward the customer, toward the marketplace.

With each successive wave of change, stagnant organizations get knocked over and washed away. Others come up for air, coughing and sputtering, but manage to survive. Organizations that excel, on the other hand, maintain the momentum that enables them to catch each new wave. And when they're not catching waves, they're making them. They can do this only if filled with people working in unison, traveling the competitive currents like a school of fish, moving individually yet as one...quickly and sharply...in unison, toward opportunity and away from danger.

Slow-moving fish are a feast waiting to happen, bait for the taking. The last to move will perish. In the pages ahead are some swimming lessons. Read them, learn them, practice them—and avoid being the last fish.

*“In business, the competition will bite you if you keep running. If you stand still, they will swallow you.”*

—William S. Knudsen, Former Chairman, General Motors

*“If you always do what you’ve always done...you will get less than you’ve always gotten: decreasing margins and increasing competition.”*

—Karl G. Schoemer, Founder and President, VisionQuest



# Operating Instructions



**THIS BOOK OFFERS YOU MESSAGES, GUIDELINES, AND TOOLS** that can help you *Seize Change* and master it.

Read it. Then go back and read it again. Take some time—an afternoon, a week, a month—whatever you need for the messages to sink in and make the information real and meaningful.

These messages are delivered from a universal perspective. They address global themes that should be familiar to anyone immersed in today's dramatically changing workplace. They are designed to jump-start your thinking and prod you to action.

When it comes to the particulars pertinent to your job, however, you are the expert. You know what works and what doesn't. What you can do and what you can't. What makes sense and what doesn't. Ultimately, only you know what actions to take and when.

Each of the 15 themes explored on these pages is accompanied by suggestions—*What to Do* sections. Beneath them is the most important element in this book: blank space...because it's where you can write down your own ideas. Fill those spaces with *Specific Actions* that will improve your performance and make change your personal competitive advantage. The actions you take may spell the difference between your success or failure in a radically changing world.

*“You’ve got to be very careful if you don’t know where you are going, because you might not get there.”*

—Yogi Berra, Former Professional Baseball Great

# 1. Rewrite the Contract

“I WILL COME IN EVERY DAY and do what you want, when you want it, how you want it. I’ll toe the line, I won’t rock the boat, I won’t take risks. In return you will give me a job for the rest of my life.”

This unwritten contract between employers and employees is extinct.

The old corporate ethic rewarded longevity and tenure. It implied the promise of stability. Compliant, conforming employees survived... and in fact, many thrived. These were the people who got recognized, rewarded, and promoted.

***This has changed. It’s gone! It’s different!*** No longer can we expect loyal compliance to be rewarded with cradle-to-grave job security.

Organizations can’t compete based on the number of people who simply show up. Attendance is ***not*** a competitive advantage. Now, it’s all about performance. Outcome trumps effort. This fundamental change has unsettled those of us who grew up in the old environment honoring the old contract. Many of us feel confused or betrayed.

Such feelings are understandable, but they are debilitating burdens in today’s business culture. Cling to the belief that the old contract still applies, or should apply, and each successive change places you at greater risk. Remain rooted to outworn ideology and you diminish in value daily.

“They’re asking me to do things today that would have gotten me fired 5 years ago.”

The rules are different now. The very behaviors that for years got people promoted can now result in being left behind. Likewise, the independent decisions that in the past led to punitive actions are today coveted and sought after. The desire for unquestioning compliance has been replaced with the need for creative discontent.

*“It is the nature of man as he grows older...to protest against change, particularly change for the better.”*

—John Steinbeck, Author

*“Come, my friends. ’Tis not too late to seek a newer world.”*

—Alfred Tennyson, Poet



## ***What to Do:***

Accept that the old contract is history. Bring value and bring it daily. Be a creative, flexible leader. Think for yourself. Bring solutions, not problems. Challenge the status quo. Rock the boat. Be the person you would want on your staff if you owned the company. Draw a bright line of distinction between the old environment and the new. Help rewrite the new contract.

## ***Specific Actions:***

## 2. *Stalk the Truth*

“JUST TELL ME THE ANSWER. If I just knew the answer, everything would be okay.”

No longer is it acceptable to expect answers simply to be handed to you. Need an answer? Go get it. You've already asked? Ask again. Or ask someone else. Be aware, though, that the nature of answers has changed.

For one thing, if you get an answer you don't like, it doesn't mean “your question wasn't answered.” Nor does it mean that “nobody communicates with you.”

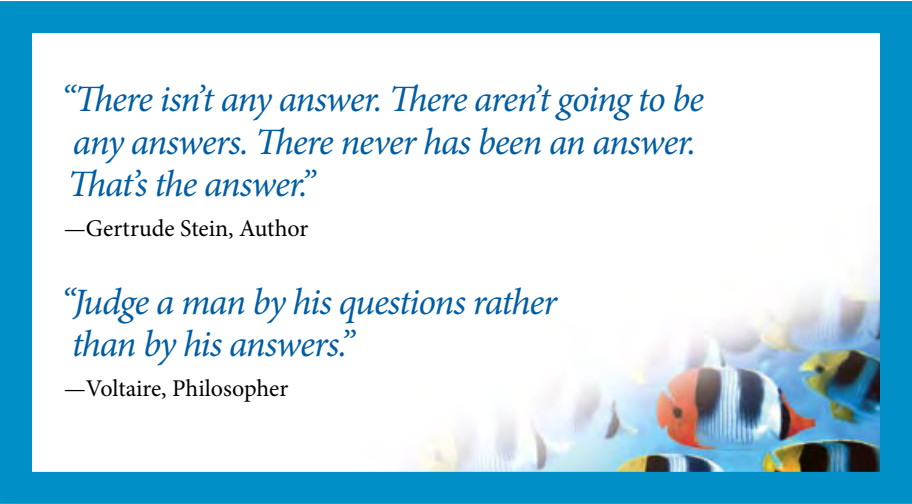
Answers have also become far more perishable. The breakneck pace of technology has made truth a moving target. What was true 2 weeks ago may no longer be true today. That doesn't mean what was said 2 weeks ago is a lie...nor does it make the speaker untrustworthy.

Another consequence of spiraling change is that “I don't know” has become perfectly valid. Ambiguity tends to make us uncomfortable, however, so “I don't know” is a tough answer—to give and to receive. But it's a response we must learn to accept; any other answer often would be inaccurate or even irresponsible.

In the old environment we used to pay managers to have all the answers. In the new environment it's impossible for *anyone* to have all the answers. Things are moving too fast. If you're trying to provide or get all the answers, you're hurting yourself. It's far better to say or hear “I don't know” than for half-truths or gossip to circulate. Even better is “I don't know—I'll try to find out.” And better yet—in these times of empowerment, contribution, and participation—is “I don't know. What do you think?”

No one has all the answers. Answers are different now.

Accept these 2 truths and the cloud of ambiguity begins to dissipate.



*“There isn’t any answer. There aren’t going to be any answers. There never has been an answer. That’s the answer.”*

—Gertrude Stein, Author

*“Judge a man by his questions rather than by his answers.”*

—Voltaire, Philosopher

### ***What to Do:***

Go get the answers. If your boss can’t give them to you, ask your boss’s boss or someone else in the organization. Expect that those answers will change—soon. Choose your answer battles carefully, but choose them and wage them; the bigger risk is to do nothing. Formulate good answers on your own using the best information available, but never shy away from saying “I don’t know.” Accept it as a valid statement, whether you’re on the giving or receiving end.

### ***Specific Actions:***

### 3. *Try Different, Not Harder*



“I CAN’T WORK ANY HARDER.  
I’m already working harder than I ever have.”

This common complaint during times of change is a red flag. No reorganization, reengineering, or right sizing sets an objective to have people work harder or longer. The goal is not to have fewer people do the same amount of work, but to have fewer people figure out which part of the work is most important to the customer and do that.

Underlying the change, though, is a marketplace mandate for greater efficiency, greater productivity, greater levels of service. So while you need not necessarily work harder, you definitely must work *differently*.

The problem is that the old tools and methods are where our competence and confidence lie. We are more comfortable redoubling our efforts than changing them.

“The way we’ve been doing it has always been good enough,  
so more of the same should be better.”

Just when we should be letting go of the old, the ambiguity and uncertainty of change make us grip it even more tightly. Instead of giving the wheelbarrow a try, we feverishly attempt to move rocks more quickly by hand.

“How can my work suddenly be unacceptable?  
I’m doing exactly what I’ve always done, exactly how  
I’ve always done it.”

Productivity is now gauged not only by the result but by the processes and tools you use and your willingness to change those processes and tools. If you’re still doing your job the way you always have, gritting your teeth and working longer and harder, digging in your heels against change, every day puts you farther behind. In fact, if you simply do more of what you have always done, you’ll be getting less than you ever have.

What worked yesterday won't necessarily work today. Good vaccines become ineffective against adaptive viruses. Even the best major league pitchers, if they don't constantly revise their strategies, eventually get hit. The tendency to do more of what made you successful is natural, but what made you successful may not **keep** you successful.

*“If the only tool you have is a hammer,  
every problem begins to look like a nail.”*

—Anonymous

*“The only sense that is common in the long run  
is the sense of change—and we all  
instinctively avoid it.”*

—E.B. White, Author

## ***What to Do:***

Resist your natural resistance to change. Figure out what needs to be done. Find what no longer needs to be done, then stop doing it. Separate the wheat from the chaff and invest your time and energy in the wheat. Don't do more with less; do more by doing it differently. Work smarter. Perpetually adjust, refine, innovate, adapt.

## ***Specific Actions:***

## 4. *Separate Loyalty From Performance*



“WE USED TO BE SUCH A FAMILY AROUND HERE.  
Now they obviously don’t care about us.  
You can’t even trust anyone anymore.”

Trust and loyalty are seductive concepts. We expect them readily, bestow them grudgingly, and mistakenly equate them with job security. As long as my company provides job security, the thinking goes, I consider it trustworthy and loyal—deserving of my trust and loyalty in return.

But in an age of vanishing job security, employee loyalty is diminishing as well.

“I’ll just do my job and nothing more.”  
“I’ll put my time in and then leave.”  
“They won’t get anything extra from me.”

What is employee loyalty? Going above and beyond? Putting in extra time? Performing better than expected? Regardless of how you exhibit loyalty, when you withdraw it out of resentment, who is at risk? If you cloak yourself in a cloud of distrust because you no longer have job security and you’re angry about it, who gets hurt?

Most companies would like to provide some sense of job security, but no organization can be more loyal than the marketplace allows. Today’s marketplace is intense. Tough. Unforgiving. The competition is worldwide and world-class. What would become of an NBA or NFL team that made its roster decisions based on loyalty or sentiment? Or an army command that made tactical decisions based on what its troops would prefer? Loyalty has its place, but if it strips the company of its ability to compete, it’s dangerous. A lean, productive, well managed organization can employ more people than a bankrupt one can.

Because organizations can no longer guarantee job security doesn’t mean they are not loyal. The loyalty lies in trying to make the company as successful as possible. Doing that creates and keeps jobs.

Let's separate this "loyalty" discussion from performance, once and for all. In *The New Reality*, the deal is that the organization trades performance for money. You perform, the company pays you. Period. The better you perform, the more they pay you. The longer you perform the longer they pay you.

Be loyal to your performance and it will be loyal to you.

*"Only foolish people are completely secure."*

—John Kenneth Galbraith, Economist

*"Too many people are thinking of security instead of opportunity. They seem more afraid of life than death."*

—James F. Byrnes, Politician

### ***What to Do:***

Separate loyalty from performance and differentiate yourself through your performance. Realize your employer *isn't* your family. Invest your loyalty in yourself, your skills, your future. Increase your employability in the world at large, to expand your opportunities inside your organization. Build trust by investing it in others.

### ***Specific Actions:***

## 5. *Embrace Openness*

“I WISH THEY WOULD MAKE UP THEIR MINDS.  
Every week I hear something different.”

Communication is the handmaiden of change. Without constant, consistent communication, change creates division, confusion, and chaos. In football the result is called a broken play. In business it's called inefficiency, mismanagement, a fourth-quarter loss.

No longer is anything set in stone, or even sand. The best laid plan, structure, process, or system will change. Probably soon. This accelerated pace has complicated communication in the workplace. A typical scenario: You get information about a change that needs to be communicated, so you convey it to colleagues. But within weeks or even days, the information is no longer accurate. The result? Your colleagues' trust and confidence in you decrease.

Ah, but quick study that you are, the next time you get some information, you take a different tack. Not wanting to frustrate people by inadvertently leading them astray, you hold on to the information while you check out its accuracy. Meanwhile, your colleagues get it from another source. The result? Their trust and confidence in you decrease.

Ah, but quick study that you are, the next time you get some information you...do what?

What you must do is turn and share everything you know. But always attach a strong tagline. In the past “subject to change” was a sufficient disclaimer. Not anymore. Today it's impossible to overemphasize the likelihood of change: “This will change. I don't know how. I don't know when. But it will change.” And remember to be forthright about what you don't know. If you don't know say “I don't know.”

In the old reality, trustworthiness was defined as the shelf life of answers. The longer it stayed the way you said it was going to be, the more they could believe you. The more they could trust you! But you can't use the same definition of trustworthiness in *The New Reality* that we used in the old reality.

“I know I said last Monday *that* was the way we were going to do it. I know this Monday I said *this* was the way we were going to do it. I also know that the two are different. So what. That doesn’t mean you can’t trust me or believe me. With what we knew last week, we were going to do it that way. With what we know this week, we are going to do it this way. That has nothing to do with whether you can trust or believe me.”

*“I’ve got nothing to say and I’ll only say it once.”*

—Floyd Smith, Former Toronto Maple Leafs Coach

*“Anybody who isn’t confused  
isn’t well informed.”*

—Anonymous

## ***What to Do:***

Promise change. Say “for now” as often as possible. Stop defining believability by how long information is valid. Share everything, good or bad. Be honest. Don’t hold on to information. Move it as fast as you get it. Instead of conveying large blocks of information infrequently, give short bursts continuously. Clearly say, hear, and accept “This will change.”

## ***Specific Actions:***



## 6. *Deliver Quicker Quality*

“**SLOW DOWN AND DO IT RIGHT** the first time.  
Eliminate deviations.”

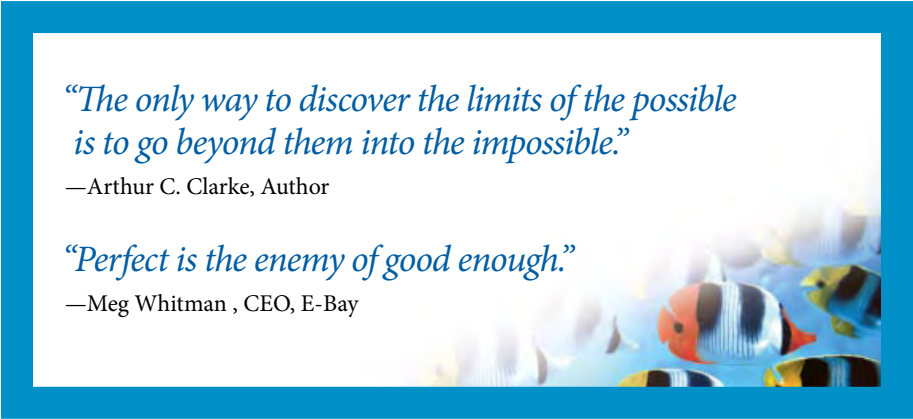
Emphasis on quality proved a saving grace for many companies in the 1980s. Unfortunately, the shift toward total quality management ran headlong into the exponentially accelerating pace of change. Total quality is now the price of admission. Merely meeting customer expectations puts us behind competitors who are *exceeding* those expectations.

The marketplace has added time as a critical component of quality. Quality isn't quality unless it's timely. The principle isn't new, but our concept of timeliness is. Timeliness today requires speed that only recently was unfathomable. Achieving that speed calls for constantly upgrading our processes and tools. No upgrade, no timeliness. No timeliness, no quality.

As crucial as quality is, if we fail to deliver the product or service when the customer needs it, even exquisite quality loses its value. More players enter the game daily. Technology continues to shrink the world and intensify competition. As a result, customers can and do demand unprecedented speed. Timeliness is their call—not yours, not your boss's, not the CEO's—the customer's.

The time we have to get it right is no longer unlimited. Now not only must we get it right the first time, we must get it right and do it faster and better than ever. Impossible? That's a tempting response, but it's demonstrably wrong. We either accept this challenge or put our company at a severe competitive disadvantage. If we don't do it, somebody else will...somebody else already is doing it.

Quality is everybody's job. So is quickly aligning with the customer. Here's the important part: they are not mutually exclusive. It's not one or the other. It's both! Move quickly to align with the marketplace *and* constantly, continuously improve the quality of what you deliver. Do this...and you are delivering “quicker quality.”



*“The only way to discover the limits of the possible is to go beyond them into the impossible.”*

—Arthur C. Clarke, Author

*“Perfect is the enemy of good enough.”*

—Meg Whitman , CEO, E-Bay

## ***What to Do:***

Step on the gas. Don't just improve the process; look critically to see if the process is even necessary anymore. Try it out...give it a run...see if it works. Don't study it to death. Forget just perfect—you need to be fast **and**...good enough. Trust your intuition. Be crystal clear on the customer's definition of quality; ask, then ask again. Critique every process with timeliness in mind. Inject urgency at every turn. When measuring quality, always include speed.

## ***Specific Actions:***

## 7. *Move Your Mastery*

“**JUST SLOW THIS THING DOWN** and let me get as good at this as I was at that.”

We used to be able to master things. The system, the technology, the structure. Not anymore. At least not like before.

The flow of change that courses through contemporary organizations has shifted the whole game. Mastery is no longer in one place, in one job, or in one skill set. But it still exists—the mastery today is not in mastering *the* change, but in mastering *change*.

Any system, any process, any technology is temporary. This isn't a revelation. Heraclitus (“there is nothing permanent except change”) was on to it 2,450 years ago. But technologies and systems have become so temporary that the journey from one to the next is now the predominant state. And that is where we must exercise mastery: over the journey—over getting from here to there...to there, to there...and on and on. Transition is not a temporary phase to get through, it's the element we live in now. It's the oxygen that sustains the whole system.

Today's mastery is measured by how well we foresee and adapt, how quickly we move, how fast we can let go of the old and grab hold of the new. This is the true mastery, because to achieve it we must violate that screaming instinct to resist all things new and different.

Your ability and willingness to adapt, to move, to change—quickly and effectively—are as marketable as any skill you possess. The very value that you bring to the organization comes as much from your ability to get from here to there, from this to that, as any other competency.

Master the movement. Master the transition. Master the white space between here and there—and you have moved your mastery!

*“Hindsight is much more accurate than foresight,  
but not as valuable.”*

—Gen. A.J. Goodpaster, US Army

*“If we watch ourselves honestly, we shall often find  
that we have begun to argue against a new idea  
even before it has been completely stated.”*

—Arthur Koestler, Philosopher

## ***What to Do:***

Master the process. Become better at change than everyone you know. Ask questions. Speed up. Look for the opportunity to practice your change management skills. Better yet, **create** opportunities to practice. Change the criteria: don't measure success by getting through it; measure success by getting...here...there...everywhere. Reward masters of change. Continually improve the process of change. Be the first to try.

## ***Specific Actions:***

## 8. *Flex Your Flexibility*

“**JUST GIVE ME SOME TIME** to get used to the idea.  
I’ll warm up to this in a month or so.”

In the old environment there was time to adjust. People had the chance to get comfortable, to work through their resistance to any changes occurring around them.

Now, as the global marketplace gets bigger and grows more complex daily, competition can and does come from any quarter. Gone is the luxury of time to adjust. And failure can descend more quickly than ever.

How long do you have to work through your resistance? Unfortunately, you don’t get to decide. Neither does your boss or your organization. The limits are set by the marketplace, by your customers.

“I just don’t like the new system.”  
“What was wrong with the old way?”

Your willingness to adapt quickly becomes a competitive advantage—individually and organizationally. Just as certain, your unwillingness or inability becomes a huge competitive disadvantage. For you. For your organization.

Look around. There are people in your organization, in your department, maybe even in the same job, who are thriving on all this change. If they have adjusted and you haven’t, who is at risk? Who is vulnerable? Who is unhappy? Embrace change or it will hunt you down—exposing your rigidity and diminishing your value.

How can you increase your flexibility? Two words: Let go. That’s right. Let go. Let go of the past, the old way, the old process, the old thinking, the old approach or method. Let go of your perception of the “good old days.” Let go of old work habits, old processes, old expectations. Let go.

Do this...and you begin to flex your flexibility.

*“The past always looks better than it was.  
It’s only pleasant because it isn’t here.”*

—Finley Peter Dunne, Humorist

*“It’s what you learn after you know  
it all that counts.”*

—John Wooden, Hall of Fame Basketball Coach



## ***What to Do:***

Bring a sense of adventure to work each day. Make your reputation on how quickly you adapt. Question your resistance. Don't hold onto the old way. Don't waste precious energy digging in. Be the first to try. Fix it on the fly.

## ***Specific Actions:***

## 9. *Stay in Motion*

“**JUST TELL ME THE EFFECTIVE DATE**, the roll-out date.  
Once we get past that, everything will be okay...  
things will get back to normal.”

Change is a process, not an event. Characterizing it as an event implies there is a start and a stop. There is no beginning or end to change. It is constant, and will continue to be.

“If I hold my breath until this thing passes...until it goes away...  
until it runs its course, I'll be okay. I've seen these 'programs  
of the month' come and go.”

Back to normal? This *is* normal. Any reference to change as temporary or isolated gives people a reason to wait for it to pass and implies a false sense of reality. It will not pass. It will not blow over.

“Just give me a minute.”  
“One thing at a time.”  
“I'll be ready for that next week.”

A lot of people are holding their breath, waiting to see. How long can you wait? How long can you go without breathing? Every minute you wait puts you farther behind the competition—individually and organizationally. Change won't go away. In fact, it will go even faster. The hard reality is that there is no stop, no finish. It is a continuous process.

In the old reality we were able to finish—the project, the process, the upgrade. Finish learning the new system...finish the change.

Not anymore. The language of delay and deferral that was once so common in the workplace has become unacceptable. The pace of modern business requires us to start the new before finishing the old. The satisfaction of closure has been replaced by the satisfaction of adaptability, by the instantaneous ability to change.

*“If you don’t drive your business, you will be driven out of business.”*

—B.C. Forbes, Founder, Forbes Magazine

*“How dull it is to pause, to make an end.  
To rust unburnished. Not to shine in use.”*

—Alfred Tennyson, Poet



## ***What to Do:***

Stop waiting. Try. Adapt. Stop holding your breath. Instead, breathe deeply the air of “What if”... “Why not”... “Let’s try it”... “Let’s go.” Be proactive. Make it better. Improve it. Change it. Predict the next change. Suggest the next change. Already be there when everyone else catches up. Give up trying to complete everything. Adopt versatility. Let go of your attachment to closure. Don’t invest yourself in finishing a project that, due to changes, may not need to be finished. Be willing and able not only to change horses in midstream, but to change streams.

## ***Specific Actions:***

## 10. *Minimize the Drop*

“**I KNOW THE ORGANIZATION IS EXPECTING MORE** of me.  
They need me to change, so I will.  
I will just do more of the old. There...I changed!”

All major changes carry with them a temporary drop in productivity. Some will dispute this, but only if they're measuring output without regard to input. Look at the overtime, documented or not, that people put in during times of change. Look at the work people take home. Look at the stress, the anxiety, the frustration. If, in the wake of change, productivity doesn't dip, it's only because people are working harder to compensate for the temporary drop in efficiency.

“It didn't work! We need to go back,  
forward, up, down, sideways.”

You have to get through this drop in productivity as quickly as possible—if for no other reason than to prepare for the next change—because there will be a next change. Eventually productivity will rebound. It should even exceed old levels. After all, that's why the organization made the change in the first place. But the transition time absolutely must be kept to a minimum. This didn't used to be as crucial as it is now. We had time to get comfortable, to assimilate the changes one by one. No longer. Today it can mean the difference between success and failure, organization life and death.

That's why it is imperative to equip yourself with the skills necessary to manage through the transition quickly. Not doing this often casts a false shadow of failure on the change itself.

Like the prospector who abandons a claim, not knowing he has come within a single ax swing of striking ore, the organization could mistakenly abandon a good change—a change that was right all along.

*“The handwriting on the wall may be a forgery.”*

—Anonymous

*“Life is like riding a bicycle. You don’t fall off unless you stop pedaling.”*

—Anonymous



### ***What to Do:***

Anticipate the productivity drop and recognize it when it arrives. Be mindful that the speed of the transition is critical. Overcome your discomfort and awkwardness as fast as possible through learning and practice. Take the class, meet with the instructor, reread the plan, find a mentor. Focus on the gains.

### ***Specific Actions:***



## 11. *Fill the Void*

“**HOW COULD I BE HARMING THIS ORGANIZATION** by continuing to do what I’ve always done—what I have been paid, rewarded, and promoted to do? As soon as they make up their minds, I’ll gladly go along. In the meantime...”

Change creates voids—in communication, leadership, information, authority, decision making, risk taking, innovation...

Inevitably many people respond by not responding, by waiting passively for the voids to be filled before they move forward.

“Someone needs to fix this. I can’t do anything because no one told me, directed me, explained it to me, or approved me.”

Those who do the filling stand out. They are held up as heroes. They make their customers happy. They make their boss’s job easier. They increase effectiveness and make themselves more valuable. And by the way...they are usually more satisfied, less stressed and frustrated, and generally more happy.

It is the waiting that is silently killing off good organizations every day. Riding the winds of all radical change is a classic paradox: Safe is dangerous. Holding steady creates more turmoil. Waiting for voidless paths creates more voids.

Making this destructive dynamic even worse is the fact those who wait think they are doing no harm.

“I’m just doing my job, the way you taught me to, pay me to, told me to. As soon as you tell me what to do differently...exactly and specifically... I will.”

We who passively wait are slowly but surely jeopardizing the future of our organization and, accordingly, our own jobs.

*“Iron rusts from disuse; water loses its purity from stagnation...even so does inaction sap the vigors of the mind.”*

—Leonardo da Vinci, Painter and Scientist

*“It is not enough to be industrious; so are the ants. What are you industrious about?”*

—Henry David Thoreau, Author



## ***What to Do:***

Step up. Volunteer. Challenge the status quo. Spot the voids before anyone else. Call attention to them and get them filled. Give others detailed directions on how to fill them. Encourage them. Coach them. Identify those who are filling the voids—then recognize, reward, and promote them.

## ***Specific Actions:***

# 12. *Care About Performance*



“WHAT WILL THEY GIVE ME? What am I owed?

What can I get? Raises every year, promotions every 2 years...  
job security...more vacation time...my birthday off?”

Somehow things got turned upside down. Obligations and responsibilities shifted from those who work for the organization to the organization itself. Entitlements and benefits took center stage. The organization’s success and prestige were measured in no small part by how much it “cared” about its people. How much it gave them. How fat the benefits, perks, and extras were.

Organizations that didn’t provide these things and more were antiquated, considered cold and uncaring. Then came the restructurings, followed by layoffs, followed by reorganizations, followed by layoffs, followed by reengineering, followed by...well, you get the idea.

Amid all this tumult the outcry about heartless, callous organizations became even louder.

“They don’t care about people any longer.”

“It’s all about the bottom line.”

“Corporate greed.”

Hold it!

The mistake was not in rescinding guaranteed employment, raises, promotions, and the like. It was in implying that employees were automatically entitled to them in the first place. Entitlement is a slippery slope. What was “extra” this year is expected the next.

Institutional paternalism creates a vicious cycle of growing expectations and subsequent disappointments. Managers who care more about the individual than the organization do them both a disservice. In today’s marketplace, no company can withstand that burden over time.

Let's get back to the very foundation of our market-driven economy. The very fabric of our society. The very reason that there are any jobs. Performance counts! It's the only thing that counts. Without it everything else is moot, meaningless, nonexistent. Care about performance. Yours. Other's. The organization's. If we all do this, we have our best shot at success.

*“Frankly, I don’t believe people think of their office as a workplace anyway. I think they think of it as a stationery store with danish.”*

—Jerry Seinfeld, Comedian

*“We are not endeavoring to get ahead of others, but to surpass ourselves.”*

—Hugh B. Brown, Prominent Leader in The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints

## ***What to Do:***

Care more about your performance than what your employer can do for you. Give up the entitlement mentality. Expect more from yourself. Build your own employment security. Make your performance expectations clear to others. Be sure you know what others expect from you. Create your own benefits.

## ***Specific Actions:***



## 13. *Act Like a New Hire*

“**I CAN'T DO THAT!** How much more are they going to ask of me? I don't need this anymore...”

Who most often asks, “Why do we do it this way?” Who usually has a wealth of new ideas to help improve a process? Who is usually the most willing to do whatever it takes? Who is eager to learn, to try new things? Who is ready and willing to start with a clean slate?

In each case the answer is: a new hire. Where do new hires come from? Old jobs. Ironically, the people so willing to do whatever it takes in a new job are often the same ones who were negative and resistant in the old job.

In fact, many of them left the old job because they thought they couldn't do what was being asked of them. Or they didn't want to. Often the changes they regard as fresh and innovative at their new place of employment are the exact same changes that were “impossible” at the old place.

The difference between “I can't do it” and “I'll do whatever it takes” need not involve a change of address. All it takes is a change of perspective. It makes no sense to resist change now, only to later welcome it elsewhere.

*“Only a mediocre person is always at his best.”*

—Somerset Maugham, Author

*“Nothing great was ever achieved  
without enthusiasm.”*

—Ralph Waldo Emerson, Philosopher and Author



### ***What to Do:***

Treat each day like a new job. Try to bring a fresh perspective. Make a habit of asking why. Refuse to accept “Because we’ve always done it that way.” Skip the resistance. Clean the slate. Be the employee you would want to hire.

### ***Specific Actions:***

## 14. *Be Customer Centered*

**“THAT’S NOT MY JOB.”** “I don’t have any contact with the customer.” “All my customers are internal.” “I’m in a staff, administrative, support, role.” “I don’t talk to the customer, see the customer, or interact with the customer.” “That’s a sales job.”  
“My job has nothing to do with the customer.”

In *The New Reality*, those sentiments couldn’t be more wrong. Everything everybody does is—or should be—for the customer. They are our reason for being employed. Take away customers and the need for your job vanishes.

Every person in the organization needs to clearly understand 3 things when it comes to customers: Who they are, what they want, and how each job connects to giving them what they want.

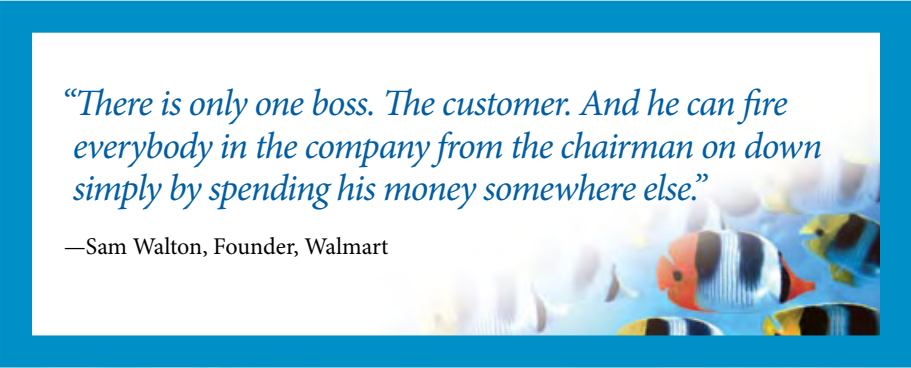
**“This is a big company.”** “We are in research and development.”  
**“This is a nonprofit.”** “Patients aren’t customers.” “All I do is assembly.” “This is a manufacturing site.” “Information technology is internal.” “I’ve never even talked to a customer!”

Wrong again. Every organization, company, group, association, agency, or entity has customers. There is ultimately someone we are doing the job for. Every employee should know who that is and what they expect—regardless of the job, role, purpose, or size of the organization. Today’s employers need to be built from the customer back. They need to be turned sideways so that everyone can clearly see the customer. Every window should provide a view of the customer and every phone line should be a direct connection to the customer.

**“If it weren’t for those pesky customers, my job would be easy.”**  
**“I could get my work done if I wasn’t being constantly interrupted by customers.”** “If the phone would only stop ringing, I’d be a lot more productive.” “I’m just not in the mood to deal with them.”  
**“They are unrealistic in their expectations.”**

They are who they are. They want what they want. If *you* don't give it to them, somebody else will. It's an old adage but never truer than today: Customers sign our paychecks. We work for them. They are our boss. They call the shots. If not for them, there would be no us.

In *The New Reality*, every employee needs to understand just how important customers are—and act accordingly. We also need to understand that customer expectations are a moving target. They change. They shift. They grow. The only way to move with them is to be agile, mobile, and adaptive—in short, to make change part of your competitive advantage.



*“There is only one boss. The customer. And he can fire everybody in the company from the chairman on down simply by spending his money somewhere else.”*

—Sam Walton, Founder, Walmart

### ***What to Do:***

Introduce yourself to your customer. Know your customer. Know your customer's customer. Understand how your job adds value for the customer. Understand your customer's expectations. Strive to exceed those expectations daily. Talk to your customer. Thank your customer. Delight your customer.

### ***Specific Actions:***

# 15. *Take Charge of Your Happiness*



**“IT’S NOT THE WAY IT USED TO BE.”**

“It used to be better in the old days.”

“I don’t like it around here anywhere near as well as I once did.”

“It’s not fair.”

Things are definitely different today. Faster. More complex. More full of change. Higher expectations. Less security. Less stability. Less time for chit chat.

Definitely different.

Unfortunately, many people equate different with bad. Not the same means worse. The old days were always better than now. Back in the day, organizations cared about people and the people cared back. Because of all this change, we have lost the human touch. People aren’t happy anymore. It’s just a cold, callous job.

Wait a minute.

There are 2 important points to consider when talking about happiness. First, you will never make everybody happy! Stop trying. Give it up. Forget about it. Change...don’t change. Change a lot...change a little. Change fast...change slowly. Either way, you won’t make everybody happy. As you well know, for some, nothing you do will make them happy.

Here’s the second and most important point: Happiness is a choice! Morale is a choice! Satisfaction is a choice! A personal choice. People choose every day to be happy, satisfied—or not. People choose to let the weather, the drive, or the job affect their happiness.

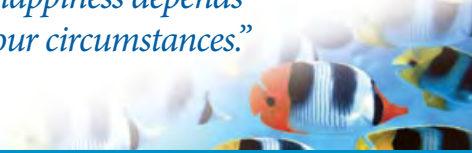
Take charge of your own happiness. It’s a key part of surviving and thriving in *The New Reality*.

*“Happiness is nothing more than good health  
and a bad memory.”*

—Albert Schweitzer, Physician and Philosopher

*“The greatest part of our happiness depends  
on our dispositions, not our circumstances.”*

—Martha Washington, First Lady



### ***What to Do:***

Stop grumbling. Accept this reality. Let go of the past. Start fresh. Look for opportunity. Find solutions. Move forward. Reevaluate priorities. Take care of yourself. Make your own happiness.

### ***Specific Actions:***

# Good News

**OPPORTUNITIES TODAY ARE SO WIDESPREAD** that the challenge has become sorting through them.

Even the willingness to try is a behavior prized by the front-runners. Dynamic organizations seek agents of change, centers of influence capable of moving the process along. Today people who master change are seen as heroes. They are recognized and rewarded. Those who drive change and take the knocks develop the thick skin of conviction—a highly regarded asset.

**Not that change is without risk. But most people don't realize the real risk is in waiting.**

Good news: Once you make the decision to let go, to move forward, to make change your competitive advantage, you instantaneously propel yourself past the masses. You immediately become someone to be reckoned with, consulted with, partnered with. Your opinion of how things might be better becomes part of the discussion.

The game has changed. New rules. New players. A *New Reality*. And it will continue to change. But most everyone is just as much in the dark as you are about what the next version of the game will be. So the playing field is level—for an instant. Help define the new rules and you not only gain an advantage, you reduce your own uncertainty. You answer some of your own questions.

**The astonishing pace of change today has created a business environment verging on controlled chaos.**

Organizations are responding to this upheaval by giving more people greater opportunities to take control. So figure out what you can control—what piece...what aspect...what component...what detail—and get busy controlling it. Your opportunity to take control has never been better.

Your experience is valuable.  
It's gotten you where you are now.

But experience in and of itself is no longer good enough unless it's sheathed in the proper outlook. Believe in yourself. Make your most important skill that of developing new skills. Successful people do what unsuccessful people don't like to do.

Make change your personal competitive advantage and you write your own ticket instead of waiting for someone else to punch it. It can be done. It is being done. You can do it too. Make your own good news.

Okay—you're ready to move, ready to swim. But which direction? Stay true to these swimming lessons and you won't have to worry about lagging behind with the last fish.

# *Do's and Don'ts*

**DO** act.

**DON'T** wait to act.

**DO** align yourself with customers.

**DON'T** malign your customers.

**DO** try.

**DON'T** try just once.

**DO** be resilient.

**DON'T** be resistant.

**DO** question.

**DON'T** attack.

**DO** look ahead.

**DON'T** focus behind.

**DO** move quickly.

**DON'T** drag your feet.

**DO** commit to the new.

**DON'T** be committed to the old.

**DO** challenge the status quo.

**DON'T** cling to the status quo.

**DO** plan.

**DON'T** plan indefinitely.

**DO** analyze.

**DON'T** overanalyze.

**DO** bring energy.

**DON'T** misdirect energy.

**DO** give your all.

**DON'T** give up.

**DO** celebrate success.

**DON'T** celebrate others' failure.

**DO** step up.

**DON'T** step aside.

**DO** say "for now."

**DON'T** say "forever."

**DO** update your skills.

**DON'T** think current skills are good enough.

**DO** take risks.

**DON'T** fear failure.

**DO** add value.

**DON'T** value the past.

**DO** be flexible.

**DON'T** be inflexible.

**DO** innovate.

**DON'T** instigate.

**DO** contribute.

**DON'T** contribute to resistance.

“Generations come and go but it makes no difference. The sun rises and sets and hurries around to rise again. The wind blows south and north, here and there, twisting back and forth, getting nowhere. The rivers run into the sea but the sea is never full, and the water returns again to the rivers, and flows again to the sea...

Everything is unutterably weary and tiresome, no matter how much we hear, we are not content, so I saw that there is nothing better for men than that they should be happy in their work, for that is what they are here for, and no one can bring them back to life to enjoy what will be in the future, so let them enjoy it now.”

—*Ecclesiastes*





**KARL G. SCHOEMER** is Founder and President of VisionQuest, specialists in helping organizations integrate change. Since 1990, Karl has shared his expertise on five continents with clients such as AT&T, IBM, Chase Manhattan Bank, Procter & Gamble, Ford Motor Company, the National Security Agency, Intel, Johnson & Johnson, the Army Tank Command, and hundreds of other organizations.

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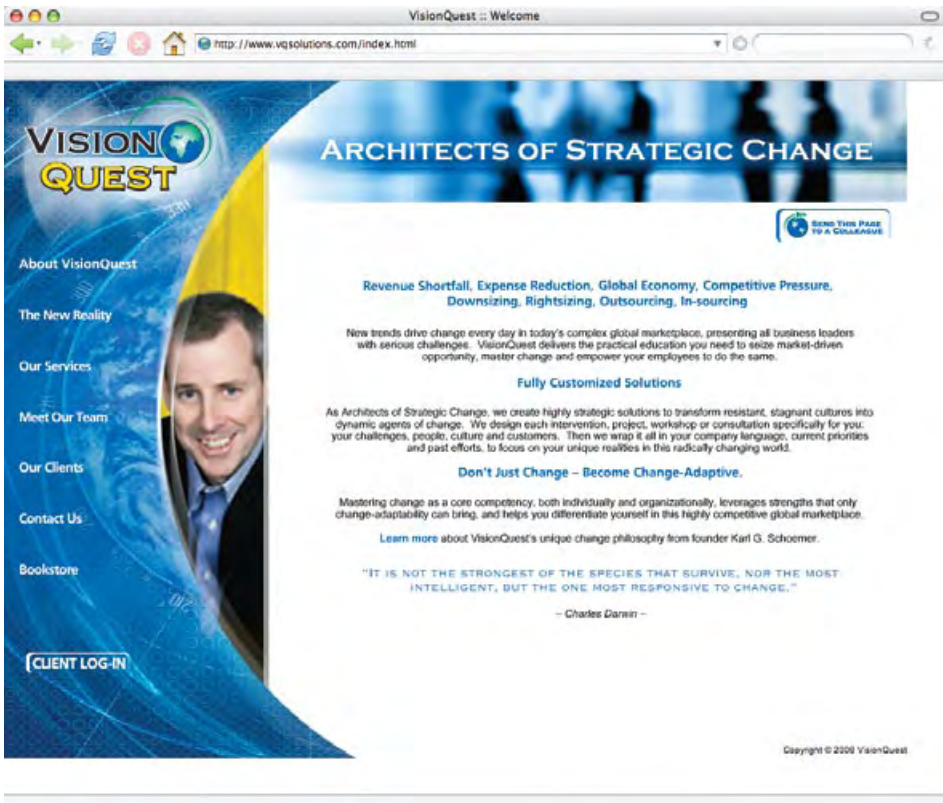
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The screenshot shows a web browser window with the address bar displaying "http://www.vqsolutions.com/index.html". The website header features the VisionQuest logo on the left and the tagline "ARCHITECTS OF STRATEGIC CHANGE" on the right. A navigation menu on the left includes links for "About VisionQuest", "The New Reality", "Our Services", "Meet Our Team", "Our Clients", "Contact Us", and "Bookstore", along with a "CLIENT LOG-IN" button. The main content area includes a "SEIZE THE POWER TO A CHANGE" icon, a list of business challenges (Revenue Shortfall, Expense Reduction, etc.), a paragraph about the current business environment, a section for "Fully Customized Solutions", a quote from Charles Darwin, and a copyright notice for 2008 VisionQuest.

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— Charles Darwin —

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in mastering change is a  
lot like a school of fish, moving  
independently, in unison,  
toward opportunity and  
away from danger.*

