

# It Starts at the Top... But... Finishes at the Bottom

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Sadly, we know when a war is started it starts at the top of a government or a group. This is an historic fact. What is also an historic fact is . . . the war is completed either successfully or not so successfully at the bottom of these organizations.

In this column, I will not discuss why wars are started but only the “WHO” starts them and who finishes them, as it relates to business models. References indicate that most wars are started at the highest level (the TOP of an organization Strategy) and, of course, are fought by organized troops or followers (the BOTTOM) to its completion (the Tactics). Of course, the TOP must have instituted funds for training of the BOTTOM as well as authorize support resources during the tactical conflicts. But, in the final analysis, when push-comes-to-shove the BOTTOM either wins or loses the war.

As it is in war, it is true with the business of successfully running an organization it is, to win.

The TOP of a business unit (management) must determine what it wants to do: remain as it is or become something else and then determine if its’ current strengths of position, resources and power can achieve that strategic objective. These determinations must then be weighed against its competitors’ and their current strengths of position, resources and power, in the target markets, to determine what the odds of “winning” will look like.

Of course, the TOP should always confer and evaluate intelligence from the marketing and sales group (the Bottom), however, the bulk of the decisions on when and how a business “goes to battle” is accomplished at the TOP of the organization.

Like in war, there is an enemy and in business, it’s called competition. There are other, what I describe as “nit-picking” enemies like time (wasting elements), tempo (the strides & frequency of same taken by all functions), and energy (“fatigue makes us all cowards” . . . Coach Vince Lombardi) As a business manager, one must accurately measure (marketing) both its competition against your target goals . . . as well as the customers’ (market) needs or wants.

Perhaps the best model is described by John A. Howard of Columbia University when he described marketing:

“Industrial Marketing is the process of (ACCURATELY):

1. Identifying customer needs,
2. Conceptualizing those needs in terms of an organization’s capacity to produce,
3. Communicating that conceptualization to the appropriate laws of power in the organization,
4. Conceptualizing the consequent output in terms of the customer needs earlier identified, and
5. Communicating that conceptualization to the customer”

It is interesting that Mr. Howard did not insert any discussion of the enemy . . . Competition, in his five-point “Marketing Process”. Competition will always attempt to block its’ competitors progress and foul their capacity to fulfill this “process” successfully. Therefore, a no. 6 point would be to “out maneuver the competitive presence and successfully block their attempt to disrupt the competent flow of the first five marketing elements.

When making a point in business we seem to inevitably revert back to a sports parallel. Let me bore you with another one.

In (American) football, you win by outwitting, outflanking, and overpowering the other team. In war, you win by outwitting, outflanking, and

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over-powering the enemy. The territory you take is only a reflection of your ability to do these things.

Why should industrial marketing behavior be any different? It’s a conflict (a War) in every sense of the word. The true nature of business marketing today involves the conflict among competing corporations. Let us NOT forget this essential nature of what industrial marketing (warfare) is all about, because it’s NOT the satisfying of individual human needs and wants (retail), it is the “want” the market (made up of many similar companies) requires.

What is the bottom-line take-away message here? It’s very simple . . . the whole of an organization, like any other “living” organism, from the TOP through the middle to the Bottom must be totally in tune (in touch with itself) and coordinated much better than its competitive enemy, to be successful.

It’s not easy and takes a great deal of intelligence and hard focused work but, the organization must “see” itself as the combination of all the other key component elements of its target value chain . . . from the four corners of any business universe . . . the Voice of Customer; Voice of the Customers/Customer; Voice of Competitors; and Voice of Company . . . and it will have captured all the chain influencers, points-of-view and become better positioned to win the “war” in the industrial marketing battlefield. **CW**