

THE AGILE COMPANY©
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THE NAKED LEADER

You may have seen the James Cameron film, Titanic?

You may have seen it more than once (why, it sinks every time?)

I discovered recently that it is based on a true story

A question - why did The Titanic sink?

It did hit an iceberg, and that definitely played a part in its demise.

But why did it hit the iceberg?

Because its rudder was not big enough to turn the ship in time

Because it was not *agile*, not *fast moving*, enough

From the moment the crow's nest phoned down to the Bridge and they had that historic exchange:

Bridge – “What do you see?”

Crows Nest “Iceberg – right ahead”

The passengers, crew and vessel's fate were sealed, because the ship was too big and its rudder too small to turn it in time,

Like too many organisations today.

One of the main reasons for this is because there is so much work to be done – we seem to have more stuff to do than ever, with always less resources.

Projects	with less	People
Marketing	with less	Clarity
Technology	with less	Application
Complexity	with less	Tolerance for error
Delivery	with less	Time
Methodology	With less	Innovation
Research	with less	Money

So, how can we ensure we are agile enough to thrive and survive in the 21st Century, and most importantly, ensure our agility is focused on our customers.

Firstly we must understand the context of this new century, of this new business age:

The Next Business Age – When Customer is King, Queen and all the other members of court as well

1. Matter, matters less
The new value of a company is to be found in intangibles: people, ideas, information
2. Space – Distance just Collapsed
The web just made you global, day one, and right next to each and every customer
3. Time – Tomorrow Just Arrived
You can now reach anyone, anytime, straight away.
4. People – Your Crown Jewels
They are your last, final, and most powerful unique selling resource
5. Growth – Be a Pioneer
The advantages of being first in your market, with a new product or service, are greater than ever
6. Markets – Buyers Have the Power
Make sure it is easy for your customers to buy from you – 24 hours a day
7. Transactions – With every sale, contract and contact
You are dealing one-to-one with your customer – make sure you treat them like they are really special, because they are your livelihood.

The Agile Company

Everyone in business is talking about The Agile Company

What is it? What does it mean? What does it look like?

In my view, there are ten key features:

In order of priority -

1. People at the front-line must be able to make the decisions they need to, to delight customers

Warning Sign – Somebody in Customer Service on the phone to seek permission to help a customer, with that customer right in front of them, hearing every word!
2. Everything in your company is geared towards customer service.

You therefore value people, inspiration and motivation very highly – it will be your people’s passion and persona that will determine, in your customers’ eyes, if you are a trusted company.

Beware – Especially in shops – overheard discussions about how appalling the company is to work for (and don’t tell people not to do this or they will do it all the more. Motivate them).
3. Company hierarchies are accompanied by clear ownership statements – “The buck stops here”

Organisational charts everywhere, powerful sounding job titles aplenty, and no indication of who does what

4. You make fast and true decisions

Put a time limit on the decision, and then take it with the information you have, closing off all other options and possibilities.

5. Everyone in the company knows the big picture, where they fit in and how they play apart in overall success.

Know where you are going and what you are about, and share it with everyone (that's everyone). This is the best way to put an end to 'us and them.' And ban terms such as "back-office," there is no such thing.

6. Know where the knowledge sits, and moves around.

It's inside people's heads, and people walk around, and walk away. Do a quick survey of your people, when you want to find something out, who do you go to? You will be amazed by the small number of people who hold all of the knowledge. These are critical people to you.

7. People from Head-Office spend time on the front line

Tesco do this regularly, and with outstanding results. A senior manager will be a shelf-stacker for two weeks; the HR Director will go on the tills to pack customers' bags etc. It is a powerful way to understand what your company actually does, and what is going right and wrong.

8. Use e-mail replies to best advantage

Avoid "reply to all" as much as you can. Set up a central e-mail depository to copy to, which can be visited by your peers to see all e-mails that have been sent.

9. Be as flexible as you can, around the needs of your people

Show understanding after a bereavement, extend maternity leave by the new mother working from home, and be as flexible with working hours as you can. Do these and other ideas, and people will work harder, and you will get a massive return for showing you value your people.

10. Appreciate that you are all totally dispensable

Oh dear – major decision to be made and he/she is on holiday – don't let it happen. And if you as a manager/supervisor/whatever believe that your true value lies in you being indispensable, consider an alternative. Your true value, your talents and strengths, your success now and in the future, lies within you, not with a job you happen to be doing, right now.

Don't believe me? Fine, make yourself indispensable. These days it's the fastest way to being dispensable, because people who think they are, and tell others, are usually not.