

The Finish Strong™ monthly e-newsletter helps business leaders consider how to improve operational performance to world-class levels.

Finish Strong™ thinking is about dotting operational i's and crossing operational t's. It is based on the premise that operations is more than an implementation tool, or a means to an end. Operations is the strategic function that delivers competitive advantage and brand loyalty to the marketplace and profitability to the shareholders. Or doesn't.

Your company cannot afford to be sloppy if you want it to be great.

TRUTH OR CONSEQUENCES

The Tour de France once ranked with Wimbledon, the Masters, March Madness and the Superbowl as premier sporting events that draw the attention of even those least interested in sports. No longer.

Using bicycling's bury your head in the sand approach to dealing with drug allegations, baseball's steroid era has equally damaged its premier event, the World Series, and cast a shadow on all personal records as Barry Bonds blasts past Hank Aaron.

It's not the "chemical enhancements" used by athletes that hurts; it's the deception. The unanswered "did he or didn't he cheat" question puts everyone in the sport under suspicion. Even if "everybody does it" it's still cheating if the rules of the game say it is.

The words "Enron" and "Sarbanes-Oxley" quickly remind us that the credibility of American business is no better. In a world of skepticism and mistrust, business must be doubly committed to knowing and telling the truth to suppliers, customers, investors, and employees. Proactively reach out. Show respect through the truth.

Why? Because a track record of reliability builds competitive advantage. A company that instead covertly or overtly misleads, hoping that what others don't know won't hurt them, will feel the repercussion of its unreliability. Better to tell the truth than to suffer the business consequences of not being believable.

CHINESE QUALITY: AN OXYMORON?

Recent news about contaminated food and lead-painted toys imported to the United States from China have many folks saying the Chinese have once again proven that they can't make quality products -- at least not ones Americans want to buy.

They'd be wrong. A significant volume and array of high tech and high quality goods are imported from China.

China is not the United States with cheaper labor and less restrictive laws. It is the product of its own history, a history very different from our own. We live in a nation of laws, much of the world does not. We have developed and legislated a set of business ethics (which someone in our country violates every day) that is different from those of other countries. Not necessarily better, but different.

Other nations are attaining a level of significance in the world economy that many of us had held as ours and ours alone. It's time for each of us to learn to identify major economies on an unlabeled globe, to name the political leaders of the G8 and other major trading partners, and to begin building cultural understanding.

Chinese quality is improving daily. Don't let a handful of product problems take your eye off the ring.