

The Finish Strong™ monthly e-newsletter helps business leaders examine issues important to taking operational performance to world-class levels. Do your Operations deliver your company's espoused brand promise to every client on every order?

Finish Strong™ is about developing an appropriate Operations strategy, and effective execution, dotting operational i's and crossing operational t's as you go.

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

LEARNING FROM BOEING

The Dreamliner has become a nightmare. In a significant strategic shift, Boeing decided to design and build this new aircraft through outsourcing much of the work traditionally done inside to a network of companies that had in many cases never worked together before.

Boeing is finding that weakness in planning, coordination, communication, and problem solving skills throughout the supply chain has compromised anticipated gains.

What looked good on paper is ugly in real life. No matter how fast management tries to push the network, it can only change as fast as it can. Skills and experience don't arise through spontaneous combustion, regardless of project timelines.

When engineers sit side by side for years without knowing what the other is working on...

when supply chain managers struggle to work effectively with direct suppliers and don't give proper focus to the supply chain's other direction...

when operations management struggles to get employees within a single business thinking together...

the alleged gains of outsourcing to achieve lower cost can easily fall into the abyss created by the absence

of requisites. Traditional Make vs Buy analysis rarely asks the question: "are we and our supply chain capable of effectively managing the planning, communication, coordination, and problem solving processes that will be required?"

People in glass houses shouldn't throw rocks. Companies that can't internally plan, coordinate, communicate and solve problems effectively shouldn't rely on a business model designed to leverage those as strengths.

If you decide that something is not your core competency and should be outsourced, be sure to outsource it to someone for whom it is a core competency. And make sure you're good at the things that effective outsourcing requires.

CUT THE AD BUDGET!

We can't escape the doom and gloom conversation about the American economy, and to many it is much more than conversation: it is real.

I am intrigued by how some companies react to tough times. It seems for many the response to declining sales is to cut back on advertising and marketing. If they think that stuff works at all, why reduce investment in attracting sales when they need sales? Use it wisely, of course, but that guideline shouldn't only be pulled out in a downturn.

Similarly, it doesn't make sense to cut back on improvement efforts when struggling to be competitive. You may not be able to control energy or material costs, but you can work to use them more effectively. Rising benefits costs may increase the cost of employees, but shouldn't we always be working to utilize that resource wisely? Again, these are not guidelines that should sit on the shelf until faced with crisis.

Your company still has to get better every day. Your competitors around the world aren't taking time off, so you can't afford to either.