



# Do something!

By:

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*“It is possible to be without resources. It is inexcusable to be without resourcefulness. That is about character, not cash. There is ALWAYS something you can do. There is always SOMETHING you can do. There is always something YOU can do. Pick up the phone and make calls. Get on your horse and get out in the field. Knock on doors. Proposition a host. Hustle.”*

Dan Kennedy: *The Ultimate Marketing Plan*

The two most impressive business turnarounds of the past several decades have been those engineered by Steve Jobs at Apple and by Howard Schultz at Starbucks. Marissa Mayer is now trying to add Yahoo! to that roster (but at Yahoo! they are not calling it a turnaround – they are calling it a Renaissance, recognizing the power that just one word can have for influencing culture).

New products and new strategies were obviously part of these turnarounds, but in each case Job #1 was to revitalize a demoralized and pessimistic corporate culture. That’s also the primary challenge facing Mayer at Yahoo! The most important duty of the leader (and of the parent on the home front) is to instill hope, optimism, and confidence when to all outside appearances there is none. In his book *Onward: How Starbucks Fought for Its Life without Losing Its Soul*, Schultz makes it clear that saving the company was first and foremost a cultural and a spiritual challenge, and that the business and economic challenges were secondary. At Yahoo!, Mayer knows that her biggest challenge is re-sparking that “can do in the face of all odds against us” spirit, which will be the non-negotiable prerequisite for recruiting and retaining the hotshot engineers that have been deserting the company for Silicon Valley startups.

Here are four key steps for sparking that sort of a cultural Renaissance (don’t you just love that word!?! ) in your organization – and in your family:

*Focus on what’s important:* There is nothing more demoralizing than seeing your precious and irreplaceable time being wasted on things that don’t make a difference and that, truth be told, probably don’t need to be done at all. Steve Jobs slashed the product line at Apple, Lee Iacocca slashed meetings during the legendary turnaround of Chrysler, and Mayer is slashing red tape at Yahoo! in order to help people make sure that the work they do really is making a difference. We had a productivity consultant

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visit us at Values Coach and her first recommendation was that we (and especially me) slash the amount of time we spend on email and internetting (I know that's not yet a word but it should be) by handling it in a more efficient manner.

*Lighten up and make it fun:* Southwest Airlines is the most productive and profitable of the major carriers – they also have more parties than all of the others put together. At Southwest they understand that people are more productive when they're having fun. Every day of the week employees at Fillmore County Hospital in Geneva, Nebraska (a member of the Values Collaborative) get together for their daily reading from *The Self-Empowerment Pledge*. During one meeting Laurie Brandt, an LPN in the FCH Specialty Clinic, received the hospital's custom-made Traveling Spark Plug Trophy for the way her work reflects *The Twelve Core Action Values*. There was applause and there was laughter – and the entire event took less than five minutes. It was a great way to start the day – both at FCH and for us at Values Coach.

*Build on small wins:* No matter how dire the situation, there is always something you can accomplish that will give you a reason to celebrate – and get people's minds off of what's not working, at least temporarily. A while back Values Coach was in the midst of a significant cash crunch and the phone was ringing about as often as the rocks in the parking lot. So I installed a ship's bell on the wall and we all got to ring it any time we had a sale of at least \$100. That's not a very high bar – 20 copies of *The Florence Prescription*, which sells for \$5 a book, will do it. But it gave us an excuse to ignore the silence of the phones and celebrate for a few minutes. By the way, we have graduated from that particular crunch but the bell has become a permanent fixture in our office – and in our culture.

*Don't run away from risk:* There is a natural tendency to become more risk-averse when the chips are down, but that's often the worst thing you can do. As each of the business turnarounds mentioned above shows, it is often *precisely* when things seem bleakest that the greatest opportunities are just around the corner (or just on the other side of the mountain). Chrysler was on the verge of bankruptcy when it took one of the biggest – and one of the most successful – risks in the history of the car business: creation of the minivan.