

THE VALUE OF A VIRTUOSO CEO

Virtuosos distinguish themselves by exemplifying E⁵: excellence, expertise, experience, enterprise, and ethics. They force people to take them seriously. They don't raise the bar—they set it for everyone else. They serve as gold standards for what people should strive to be and attain. If you were to scour the world, you'd be hard-pressed to find people who do their jobs better. You wouldn't hesitate to hire them again, and you'd be crushed if you found out they were leaving.

Others look to virtuosos for guidance and example. Often, they consider virtuosos edgy and contrarian, but they seldom ignore them. Virtuosos chafe at too much supervision or tight controls—fortunately, they need neither. They constantly search for the new horizon and welcome the unforeseen challenge. No synonym for the word “virtuoso” exists. Some might substitute “artist,” “expert,” or “musician,” but these don't suffice. Many can lay claim to these titles and still fail to be virtuosos. Few virtuosos exist. These hardy individuals go beyond resilience to grow—even after confronting adversity.

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When hiring or promoting someone to the CEO positions, boards do well to insist on a virtuoso—a leader who can help a company recover from a

crisis and avoid creating one. But they should do so with the understanding that virtuosos don't settle for the status quo; instead, they are often seen as disruptors.

The general understanding that disruption often yields positive change is not a new one. Some of the early ideas and writings of the ancient Hebrews and Greeks, and the religious teachings of Christianity, Hinduism, Buddhism, and Islam contain elements of the potentially transformative power of disruptions, often described as suffering. Attempts to understand and discover the meaning of human travails represent a central theme of much philosophical inquiry and appear in the works of novelists, dramatists, and poets. Not until the mid-1990s, however, did psychologists Richard Tedeschi and Lawrence Calhoun coin the term *Post-Traumatic Growth* (PTG).

According to these theorists, PTG explains the transformation that follows trauma and holds that people who endure psychological struggle following adversity can often see growth afterward. Many consider PTG synonymous with resilience. They contend that becoming more resilient as a result of struggle can be an example of PTG, but Tedeschi and others of his ilk disagree.

As they posit, someone who is *already* resilient when trauma occurs won't experience PTG. These theorists argue that because resilient people don't feel *rocked to their core* by an event, they don't have to seek a new belief system as a result of it. *Less* resilient people, they contend, often go through distress and confusion as they try

to understand why this terrible thing happened to them. Their struggle to find resilience causes their growth.

Dr. Linda Henman doesn't concur. Her research on war veterans suggests that the more resilient

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the person is before the trauma or disruption, the better the chances of growing afterwards. Even though Tedeschi and Calhoun don't agree with Henman about the state of the person facing the disruption, they do agree about how growth can happen after it. The researchers posit that PTG occurs in five general areas: appreciation of life, relationships with others, new possibilities in life, personal strength, and spiritual change.

These five factors determine an individual's progress in reconstructing their perceptions of self, others, and the meaning of events while they are coping with the aftermath of trauma. Henman's research mirrors these conclusions and offers the following nine benefits to the disruption virtuosos can enjoy:

1. Personal growth

A disruption often causes a shift in power, and people discover what they're made of. They discover they are stronger than they ever realized. They set priorities in their lives and gain a feeling of self-mastery and learn they can control more than they ever imagined.

2. A focus on vision, not tactics

In addition to setting new priorities for themselves, those who have slain the dragon of adversity learn to re-evaluate threats and opportunities, rationally evaluating the risks and the rewards. They insist on thriving, which goes above and beyond resilience and involves finding benefits within the disruption.

3. A willingness to kill sacred cows

By abandoning conventional mindsets and questioning long-held assumptions about revenue streams, customers, culture, and operations, virtuosos take performance to a new level for themselves, their teams, and their organization.

4. Formation of a culture of innovation, not caution

Ordinarily, culture should serve as a strong stabilizing force; however, the root of culture is "cult," a testament to the kind of thinking that can often guide decision makers to adhere to a mindset that no longer works.

5. Agility and efficiency, the complexity cures

William of Occam, an English Franciscan friar and scholastic philosopher, has influenced modern organizational theory—but not enough. Occam's Razor—the shaving away of all that is unnecessary—suggests parsimony, economy, and succinctness in problem solving. It states that the fewest assumptions should be selected—the fewer the better—even though more complicated conclusions might also prove correct.

6. Improved personal and professional relationships

Even though we couldn't be face-to-face during much of the pandemic, we connected online. A dog barking, a cat jumping in front of the screen, or a little one toddling into the meeting

didn't distract. These small slices of life created new focus on the relationships people had taken for granted—often for years.

7. **New customers**

Negative disruption, like a global pandemic, creates new customer problems that demand quick solutions. Growth had *always* been about finding new customers who had become unhappy with their other options.

8. **A more flexible labor pool and hiring practices**

Companies that were once dead set against remote work began to see tangible advantages in the “work from home” orders. Most people didn't have to be in the office to do their jobs. In fact, some people became more productive because of less time commuting, less burn out, and better work/life balance.

9. **More telemedicine, leading to a reduction in health costs**

When clinics and doctors' offices closed during the COVID-19 pandemic, patients and healthcare providers stumbled upon ideas for improving care and reducing costs. They found that patients were more likely to seek healthcare when they could do it from the convenience of their homes. This improved general wellness because people didn't wait until they were sick to seek a doctor's help. Visits were cheaper, and for the first time, people in rural areas had more choices in quality healthcare.

Growth after disruption, whether traumatic or less daunting, can happen, but it won't happen automatically. Much will depend on decision-makers learning lessons quickly and adapting adeptly. Sometimes these virtuosos will emerge because of the crisis, but just as often, they will be the exceptional people leaders always depended on to accelerate growth. Virtuosos know when and what to disrupt to engender needed change, but they also know how to react to crises others

create. Boards do well when they steadfastly search for these rare leaders who can make a difference to the organization.

Helping Define Your Company's Future Success



We can help you formulate a strategy that works:

- Defines the choices a company is making about who is and who is not a customer
- Doesn't serve as a rationalization for budgets
- Challenges assumptions
- Seeks to reduce risk, not avoid it
- Serves as a framework in which adjustments are expected and can be accommodated

We advise on any unaddressed issues to help the board and the company move forward. If you have any questions about The Board Mindset, visit www.theboardmindset.com or [contact us](#).