

If I Were The Competition, What Would I Do To Put Us Out Of Business?



- by Gary B. Cohen, Executive Coach

Successful corporations reinvent themselves every year. Sony is producing X new products per day. 3M races itself in the invention process. Leaders of these corporations ask themselves, “If I were the competition, what would I do to put us out of business?” They pride themselves on finding the answers to this question and acting on them before the competition does.

My business partner, Rick Diamond, CEO of ACI, has a saying over his desk that he got from Ted Deikel, former CEO and Chairman of Fingerhut Corporation. It says:

*“Every day in Africa a gazelle wakes up.
It knows it must run faster than the fastest lion
or it will be killed.
Every morning a lion wakes up.
It knows that it must outrun the slowest gazelle
or it will starve to death.
It doesn't matter whether you are a lion or a
gazelle.
When the sun comes up, you better be running.”*

-Abe Gubegna, Ethiopia, circa 1974

Rick and I had no prior experience in the call-center industry, so in the early days, when we woke up in the morning, we knew we had to do at least one thing better than our competition. Otherwise, our company would starve. We asked ourselves, “How can we catch the competition? How can we improve upon what they do?” We needed to find a way to increase the productivity of our call-center operators. How could we reduce the amount of dead time they spend on the phone? What if there was a more seamless transition between calls? These questions led us to create the technology for predictive dialing. Predictive dialing eventually became the industry standard, but not before little ACI grew from two

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What are YOU doing to outrun the competition?

employees to 2,200. This technology predicted when operators were going to complete a call and transferred another call to them the moment they hung up. If call center operators normally spent twenty-two minutes talking to customers on the phone, now they would spend forty-five minutes. Because payroll was our largest cost, we were able to both out-produce and undercut the competition. As lions new to the territory, lion cubs really, we caught our first gazelle.

If you are chasing the competition, be a lion. Ask yourself, “How can we catch the competition? How can we improve upon what they do?” If you are trying to stay ahead of the competition, run like a gazelle. Ask yourself, “How can we avoid being caught? What will allow us to increase the distance between us and the competition?”