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Become a Leader of Change



Be persistent and curious. Drill down until you're absolutely certain you understand all of the different elements of the question you're trying to answer.

Over the course of my nearly 40 years in business, I've witnessed extraordinary changes across my industry and many others. And yet, no single moment has been as full of disruption, as transformative, as the one we are living through right now—from economic and political volatility to breakthrough technologies that are transforming how we live, communicate, do business, and so much more.

Moments like this can be challenging. A recent study by the Boston Consulting Group found that only one-third of businesses successfully navigate disruptive change and emerge on the other side. If any of us in business hope to thrive in the future, we need to adapt to the demands of our time, continually asking ourselves what we know, what we don't, and how to fill the gaps. Simply put, we need to be lifelong students.

How do we do that? Well, I've learned a few lessons over the course of my life and career. Here are three I've found particularly helpful.

First, look at a problem from as many different perspectives as possible.

I travel quite a bit, and everywhere I go, I talk to as many people as I can to try to get a full picture of our business. I talk to customers, field salespeople, and all our employees. I talk to elected officials and civic leaders to get a broader sense of what's happening in a market. In many countries I visit, I go to consumers' homes to see how they're living and what they're buying, and stop at restaurants, bodegas, and supermarkets to see how our products stack up. As today's world becomes increasingly complex, it behooves us to walk in one another's shoes and take a multidimensional approach to learning, allowing us to gain a richer understanding of the problems before us and how to solve them.



Second, always get to the root of the answer. One of the techniques I sometimes use was developed by Taiichi Ohno, a Japanese industrial engineer at Toyota in the middle of the 20th century. It's called the "5 Whys." Ohno said, whenever there's a problem ask why it came about, and when you get an answer, ask why again, and so on four more times, until you get to the bottom of it. So, be persistent. Be curious. Drill down until you're absolutely certain you understand all of the different elements of the question you're trying to answer.

Third, be an example of inquisitiveness that others can follow. There's an old maxim that goes: "Brief the top. Train the bottom." Well, those days are over. Today, everyone needs to be trained and train themselves, especially CEOs. As one of my colleagues used to say, "The distance between number one and number two is constant." What he meant was, if a leader steps up their game, they'll raise the bar for everyone else, and the entire organization will rise with them. Thanks to the

digital revolution, there are a number of extraordinary resources at our fingertips for educating ourselves. But it's up to each of us to look for the information we need, understand it, and apply it in our own lives. That's what I try to do and encourage my entire team to do as well.

Reflecting on the theme of navigating transitions, I've been thinking about the various transitions in my own life—as an immigrant who came to the United States all those decades ago; as an employee and executive, advancing through different stages of a career.

Each of these transitions has been different. But every time, I've found that the key to navigating them successfully was not to face them with reluctance or fear, but to welcome them, to embrace them, with curiosity and courage. If we can do that with the transitions we're facing in our economy, and our society as a whole, I am confident we'll navigate this period successfully, and emerge on the other side stronger than before.

If we hope to thrive, we need to adapt to the demands of our time, asking ourselves what we know, what we don't, and how to fill the gaps. We need to become lifelong students.

