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What business leaders can learn from square apples

Former professional football player **Christopher Zorich** made millions of dollars at the height of his career, but he never forgot how it felt to be poor and hungry. As a boy, he and his mother were sometimes forced to find food in the dumpsters behind a local grocery store. When they found rotten apples, Zorich's mother would cut off the bad parts -- making the apples square -- and the two would eat them.

Zorich's story of square apples provided the title of a new book coauthored by **Susan Smith Kuczmarski** and her husband, **Thomas D. Kuczmarski**. Kuczmarski says the resourcefulness of his mother, and the positive character it built in her son -- who later established the **Christopher Zorich Foundation** to feed needy kids and their families -- exemplify many qualities necessary for 21st century leaders.

In researching their latest book, "[Apples are Square: Thinking Differently About Leadership](#)," Kuczmarski and her husband interviewed hundreds of leaders about what made them successful, then culled the list to 25 they felt were of a different breed, those who, like Zorich and his mother, demonstrate the traits required to be an effective leader and to encourage innovation in business.

"The new paradigm for leadership and success has more emphasis on the people in the organization. Success is not power, it's not wealth accumulation, it's not control, and it's not competition. Instead, it lies within your answers to questions such as: How are you successful? Do you improve the lives of other people? Do you make them feel better about themselves? Do you make them feel like they are capable of achieving more than they thought they could? Already, you can see it's a different apple. It is a lot more to do with sharing leadership, and a lot less to do with controlling and competing," Kuczmarski says.

Her book details six qualities leaders must possess today: humility, compassion, transparency, inclusiveness, collaboration, and values-based decisiveness.

"Humility is taking risks, making mistakes, embracing failure, and possessing an inner self-confidence. It has an impact on innovation because it increases your tolerance for failure," Kuczmarski says. "Compassion -- which means understanding, being nonjudgmental, and being in the heart of another person -- also has a huge effect on innovation. It increases employee commitment, it reduces bureaucracy, and it triggers hidden productivity."

Kuczmarski says transparency, both in positive and negative situations, is important because it creates an atmosphere in which all employees can see, evaluate and criticize decisions. Ideas can come from anywhere, and the best ideas win.

Inclusiveness requires leaders to be open and respectful of differences, recognizing everyone else as part of the whole. It reduces the hierarchy typical in many businesses, increases team strength, and improves decision making.

"Collaboration is about recognizing others' strengths and leveraging those strengths," she says. "It means the whole is greater than the sum of the parts. The team owns ideas and projects. There is more open communication, and there is a self-imposed responsibility. People need to know, if there is an issue, they can face it. They can solve anything as long as they talk about it."

The final leadership quality Kuczmarski highlights is values-based decisiveness, which she defines as "using your values as a decision filter. Values-based decisiveness has a major impact on innovation, because you're aware of your values as a team. It brings people together, and it really does commit and engage employees."

Learn to implement these strategies from the AIE Imaging Executive podcast

Kuczmarski has much more to say about leadership. She outlines the seven steps for change all leaders should take, and shares other insights from her research, in an interview with PMA Senior Editor **Jennifer Barr Kruger**. Listen to it all on the [AIE Imaging Executive Podcast](#), available now.

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President's corner: Small-business killers



Susan Smith Kuczmarski



The average lifespan of a small business is 30 years. To be sure, many last far longer than that; but the reality is most do not. Since this is a real statistic and has not changed much through time, there must be a set of universal business-killing constants that come into play. I've been in business for 34 years now, and am fortunate to be able to say it looks like I'll be here a while longer. Many of my friends in this industry have not been so fortunate, and there have been more than a few challenges I have faced that could have made my company part of this majority.

I've compiled a list of what I believe are the most serious threats to business survival. If you can add to this, please send me your thoughts. I can follow up in a later article with the expanded list. We can all benefit from the knowledge.



Tom Reiger, AIE president

1. Undercapitalization

The true No. 1 all-time business killer: If you need a dollar, you don't have a dollar, and you can't borrow a dollar, then you are done. It's as simple as that. Developing a working relationship with your banker is as important as developing one with your customer. I know this to be true.

2. Failure to plan

Without a clear idea of what you want to be, you will never get there. Business planning is about as much fun as taking a test; but, in a way, it is a test -- and yes, you have to take it. No cheating.

3. Poor leadership

The captain of a ship must have the complete confidence of the crew or, sure enough, it will sink. It's no different in business. You provide the direction and the motivation. They provide the muscle. Don't cross the two.

4. Lack of integrity

You can fool some people sometimes, but you can't fool them forever. Lincoln had it right. Lack of integrity is like lack of Vitamin C. Nothing more to say.

5. No high-level view

You need to be honestly able to look at yourself and your company from very high up. See yourself as your employees, customers, and competitors do. It may not be very pretty; but once again, who do you think you are fooling?

6. Not recognizing your limits

Do you really believe you have the skill set needed to take your company from a single location to 2 or 20, and manage the expansion process? Or expand from 5 employees to 50? Are you that good? Are you sure? Get it wrong, and you are gone.

7. Betting the farm

Do you really think one big, expensive bet is worth risking everything? Are you kidding?

8. Not staying healthy

Sometimes this one is outside your control. Most times, it's up to you. Always have a Plan B. Most of us are sure we are indispensable. That's the biggest delusion of all.

Tom Rieger

AIE president

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