



What the Serengeti Can Teach You About Growing Your Business and Survival: Understanding Critical Survival Skills

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Today's business environment is brutal. Despite being on the upswing of the recession, companies are still struggling to survive, with layoffs a daily occurrence in many industries and scale backs the norm across the board. Former major companies, such as Borders and Kmart, are barely hanging on, and many others have already shuttered their doors.

Growing up in Africa, I learned firsthand about the survival of the fittest; about how understanding one's innate skills could mean the difference between life and death, or success and failure.

On a recent trip back to Africa, it struck me that there were strong parallels between life in the Serengeti plains of East Africa and in the business world today. The animals of the Serengeti must migrate 1,000 miles every year; they must keep moving forward; and they must rely on their inborn skills to survive. The same is true in business. While it's not usually a life-or-death scenario, as is the case in the Serengeti, business leaders struggling with how to keep their business afloat, much less thrive, must realize their innate skill and capitalize on it.

The skills necessary for survival both in Africa and in business are: strategy, endurance, efficiency, enterprising, gracefulness, risk-taking and communicating.

Regardless of which skill we turn to, strategy and planning are critical if we are to successfully triumph over the challenges facing us. Strategy cannot be just about achieving an end; it's about how we arrive there. The best and most successful companies and leaders have learned that in order to survive and excel, they have to:

- **Consider all the challenges** – What are the possible roadblocks as you move forward with a new product launch or propose a new client strategy? For someone who is innately enterprising, this means learning to evaluate and analyze potential risks before diving in head first. Developing a plan to address potential problems and risks early on will ensure that you are able to make the most of every legitimate opportunity.
- **Define the intended result** – Defining the intended result is critical to making sure you are working toward your end goal before jumping in. People who are risk-takers evaluate all the options on the chance they are taking before making a decision. They frequently review goals and determine the various routes to get to the destination. Often, they choose the path with the highest risk in order to gain the maximum reward. Defining your intended result will guide you through the process of determining the best route to take, but it also serves as a compass along the way to ensure you

are constantly working to satisfy the end goal.

- **Identify the resources required** – Reaching your intended result requires that you have a clear picture of what resources you have and what you need in order to reach your goal. People whose primary skill is strategy have the ability to organize their thoughts, ideas, expertise and expectations to accomplish the intended result. Creating a written plan to achieve that goal, paying special attention to your objectives, tactics and resources, will ensure key aspects are not missed as you move forward.
- **Stay focused and execute your plan** – For people who are enduring, this part is easy. Endurance keeps our mind going when our body wants to quit and gives us the mental capacity to continue moving forward, despite the obstacles, hardships, pain or fatigue.
- **Adjust to changing conditions** – In our 24/7, constantly wired, continually innovating world, being rigid almost guarantees failure. You must be flexible and adjust your plan as needed. This is easier for some than others, but successful communication with your team and those around you will help you identify the changes that are necessary and how to best go about making them.

Survival depends upon knowing your strength – your instinctive survival skill – and making the appropriate adjustments to supplement your weaknesses.

What's more, we can significantly increase the odds of success in any endeavor if we know who we are, what we want, where we're going, how we're going to get there and, most importantly, what we are going to do when we get there. Survival is first and foremost a "state-of-mind," but without implementing the necessary skills, we can very easily change from the predator to the prey.

Stefan Swanepoel is an international speaker and the author of the *New York Times* bestselling book, "*SURVIVING YOUR SERENGETI: 7 Skills to Master Business and Life.*" To discover your innate skill, visit www.WhatAnimalAmI.com.