

“It is not the strongest of the species that survives, nor the most intelligent that survives. It is the one that is the most adaptable to change”— Charles Darwin

Last month, I had a chance to read two interesting articles.

The first one is about a CEO at a leading company in the U.S who had been sacked from his position due to his inability to adapt to change.

The second one is about an electrical-appliance shop's owner in Chiang Mai who had no fear of change and was ready to fight till the end to survive.

The first story was written by Don Jones and covered by The Nation. The article wrote about Robert Nardelli, Home Depot's CEO, who, according to the news, was actually quite good. In six years on the job, he doubled Home Depot's sales and earnings. But it's a pity that he was a good performer in the old business world where CEOs were only responsible for numbers and reporting only to the boards and shareholders.

The world of business has changed, so do the roles and responsibilities of the CEOs.

Today, CEOs cannot hide themselves behind the closed door anymore. They have become public figures accountable to all types of stakeholders – NGOs, academics, politicians, consumer advocates, business partners and media.

Limiting the roles of CEOs to be just the Chief Executive Officer is no longer enough to make companies survive today's rapidly changing competition. I personally believe that a CEO should also be Chief People Officer and Chief PR Officer.

In today's business world, people are the most crucial factor to create a sustainable competitive advantage. A CEO should spend no less than 30% of his time on attracting, developing and retaining talented employees.

At the same time, the CEO should make himself accessible to public inquiries. This is to build up trust and prove that the company is a trustworthy, transparent and responsible organization.

We have to admit that when the world changes, we have to adapt. If we can't, we won't be able to survive. But if we can, we will not only survive but may even bring our business to the next level.

Khun Pitak Ploempitakkul's story that I read from the Bangkok Post is actually a good example of a leader who successfully adapts to change.

Khun Pitak is the owner of electronic Plaza Siam TV, an electrical-appliance store in Chiang Mai. When the local competition was intensified by the entrant of international retail chains, instead of letting himself be vulnerable and passive, he decided to compete head-on, by adopting fast, proactive approach. He initiated several 'unexpected' marketing strategies to differentiate his business and to win the customers back.

Among the winning strategies were the cheapest price guarantee and the 'lightning service'. To ensure that his products were the cheapest, he sent out his staff to check the market every 10

days. To win the customers' heart, he introduced the 'faster-than-expected' delivery service. The news reported that the product would be waiting for the customers at the doorstep even before he returned home.

I like what Khun Pitak said – “Before asking for help, you must help yourselves first by working harder than others, build your team and be eager to learn new things”

He changed before he was forced to. That's why he could lead his business out of crisis. I think the ability to adapt oneself to change is one of the most important qualifications today's leader should have.

Charles Darwin once said, “It is not the strongest of the species that survives, nor the most intelligent that survives. It is the one that is the most adaptable to change.”

Hundreds years passed by, this remark is still so true.

If we don't adapt, we can't survive. If we don't fight, we will never win.