

## Leading in Uncharted Terrains

By Ann N. Gatty, Ph.D.



In this time of economic uncertainty, business leaders often find themselves leading in uncharted terrains. For many industries, the future is difficult to predict much less survive. The leadership skills that were important in navigating the development of your business may no longer be relevant to ensure future sustainability. For many leaders, this is a time marked by ambiguity. This is a time that requires leaders to think differently. Here is an analogy of what it means to navigate when the business terrain you are crossing is uncharted.

At the United States Military Academy, cadets are required to complete a land navigation course. The purpose of the training is to assist the cadets in being able to find their way through unfamiliar military situations after graduation. Out in the field, the cadets wear a GPS device, and also, they plot what they think would be the best course of travel using digital pins on a computer. Then they use their compass and complete their navigation of the assigned terrain. Upon their return, the cadets compare the computer route with the actual course taken from the data collected by the GPS device. There are always variations, because the terrain is not always what they had anticipated.

This analogy offers an interesting comparison for businesses. As a leader, you have mastered many tools to navigate through various business situations in the past, but they may seem inadequate for handling today's decisions. You may be encountering a time when you can't predict how your market will behave nor can you control the changes in the market. These are the times when you must adapt your business strategies in order to survive.

### Answer these 4 questions when you are leading in uncharted terrains.

What is the purpose for your organization?

No matter what happens, the purpose for your organization must be consistent. It's the overarching reason that the business began. Everyone within the organization should be aware of what that purpose is and where you are leading the organization in the future.

What is the significant challenge your business is facing now and in the future?

Answering this question requires you to identify the capabilities and expertise that you and your staff currently possess and what capabilities you must add to handle the forecasted challenges. Such challenges could change from product development during the start-up phase to product delivery as the company grows

and expands. Do you have the capabilities to handle this change? Do you need different marketing strategies now? Make a list of then and now capabilities and hire the right people as you move through transitions.

#### What direction are you taking the business?

Having a clear sight line is imperative. But even more important is being objective about where you have been and what the past actually looked like. When you are leading in uncharted terrains, you need to remain keenly aware of where you are taking the business and communicate this goal to all staff members.

#### How are you going to get there?

Execution of your plan is key. Keeping things simple and focusing on those few things that are critical for success will allow you to eliminate those activities that are distractions. It takes courage to communicate to your staff some of the severe realities your business may face and the difficult choices you must make. However, engaging and mobilizing your staff by using the strengths they bring are useful in moving the organization forward always keeping the line of sight in focus.

#### The Secret is Understanding Liminality.

Liminality refers to a quality of ambiguity or disorientation that occurs during times of transition, when a business is in between something that has ended and something else that is not yet ready to begin. A liminal organization needs to unlearn old behaviors, challenge the status quo, experiment, take risks, and learn.

Susan Beaumont, writing in [How to Lead When You Don't Know Where You're Going](#), explains that "The words liminal and liminality are both derived from the Latin limen, meaning a threshold; that is, the bottom part of a doorway that must be crossed when entering a building. In Latin, limen refers to the stone placed on the threshold of a door that physically had to be mounted to cross from one space into another." The word, liminality, refers to a time of ambiguity during transition between what an organization has been and what an organization will become.

Realize that during a time of liminality, your destination may not be clear, even as you continue to move forward. Leading in uncharted terrains may seem like an adventure. Use this time to consider the possibilities and the opportunities that you can create so that you are not trying to continue embracing previous strategies that no longer work. This can be a time of experimentation before reorienting your business to its new identity as a part of a newly crafted future.

#### About the Author

Dr. Ann Gatty is a business development strategist. She helps her clients clarify the vision for their businesses, boost their leadership capabilities and add quality talent to help the clients reach their goals. Through a collaborative mentoring process, she and her clients create workable strategic business plans and success



initiatives, while improving their workplace processes. Dr. Gatty is a frequent writer and contributor [www.AllBusiness.com](http://www.AllBusiness.com), [www.MarketingInsiders.com](http://www.MarketingInsiders.com), and [www.WomenOnBusiness.com](http://www.WomenOnBusiness.com). Her interactive speaking engagements assist participants in discovering new-found talents and skills that they can immediately apply in the workplace. Join her [Facebook Group, Strategic Thinking Summit Elites](#) for strategies you can implement to grow your business success and enjoy camaraderie with others entrepreneur members.

Learn more about how Strategic People Solutions can design [leadership development strategies](#) for you. We offer one-to-one coaching and masterclass opportunities. In addition, Dr. Ann can assume the role of chief learning officer for your organization, and has extensive experience designing leadership development curriculum that is customized for the needs of your organization. Grab a copy of her timesaving [productivity guide](#) and reach the goals you aspire to achieve.