

Soaring With the Eagles: Rebounding Your Business from the Brink of Extinction By Dan Stockdale

Happily, our children may never know that the bald eagle, the proud symbol of our country, was once nearly extinct. In the 1960s, there were fewer than 500 pairs in the US, because of shootings, pesticides, habitat destruction, and pollution. Thanks to endangered species and environmental protection laws and other conservation efforts, the bald eagle, though still considered “threatened,” has been brought back from the edge of extinction. This magnificent bird –an icon of rugged strength, incisive action, and tenacious care giving – once again soars through our nation’s skies.



As a business leader, what can you learn from the eagles about coming back from setbacks, big or small? If you find yourself facing down the total “extinction” of your organization, or you want to head that possibility off before it gets any closer, consider what the eagles can teach you about regaining or maintaining your company’s status from your perch high atop the cliffs overlooking your vast corner of the world!

Develop an Eagle’s Eye

Eagles are renowned for their excellent eyesight. They can scan thousands of acres, as they soar up to 10,000 feet above the ground. Eagles actually have two centers of focus, which allows them to simultaneously see forward and to the side. Unlike human fishers, who may have trouble seeing fish only a few feet below the surface, eagles can spot a single fish while flying several hundred feet up in the air.

Such keen vision could come in handy, even if you never make it out to a lake. Honestly assess how observant you are: Are you able to look below the surface of an issue to see the source of a conflict? What is your level of insight into the people and problems in your organization? If you have difficulty in one area, are you willing to hire the professional resources you may need so that you can accurately visualize the situation?

To recover from business difficulties, you must develop the eagle’s dual vision. First, seek to see clearly in the present, observing honestly the current realities of your situation. Then simultaneously develop a positive vision of the organization’s future. In

other words, to get through setbacks, you must be in the present moment but also able to look *beyond* the moment, and definitely not allow yourself to get caught up in anxiety and self-pity about the obstacles you face.

To pull yourself out of a crisis, you must make a realistic assessment of where you stand, determining how you got there as honestly as possible. Get as much information as you can from others, seeking to determine both how you got off course and what strengths your organization has that may allow you to compete again. Gather those around you whom you believe can offer fresh insights and ideas for recovery and listen closely to what they have to say.

Adapt by Adopting an Action Plan

Eagles' nests are between five and ten feet in diameter – some can weigh up to a ton! - and are built in trees or cliffs near coasts for easy access to fishing. If a natural disaster destroys the nest, the pair will not spend time arguing about who or what is to blame for their nestlessness. Instead, they work together diligently to rebuild the nest in time for breeding season.

Once you and your team have assessed what brought you to your current state of crisis, you need to form a united vision for your future and get to work on building your nest - making your vision happen. Many organizations have vision statements that serve little purpose other than to adorn a plaque in the lobby. Others may have once lived by their stated vision and mission, but got caught up in daily crises and have lost sight of their original goals and have no action plan to attain them.

Revisit your organization's existing vision and determine if it is applicable to the current realities. Can it be adapted? Or must you create a new vision of the future altogether, given the current state of affairs and the prospects for the future? Always keep in mind the necessity to move forward. Action is strength.

Sharpen Your Talons of Determination

When an eagle hunts, it swoops down to seize its prey with powerful, sharp talons that produce approximately 1,000 pounds of pressure per square inch in each foot.

Do you have the same degree of strength within yourself? You need that sort of determination to succeed even when you're *not* in a struggle to avoid extinction, and when you are threatened, you need it all the more. When you can say with certainty that you have the desire to lead your organization to success, you then need to look at top managers and see whether they, too, have this strength and desire to do the work that needs to be done. Your key people must be fully invested in your efforts in order for the team and the organization as a whole to succeed.

Negative naysayers among your key players aren't likely to *ever* buy into your vision, but you can still use your own strength to try to convey the message to them once you've determined how long you can wait for their buy-in. If your naysayers aren't on board within an amount of time you determine to be reasonable (which may only be a few days, depending on the seriousness of the situation), you may have to use those talons to lift them up and deposit them on the farthest shore so you and your team can fly on to success.

Protect Your Fledglings and Your Nest

Eagles are very progressive by human standards in terms of their sex roles. They mate for life and both parents share all hunting, egg incubation, nest watch, and eaglet feeding and brooding duties until their young can fly at about 12 weeks. In spite of their fierce protectiveness and tender attention to the eaglets' needs, only about 50% of eaglets hatched survive their first year.

That figure is reminiscent of often-quoted statistics about business failure, isn't it? Consider the fledglings as analogous to your "new" organization, that which is emerging from your new attention to the vision, goals, and action plan to attain them. Just as the care, feeding, and training of eaglets is not a solo sport, nurturing and growing the organization after crisis will require *everybody* to make it work.

Your protection must be diligent, guarding the organization fiercely from predators, which, in the form of your competition, will be looking to pick off a newly reorganized institution. You may find other businesses trying to recruit your top talent,



for example, while your organization struggles to. So tend to your talent with a careful eye on operations and resources. Throughout this process, you must remain constantly vigilant in order to know everything - good and bad - that's happening so you can avoid being blindsided by a sudden storm or marauders bent on destroying your work.

Survive, and Thrive, the Eagle's Way

From the beginning of our nation's history, the bald eagle has faced struggles. Ben Franklin originally proposed the wild turkey our nation's living symbol of Freedom, Spirit & Democracy. Fortunately, he didn't get his way and the rest of our founding fathers prevailed in naming the bald eagle as our national icon. After all, a "Nation of Eagles" has such a better ring to it than a "Nation of Turkeys"!

Then, after nearly wiping eagles from the face of the earth, mankind turned its efforts to saving the noble birds, and after four decades, this attention has paid off in a revived eagle population. Such patience and determination are yet another metaphor you need to follow when faced with the prospect of your own organization's "extinction." You shouldn't expect a complete, overnight change in the circumstances that caused your quandary, and you must have a strong sense of purpose, even when prospects seem grim. You must also rely on a trusted team to help you accomplish the goals that support your vision for the revitalized organization. Although it may take awhile, you *can* soar in the thermals once again!

About the Author: Dan Stockdale is the author of the upcoming book, "Taming Tigers" (projected release date 01/17/07). He is an author, business advisor, spokesman and exotic animal trainer. He has served as an expert guest on Fox News, Hannity & Colmes; Fox News, The Big Story with John Gibson; and Fox News Live. I have also served as an expert source for the New York Times, Chicago Tribune, Boston Globe, VOW Magazine, and AOL (America Online) and many other media outlets. In addition, his articles have been published by scores of organizations including Microsoft, American Management Association, Golf Business, Lowes Home Improvement, Monster.com and many others. He has also served as a consultant to numerous national corporations and government entities.

Dan also serves as President of Adventures in Leadership, Inc., a consulting and educational firm that specializes in applying his Taming Tigers Techniques to improve organizational effectiveness, enhance sales performance and increase revenue. Dan's principles allow his clients to achieve extraordinary results while maintaining a positive, energetic environment. Dan also accepts keynotes where he demonstrates his philosophy of management using live animals. You can find out more about Dan Stockdale by calling 877.3.JUNGLE or by visiting his website at: <http://www.AdventuresInLeadership.com>.

Dan is a member of the following organizations:

- *National Speakers Association*
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- *The International Federation of Professional Speakers*
- *Elephant Managers Association*
- *Animal Behavior Management Alliance*
- *American Zoo and Aquarium Association*
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You can find out more about eagles by visiting the online site of the American Eagle Foundation at <http://www.Eagles.org>. The American Eagle Foundation is largely responsible for saving the bald eagle from extinction. The need, however, continues to be great if we are to continue growing their numbers. Please visit the Eagle Foundations website to learn more about how you can help save America's bald eagles.