

## Lessons learned from 40 years in corporate and agency marketing

By Ron (Doc) Halliday, MBA, FCIInst.M., RPM, CMC  
Strategic Imagineer & Business Improvement Advocate  
dochalliday@shaw.ca



The most significant lessons I have learned from my 40-year career in corporate and agency marketing are that sustainable results cannot be attained unless: business leadership is passionate about continual improvement that is embraced and lived by a motivated workforce; and employees who are well-trained and rewarded for achieving excellence.

Companies, whether they are large or small must improve, inwardly and outwardly. Leaders must apply a multi-discipline strategic and imaginative approach to address business challenges such as: culture change, adoption of a values-based operating philosophy, productivity/ process, performance measurement, customer relations management, marketing/sales, HR development, and competitive benchmarking.

Internal improvement encompasses improving performance, individually and as a team, and delivering quality products/services to achieve sustainable and profitable growth within a healthy culture. On occasion, it may require leadership re-visioning, re-assessing operating principles and values to validate they are understood, meaningful and in play throughout the organization. One of Stephen Covey's fundamentals for success is the principle of 'understanding before being understood.'

Understanding a business or organization holistically in advance of strategic guidance leads to sustainable improvement. This requires collaboration with both the leadership and employees to establish an integrated matrix of strategies and tactics, all operating in harmony and directed towards a common purpose. Fundamental to achieving improvement is the acceptance that it is imperative that the people within the

organization believe it is possible for the organization to excel - and doing so within a culture that thrives on innovation and improvement.

Outward improvement includes improving communication effectiveness. It is not unusual for business to solicit the assistance of a Canadian Institute of Marketing professional to introduce and/or strengthen comprehensive integrated creative strategies designed to improve brand building, marketing, advertising, public relations, promotional planning and sales.

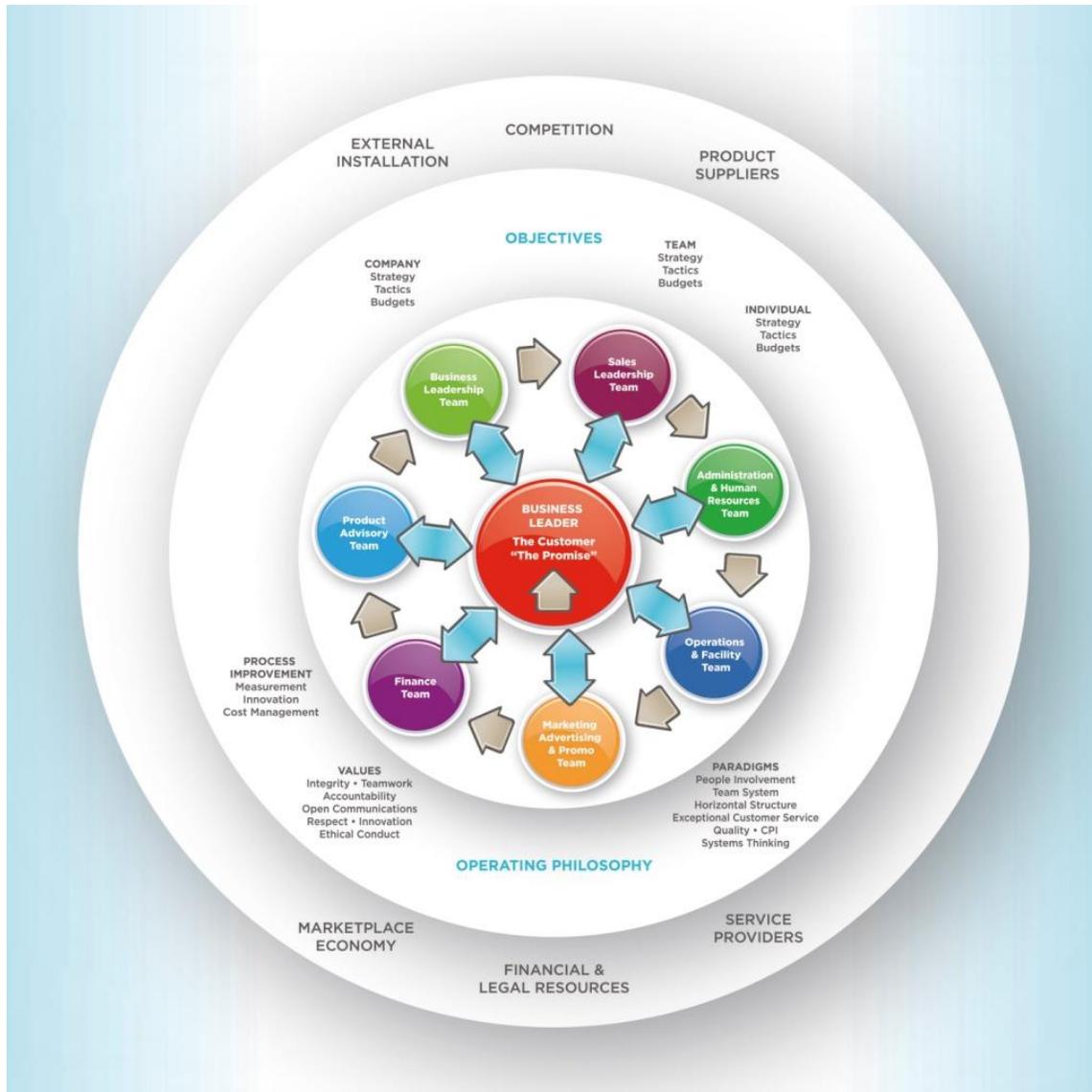
Choosing a winning strategy for business and organizational improvement goes beyond traditional marketing, too commonly understood as advertising, and promotion. I have learned and believe that “delivering a product/service that has real value, as viewed by a preferred customer, and doing it consistently through highly motivated people while delighting customers is a winning strategy.

Employees/Associates are viewed by customers/suppliers alike as “Brand Ambassadors.” Combined with the fact that ‘customers decide whether a brand will succeed or not’ must be incorporated into a winning marketing/advertising strategy.

**Bottom line** - Without the imagination, energy, creativity and desire of employees, both individually and collectively to exceed customer expectation – the most sophisticated business plan will miss the mark. Marketers who consider themselves the best of the breed intrinsically incorporate their clients’ employees/associates into every conversation about market growth – profitability – and sustainability.

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A picture is worth a thousand words – I hope my graphic will encapsulate the essence of my message in this article.