

## The Business Challenge: Navigating Perpetual Whitewater

All organizations today are in a state of perpetual whitewater. Change is constant. New challenges lurk around every bend in the river. These challenges include:

- Rapidly changing customer and consumer preferences;
- A competitive landscape which can change almost daily and may often come from an organization's own suppliers and customers;
- Technology changes which can completely alter the sources of competitive advantage overnight;
- Seemingly conflicting needs to radically improve the value provided customers – through better service, more rapid turnaround, higher quality, mass customization of products and services – while stripping out every possible cost;
- The need to have a highly productive, highly skilled, constantly improving mobility workforce, while carefully managing compensation costs and maintaining flexibility in employment levels;
- Providing ever faster response times to customers while eliminating the costs of inventory; and
- The challenge of acquiring and developing the depth of leadership talent necessary to guide the boat through the rapids.

The most severe rapids can quickly swamp even the best positioned organization. Companies that are unprepared for the challenges are perpetually at risk in this environment. Even when organizations think they are not in the rapids, conditions can change quickly. And, the river is infinitely long. What seems certain and secure today will almost definitely be turbulent and threatening tomorrow.

So, who survives and prospers?

The factors that drive success in the business world are the same factors which drive success on a whitewater expedition. Organizations that prosper and sustain themselves in this climate of perpetual whitewater share several common key factors:

- 1) A clear understanding of where they are (their strengths and weaknesses both internally and externally) in the competitive environment.
- 2) A clear vision of both how they must compete strategically and how they must shape their internal organization to be successful;
- 3) The skills and capabilities to execute the journey. And the ability to grow new skills and take existing skills to higher levels to meet challenges as the journey progresses.
- 4) The ability to identify necessary changes in systems, structures, processes and key business and people practices to move quickly from the current state to the future state; and
- 5) Leadership -- The ability to engage people in their organization in the effort.
- 6) Adaptability – the ability to make quick turns and decisive moves when encountering new rapids, while staying focused on the ultimate long-term goals.

The one compelling difference is huge: On a whitewater expedition, almost every precaution is taken to ensure the safety of the participants. Rapids are scouted. Safety lines are deployed. In the business world, there is no safety line. If we're not prepared, if we don't have an understanding of where we are and where we want to go, if we don't have the necessary leadership or take the time to develop the talent necessary of success, failure is certain. No one is waiting at the bottom of the rapids with a throw rope to pull us out if we make a major mistake. So ultimate success and sustainability requires constant effort to chart the right course, get everyone aligned and build the capabilities necessary to navigate the rapids.

**Produced and Developed By:**  
**WhiteWater Consulting Group, LLC**  
**lead. learn. change. thrive.™**  
**wwcg.biz 877.890.6356**

lead. learn. change. thrive., Just Lead!™, and the WhiteWater Logo are  
Registered Trademarks of the WhiteWater Consulting Group, LLC  
© 2008 WhiteWater Consulting Group, LLC