

#01

Futureproof Your Business

Five Survival Tactics

TABLE OF CONTENTS

00

Introduction

01

Be a lab, not a factory

02

Focus on employee experience

03

Embrace top-down transparency

04

Make smart technology a strategy

05

Tap into distributed talent



00

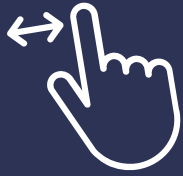
Introduction

You're at your son's soccer game, sitting in the sunshine and cheering him on.

A gentle ping from your coat pocket tells you have an email from a client. You glance at your phone, type up a quick reply, put your phone back in your pocket—just in time to see your team score.

You're there for your family. You're also available to your customer base. Technology has changed the business landscape so drastically, so quickly.

And it's not just you who is experiencing a different mode of work. Your employees and customers also now enjoy an extremely fluid, flexible, "in the moment" experience.



***With a quick swipe** of a smartphone, anyone can speak to a relative across the globe, send a live broadcast to multiple viewers, or simply pay their mortgage online.*

This technology—these expectations—are starting to affect how employees view your business. Does your company live up to everyone's "in the moment" expectations, or will your archaic business practices leave you in the history books?

In this e-book, we'll walk you through a new paradigm called "the future of work." (We originally penned this piece as a blog series, in support of the fantastic e-book by Jacob Morgan and our partners at Salesforce.)



*In this book, we'll equip you with fundamental, practical advice on exactly how to **"future-ize" your company.***

Your future office will be in the palm of your hand, if it isn't already. It will be utterly mobile. One quick tap on a device shows us what we need, no matter where we are. The world is real time. No one has to wait for answers any more. Information is no longer outdated by the time it gets to us. We are also instantly—and infinitely—social. We can put a question out to our social networks and get thoughtful, personal replies within seconds.



Your future business is also global. Customers are no longer just down the street. They can also be located anywhere on the globe. Telepresence technology can connect a partner in London with one in Vancouver. And both can chat with their factory liaison in Vietnam.

Time zones have become almost irrelevant.

Business is happening 24/7. So are your partners' and suppliers' businesses. They are always on, and they are everywhere.

And that's just the technology! The future of our HR will change as well. There will soon be very few boundaries between departments or teams. No silos, no walls. No front office and back office—just one office. There will be no need for multiple disconnected systems.

In fact, you'll notice that quite a few of the topics in this e-book don't deal with technology as much as they do the human side of your business. Here's a complete list of what you can expect in this e-book:

- ***Be a lab, not a factory:*** How to encourage your team to be more "scientific" and innovative.
- ***Focus on employee experience:*** Ways you can empower your employees and increase their engagement.
- ***Embrace top-down transparency:*** Why you should be sharing your metrics and plans with your team.
- ***Make smart technology a strategy:*** Integrate tech into your daily business and watch it boom.
- ***Tap into distributed talent:*** Tips on expanding your talent pool.



01

Be a lab, not a factory

The days of mindless clock-punching and assembly line corporate cultures are far behind us. Today's rapidly changing, digital age demands a new business philosophy: creative, lab-based thinking.

Lab-based thinking is exactly what it sounds like. Imagine a scientist running a controlled experiment and taking notes along the way. Observations are made, hypotheses are formed. Creative solutions are recommended and put in place.

Lab thinking is about reframing how you see your company, your KPIs, and perhaps most importantly—your employees. If you get them thinking micro and thinking creative, great big results can happen. After all, science lives in the details.

STEP 1

Track and Creatively Attack

Many business owners suffer from target fixation. They're so focused on the bottom line, the sale, the high-level business goal. These goals are easy to see from a distance—they are top of the mountain peak. They represent finality of the achievement, and they're beautiful.

But to get there, one must “go micro” to ensure each action is planned and improved. Paying attention to micrometrics paves a clear, incremental path to the intended goal.

In Lawton Ursrey's role as Customer Success Manager of Sage One, he and his team are expected to know and always improve their conversion goals, retention goals, and so on.

According to Ursrey, they do this by hyperfocusing on the observable metrics. If they are good, they'll most likely lead to customers finding value in the product and support of Sage One. (We even have text support for customers, and they love it.) Ursrey and his team curb frustration and elevate our brand's reputation simply by paying attention to the details.

Each member has a daily live chat dashboard which tracks all of their own observable metrics: how quickly do they reply to new chats, how many times are they able to resolve issues, how often must they transfer the customer.

If they hit or exceed the standard, their status for that KPI turns green. If they miss it, it's red. Ursrey happily reports that their average response time for a new customer chat is 2 seconds, which is decidedly, impressively green.

Then—and this is where the innovation comes in—they attack their reds. They are challenged to find creative ways to turn their reds to green.

The upshot? The most powerful innovation from your team will always be about problems they themselves touch every day. A great side effect is that this “lab-based thinking” is also extremely empowering. Their team is hyper-engaged and empowered.

STEP 2

Take the Journey

Another way you can "lab think" is to challenge your employees to take a task-oriented end-to-end journey. Have them take the exact journey your customers do, every day, and take notes along the way.

If you sell goods online, assign one employee the "task" of purchasing something from your online store. Task another one with trying to return an item. A third could be challenged with buying your product online as a gift.

Have them begin at the very top of the funnel. They can start by reading some content they saw on one of your social platforms and end in your shopping cart. What snags in the system did they encounter? Look for friction points. What clunky instructions confused them? Where did a button or link not work?

Once that journey/experiment is complete, your employee can then review the problem areas and come up with creative solutions. Again, the innovation is in their hands, on something they themselves have personal experience with.

Then the testing cycle begins again. Instead of large overhauls, they put in place processes which allow incremental change every single week.

It's worth noting: this process should be fun. Iterating, improving, innovating is enjoyable. So encourage your employees to have fun with it and watch them get crazy innovative.

Have them take the exact journey your customers do, every day, and take notes along the way.



02

Focus on employee experience

It's time to think beyond the cog.

Today's employees don't want to feel like just another gear in the big corporate machine. They need more. Team-building days, free sodas and high tech workspaces, are all great perks. But they're not enough to keep your exceptional employees engaged and productive. They also need to feel empowered, heard and important.

In Deanna Buchanan's role as Director of Talent Acquisition at Sage, she trains her team to care as much about retaining talent as they do about acquiring it. Buchanan places as much emphasis—if not more—on employee satisfaction as she does on finding great employees. After all, **if you want to hire people with big brains, you better make sure they feel like they are using them once they get on board!**



Loosen the reins.

Heck, throw the reins out altogether. With all of the technological advances and mobility options, employees know that they can realistically work just about anywhere. What's more, many of their friends probably already do.

So forcing them to report to a desk in your building from 9 to 5 every single day could eventually foster resentment. It might even cause employees to start looking elsewhere. So when possible, **offer them the option of working from home.** They'll appreciate your trust as much as they do their freedom.



Give them a chance to give back.

Another way to show that you care about your employees is to support them in other aspects of their lives, not just the work they do for you. It's why companies offer medical benefits, vacation, family leave. Try taking it a step further and **show them you understand their value as a community member.**

Many of your employees would love to give back to their communities if only they had the time or energy. Children and other family obligations often eat up the weekends. So "give" them a certain number of work days where they are encouraged to go out and give back. Bonus: This also shows them you care as much about the community as you do about your company's productivity.



Recognize top performers.

Does reading that phrase have you thinking about your P&L statement? Maybe you're nervous how much it would cost to implement a bonus program. Actually, **if you think a bonus program is expensive, wait until you see how much replacing them will cost you.**

The **Society for Human Resource Management's** research "... suggests that direct replacement costs can reach as high as 50%-60% of an employee's annual salary." Now how do you feel about handing out a few small bonuses?

Also, recognition **need not mean spending a lot of money.** There are many affordable ways you can make your employees feel important. You can give them time off, a great parking space, overnight stays with their spouse at a nice hotel, anything.

You can also just remember to say thank you! The more public, the better. Give them a shout out in the company newsletter or give them something they can proudly display on their cube wall. You'd be surprised how far a simple show of gratitude can go.



Take their feedback and actually implement it across the business.

Finally, there's one more no-brainer way to focus on your employees. Listen to them! Actively elicit feedback on ways they can improve their workflow or anything else you think they might have an opinion on. It can be as simple as asking them how they might handle meetings differently. **And don't just ask for their opinions. If they are good ideas—act on them!** Your employees can often see issues in your business you cannot and can find solutions you would never dream up. They feel empowered and needed and your business profits from their good ideas. Win win.



03

Embrace top-down transparency

Zappos is famous for it. More and more modern business owners are embracing it.

It's top-down transparency, and it's an absolute must-have in today's corporate culture. By pulling back the veil and sharing your businesses roadmaps, performance and customer metrics with your employees, you will kick their enthusiasm and engagement into high gear.

Before we dive into the dos and don'ts of transparency, let's talk about the whys.

Why is transparency so important to today's workforce? Why should you share so much about your company? Because it's expected. And because—in many ways—transparency is already in place, all around you.

The Internet has made sure of that. Social media shows the world what your customers think of you. Google anything, dig hard enough, and you can probably find out what you want to know.

Having grown up in this "open book" environment, millennials have come to expect it. Understanding and having a greater impact on the company they work for is very important to them. They don't just want to work anywhere . . . they want to work somewhere that helps give them a higher sense of purpose.

Here are some guidelines on how to share information with your team in ways both motivating and empowering.

Do . . . realize that they are going to find out a lot of this information anyway.

Like we said, the world has gone public. So get there first when you can. Remember that in the absence of information, people make things up. And unfortunately, it's rarely good. Fear and suspicion tend to creep in. So make sure you are filling that vacuum before negativity and complaints can.

By getting out in front of the communication, you are able to frame it how you want. If it's good news, you have the opportunity to celebrate with the team and reinforce to them that they're an important part of the good news. If it's bad news, you have the opportunity to quickly mitigate any concerns and build their confidence on how the company plans to handle the news.

Do . . . face rumors head on.

Say one day you come in to work and you find employees freaking out over the news that two of your biggest competitors have merged. They are worried that either your company will be put in a competitive disadvantage or you'll have to merge your own company. In either situation, your staff is worried that their positions are going to go away.

Instead of hiding in your office and waiting for the freak-out to blow over, call everyone into a conference room and invite them to hit you with every rumor they've heard or any concern they have. This can have a profoundly calming effect and be cathartic for the whole team. This puts to rest any rumors and concerns, while giving them the opportunity to voice their bold questions in a safe place.

Don't... fake it.

If you are asked a question you don't know the answer to, don't pretend you do. A simple "I don't know the answer to that question" will gain you much more respect than fudging it. If it's something that needs to be answered, tell them you'll find out and get back to them.

Don't... share everything.

There's a level of transparency that becomes disruptive to the organization. Don't share upsetting news like workforce reductions or demotions too soon. It is important to gauge when sharing the news would be premature and therefore disruptive to the organization.

In those cases, waiting for the right time to share is paramount. Remember that the point of sharing information is not to gossip or scare them. It's to align your team so they can charge ahead into battle and "take the hill" with you!

Just remember: Everybody on the football team realizes that the likelihood of a successful Hail Mary pass at the end of the game is low. But if the quarterback goes into the huddle and says "Hey guys, I doubt this is going to work, but let's give it a try"...it most assuredly will not.

Do... share your passion.

One of the simplest ways to engage their enthusiasm is to share yours. On a regular basis, tell them why YOU love to what you do. Tell them why you think the work you do is important. And encourage them to share their passions as well.

*At the end of the day, if you don't share information with them, you are missing out on their creativity. You can't be the only person coming up with solutions and ideas. You shouldn't be! No one of us is as smart as all of us are. By being transparent, you are **empowering your team to create extraordinary results.***



04

Make smart tech a strategy

Are you a typical small business owner? Do you constantly defer to others—perhaps a savvy young employee—when it comes to technology? Do you often find yourself saying the words, “I’m just not very technical”?

Stop saying that.

Embracing technology is no longer optional. You yourself must be ready to explore new technologies. There are so many time-saving apps, social networking tools and online project management platforms out there.

So it's time to stop thinking of these tools as fun gadgets and instead start building them into the core of your workflow. (You can bet that your competition will, if they haven't already.) **By placing new tech at the center of your business practices, your efficiency and communication will greatly improve, company-wide.**



*By placing new **tech** at the **center of your business practices**, your efficiency and communication will greatly improve, company-wide.*

For instance, as the CEO of Veltig (a rapidly growing Salesforce partner) Donal de Paor knows that cloud computing is central to his business. So he always tries to hire really smart people who know Salesforce, whenever possible.

Once they're hired, the Veltig team wants to keep them. De Paor says that one of his most important responsibilities is to retain employees by building a great culture and having a great employee experience. A good experience doesn't just mean free snacks and great PTO. It means giving them the tools to do their jobs better, with less frustration.

For example, Veltig used to manage its HR records and PTO on manual spreadsheets and then used Dropbox to upload and share them. (The founder even entered time off into their payroll system by hand!) Sure, some of those processes and tools are free, and that can be alluring to a cost-conscious business owner.

But **"free"** quickly becomes expensive when invaluable time is wasted on tasks that should be automated. That time is much better spent improving operations and services. Veltig consultants soon grew frustrated when the systems designed to help them were actually eroding their productivity.



As the team continued to grow, the processes that had served them well in the past proved too manual or error-prone. Far too many emails were flying around—and as a result some occasionally slipped through the cracks, which negatively impacted customer and employee satisfaction.

Their onboarding process was also very manual and inefficient. This was not the first impression Veltig management wanted to create especially as they began to hire more people from beyond their network.

Something had to change.

So they moved to Sage HR and payroll, and things began to improve in a big, time-freeing way. They began to enjoy the benefits of seamless integration and enhanced automation. Paid time off is now managed completely online. Time off requests are submitted and approved online.

The onboarding experience for new hires is now completely automated and integrated with payroll. As an added bonus, de Paor no longer has to track the constant changes in labor regulations like ACH or state laws. Sage manages that complexity for him.

Putting this kind of technology in place has allowed him to spend less time on frustrating administrative tasks and more time with the most important aspects of his job: their employees and their customers.



05

Tap into distributed talent

The boy (or girl) next door should not be your only hire. Why?

Because new digital tools have changed the business landscape immensely. From mobile apps to cloud to video conferencing technology, there are so many new ways to connect with your peers, customers, vendors and employees.

Embracing these new technologies—and the new HR opportunities they present—**isn't a luxury. It's a survival tactic for every modern business owner.**

By limiting your staffing search to employees who are able to work in your office from 9 to 5, you are shrinking your talent pool. This archaic thinking could cause you to miss out on a super-talented, uber-affordable remote worker. A rock star who your competition might snap up! Here are just a few ways your business can tap into distributed talent.



Work locally, network globally

Successful business owners know networking is crucial. Trading notes with like-minded business owners can improve your business on every front. Some business owners mistakenly think that local events are the only ways to network. But it can feel counterintuitive to share your best ideas with someone who is marketing to the same customer base that you are.

That doesn't mean you should abandon your networking efforts. Just move them online! There you can trade notes with like-minded businesses who sell what you sell and do what you do. They just do it to a different customer base.

By networking online, you get to tap into all that great experience, without any of the competitive risk that may concern you. Find an online community to suit you and your business the best.

If you're the kind of person who loves face-to-face networking opportunities, there are many conferences around the globe you should consider attending like [Sage Summit](#) or [Dreamforce](#). They will allow you to network with people outside of your competitive battlefield, and the attendees are often at the top of their game—after all, they made the investment in attending the conference.



Think relo

As fantastic and affordable as remote contractors can be, many roles demand a bit more face time. But that doesn't mean you should only consider local candidates. Your ideal candidate might be willing to move to you!

When you're looking for great talent, cast your net wide, all over the country. When you pitch your job, pitch your location as well.

Talk about the great lifestyle and amenities they would enjoy if they moved to your town. Sell your awesome city in addition to selling your awesome company.



Stop the clock

One of the cheapest, easiest perks you can give your employees is the ability to work from home—or to offer flexible hours. It doesn't cost you a penny (unlike paid time off, benefits or free lunches) and yet it's perceived as valuable.

The "sit at your desk where I can see you, from 9 to 5" management style is dangerously outdated. Here's where you can lose out on some great talent. There's a new shift away from time-oriented management and toward results-oriented management. Simply put, as long as your staff gets their work done when you want them to, you should consider letting them work flex hours or even occasionally work from home.

Overall, the world is becoming hyper-connected. Thinking outside the confines of your city for staffing and networking can give you access to the best people and the brightest talent.

*Thinking outside the confines of your city for staffing and networking can give you access to the **best people and the brightest talent.***



Futureproof Businesses Need Futurized Business Tools

New **Sage Live** is the accounting tool of the future. Utterly mobile, realtime, integrated with Salesforce . . . find out why **Sage Live** is the perfect solution for your business needs!

LEARN MORE >



sage Live