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The Conversation



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Why You Should Fire Yourself

10:31 AM Wednesday December 30, 2009

by Ron Ashkenas | [Comments \(9\)](#)

When management changes were announced at General Motors earlier this month, most people focused on the firing of CEO Fritz Henderson and his replacement by Chairman Ed Whitacre. The more significant moves, however, were those that took place afterwards when Whitacre promoted a number of younger managers (including two women) to key positions. Taken together, these shifts (with more to come) sent a strong message to everyone in GM that it was time for fundamentally new perspectives and faster decisions.

But why did it take a virtual purge for GM's executives to realize that it was time for change? Wasn't bankruptcy, a federal bailout, a near-death experience, and international embarrassment enough of a wake up call? Didn't former CEO Henderson and his team understand the urgency for turning around GM?

Unfortunately, the GM situation reflects the reality that most managers become enamored with their own strategies and have trouble breaking free of their tried and true patterns. In other words, even when we intellectually understand that the world has changed and we need to do things differently, it's difficult to let go. We become invested in what we've created and how we've learned to do things. And it's not just managers at a troubled company like GM; it's all of us.

Jack Welch used to gather his senior executives together in January and tell them to act as though they had just been newly appointed to their jobs. What would they do differently if they were coming in to their business without preconceived notions and with a completely fresh perspective? It's a powerful question, and one that most of us never ask ourselves.

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Naturally, it's easier to take a fresh perspective when you really *are* new and when the assumptions you are questioning are not your own. We're all more comfortable challenging someone else's thinking than stepping back and critically assessing our own ideas and behaviors. That's why Ed Whitacre needed to shake up GM's management team — because the incumbents couldn't get enough distance to challenge the way things had previously been done.

But why wait for your company to get in trouble and for the board of directors to shake up the management team? The turning of the calendar year is a good time for every manager to take stock and think about what you would do if you were starting fresh. So here's a thought-exercise you can do: First, take a deep breath and fire yourself. That's right — take yourself out of your job so that you'll get some distance from it.

Second, consider what you would do to reapply for your job. What are your qualifications? What would you say in an interview about the changes you would make and the improvements you would engineer? What unique "stamp" would you put on this new job? How do you feel about the business strategy and the quality of the leadership team? What would you change?

Answering these questions candidly and constructively can not only help your business to thrive — it also can reenergize you for the coming year.

And who knows? Maybe you'll end up re-hiring you.

Ron Ashkenas is a managing partner of [Robert H. Schaffer & Associates](#) a Stamford, Connecticut consulting firm and the author of [Simply Effective: How to Cut Through Complexity in Your Organization and Get Things Done](#)

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December 30, 2009 at 4:08 PM

Funny post but true. Difficult to achieve in reality though. Mandatory job rotation seems to be a good alternative.

— **CEDRIC LARIDON**

December 30, 2009 at 10:58 PM

Great post, Ron. A possible next question could be: "what are the few critical issues I would tackle first in this new job?" If I'm not already tackling them, I need to change that...

— **ANDREW**

December 31, 2009 at 4:11 AM

Thanks for your input, it is certainly a perspective that many managers out there need to take upon. Many of them have become so complacent in their thinking that they don't think OUT as what you have mentioned here.

— **SHIH**

December 31, 2009 at 9:12 AM

Excellent...as the page turns on not just another year...but another decade. This is good for any type of organization...not just those in some form of business. This will be passed around. And by the way, Ron, I hope you've rehired yourself! :-)

— **WES**

December 31, 2009 at 10:18 AM

Great post Ron and the timing is perfect. I spent some time earlier this week reviewing my Personal Development Plan for 2009 and preparing my 2010 Plan. As I completed my review, assessed my progress, and acknowledged my accomplishments, I was reminded once again how we humans resist change. Recalibrating our perspective(s) and re-tooling our skill sets is definitely not for the faint of heart but in today's environment do we really have a choice? Happy New Year!

— **DEWEY**

December 31, 2009 at 11:07 AM

Thanks for the Post Mr Ron. Self analysis and takin course correction will give more energy and time

to execute the assignments well. Good guidance and wake up call for me to think & act to make 2010 a great Productive year.

Surely I will re employ myself.

Best wishes for 2010

v s kumar

INDIA

— V S KUMAR

December 31, 2009 at 11:08 AM

After working for a boss that would only appreciate her own thoughts and would never acknowledge anyone else except herself and her "favorites" in the office, I felt as if I had lost my "edge." However, you made me re-think about all I have left to give in this job. I know my customers appreciate my commitment to them even though co-workers and supervisors may not. It is a shame that local government jobs, at times, are given to those who have the best personal connections, and not those who care to do the best job they can! Thanks for your perspective and helping me obtain a successful personal outlook for 2010!!

— ERLINDA

December 31, 2009 at 11:20 AM

Why did the board of directors wait so long to change the leadership?..I would find it hard to believe that Mr Henderson so dazzled the board that they had no idea that GM was going in the wrong direction a long time ago..what convinced the board that Henderson should continue to command during the time when change should have occurred?..was the Board just rubber stamping his strategy and ,if so,was it because they knew little about the industry or had become too personally close to Mr Henderson which biased their judgement?..remember the people leading the organizations and the board of trustees have many common friends and relationships because of social status..and even when they change leaders ,their relationships do not end..

— JIM

December 31, 2009 at 2:48 PM

I realize this concept of "firing yourself" is just an interesting mental exercise. Well, if anybody decides to get literal about it, fire yourself, and then have the company rehire you on a temporary or trial basis...to see if you'll work out. Think of it as a "pre-employment test drive" of sorts. If you do a good job for the company as a contract employee, maybe they'll rehire you back on as a full time employee. But...then again...maybe not! Ha!

— JULIE MAJORS

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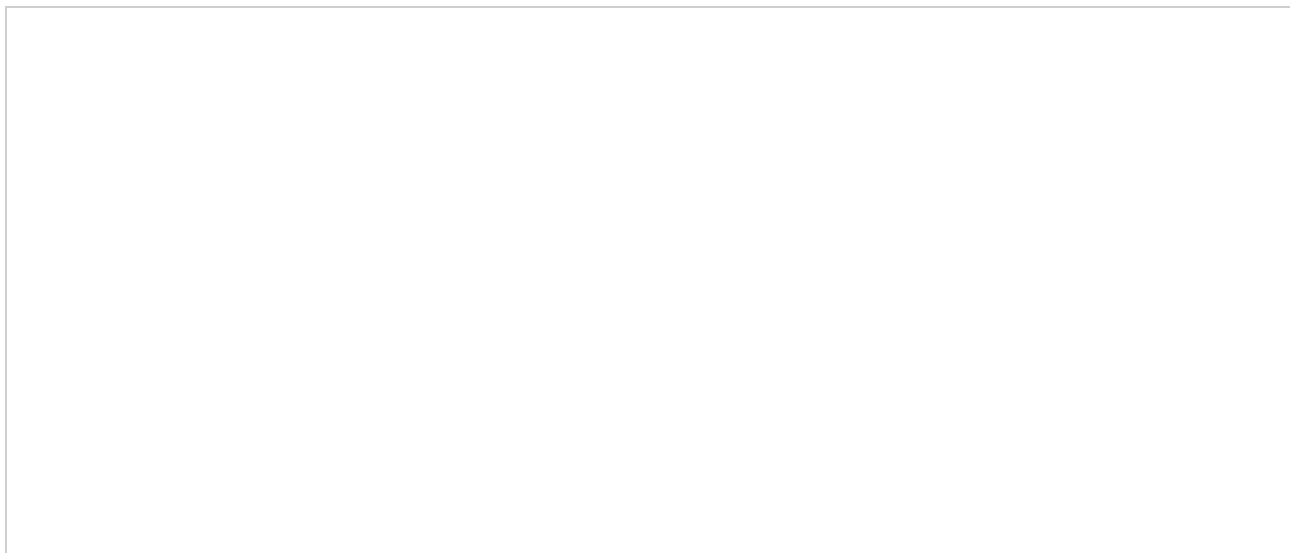
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