

DODOS AND COYOTES: Only the Nimble Survive



BY RANDY G. PENNINGTON

The likelihood of your long-term success as a leader might possibly come down to one simple question: Are you a dodo bird or a coyote?

IN DEFENSE OF THE DODO

Have you ever heard the term dodo used as a way to describe someone who is lacking common sense and is perpetually confused? The dodo bird has become the iconic symbol for failing to adapt to a changing environment. The dodo became complacent and comfortable, but not because they were stupid. They just evolved in an environment that had no natural predators, so there was no need to adapt. The dodo had no reason to fly, much less grow and change. When a species lacks the ability to understand the concepts of danger, urgency, complacency and change, extinction is the natural result.

However, that's not the case with humans. And yet there are people, companies, and organizations of all types and sizes who view their world through the eyes of the dodo bird. Take a look at the factors that led to the dodo's demise and see if you find any similarities to your organization or team:

- A stable environment gave you a false sense of security
- Comfort and complacency led to losing the ability to expand your reach
- Never learned how to distinguish predators from friends
- Lost or never learned to adapt to changing opportunities or threats
- Never saw change coming
- Anticipated a different outcome with no way to adapt at the last-minute

Dodos didn't know any better. But you do.

IN PRAISE OF THE COYOTE

The classic Road Runner cartoons featured Wile E. Coyote as the bumbling nemesis trying to capture the endlessly out of reach object of its desire. The reality is far different. That's because the coyote is an ideal model for flourishing in the face of change. Here's why:

Adaptable: Coyotes originally inhabited open prairies and deserts in the southwest part of North America. Today, they are found from Alaska to Central America. They have expanded their habitat

to forests, mountains and urban areas. Unlike most species, they have thrived in areas where humans live—often without us even knowing that they're there.

Opportunistic problem solver: Coyotes learned that survival not only means doing different things, it also means doing things differently. They prefer meat, but will eat basically anything, including mammals, insects, fish, snakes, fruit, discarded human food and plants. Coyotes were never told to adapt. They just did it.

Aware of its surroundings: Coyotes can detect food and danger up to a mile away. In other words, it is hard to surprise them. They know you are coming before you know that they are around.

Speedy: Coyotes can run at a respectable 40 mph. That is not puma-like speed, but it is fast enough for them to avoid their predators and catch their prey.

Territorial when needed: Like their cousins the dog, coyotes mark and defend their territory. What is theirs is theirs, and you will have to fight them to take it.

Secretive when it serves them: Coyotes have developed the ability to hide in plain sight, and they will even walk on their toes to keep their prey from hearing them.

Committed to family: Coyotes mate for life. Their strong sense of family increases their opportunities to protect and grow the species. Male coyotes are active participants in caring for newborn pups, which means more of them survive.

Versatile when working to succeed: Coyotes usually work alone or in small packs, but will work in larger teams when it serves their purpose. Coyotes will even team up with badgers—a natural enemy—to track and kill a common prey. There is no illusion of friendship. The coyotes and badgers enter into this partnership of convenience because it conserves energy and increases their mutual effectiveness.

The future belongs to the coyotes. The dodos will become extinct. Which one are you?

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