

Own the UGLY

In a world of demographic changes,
are you keeping up?

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The marketplace for infrastructure is changing. Stability used to be enough, but now the top U.S. cities demand infrastructure that is alive—smart, wired and walkable.

In part, this shift is driven by the business needs of communities. Municipal budgets are strained and cities need innovative infrastructure to monitor utilities, regulate energy usage and leverage transportation patterns for economic growth.

But businesses, too, are demanding smart infrastructure. Millennials now make up the majority of the U.S. workforce and comprise 30-40 percent of the population in several top U.S. markets. Tech-savvy and social, these 83 million urban workers want wired, walkable communities in which they can live, work and play. In order to recruit and retain millennial talent, businesses are demanding from their civic leaders investment in infrastructure that is “livable” or they will relocate to cities that already are.

In fact, as reported in PwC’s latest Emerging Trends in Real Estate – Infrastructure, when asked which infrastructure criteria influenced corporate relocations the most, 96 percent cited technological readiness, which they defined as smart power grids and smart mobility.

The question is, are you prepared to capitalize on the growing demand for smart, sustainable infrastructure?

Embracing Industry Shifts

Technology is progressing faster than at any other point in human history. It’s impossible to be ahead of the curve every time, but it’s important to be aware of when you’re lagging behind so that you can take steps to redirect and get on course.

In our work, we commonly encourage leaders and teams to “own the ugly” around their readiness to leverage industry shifts. To launch and guide those candid, yet difficult conversations about your team’s readiness to embrace change, try our road-tested script using a simple acronym for UGLY:

U: WHAT ARE WE UNDERESTIMATING?

You may understand the shifts occurring in your field, but are you underestimating their impact?

The truth is, even if you feel insulated from what’s occurring in the industry, eventually, some aspect of this trend will affect you. Tech-readiness is a mindset and worldview that sustainable, inclusive communities will become the desired norm.

Where can this trend impact your team and organization? Where do you need to pay closer attention? You may be discounting the trend toward smart infrastructure because it’s expensive, but public/private partnerships are increasingly bridging that gap. Consider this: Are your competitors ahead of you in establishing such partnerships?

You can’t afford to underestimate real threats to your market position—especially when they’re threats that you can take steps to mitigate.

G: WHAT’S GOTTA GO?

To make room for innovation, you have to get rid of the policies, practices and procedures that hold it back.

What are you doing now that doesn’t make sense anymore in the face of rapid demographic change in America’s top markets? What processes are more habit than value? What meetings are wasting your time?

What has simply gotta go for you to have the time, energy and resources to focus on what matters most to stay competitive in the era of smart infrastructure? The time to ask these questions around tech-readiness is now—not just in your industry, but in every industry.

L: WHERE ARE WE LOSING?

Mapping out a change strategy and following through on those plans can be a monumental effort. But what happens when you do everything “right” and still fail to move the needle on innovation in your team? Well, then it’s time for the gloves to come off—all the way off.

Ask yourself the hard questions. Where are you still under-performing despite your best efforts and why? Who is doing it better and how? Most importantly, what systems and partnerships must evolve to support your change effort?

Adapting and learning to thrive within a monumental industry shift isn’t easy. But to quote one of our mentors, if it was easy, any idiot could do it. Set yourself apart from the people in your industry who are waiting for change to happen to them, instead of because of them.

Y: WHERE ARE WE MISSING THE YES?

What research, projects and partnership must you say “yes” to in 2017? What new opportunities are ripe for your attention? Where must you invest before your competitors outmaneuver you?

You know you can’t afford to stand still and wait for the light bulb to go off when it comes to developing your approach to leveraging the smart infrastructure trend. You’ve got to go

after what it is you most want and need. Say “yes” to sticking your neck out there a little. Affirm your commitment to pushing your industry forward and you’ll be rewarded. Not just with favorable public relations, but with the knowledge that you’re making a real difference for this country’s communities and for the global environment at large.

The Payoff

Always remember why you got into this industry. Of all the alternatives available to you, you chose to build and connect people and resources to one another. You know that contributing to smart infrastructure is a powerful way to take those connections to the next level.

Own the ugly that’s holding you and your team back from embracing your industry’s trend toward tech-readiness. Any step you take in this direction will deepen the human connections that are the lifeblood of our economy and national spirit. ✪



Karin Hurt and David Dye are seasoned management experts and co-authors of the award-winning book, “Winning Well: A Manager’s Guide to Getting Results Without Losing Your Soul.” For a free Winning Well Toolkit, visit www.winningwellbook.com.