

### **Join Me for some Jambalaya!**

Years ago I saw Larry King (Larry King Live) interview one of Louisiana's great Chef's, Paul Prudhomme, while Paul was enjoying his 15 minutes of fame. Paul, a mountain of a man, was stirring a pot of Jambalaya as he responded to Larry's questions. Larry was sweating, Paul, a much less fit figure, wasn't. Larry asked, "why is this Jambalaya so spicy?"

Paul responded, "The Cajuns were poor folks and in the old days refrigeration wasn't as effective as it is today. Rather than waste overripe food, these folks would add a little spice as cover." Larry rolled his eyes.

Paul further explained that the reality of the Cajun people and their food included never wasting leftovers, creating dishes that were cost efficient, and tailoring these preparations to the taste of the guests.

Later in the interview, Larry asked Paul the most significant discovery in his newfound celebrity. Paul answered, "my brother and I are both still amazed that people will pay \$7.95 for an appetizer that is just a dish of Jambalaya." (Since a serving of Jambalaya can be made with pocket change, I'm sure Paul was laughing to himself and thinking – "they think Cajuns aren't too bright.") Larry again rolled his eyes.

The genesis of this article was a request from a friend to create a column addressing issues of interest to business leaders and managers. He even suggested topics of interest as ingredients for this process.

I've got several leftover ideas on each of these topics, so I'll start by mixing these into a Jambalaya for your consideration. Over time I'll also take each of these suggested ingredients and using a fresh approach create an additional column or entrée for your consumption.

Now let's get to the kitchen and begin preparation. The ingredients Tom suggested are:

- **How to attract and retain valuable employees**
- **Re-inventing Strategic Planning**
- **Creating a Customer Focused Operation**
- **Tough Policy Management**
- **Improving Leadership Performance**
- **The Needed Revolution in Risk Management**
- **Designing Effective Surveys**

My icebox is full of leftover ideas on each of these topics. Next column we can start fresh. Let me grab my Tabasco, turn on the stove, and get cooking!

**How to attract and retain valuable employees? – Employees ready, willing, and able to exceed the expectations of your customers are critical to the future. Attracting and retaining them can be the difference between success and failure. In most instances, I believe the problem is a cultural, not a personal or personnel one. Many businesses today are transitioning from a yesterday of autocratic leadership with a Command and Control structure to a team driven model “flattened” for efficiency and speed.**

Here's the reality as I see it. People in the Command and Control world are told what to do. People in teams must think and risk. These are different skills and require different motivation. Most organizations have good (and could be great) employees but the system fails to properly prepare them for the New World. If your employees need to improve in their skills – offer development programs. If they aren't willing to pursue the NEW that is tomorrow, work on motivation. In reality the best thing an employer can do in times like this is create a safe haven for reasoned risk taking and learn from the mistakes made in the process.

Reinventing Strategic Planning – the short form (low fat) of my thoughts on planning are this. Planning is like a jigsaw puzzle. The finished picture is the Mission and Vision of the organization. The border (the shape and size) is determined by the Situation Analysis, your current reality (the capabilities of your employees, commitment of the leadership, budget, marketplace served, competitors, history, etc.). The pieces of the puzzle are the people in your organization and the functions they perform to obtain the RESULTS you need.

And the most important first step in the process of puzzle making is finding the surface needed to build the puzzle; it must be bigger than the puzzle, stable, and a surface conducive to the work at hand. In planning this foundation is the Organizational Values. My experience indicates that all too often planning focuses on tactics (pieces); in effect building the puzzle one piece at a time from the center out. This can't work. To be effective, you must start on a solid surface (Values) and fully communicate the Finished Picture (Vision and Mission) to all involved.

**Creating a Customer-Focused Operation** – In my mind this is a most potent ingredient. It's like garlic or Tabasco; you want just enough to spice it up but not too much to make the dish inedible. Read the classic poem, **The Blind Men and the Elephant** (you can find it on the Internet). Your customers are the Blind Men. Your organization is the Elephant. In tomorrow's world you will be customer defined and customer driven. In a global economy, with the most sophisticated consumer in the history of the world, equipped with full information through the Internet, and shopping from any source anywhere – you're no longer in charge – the customer is! You must be to them what they define you to be.

**Tough Positive Management** – Command and control leadership in most organizations is dead! The future belongs to conductors who can blend the diverse workforce and their skills into a beautiful symphony performance. In such a system, diversity is needed and consensus is good. Unfortunately, too many people confuse the application of these factors with the Values, Vision, and Mission.

Margaret Thatcher said, "consensus is the absence of leadership." She was right. The final Vision, Mission, and Organizational Values must be established and embraced by all involved (those that can't accept these must leave or be left). The process to achieve these can consider the diversity of the workforce and the consensus that will evolve through the process. Leadership should invite dialogue, debate, discussions, dissent, etc. during the planning process but once a DECISION is made the only option available to the team is COMMITMENT.

**Improving Leadership Performance** – I believe there is much confusion in the world today between leadership and management. You must lead people and manage

things. Leaders must be effective (“doing the right things” – Drucker); managers need efficiency (“doing things right” – Drucker). A few roles of a leader include:

- **Dream Catcher – Capturing the Vision**
- **Environmental Engineer – Removing the toxins from the workplace**
- **Security Guard – Protecting the Vision, Values, and Mission**
- **Organizational Architect – To design the foundation / infrastructure**
- **Coach – recruiting, developing, planning, scouting, and winning**
- **Cheerleader – the voice of opportunity – motivating the team**

**The Needed Revolution in Risk Management** – Let’s get back to basics (start at Square One). Risk is uncertainty. Uncertainty is the difference between good and bad in life. Good is our dreams and goals and converting these to assets (a goal achieved is an asset). Bad is anything that destroys an asset or interferes with our achievement of a dream or a goal. Management is control. Risk Management is the control of uncertainty. Simply stated the Purpose of Risk Management is to maximize the good in life, minimize the bad, and mitigate the damage from the bad that is inevitable.

It’ time to look at the world through the eyes of our customers instead of our paradigm as Broker, TPA, reinsurer, etc. What’s their good to have and bad to avoid?

**Designing Effective Surveys** – I believe the biggest need in business today is to **KNOW** customers. All too often managers know **ABOUT** customers but they don’t know customers. My first advice is to “get out more”. Mass markets are the past;

mass customization is the future. Surveys are important in learning more ABOUT the customers but I first urge you to know these folks – BUILD RELATIONSHIPS.

My daddy did mosaics. He'd place the glass tiles on a board and once the process was complete, he'd add grout to finish the picture / fill in the spaces between the pieces. I believe the individual relationships (niche of one) are the "tiles" and the grout (surveys / market research) can complete the picture. Never confuse numbers with people!

Come and get it! This is the best I can do for a currently unknown audience using the leftovers from my icebox. I hope you like it. If you catch yourself rolling your eyes, realize that you and Larry King share the same beliefs about these Cajun People! I hope I informed you. I pray you were entertained. Bon Appetite. "Y'all come back now, Cher (Cajun term for "dear" – not the singer).