



THAT WAS THEN, THIS IS TOMORROW:

Eight lessons on leading in the Digital Age

By Cate Gutowski

Forgive me for stating the obvious, but the workplace has changed. Drastically. And I'm not talking about in the last 20 years; I'm talking about just in the past five. Gut instinct is being replaced by science. Collaboration trumps dog-eat-dog mentality. Selling is becoming buyer-centric. Personalization is here to stay.

The shift from the Industrial Age to the Digital Age is complete. And it's time for workplace thinking to catch up.

Oh sure, we all have our iPhones, Skype, CRM and other digital tools to help us be more efficient, more productive, more connected. But it's not the tools that are the problem; *it's our thinking and our mindset.*

We are conducting business in the Digital Age, *using Industrial Age approaches.*

These eight lessons are a reflection point for me, as I step back and contemplate what I have learned in my 20 years with GE, and more recently in leading the digital transformation of our sales force. That journey alone has transformed my perspective on how I lead, how I think, and how my team and I operate. I share these lessons with the hope that they will not only help you adapt to this new age, but also help you prosper.

Lesson 1: It's not about *you* anymore.

The Industrial Age way of thinking focused on the process. On managing your team's activities using generally accepted best practices. You diligently build your playbook, and you stick to it. The playbook. The process. Both focus your efforts inward.

The Digital Age focuses our thinking on the customer—both internal and external. That's not to say you've been ignoring your customers, or don't put them into your plans. But we work in an age where the tools are finally at the point where you can authentically meet your customers where they are. Where they want you to meet them.

It's no longer about the playbook. It's about personalization. It's about evolving your efforts by *revolving* your efforts around the customer.

Who's doing it right?

Zappos. Zappos wants to be the company that provides the absolute best service online—not just in shoes, but in any category. In fact, as the story goes, Zappos CEO Tony Hsieh was with some clients at a hotel after a night out on the town, when one of his clients craved pizza. But the hotel's room service was closed for the evening. Hsieh, confident about his company's customer service, suggested that this client call Zappos for this request.

Of course Zappos did not deliver pizza, but the rep who took the call at 2 a.m. found three pizza parlors that were still open near the hotel and made the order for the client. Now that's living the company's mission to "*Deliver WOW through service.*" It's also why Zappos customers are some of the most loyal in retail, online or otherwise.

Lesson 2:

Use volume to measure liquid, not productivity.

There seems to be an immutable law in the Industrial Age handbook that says the productivity and revenue of the team will increase in direct correlation to the number of activities it completes. Or, to put it in the vernacular of car dealers, it's all about *volume, volume, volume*.

The Digital Age offers a different approach. Instead of focusing on the *volume* of the activities, we should focus on the *impact* of those activities, and make the most of the time spent doing them. The sales technology landscape is exploding now, with a variety of new and better tools, and smarter technology. If companies invest in creating a technology stack for sales, they can equip the sales force to increase productivity and revenue by doing just that. *Better beats more every day.*

Who's doing it right?

Microsoft. The stated mission of the company is to “empower every person and every organization on the planet to achieve more.” It wants to help people work smarter. That's a cliché for a reason—it's the very cornerstone of Digital Age thinking. Technology presents us with the opportunity to work in new ways, and as a result, there's no excuse to waste efforts and actions. As Microsoft CEO Satya Nadella states, “*The real question that needs to be asked, as well as answered, is: What is it that we can do that is unique, that is impactful?*”

Lesson 3:

Use your head more, your hands less.

Until now, the bulk of human work has consisted of inputting (manually), collecting (via meetings) and organizing data (via spreadsheets). And we judged the outcomes by how consistently the results matched predetermined expectations.

But this is a new age, with new technology. We can replace that “grunt” work with machine-generated, shared and real-time intelligence. For sales, this means that you have the opportunity to have another set of eyes and ears on the field. There are new sources of intelligence and insights that can help you determine if you should take a right and call on one customer, or a left... and call on another. All of this new intelligence can free you to focus on strategy and collaboration. You can use your mind for guiding the outcomes you want.

Who's doing it right?

The Oakland A's (via the movie, *Moneyball*). *Moneyball* is based on the true story of how the Oakland A's built a competitive playoff team—using one of the lowest salary budgets in all of baseball. How? Oakland built a data-driven, smart strategy, and used analytics to help them deliver the right outcomes. As assistant GM Peter Brand puts it, “*Your goal shouldn't be to buy players. Your goal should be to buy wins.*”

Lesson 4:

Move data from the locked gate to the open pantry.

Industrial Age thinking tells us that our proprietary data is invaluable and should be hoarded, only shared with others on a need-to-know basis. The information you need, guarded by a gatekeeper. Not a great pathway to efficiency.

The new way, however, is very open. Intelligence generated from internal and external data sources is still seen as invaluable. But we realize that the best way to leverage intelligence is to make it accessible to any employee who needs it. If you don't have access to it, you can't use it. And that's not very intelligent, is it?

Who's doing it right?

Google. Since its founding in 1998, Google adhered to its mission statement “to organize the world's information and make it universally accessible and useful.” The company uses its proprietary algorithms to maximize the effectiveness of information, making sure that people worldwide can access the information they need.

Lesson 5:

Slow and steady does *not* win the race.

Apologies, Aesop, but that is not how business is done in the Digital Age.

Sure, the Industrial Age taught us a different view. We learned then that if you want to avoid mistakes, decision-making should be hierarchical, slow and deliberate. It was a very top-down structure. Slow and steady, indeed.

But today, speed and agility win. We live in the Age of the Customer, and our customers value SPEED. Decision making must be impactful, and timed to adapt to changing markets with a constant stream of unexpected threats and opportunities.

Who's doing it right?

Facebook. Boldly stated on the wall of its headquarters is the statement: *Done is better than perfect.* It's not about being afraid to make mistakes, but about moving quickly, adapting and course-correcting along the way.

Lesson 6:

Us versus Them? Try *Us plus Them*.

The Industrial Age taught us that competition and aligned thinking lead to optimal outcomes. Group Think is the way. Everyone in lock-step. No room for creativity or original thinking.

Today, new tools and technologies are enabling new ways of collaboration. Group Think now gives way to Group Win. Gone are the days when one individual sales professional could go out and win a deal on their own. Today, customers are more informed and demand more value. We are best positioned to deliver on that value our customers expect when we work together as one team. The future is about collaborative, cross-functional, and diverse teams that can deliver better outcomes.

Who's doing it right?

Waze. Waze exhibits perhaps one of the greatest shows of collaboration by connecting drivers to one another, creating local driving communities that define the company's mission: *Fight traffic together.*

Lesson 7:

Be a mammal, not a dinosaur.

One theory for the destruction of the dinosaurs is that mammals were more agile and more adaptable, so they ate the dinosaur's lunch. Or, more specifically, ate all their eggs.

Large companies today could learn from this. Past thinking centered around protecting the status quo and current market position, and focusing on risk mitigation. Simply being large and operating at scale was good enough.

But today, companies need to adapt quickly, and focus on how to evolve and innovate. We need more small, mission-based teams who can work together to create change in a company. I've seen the power of these types of teams first-hand, and I'm convinced that this is what the future of work looks like. Speed and execution are the pathways to success.

Who's doing it right?

Jeff Bezos. According to the Amazon founder, the biggest threat to successful companies is *"...if you won't or can't embrace powerful trends quickly. If you fight them, you're probably fighting the future. Embrace them and you have a tailwind."*

Lesson 8:

You can try to predict the future. Or you can create it.

The goal of operations has typically been to predict revenue. So the overriding question for those in charge was: *How do I forecast outcomes?* In other words, *How do I predict the future?*

Thanks to the Digital Age, we have the tools to be a bit smarter. The goal of operations now should be to *increase* revenue, not just predict it. Today, the overriding question should be, *How do I improve and maximize outcomes?* It's about being the architect of your future, not simply being at its whim.

Who's doing it right?

Twitter. Twitter lives this shift every day, with its mission *To give everyone the power to create and share ideas and information instantly without barriers.*

A change in perspective, a change in prosperity.

Embracing Digital Age thinking isn't some big, daunting task. It's simply a matter of shifting your perspective. From rugged individualism to dynamic collaboration. From processes and playbooks to personalization. From how you've always done things to how your customer wants things done.

The Digital Age is here to stay. Don't let it intimidate you. Make it work for you.

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“Enjoying success requires the ability to adapt. Only by being open to change will you have a true opportunity to get the most from your talent.”

— Nolan Ryan



Cate Gutowski, vice president, GE Commercial & digitalTHREAD, leads the company's effort to transform how GE's global sales force utilizes technology to drive customer success across all GE businesses. In this role, she guides teams that are innovating new technologies in artificial intelligence, machine learning and predictive analytics to drive productivity, and enhance the customer experience. She also leads GE's global leadership through storytelling initiative, "If You Can See It, You Can Be It." Previously, Gutowski held corporate general manager and operational leadership roles for a variety of GE businesses in the United States and Europe.