

Top 4 Business lessons from Game of Thrones

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Millions of people around the globe are waiting for April 15, 2019 with bated breath. The day heralds the premiere of the last and final season of HBO's epic drama, Game of Thrones.

What started as a series of books by American novelist George RR Martin in the late nineties has become a cultural phenomenon today. Unbelievable twists, elaborate wars, strong characters, zombies and dragons, the simultaneous plots in Game of Thrones have touched a chord in everyone! Youth, adults, students, professionals, businessmen and leaders everywhere know what social media memes such as "Winter is coming" and "A Lannister always pays his debts", refers to!

With its cult-like following, excitement for the next season premiere is palpable.

As the previous season draws to a close, like the three-eyed raven, Game of Thrones has made me ruminate on some important learnings that leaders of the new world can draw inspiration from. So, here goes my top 4 business lessons from the Game of Thrones...

1) Build trust and know who to trust

In my professional career of xx years, Trust has played an integral part. To trust, and to be trusted is the bedrock upon which successful careers are built. Ned Stark failed because he couldn't earn the trust of key stakeholders at King's Landing. He trusted Little Finger, the wrong person, and this ultimately led to his death. So clearly, the lesson to be learnt is that one must know who is worthy of being trusted. And, one must also inspire trust in others. Being able to win the trust of your team is non-negotiable. Trust is an essential dimension of relationships with customers, employees and partners. One way

of building trust is by listening. Lord Varys has an omnichannel network of seemingly harmless kids or “little birds” who “whispered” information. Access to the right information at the right time can offer leaders great insight and must-have feedback. Leaders can then work on the feedback from their company’s stakeholders and win their trust. Decapitation, as punishment for being perceived as untrustworthy as in Game of Thrones, is not a real-life business scenario. All the same, lack of trust can be the death knell of a business.

2) Learn to let go. Don’t be afraid to kill the things you love

A business must keep reinventing itself. A brand cannot sit on the throne forever, without innovating. A product that leads in today’s market could lose relevance tomorrow; modern technology innovations may become obsolete in the future. In such situations, business leaders must build capacity to kill their product and transform their strategy. The battle between Jon Snow and his love interest, Ygritte was heart breaking, but it was essential. Jon Snow was devastated when he ordered the death of his protégé, Ollie, but as a leader he had to make that decision. Game of Thrones is packed with examples of characters who made tough but essential decisions. Businesses would do well to take a leaf out of this book and remember that letting go of successful products, strategies and people is sometimes imperative for the larger cause.

3) Be flexible. Be resilient

Only the most adaptable characters in Game of Thrones have survived all the seasons. Despite losing his hand, Jamie learned to fight. The loss of her father and then her family, made Arya Stark stronger than ever before. Tyrion, Daenerys, Sansa and Jon Snow are masters of resilience, and this led to their becoming the most popular characters of the show. In today’s market, businesses need to be agile and quick. They must adapt to a changing environment and new market developments. Evolving geo-political scenarios, altering policies, hyper-competition, new-age technologies are only some of the aspects that businesses need to accommodate quickly. In the end, no matter how bad the winter is, adaptability, resilience and a robust strategy can enable leaders and their firms to sail through. Long term planning and being

prepared for worst case scenarios, when times are good, can be gamechangers for any business.

4) *Be vigilant and alert*

Winter, as we all know, will come. One must simply be alert to its first signs. For, when the chill winds blow, businesses must be prepared with their Valyrian steel swords, dragonglass and dragons, to face the Night King and his army. As Little Finger says, “What we don’t know usually gets us killed”. Therefore, leaders must avoid being like Jon Snow, and must be competent to ‘know’ things. Being prepared can help businesses stay relevant. It is critical for business heads to constantly reassess strategy, technologies and listen to the ‘whispers’ across all channels. Leveraging technology embedded with emerging technologies like AI, ML, IoT etc. can enable organizations to step into the future with certainty and bring better predictability to business.

There you have it.

My top take-aways from Game of Thrones for businesses and leaders to survive and to be at the top of their game. Strategy, innovation, agility and modern technology can enable leaders to stay relevant and appeal to today’s consumers.

As we wait for the series finale, I leave you with a famous quote by Cersei Lannister, that works for small and big companies, wanting to be market leaders – “When you play the Game of Thrones, you win, or you die.”

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