



Bruce's Timeless Insights on Corporate Revitalization

To BCG's network around the world,

Last week was the first nearly all in-person global partner meeting—with participants from ~50 countries—since I stepped out of the CEO role and into my position as global chair. It was also roughly one year since Christoph was elected as our seventh CEO, a year that has included an intense rethinking of our strategy, priorities, organization, and investments.

Of course, some things will stay the same. We reaffirmed our purpose at the partner meeting. And we focused once again on how to continue to lead with integrity in a world of greater complexity, challenge, and scrutiny. But overall, a mood of change filled the air, which made for one of the most interesting and energizing weeks of my BCG career:

- How we will bring to life the priorities in climate and sustainability and in AI that Christoph has been talking and writing about, including through major organizational restructurings and investments
- How we will stay at the forefront of other technologies: quantum computing, synthetic biology, virtual and augmented reality, and the metaverse
- How we will adapt to a rapidly changing geopolitical and macroeconomic environment
- And most important, how we will strengthen the value propositions for all our BCG colleagues through the ways we operate as teams, the flexibility we offer

in career paths and work models, and how we bring diversity and inclusion to life

Along with these changes are coming dozens of new leaders, many earlier in their careers, to lead the charge.

I have written before about the requirements [to turn around a successful company before it begins to stagnate](#). Still, it can feel a bit different when the successful company being turned around is one you recently led, and sometimes I needed to remind myself not to stay too wedded to choices I had made. But mostly I felt the same sense of opportunity and excitement shared by so many of our partners. And I was proud of our new leadership for not just riding the last wave and instead positioning us boldly to get ahead of the next ones.

On the last night of the meeting, Pattabi Seshadri, the new leader of our global Energy practice and a longstanding member of our Executive Committee, shared that he had been reading some of the [Perspectives](#) written by our founder and first CEO, Bruce Henderson. Bruce was a brilliant man, the pioneer of business strategy, an iconoclast, and a sharp and insightful writer. Pattabi directed me to this piece by Bruce—[Why Change Is So Difficult](#)—written in 1968.

Long before many of the buzzwords, books, and podcasts on change, this article uses only about 800 words to crystalize why so many successful companies struggle to sustain their success, what an enormous challenge that struggle presents to leadership, and what must be done to overcome these issues. I encourage you to take five minutes to read it, but I will include the final two paragraphs here (the bold font is mine):

All the forces of corporate culture are set against change. Yet the rewards can be substantial for those managements who have strong enough leadership to both anticipate the change required and manage the evolution. The competitive advantages of superior strategy will only be available to those managements which can make major shifts in policy early enough for the need or the purpose not to be obvious to their organization as a whole or to their competitors.

*There are at least three major requirements of management who expect to outperform their competition. The first is to conceive and make explicit a superior strategy. The second is to provide the leadership required to overcome the obstacles to change. **The third, and often critical one, is to provide that leadership at a time when the organization as a whole would ordinarily oppose the changes required.***

If anything, what Bruce wrote 54 years ago is even more relevant in today's rapidly changing world. And for those of us who have been around the block a few times, we must never forget our responsibility to empower and support the next generation of leaders as they set the new direction and tackle the obstacles inherent in revitalizing—and sometimes turning around—even the strongest organizations. That is nearly as much a part of our legacy as what we did when we were at the helm.

Now I am off on a sabbatical for a couple months. You will hear from me in three weeks from the Sydney Energy Forum, which I so look forward to joining, and then I will be back again in September.

Have a great summer/winter. I certainly intend to!



Rich Lesser
Global Chair

Further Reading



Why Change Is So Difficult

Bruce Henderson wrote that all organizations must adapt or die. So why are the forces of corporate culture so set against change?

[READ MORE →](#)



Turning Around a Successful Company

Rich Lesser describes why it's so important for leaders of successful businesses to re-energize the organization before a crisis hits. It's not just about staving off decline.

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Building a Mutually Reinforcing System of Organizational and Personal Resilience

Multilevel resilience is built upon the relationship between organizational and personal resilience, an optimal level of stress, and the right approach to change.

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