

CATCHING YOUR DRIFT

Breakthrough results begin by recognizing—and rejecting—a company's attachment to the status quo.

By Jon Kleinman

The *Great Gatsby*, F. Scott Fitzgerald's classic Jazz Age novel, closes with one of literature's great final lines: "So we beat on, boats against the current, borne back ceaselessly into the past."

It is a powerful ending, but it implies that no matter how bold their dreams, people cannot transcend their past. While true for Jay Gatsby, we at Insigniam have a different perspective. We have helped unbind thousands of executives from the shackles of the past to chart a new future.

Like ships in an ocean, all businesses experience "drift": momentum that pulls strategy and performance in the same direction it has always gone. Leaders find themselves caught up in the current.

Drift is a natural, nearly imperceptible force. Because it is "the way things have always been," executives often struggle to recognize its dangerous effects. It breeds complacency. It supplants the good for the great. It prevents breakthrough thinking and unprecedented growth.

The first step toward transformation is to recognize and confront current habits. When we begin working with a company, we ask lots of questions: How has the organization historically handled strategy and challenges? What internal processes dictate its direction? We also examine the rate at which a company's productivity and profitability are improving or declining.

Through this process, we almost always find that people really want significant change. To achieve it, we help our clients reconcile their past in a way that provides for a previously unimagined future. We unhook people from the patterns they have been operating within by helping them to see their limiting beliefs.

This is where things get fun. By this point, people are ready to create an inspiring new context for breakthrough results. But unlike past efforts that failed to move the needle, leaders now have an imagined future so compelling

that it calls them to action. They realize they are bigger than their circumstances.

Plan Backward

After this epiphany, we help executives plan backward from the future. This is the opposite of most corporate planning, which relies on the past to inform a future strategy. Instead, we ask our clients to imagine their breakthrough results and then answer the question: What happened immediately before to make it possible? By reiterating this question, leaders can create a framework that will guide them to what was once an improbable future.

Drift is a pernicious condition—even the best companies fall prey to it. But by recognizing the past paradigms that have stifled growth, leaders can begin the creative process of redirecting their organization and propel themselves ceaselessly into the future. **IQ**

Jon Kleinman is a partner at Insigniam.