DO YOU HAVE THE ATTACKER’S ADVANTAGE?

A Self-Diagnosis & Improvement Guide

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Leading in this era of structural uncertainty requires specific skills and mindsets. Do you have them? Test yourself by answering the questions below.

The questions are divided into four parts that correspond with the four sections of the book The Attacker’s Advantage: Turning Uncertainty into Breakthrough Opportunities (Public Affairs, February 2015):

• If you scored 90-100 points in each part, you qualify as an Attacker. Congratulations.
• If you scored 70-90 you are an Early Responder. You may be quick on your feet but you could benefit from improving your leadership in some areas.
• If you scored 50-70 you are a Defender. You should “up your game” to keep pace with the speed of external change.
• If you scored lower than 50, you are a Sitting Duck, at risk of being blindsided by an attack you don’t see coming.

Remember that the greater your intellectual honesty and deeper your self-reflection, the more valuable this tool will be. Use the action items to improve your score, then revisit the questions every three to six months to track your progress.

Part I: Preparing to Lead in the Face of Structural Uncertainty

Consider each of the following statements and rate yourself on a scale of 1 to 10, where 1 is “not at all true” and 10 is “very true.”

1. I am aware that structural change is occurring more frequently and that it is my job as a leader to detect it.

   1  2  3  4  5  6  7  8  9  10

2. Instead of ignoring, fighting or worrying about structural change, I focus on seeing the opportunity in it.

   1  2  3  4  5  6  7  8  9  10
3. I consider it part of my job as a leader to create structural change that benefits my organization.

4. I frequently scan the external landscape looking for developments that might impact my business (such as Bill Smith’s scanning and insights in Chapter 4 of The Attacker’s Advantage).

5. I regularly look beyond my industry to monitor the geopolitical and other macro factors that can impact the global economy and business landscape.

6. I have created disciplined routines for myself and my team to rise above the daily details and sharpen our ability to detect and predict structural changes.

7. Whenever operating problems arise, I check to see if they are related to any signs of structural change.

8. I track companies that are using mathematics and advanced computing power to transform their businesses—even if they are outside my industry—and imagine how some of them might destroy our industry and reshape our market space.

9. I accept the fact that uncertainty is here to stay, and that I may need to make bold decisions even when some of the deciding factors are still not clear.

10. I am psychologically and organizationally prepared to recognize uncertainty and convert it into breakthrough opportunities.

**Part I Action Items:**

- Consider your business goals and your personal career plan. Then select the one or two items above that would have the greatest impact and focus on them.

- Reflect on your attitude about structural change. Think of structural changes you have witnessed in recent years and consider how others dealt with them, positively or negatively.
• Commit to widening your lens, reshaping your mindset, and building new skills. Set aside time for it and make it part of your routine.

• Decide on one or two specific actions you will take, for example, setting aside time weekly to reflect on your observations.

• Anticipate the challenges that you might face as you incorporate new habits and mindsets at your job and prepare to act on your new insights. Consider how you might encourage others to do the same.

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Part II Checklist: Building Perceptual Acuity

Consider each of the following statements and rate yourself on a scale of 1 to 10, where 1 is “not at all true” and 10 is “very true:”

1. I seek out information from many sources—print, video, the web, social media and personal conversations—and am on the alert for what is new, an anomaly, a contradiction, or an oddity.

   1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

2. After identifying new ideas, events, technologies, or trends I pause to view them from multiple angles and discern what’s important. Then I practice crystallizing what I’ve learned in fewer than thirty seconds.

   1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

3. I proactively expand my information networks, including diverse sources beyond my industry, country, and comfort zone in order to widen my lens and broaden my perspective.

   1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

4. I have identified key catalysts whose activities I want to track, the “seeds” that a catalyst could pounce on, and the barriers a catalyst would have to overcome to gain traction.

   1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

5. I regularly allot some of my team’s meeting time to pool our observations about the external landscape and explore potential impacts on our business.

   1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

6. I actively look for contrary viewpoints at work and socially, surrounding myself with people from different industries, backgrounds, and lifestyles, to help me calibrate my thinking through other people’s lenses.

   1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
7. I ask people, “What’s new?” and then listen intently.
   1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

8. I imagine scenarios of the future, playing out the trends that are accelerating and unusual events that have happened. I ask myself and others, “Who could scale this up? How fast could they do it? What would this mean? Who would benefit? Who is at risk? How can we take advantage of this?”
   1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

9. I occasionally test my perceptual acuity by revisiting my former hypotheses about a trend I saw emerging or what a catalyst might do, to see how accurate my conjectures were. With curiosity, I reflect on where I was correct and where I wasn’t and why.
   1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

10. I encourage and value perceptual acuity in those who report to me. I ask them to scan the external environment and to share their ideas and insights on external trends, catalysts, and future scenarios, and what these could mean to our business. I also expect them to do the same with their teams to help create a culture of insights and innovation.
   1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Part II Action Items:

• Consider your business goals and your personal career plan. Then select the one or two items above that would have the greatest impact.

• Choose one or two techniques to incorporate into your weekly routine.

• Reflect on the accuracy of your past judgments and the signals you missed that might have caused you to recalibrate.

• Encourage and support those around you to expand their perceptual acuity.

• Anticipate the challenges you might face as you implement these actions and consider how you will meet them.

Part III Checklist: Going on the Offense

Consider each of the following statements and rate yourself on a scale of 1 to 10, where 1 is “not at all true” and 10 is “very true.”
1. I observe consumers and their purchasing first-hand on a monthly basis. I also talk with customers and consumers monthly to ensure that I immediately pick up on changing trends, interests and needs.

2. I have complete maps of all the touch points in our customers’ and consumers’ end-to-end experiences. I review each touch point on a monthly or quarterly basis to discover new ways to reduce the customers’ “pain” and increase their satisfaction. My team and their teams do the same.

3. I have consistent habits in place to continually educate myself about new technologies, the use of algorithms, and new digital players coming into our space (for example, reading Wired magazine, technology blogs, and Google news alerts).

4. I regularly talk with people who have digital expertise, and discuss and reflect on how we can use technology to transform our business. I share these findings with my team and expect them to do their own exploring, considering and sharing of digital developments that could impact our business. I devote at least 10 minutes of our team meetings every month to discussing these ideas.

5. I communicate with my colleagues and manager to help keep them aware of any potential game-changing effects of new digital technologies on our industry.

6. I understand the human tendency to revert to what is comfortable and known, and am mindful of my own mental blocks and fears that might keep me from seeing new opportunities. I try to overcome these mental traps as I make business judgments, particularly those that involve new and unfamiliar areas.

7. To help tame the uncertainty, I focus on defining the questions that need answering and the factors to watch to get my answers.

8. When I see a new opportunity for profitable growth, I am willing to move with speed even if some variables are still uncertain.
9. I am willing to step into the “discomfort zone” to help drive change in adapting to the new digital realities. When it makes good business sense, I make moves that are well thought out even if they are not immediately popular.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

10. I have quarterly reflection sessions marked on my calendar each year to ask myself: “What new developments can I take advantage of to create a new need or give the customer or consumer a more compelling experience?”

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Part III Action Items:

• Consider your business goals and your personal career plan. Then select the one or two items above that would have the greatest impact.

• Choose one or two techniques for staying up to date on new uses of technology, especially mathematics and sophisticated software.

• Look back at observations or decisions you made recently and reflect on whether any psychological blockages were at play.

• Encourage and support those around you to overcome their psychological barriers and expand their imagination about the range of possibilities.

• Anticipate the resistance you might face as you implement these actions and consider how you will meet them.

Part IV Checklist: Making the Organization Agile

Consider each of the following statements and rate yourself on a scale of 1 to 10, where 1 is “not at all true” and 10 is “very true.”

1. I have instituted mandatory weekly Joint Practice Sessions (JPS) that include all key people needed to identify opportunities, solve problems and make important decisions.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

2. I insist on candor and intellectual honesty in the JPS as everyone summarizes their progress and setbacks with dashboards that show which tasks are on target (coded green), encountering difficulty (yellow), and stalled (red). My leadership puts the focus on helping each other succeed.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
3. I have identified the most critical decisions that need to be made now, the ones that are pivotal to the business. To find the decision nodes that matter most, I work backward from the crucial actions that must be taken.

4. I ensure that crucial decision nodes have the right leaders and experts involved.

5. I monitor the nodes regularly to ensure they are functioning well and the necessary collaboration is happening.

6. I face the need to extract resources and people from parts of the organization that are becoming less important in order to fund promising new opportunities that are important to the company’s future.

7. I recognize the human and practical problems associated with changing focus and shifting resources and modify incentive and recognition programs accordingly.

8. I have a well-considered plan for how to balance focus and resources between the current business and the activities and investments that will build the future. I have identified clear short-term milestones to ensure that I make progress on the longer term priorities.

9. When I see new opportunities or shifts in the marketplace, I discuss the ramifications with important constituencies, including colleagues, direct reports, and senior leaders. I present clear facts and compelling conclusions about what this means to our customers and our business.

10. I am actively building the financial resilience to withstand structural uncertainty and pounce on new opportunities when they emerge.

Part IV Action Items:

- Consider your business goals and your personal career plan. Then select the one or two items above that would have the greatest impact.
• Turn pivotal meetings into Joint Practice Sessions and conduct them in a way that reinforces transparency and the need to help each other over the humps. Eliminate whatever meetings the JPS replaces.

• Identify the important decision nodes under your purview and ensure that they have the right leadership and composition and are linked to external change. Quickly diagnose and fix problems that are slowing decisions or making the decision makers out of touch with where the business is headed.

• Revisit your budget every quarter to be sure you are allocating sufficient resources to keep the business in sync with external change. Make big shifts when necessary and prepare yourself for resistance from those who can’t see the emerging forces.

• Create short-term milestones to track progress toward your longer term goals and build credibility by making your progress visible to others.

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