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Jeffrey Hayzlett drives change

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THE MAVERICK

Jeffrey Hayzlett is part marketing guru, part showman—and all change agent

By Katharine Fong

Call Jeffrey Hayzlett a straight shooter. “Understand that *no one is going to die* with everything being digital, *no one is going to die* because of the changes you make,” says Hayzlett emphatically. A marketing and change expert and media personality, Hayzlett has a reputation for asking questions and confronting issues that no one else will. “Don’t be afraid to take risks,” he says.

The death thing might not quite be accurate, as Hayzlett has said very clearly in keynote speeches and bestselling books that in today’s business climate, one must adapt, change or die. He knows of what he speaks: As chief marketing officer for Eastman Kodak for four years until 2010, he saw the iconic company adapt too slowly to the digital universe and fail. (Kodak declared bankruptcy in 2012.) He believes that if you’re not willing to change what’s not working, you’re in for a rough ride and your prospects for survival—whether you’re a company or an individual—are not good.

On the other hand, he says that if you can get past your fear, apathy and failure to take personal responsibility and actually *serve* your customers, you have a chance. (Like we said, he’s a straight shooter.)

For example, “Companies need to be radically transparent,” Hayzlett says. “For years, they forced people to deal with them through 800 numbers, or some sadistic bastard who could talk to you only between 8 and 5. Companies have had to change and become transparent about their brand promise and how they deliver it.”

Hayzlett cites the case of Domino’s Pizza, which in 2010 had experienced three years of declining sales and stock prices. “Their promise used to be that the pizza would be delivered within 30 minutes or it was free,” he says. “But they knew their product wasn’t good, and [their leaders] decided to be honest with people that their pizza sucked.

“They retooled, and changed their brand promise; they said, ‘We will care more about what we put in the box than getting you the box.’ They were transparent. The result has been unbelievable growth, a stock that’s high, franchisee growth.”

Hayzlett, 51, has parlayed his outsized personality—complete with booming voice and flashes of humor—and brash style into celebrity, at least in the business world. He currently hosts *C-Suite with Jeffrey Hayzlett* on Bloomberg Television, taking audiences inside the corporate headquarters and strategy of companies such as Dunkin’ Donuts, Autodesk, Cadillac and CrossFit. He just launched C-Suite TV, a digital broadcast channel with business programming that includes his new show, *Mind Your Own Business*. He’s a contributing columnist for Entrepreneur.com. He’s shared his insights and commentary on both news and entertainment platforms (as when he served as a judge for

three seasons on *Celebrity Apprentice* with Donald Trump). His business books have been best-sellers; he's a hyperactive presence on social media. And he's a popular speaker—Hayzlett will deliver the keynote at the Smart Meeting in Vail, Colorado, in October.

Hayzlett describes himself as a maverick marketer and a turnaround architect of the highest order. "You should be in the business of continual improvement," he practically shouts at the audience in one of his many talks on video, punctuating his points with his hands and body as well as with dramatic pauses. "I'm not talking about driving change for change's sake. I mean, who gets into a car and locks in the steering wheel? No, you're always making adjustments to the gas pedal, the brakes, the steering wheel, the windows, radio, air conditioning—whatever. We should be fighting for continuous improvement no matter what we do."

Hayzlett understands that not everyone is in the C-suite, or has access to it, and that meeting planners, in particular, might not even be on staff of the company they work with. In these cases, he says it's important to keep in mind:

- How can you be an accelerator of the company's brand promise?
- What can you do to help the company meet its goals, to deliver that brand promise to customers?

"A lot of what people in the meetings and conventions business do is help a company take the stage and hit its marks," Hayzlett says. "Meetings can't be frivolous or without purpose. They have to serve some goal, achieve mutual satisfaction and deliver great value."

Though he's embraced tech and its conveniences, he's bullish on meetings. "People have been predicting virtual events and the demise of the meetings industry for years, and all I can say is they're idiots," Hayzlett says. "Meetings will be even more important in the future. Nothing will replace looking someone in the eye, or the motivation someone gets from being part of a team, of collaborating in a meeting."

That Hayzlett can motivate a crowd is clear. "He's a very smart guy—both in street smarts, which I think is his strength, but also book intelligence, which he has plenty of," says Chris Brandon, director of external communications and events for Domino's Pizza, who hired Hayzlett to speak at the company's annual three-day rally of corporate executives and global franchisees in June. "I saw him speak to another group of 4,000 people in Las Vegas. One of things we look for is, can someone carry a room? We bring in over 5,000 to our event. It didn't take long for me to realize he'd be the ideal person."

Brandon was particularly excited by Hayzlett's background. "Jeff could speak to being an executive, as well as a small business owner, [which reflects] our audience at this worldwide rally. He could connect at both levels."

It's safe to say that Hayzlett's independence and leadership instincts stem partly from his cowboy way of thinking. He's a "sometime cowboy" who strides the halls of corporate America in his trademark boots, and—at least when at

home outside of Sioux Falls—rides horses and tends to his ranch.

"The cowboy way is, 'do it the way you want to,'" Hayzlett acknowledges. "There's a genuineness of character and purpose; it's extremely straightforward. You just say it and do it, no nonsense. If you're a good cowboy, you herd people up and get them going in the right direction."

Hayzlett admits he's had his share of failures, from making "big boneheaded moves in my career" such as hiring the wrong people, buying the wrong stock, selling businesses at a major loss and falling into debt (and working his way out of it). But the way he sees it, you get over it and move on. And according to Hayzlett, his biggest failures—and greatest successes—are ahead of him.

"I don't say that nonchalantly," he says. "I have reinvented myself many, many times. I have a lot more in me. [The successes and failures in the future] are going to be 'wowsers.' But I am better today and will be better tomorrow."

He now has three rules he adheres to in his career:

- Build wealth; "It's how you keep score. You want your family to have it better than you had."
- Grow professionally; be challenged and learn
- Have fun


IF YOU'RE A GOOD COWBOY, YOU HERD PEOPLE UP AND GET THEM GOING IN THE RIGHT DIRECTION. —Jeffrey Hayzlett

Family, faith and community are integral parts of Hayzlett's life. His wife, Tami; son, Tyler; and daughter, Lindsey, are all involved in his business, which keeps them close. He attends Gloria Dei Lutheran Church in Sioux Falls when he's in town, often filling in as an usher.

"One thing Stephen Covey [author of *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*] said is you've got to have balance in life," he says, "meaning the spiritual side, work, family, friends. I look at that and ask myself 'How are my buckets right now?' Are they full—or where do I need to spend time?"

With his busy schedule, extra time would seem to be hard to come by. But he gets by on four-to-six hours of sleep a night, and manages to squeeze in things such as reading for pleasure (currently, a book about the Crusades).

Life, he knows, is good right now. He's certain it will get even better.

"In 10 years, I'll be doing the things I'm meant to do," he predicts. "Every day something new unfolds, and I can't wait to find out what I'll be doing in the future. I'll be damned good at it, whatever it is." 

Jeffrey Hayzlett is keynote speaker at The Smart Meeting in Vail, Colorado, October 8-10. To register, go to smartmeetings.com.

QUICK TAKES: JEFFREY HAYZLETT

- Marketing and business expert, host of Bloomberg Television's *C-Suite with Jeffrey Hayzlett*, creator of digital broadcast channel C-Suite TV (and host of its new show, *Mind Your Own Business*), contributing columnist for Entrepreneur.com, CEO of The Hayzlett Group and chairman of Tall Grass Public Relations
- Author of *Running the Gauntlet: Essential Business Lessons to Lead, Drive, Change and Grow Profits* (2012) and *The Mirror Test: Is Your Business Really Breathing?* (2011)
- Eastman Kodak's chief marketing officer, 2006-2010; previously head of a private business development and public relations firm; held senior management positions with Cenveo, Webprint and Colorbus
- Lives in Sioux Falls, South Dakota; owns horses named Blaze and J

