

## THE BRIGHT SIDE® OF CHANGE

Written by Donna Rae Smith

### LEADING FROM THE FRONT

Leaders must go out on a limb and risk it all if they want to Think Big, Believe Big, Act Big and Win Big! That was the theme of Smart Business' 13<sup>th</sup> annual Innovation in Business conference last week. James White, Jamba Inc. CEO, shared how he [won big](#) by setting priorities and engaging employees as their new CEO. When he took the helm in late 2008, White knew that he couldn't be successful without setting and achieving stretch targets and strategies for the Jamba team to aspire to. He also knew that people wouldn't truly follow him if they didn't trust that they could reach these aspirational targets. He wasn't after compliance; he wanted commitment. In a Q&A with Dustin Klein, he offered insightful advice for engendering trust, staying in touch with progress, and being a leader that followers respect.



Leading from the front starts with painting a picture of what can be, and creating a shared vision for the future. James accomplished this through the first three steps. He then committed himself to making this shared vision become reality by personally investing the time and energy required to build trust and constancy for his workforce.

1. **Prove the customer is first.** Regardless of the challenges Jamba was facing when he took over— a net loss of \$149 million and massive leadership changes—White never lost sight of putting the customer first. He made sure that everything Jamba did was customer-centered, as in “How can Jamba WOW you?!”
2. **Hit the road and get your hands dirty.** In his first year on the job, White spent at least one day a week in Jamba's stores. He was on the road constantly, learning the business from the frontline point of performance. His best ideas came from frontline employees and customers.
3. **Engage one-on-one.** Being in the stores gave White the chance to see the nitty-gritty of daily operations, and it allowed him to engage one-on-

one with employees and franchise owners. His attention to the individual—listening to them and learning from them, then acting on their feedback—led employees to trust that his strong leadership would result in the outcome they all desired: a strong and healthy Jamba.

4. **Keep results front and center.** It's great to have an office culture like Jamba's—playful and energetic, even quirky. But even when they're having fun, they don't lose sight of the end results. They have a performance culture that focuses on each server meeting daily targets in order to achieve the store goals. Visual charts and graphs emphasize the importance of delivering to the customer and expanding customer desires through suggestive selling. Constructive and fun competition result in a high-performance environment.
5. **Lead with great transparency.** White recognized that an engaged, committed organization needed to feel secure in the constancy of leadership. Once he unveiled his strategy for growth, and received validation from the organization, he made a personal commitment not to change the strategies and targets until they were accomplished.
6. **Repeat and repeat again.** You may think you've been clear as a bell in communicating your vision or strategy, but don't expect people to absorb it with just one or two or even three exposures. White says you must keep repeating your message and vision at least seven times to guarantee that everyone understands where you're going and consciously commits to helping achieve it.
7. **Make it eye-catching.** The proliferation of digital media has altered the way we process information. Don't neglect the importance of *how* you communicate new information to your employees. Visual materials are the present and the future. They provide focus and engage us, energize us, and get us excited about learning new and different ways of working.

Learn from White: articulate a clear vision, build trusting relationships, be consistent/persevere, and stick to the message. When leading like this, you can bet people will embrace their roles in the transformation.

### **The Experiment:**

Challenge yourself to lead from the front:

1. How will you learn what WOWs your customer? How can you learn from your customers and your frontline people? Second hand information is not an option – get it straight from them.

2. How can you build your presence in front of those who deliver your service or make your product? Go to the floor or locations where delivery is built and delivered.
  
3. What can you do to ensure that everyone knows how they're performing and that they have fun while pushing themselves to do more, get better, and grow?
  
4. How are you engaging and communicating in a way that is easy to understand and is repeated enough times to have "stickiness" for those who are listening?

We would love to hear your stories as you experiment with Leading From the Front.

**THE CONVERSATION:** Share the results of your experiment in the comments below or contact the author directly at [donnarae@bright-side.com](mailto:donnarae@bright-side.com).

**ABOUT DONNA RAE SMITH**

Donna Rae Smith is a guest blogger for Smart Business. She has forged a career, enterprise and an applied discipline on the practice of teaching leaders to be masters of change. She is the Founder and CEO of Bright Side, Inc., a transformational change catalyst company with an emphasis on the behavior-side of change. For more than two decades, Donna Rae Smith and the Bright Side team have been recognized as innovators in executing behavioral strategies coalesced with business strategies to accelerate and sustain business results. Bright Side®, The Behavioral Strategy Company, has partnered with over 250 of the world's most influential companies. For more information, please visit [www.bright-side.com](http://www.bright-side.com) or contact Donna Rae at [donnarae@bright-side.com](mailto:donnarae@bright-side.com).

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