Dinosaurs or Dynamos: Entrepreneurial Skills for the Future of HR
Part II, Future Forecasting
by Lynne Eisaguirre

In the October issue of the CHRA newsletter I identified one major strategy for avoiding dinosaur status as HR professionals: participating in a trade association for your business or industry. Another essential skill for becoming a strategic business partner is learning how to forecast the future, what I call FUTURETHINK.

Although a crystal ball might be helpful, there are more mundane skills you can learn to use to stay ahead of the learning curve. I've developed the following FUTURETHINK test to help you determine your current skill level. If you can correctly describe all of the following terms, perhaps you don't need to read the rest of the article!

FUTURETHINK Test—Dinosaurs or Dynamos?
What is—

Vaporwrap
Clanning
Co-housing
Latina
Wired
Byte
Une
Fast Company
Tricycle
Fuzzy Logic
Manglers
Gaia
Strategic inflection point

Relax. It's not an easy test. I tell my seminar participants to feel somewhat satisfied if they can identify six out of the thirteen.

There are four essential skills you need to develop for future forecasting to prevent extinction in your profession:

1. Reading
2. Researching
3. Surfing
4. Reverie

Most of us do read, at least the newspaper or the cereal box during blurry-eyed mornings. But I'm talking about something more focused. Reading should be your primary leisure time activity. (Yes, you may have to give up TV, which stifles creativity in adults as well as children.) With the limited time most HR pros have, we need to be more discrete about what we read. In addition to a quick scan of what's on the business best-seller list, read cutting edge publications. The most futuristic business one is called Fast Company, a new publication by the publishers of the venerable Atlantic Monthly. In addition to its breezy, engaging style, most of the articles are well-researched and thought provoking.

Second, you should read at least one of the general interest magazines that push beyond the mainstream; try, for example, The Utne Reader, the best of the alternative press. Or read something from another culture, since all the futurists agree that we'll all need to develop a global perspective; you might consider Tricycle, the classic review of issues from a Buddhist outlook, if you're Christian. Various trend watchers publish newsletters. Some examples are Faith Popcorn's Popcorn Report, which focuses mainly on consumer products trends, and The World Future Society, which focuses on global shifts. You should subscribe to at least one and study each issue for thoughtful ideas on trends pertinent to your industry. The following books on future trends are also idea-generating reads: Thinking in the Future Tense, by Jennifer James; Megatrends II, by John Neshit and Patricia Aberdeen, The Popcorn Report, by Faith Popcorn, and Only the Paranoid Survive, by Andy Grove.

The second FUTURETHINK skill is interviewing. You should be constantly asking questions and using your active listening skills. Interview your clients or customers, both internal and external. (What? You have no contact with external customers in your organization? Big mistake. Identify a few of the best and develop phone relationships with them.) Ask what trends they see in their industry that might affect yours. Ask what their needs are that no one is meeting (Be sure these are needs they're willing to pay for rather than just wishful thinking). Ask follow-up questions until you understand the impact on your industry and your career. Ask what they read regularly to find out about trends.

Finally, surfing. As in the World Wide Web. By now I suspect that you're sick of hearing about the Net, but the truth is that it's a trove of future trends as well as the best source of up-to-date information about your business. Most trade associations and industry journals have interactive web pages, as do most general interest publications and future trend watchers. Surf, read, interact, chat. Your survival may depend upon it.

The fourth skill is reverie, an old-fashioned word that means day-dreaming, meditation, reflection. Allow time to ponder your life's imponderables in an environment outside your home or office. Time spent in nature, a museum, or an art gallery help you to see things differently. You need to integrate what you've learned in order to be able to forecast the future. Even dynamos need to recharge their batteries.

*For test answers call 794-9440 or E-mail: eisaguirre@aol.com. Lynne Eisaguirre, President of Workplaces That Work, helps people solve employee relations problems and improve employee performance through consulting, training and speaking. An attorney, entrepreneur and author of Sexual Harassment: A Reference Handbook (ABC-CLIO), as well as many articles, she is researching a book about ways to create the Future Employee Contract through helping employees develop the skills they will need for the next century and helping managers Lead Into the Future.