

When the hunter becomes the hunted

Globalisation creates a shrinking marketplace. Business owners should turn to animal instincts to learn how to not only survive but thrive in this globally competitive environment.

A *National Geographic* programme on the impact of drought on predators at Mala-Mala showed that in the face of adversity, the normal rules of engagement change. As food disappeared and waterholes became smaller, suffering increased and animal behaviour became less and less predictable. It reached a point where desperation ruled, all table manners disappeared, and the hunter became the prey.

This can be compared to the challenges facing entrepreneurs in a globalised economy where more and more competitors are entering the same marketplace, creating a surplus economy and cannibalising traditional profit streams.

At Mala-Mala, large prey moved away in herds to find more suitable food creating a totally new food chain for predators. Specialised animals like the cheetah, which focus on small prey only, had to abandon Mala-Mala. And even lions had to change their focus from large to small prey.

This highlights an important lesson for entrepreneurs. Being totally specialised in a dwindling market can force you to improvise, like the lion that had to expand its menu to survive.

The leopard also had an important lesson to teach. In an era of plenty, where there is too much of the same, the challenge is to create scarcity. The leopard does this by catching its prey and climbing into a tree, away from predator rivalry. In other words the leopard removes itself from a surplus economy.

As an entrepreneur, you must learn to create scarcity in an area of plenty, where the challenge is to differentiate your offering in such a way that your customers find it appealing.

The hyenas - considered the cowards of the animal kingdom - also started changing their behaviour to the extent that they challenged the leopard. The leopard did not climb high enough into the tree because the hyena was able to grab the prey by the foot and snatch it from the grasp of the leopard.

The lesson for entrepreneurs is clear - it is dangerous to create become complacent and too lazy to compete. Your offering of scarcity can be challenged if competitors are hungry enough to challenge you. The leopard will not forget this lesson.

Entrepreneurs must keep this in mind and always focus on innovative ways to outsmart the competition. As industries overlap, competition might come from outside. Examples of this would include Pick



'n Pay's banking service and Clicks and Shoprite introducing pharmacies in their stores.

But then came the rain, and animal behaviour normalised. In the same way market conditions correct after a recession. But wise business owners will remember the lessons learnt during difficult times and be better prepared to focus on staying abreast of trends and being the best.



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