

# Surfers Rules: 6 Strategies for Riding the Wave of Change

by Robert Kriegel

## Surfing Strategies

I often use the ocean as a metaphor in my speeches to teach audiences how to keep out in front of the changes and challenges they are facing. Just as a turbulent ocean is in constant motion with shifting currents, undertows, rip tides and rogue waves, the business environment is constantly moving, changing and uncertain. Like the ocean, nothing is static in any area of work or life. Huge “waves of change,” are barreling in from every direction and shaking up the basic foundations of everything we know and do. And what’s more, these change waves continue to get bigger and come faster. In our current environment, hurricane conditions prevail and the comfort zone is a pipe dream. The good news is that these waves of change create exciting new opportunities for getting the edge on the competition and creating the future.

Surfing presents a perfect analogy for keeping ahead of change because, like work and life, this sport occurs in an environment that is in flux, constantly changing. Just as in surfing, if you aren’t out in front of the change wave you’re facing, it’ll pass you by, leaving you struggling in the backwash. A top executive at Apple, one of the most innovative companies on the planet, told me, when asked to what he attributed their phenomenal success; “We keep out in front of the wave and create the future. If you wait for the wave before you move, you’re already too late.”

The same strategies and mindset necessary for surfing those big waves in the ocean will help anyone keep out in front of the changes you are now facing, and create exciting new opportunities. Below are 6 “Surfers Rules” for keeping out in front of the change waves you are facing.

## Passion Rules

No matter what waves you are trying to surf, fire in the belly will play a crucial role in differentiating the outstanding from the good performance. A recent nationwide cross industry study found that the most significant factor that distinguished “top” from good sales performance was enthusiasm a word that describes being spirited and passionate.

“If you don’t have enthusiasm” said Kemmons Wilson, the founder of Holiday Inns, “You don’t have anything.”

At Change Management programs I conducted for Hewlett Packard, each manager was required to come to the program with a “change project.” After sharing their project with the group, I would ask them to rate it on a passion scale of 1-10, with 10 being fired up and excited about it and 1 being a dying ember.

Four years and thousands of managers later we found that a project rated 7 or below on that passion scale wouldn’t get done.

When you are excited about what you are doing, you will go to all ends to make it happen. Being passionate is like having jet fuel in your tank. Nothing is too difficult. Mountains seem like molehills. Obstacles become opportunities. With that fire in your belly, no peak is too high, no dream impossible. And you’ll enjoy the climb as much as reaching the summit.

“Passion Rules” is a bumper sticker that I have seen on many surfers’ cars. Not a bad bottom line for any of us in whatever we do.

So whatever you are doing, whether it’s a new idea or a dream you are chasing, rate it on a passion scale of 1-10. If it’s not an 8 or above, rethink it until you can feel that adrenalin surging. Rethinking usually involves increasing the risk and challenging old assumptions. The key is to make sure that project, or idea, stokes the fire in your belly.

## **No Dare No Flare**

Top performers in any area are never satisfied and thus they're constantly pushing their limits. Good surfers are continually trying innovative new moves, new equipment, new places and going for bigger waves and longer rides. Staying ahead of a wave demands taking risks, trying new approaches and constantly challenging yourself and those around you.

What limit are you pushing or need to transcend?

Expect to Wipe out

When you're pushing your limits and trying new things, you won't get it right every time. Good surfers know this and are prepared to eat some sand before lunch every day. They know that for every great ride there maybe two or three times as many wipeouts. And that if they aren't wiping out, they're playing it too safe and won't keep improving. A CEO of a large multinational once told me that if you aren't making any mistakes you aren't trying anything new and aren't doing anything worth a damn.

Beware the perils of perfectionism.

## **Keep Looking Outside**

Surfers know that the wave closest to you is already gone and thus are always looking beyond the current wave to what is rolling in on the horizon. If you aren't looking towards the future the next big wave will batter you and leave you eating its foam. Looking "outside"—to the future—helps you to prepare so that you are already moving when that next wave arrives.

What's your next wave going to look like?

Move Before you Have to

To catch a big wave you have to begin moving well before it arrives. A big wave, like change itself, is moving so fast that if you wait too long it will pass you by, leaving you struggling in the backwash. If you're out in front of the wave you can "own" it before others do, and use its power to propel you forward and keep you out in front of the competition. To reiterate that Apple executive; "We're out in front of the wave, creating the future. Wait for it and you're too late."

## **Don't' Surf Alone**

In a complex society no one tackles life all by him or herself. Good surfers know that not only is it important to have the security of a good backup should an emergency arise but also by pooling knowledge, experience and resources they can learn new approaches, new tricks, and new places, as well as share tips about the latest equipment, hot spots.

Who's on your Team?

Applying a surfer's mind-set to your own life and work is exhilarating. These surfing rules can teach us how to ride the waves of change whether they are rolling into New York, New Brunswick or New Delhi.

The future belongs to those who have the courage and daring to paddle out to where the big ones are breaking; to those who welcome the challenges of an ever changing world.

So the question is are you out there in the water searching for the next wave or waiting on the beach till things calm down and "get back to normal" which, these days, is rip roaring change.