

# CRITICAL THINKING. EXPECTING THE UNEXPECTED. TOUGH CHOICES.

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In my 30 years of working with business leaders to help their companies succeed, I have found three recurring themes that are pivotal to their success.

**Critical Thinking** is the disciplined, skillful blending of information with experience to guide one's beliefs and actions. As a business leader, you synthesize objective and subjective factors to decide on a course of action every day -- usually many times every day. In a world of instant communication, information overload, and almost limitless inputs, it's

challenging to ponder anything in a thoughtful, dispassionate way. But that's how we make high-quality decisions. Collecting information and data isn't enough. Neither is simply having the skills to engage in critical thinking. Nor is applying those skills without accepting the logical conclusion. All three facets, approached with intellectual honesty and fairness, must be put into play. When they are, business leaders make rational, fair, objective decisions. This is essential to building and sustaining a high-performing, valuable company.

**Expecting the Unexpected** should be a way of life for a business leader. Most of us plan for the most-likely scenario. Smart business leaders anticipate surprises, whether to the upside or the downside. Contingency planning -- playing out "what-if" scenarios -- prepares you and your team to be agile, resilient, and competitive. It forces you to think about how an unexpected event could affect your company's financial health. What would you do if a new competitor enters the scene? What could happen if you take on the large

customer who grows your top line but shrinks your bottom line? How would you replace key employees if they leave? Planning for opportunities or challenges before they become real is pivotal to how quickly and how well you and your team can respond.

Some days, does it seem that all choices are **Tough Choices?** You aren't alone. For every leader--from CEOs of small to medium-sized companies to CEOs of Fortune 500 companies--every meaningful choice influences the course of history in some way.

Leaders must have the courage to make tough choices. Use your critical thinking skills. Set a deadline. You'll rarely have all the information you want; know when you have enough. Assess the potential risks and implications, and make your decision. Some of your decisions will be welcomed. Others might be unpopular. Whether your team agrees or not, they will respect you for making the tough choices. The best people want to follow a strong, decisive leader. If you want your company to succeed, you must be that leader.



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Kittridge Chamberlain is EVP/Corporate Finance at Pacific Mercantile Bank. With over 30 years of experience in sales, relationship management, and risk management, she is responsible for helping companies succeed, by understanding their business (and what keeps them awake at night), providing tailored solutions, and being flexible and proactive as their companies evolve. Prior to joining Pacific Mercantile Bank, Kittridge was a consultant to banks and other capital providers. Previously, she was a Senior Credit Officer and Senior Relationship Manager at Silicon Valley Bank. Kittridge also held positions at Tokai Bank of California, First Interstate Bank of California, and Bank of America. To explore how Pacific Mercantile Bank could be the right banking partner for you, email: [kchamberlain@pmbank.com](mailto:kchamberlain@pmbank.com).