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Jumping Freight Trains - Are You Ready For the Upturn?

Jumping Freight Trains

Are You ready For the Upturn?

When I was younger part of my often misspent youth involved hopping freight trains. My buddies and I would camp out in the White Mountains of New Hampshire and hop the freight train that ran back and forth from Burlington, Vermont. What, you ask, does hopping a freight train have to do with making sure your business is ready for the impending upturn in the economy. Read on and find out.

It's All About Perspective

Freight trains are pretty impressive machines. Long before you see them you begin to pick up faint vibrations from the tracks. You wouldn't even notice this unless you were looking for it. Then you begin to hear the faint but steady groan of the five locomotives pulling the 110 rail cars up the mountainside. At first, it is difficult to identify what you are hearing as the muffled sound echoes over the ridges. Finally, you spot the first locomotive rounding the bend as it heads toward your "jumping on" spot. The first thing you notice is how slow this monster appears to be moving. You begin to think you have plenty of time to prepare for the jump. You also anticipate that the jump will be pretty easy at this slow speed.

But then something funny happens. As the train approaches it suddenly seems to rapidly grow in size and gain speed like a plane during takeoff. The only thing that has changed, of course, is your perspective. The train is not growing in size and is also not gaining very much speed. But once it is on top of you that means very little.

The Jump

So, now it is time to jump on. You are looking up at this massive machine and trying very quickly to figure out where to grab and how to swing up so you have the same number of legs that you start out with. You are trying to accelerate in order to synchronize your speed with the train but you are running on railroad bed gravel which moves under your feet like quicksand, increasing the challenge. And then there is that disorienting and deafening noise. It seems to shake everything around you. You still can't believe how quickly this all developed as you thought you were prepared for an easy jump. Finally, you pick your spot and jump up and grab the best looking location. You are committed now. A miss, even a small one can be catastrophic. A clean grab, however, is euphoric. You sit back and enjoy the beautiful scenic ride to Burlington, Vermont and back.

The Impending Upturn

So what does this story of jumping freight trains have to do with the impending upturn? Let's review:

- The impending upturn, like those faint vibrations on the track will only be noticed by those that are keenly listening for them. Since you don't know the exact time they will begin you will need to be listening all the time. You will also need to know what to listen for. Are you listening? Do you know what to listen for?

- Like the freight train at a distance the impending upturn will appear to be approaching very slowly. You will think you have plenty of time to prepare once the beginning of the upturn comes into sight. But, I think you will be quite surprised at how fast that amazingly large machine called the global economy appears to move as your perspective changes. Are you prepared? Does your company have in place right now what you will need to make a successful jump?

- And there will be noise. CNN, MSNBC, Jim Cramer, The Wall Street Journal, and your local newspaper will all be shouting to tell you what is or is not happening with the economy. And most of them will be wrong. It will be hard to accelerate

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and synchronize with the impending upturn with all the disorienting noise. How will you know what to listen to and what to tune out? Distraction can result in loss of timing and you know what that means.

- Then there is the jump. If you time things wrong you will not make it on the train. Time things really wrong and you may never recover at all. Given that you may have one shot to get this right have you done all you can to increase your odds of a successful jump?

So you see, like the next train there will be another upturn. What you don't know is the schedule. So you need to always be prepared for when the train arrives. You need to keep your ear to the tracks and learn what to listen for.

Did you hear something?

Want to work with a two-legged train jumper.

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