



Bridgeway to Success™

May 2011

**BELIEVING IN
“SUSTAINABLE”
GUARANTEES
COMPLACENCY.**

The False Promise of Sustainable Competitive Advantage

Sustainable competitive advantage means death. Yours. If you believe in it, pursue it or think you've found it.

There's no such thing as a *sustainable* competitive advantage. Somewhere, somehow, someone will develop an offering that makes what you offer irrelevant. That someone better be you. Or else.

Think of FedEx. Every time they've built a competitive advantage, others have either copied it or caught up. From overnight delivery, to “absolutely, positively overnight”, to package tracking to international customs clearance. FedEx has never built a sustainable competitive advantage. What they've done is successfully chain together *temporary* competitive advantages.

Pursuing a sustainable competitive advantage is like holding out for the home run pitch. It limits your focus and devalues going after a base hit. Believing you've found a sustainable competitive advantage is a sure sign of impending failure. Because it leads to complacency. It takes the edge off. It allows you to think that the battle has been largely won. It hasn't.

Forget sustainable competitive advantage. Instead, commit your organization to continuously finding and building temporary competitive advantages. And assume when you do that each advantage will be copied, improved upon or made obsolete by your competitors.

Pursue temporary competitive advantages. Now that's an approach worth sustaining.

Michael Canic