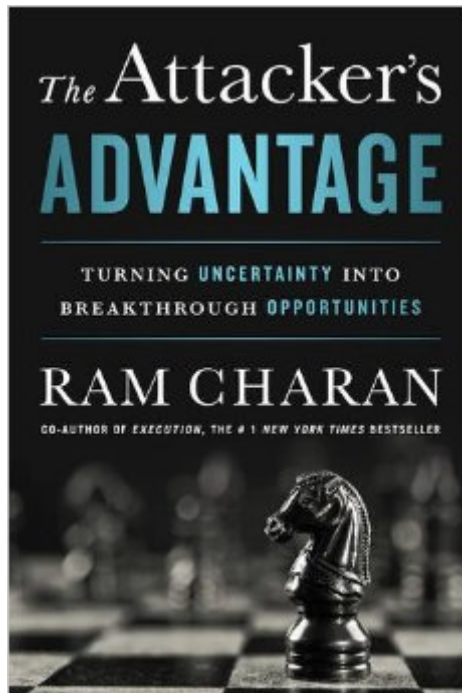


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The Attacker's Advantage: Turning Uncertainty Into Breakthrough Opportunities



Synopsis

A Wall Street Journal bestseller The forces driving today's world of structural change create sharp bends in the road that can lead to major explosions in your existing market space. But exponential change also offers exponential opportunities. How do you leverage change to go on the offense? *The Attacker's Advantage* is the game plan for winning in an era of ambiguity, volatility, and complexity, when every leader and every business is being challenged in new and unexpected ways. Ram Charan, harnessing an unequalled depth and breadth of experience working with leaders and companies around the globe, provides tested, practical tools to help you:

- Build the perceptual acuity to see around corners and detect, ahead of others, those forces—especially people, who are the catalysts of change—that could radically reshape a company or industry
- Have the mindset to see opportunity in uncertainty
- Commit to a new path forward despite the unknowns, positioning your business to make the next move ahead of competitors
- Break the blockages that can hold your company back
- Know when to accelerate and when to shift the short-term and long-term balance
- Make your organization agile and steerable by aligning people, priorities, decision-making power, budgeting and capital allocation, and key performance indicators to the new realities of the marketplace

The Attacker's Advantage provides a stark and simple challenge: stay in a legacy world of incremental gains or defensiveness, or be an attacker by creating a new world, scaling it up quickly, ahead of the traditional players.

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Customer Reviews

Best-selling author and global consultant to CEOs, Ram Charan has been a privileged insider and an acute observer of business for more than forty years. He has written and lectured extensively on strategy, execution, innovation, executive leadership, the board's role, alignment, and global competition. In "Attackers Advantage", Ram zeroes in on today's global market uncertainty caused by the revolution in digital and communications technologies which are feeding an increasingly faster rate-of-change and transformative structural changes. The victors today are those who create change (like Google, Alibaba, GE, Apple, TATA, Kaiser, and Merck) "by immersing themselves in the ambiguities of the external environment, sort through them before things are settled and known, set a path, and steer the organizations decisively into it." They succeed by identifying by anticipating "bends in the road and new needs or a total redefinition of an existing need. Innovation is either treated as a side show or as an executive sound bite that has no follow-through in most quarters. Long-term plans become toothless - even dangerous - and rigid planning processes stymie the flexible thinking needed to identify the next big thing. Companies must abandon a fixed mindset that comes from "the tried and true", and its past success, as past success blinds companies to the fact that every new challenge is unique and demands another approach for success. Technology cycles are getting shorter and shorter - forcing incumbents to unlearn and learn even faster and to identify the "bends in the road" (not trends but changes in trends) so they can ride the next wave.

The Attackers Advantage discusses conventional wisdom and advice found in other books. It is an OK book, but it delivers limited new insight, particularly if you have read other books on leadership and strategy. Charan is a master promoter of his personal brand and if you have read his earlier works you will recognize a significant amount of the same material here. I disliked Charan's prior book Global Tilt as stating the obvious and filled with platitudes. The Attacker's Advantage is better, but marginally so as it covers much of the same ground. Given the title, one would expect to see a road map or game plan for how to win a world of customer, information and technology change. This book delivers a discussion supporting the author's guru status more than it gives a reader the insight required for their own success. These are the skills and abilities Charan sees as being critical to the future:

1. Perpetual Acuity -- being able to see 'around the corners' to find the future, by looking beyond the obvious boundaries.
2. A mind-set to see opportunity in uncertainty - recognizing that you do not want to be caught by surprise and know about your internal barriers to change.
3. The ability to see a new path forward and commit to it -- build the capabilities you need end-to-end and from the customer experience perspective.
4. Adeptness in managing transition to the new path

-- change and make constant adjustments through milestones⁵. Skill in making the organization steerable and agile -- linking external realities with internal resources and responsibilities. If those points seem like sound advice you have heard elsewhere, then your right. In some ways these are Jim Collins ideas warmed over. This book spends time on each point.

Authors and audiences alike have heckled me with names like Socialist, "an obvious Communist," and "far-left" for my business book reviews. Not so. I keep agreeing to review business books because I have entrepreneurial aspirations, and I await the one that'll mentor me through my planned shoestring start-up venture. And awaiting. And awaiting. Clearly I'm not done waiting yet. Ram Charan worked his way from his family's rural Delhi shoe store, through Harvard Business School, to the heights of corporate governance. Along the way, he recognized two categories of business uncertainty. There's operational uncertainty, like markets and labor values, that you just live with. Then there's structural uncertainty, the unpredictability that breaks weak leaders and makes strong ones. Charan wants to help you master and exploit structural uncertainty. I realized I'd let myself in for a bumpy ride when I read this early quote: "The single greatest instrument of change... is the advancement of the mathematical tools called algorithms and their related sophisticated software." I've become allergic to Taylorist command-control management, reinforced by mathematical controls. Anyway I presume that's what Charan means, because he repeatedly uses the word "algorithm" thereafter without bothering to define it. The Oxford English Dictionary defines an algorithm as "a procedure or set of rules used in calculation and problem-solving." Venn diagrams and logic grids are algorithms. Presumably Charan intends calculus-based algorithms, of the type taught in MBA programs, but he never says so. This, unfortunately, epitomizes what reading this entire book is like: strings of bromides and professional buzzwords, opaque to those not initiated into today's business tabernacle.

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