

DOUBLING DOWN ON  
**2023'S** MOST  
DISRUPTIVE

JOEL G.

BLOCK

Advantage *Plays*<sup>™</sup>

# BUSINESS *TRENDS*

**12+** Advantage *Plays*<sup>™</sup> FOR THE  
ULTIMATE COMPETITIVE ADVANTAGE  
TO MAKE WINNING INEVITABLE



By

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# INTRODUCTION

## ***What's an Advantage Player™?***

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In games of skill at casinos, you typically find tables of 5 or 6 people playing casually and having fun. They win some, they lose some more. They don't seem to care much. But then there's one player who is highly tuned in. Somehow, they always seem to win.

These expert bettors are called Advantage Players™ (APs) and they use their superior skills and keen insights to defeat games that are designed to be unbeatable. APs know what cards are coming, and how to play them - when to bet small, and when to bet as much as they can. Advantage Play™ and their systems put them ahead of 99% of other players.

***Advantage Play™, the ultimate competitive advantage, is the art of knowing what comes next - and making the right moves to gain and maintain an upper hand against your opponents regardless of circumstances.*** Advantage Players™ are the top performers who do what others won't and achieve what others can't.

### How Advantage Players™ Know What's Coming Next

1. **A**sk Killer Questions
2. **P**ick Out Critical Trends
3. **A**pply Predictive Logic
4. **C**raft Solid Decisions
5. **E**xecute Powerful Strategy

No surprise—like your competitors, the house dislikes Advantage Players™. They don't want them in their clubs. But APs find a way in. They find ways to win. Always.

## ***Be an Advantage Player™ in Business and Life***

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You are always either playing with an advantage or a disadvantage. There is no middle ground. Wouldn't you prefer to play with an advantage?

Some guides, coaches, or advisors transform managers into leaders. But we transform leaders into Advantage Players™ in business and life. We help top performing executives to be just 1% better because this can translate into massive additional revenue and profit.

We see Advantage Play™ as a way of life that is high-level, confident, calculating, and strategic. It is smart, sharp, and it can be mastered. It's a unique way of thinking and seeing the world. It's a set of habits, a frame of mind, and a way of approaching life. It's a system for calculating the future. Your future.

To outsiders, APs seem to pull rabbits out of a hat, but it is really heightened situational awareness, highlighting puzzle pieces that others don't notice.

If you are not an AP, your competition will take the high roller seats while you leave details to chance. Stop playing the penny slots. Move into the high limit room. If you want to win big, you have to play big – with an advantage.

Even in the most difficult circumstances, you can make Advantage Plays™ if you know what to look for.

Our firm gives you strategies, plans, and tactics to stack the deck in your favor to make plays like a seasoned pro. We help you calculate and leverage the odds to win the lion's share of the most profitable, valuable, and important deals, no matter which cards are dealt.

As an Advantage Player™, you can play your cards right at the office and beyond. APs use the system to their advantage to be the odds-on favorite, no matter what the game is.

Someone wins every hand. It should be you.

## *Report Overview*

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This special report is just one way our firm can help catapult you ahead of the competition. If you want an unfair, strategic advantage, it starts with this report.

We present 12+ Advantage Plays™ to help you double down on the most disruptive business trends of 2023. Use this paper to ignite discussion amongst your team and strategize specific Advantage Plays™ for your company.

Some ideas might already be on your radar or seem not to apply to your company, so you might be inclined to skip over them. Don't fall into that trap. APs know that Advantage Plays™ come from broad knowledge and insights. Gather as much intel as you can.

Each of these trends is far more detailed than we can illuminate here. If you need assistance in extracting the most value from them, or if you want a personalized deep dive into the "why" and "how" of these trends, contact us. We'll ensure you fully understand what businesses are up against this year and what Advantage Plays™ you need to make.

## Uncovering Your Own Advantage Plays™: Strategy Questions

Pay special attention to the Key Strategy Questions (KSQs) accompanying each trend to uncover your next move. Our Advantage Plays™ are strong, but they are general. With your team, brainstorm answers to KSQs to produce your personalized Advantage Plays™ to play at the top of your game.

Don't skip this step because great questions produce great answers. You have great plays within reach, but you must show your cards to your team to move in the right direction.

- Each KSQ section has 3 additional questions:
  - ✓ **SWIT:** “So What’s the Impact of That?” Ask this question each time your team presents a fact. The answers reveal layers, stakeholders, opportunities, and potential pitfalls for crafting your Advantage Plays™.
  - ✓ **WWWL:** Once you understand the impact of the facts, ask, “Who Wins, and Who Loses?” The analysis pinpoints which companies to closely align with and which to avoid.
  - ✓ **What don’t we know that we need to know?** This question is the failsafe, stop gap, last minute, in case of emergency, when the bottom falls out, and the sh\*t hits the fan consideration that your team needs to ponder to make sure you have taken every angle into account.
- When asking questions, remain open. Consider all perspectives to prevent confirmation bias, where members conclude what they already believe. Some team members don't want to contradict the “boss”, so if you don't get the honesty, bring on a third-party moderator or facilitator to keep your process productive. If your team would benefit from assistance, contact us.

## ***Disclaimer***

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# DISRUPTIVE BUSINESS TRENDS IN 2023 AND BEYOND

Businesses continue to face significant uncertainty in this post-pandemic economy. Obstacles like political polarization, warring countries, currency manipulation, crypto fraud, inflation, uncertain real estate costs, rising interest rates, changing employee attitudes, the “Amazon effect”, technological tidal waves, and supply chain disruptions complicate planning and effective operations. Business models are changing. Pricing is in flux. Markets are disrupted. People are confused. Even the Fed seems baffled.

Add shrinking margins, foreign competition, industrial espionage, cyber-attacks, ransomware, stock market volatility driven by complex economic factors, and business as usual is totally upended.

The changing economy affects markets unexpectedly and potentially negatively, but it's part of the normalization of our cycle. We are emerging from a 12+ year period of escalating investment gains in stocks, bonds, mutual funds, and real estate. The pendulum is now swinging back to the center. My concern is that the young generation of investors only understand gains. Losses are not on their radar screens, and this new reality is a rude awakening.

Several general trends emerge when markets are up:

- Management and employees work better together to grow their companies and gain a foothold in target markets.
- Companies earn enough profits to share well amongst stakeholders.
- Citizens become generous and prioritize improving themselves, their inner circles, and society at large.

But when markets are down, and the economy is uncertain (such as it is now):

- Management becomes more concerned about the company, their longevity, and their own self-interest. It protects the company, sometimes to the detriment of employees. In response, employees protect their self-interests such as positions, shifts, and numbers of hours.
- Companies cut overhead and indirect costs in favor of direct expenditures that can be tied to revenue. We say they “Draw a Line to the Money®”. And if management can't draw a straight line to the money, any expenses that interfere are ripe for the chopping block.

- Citizens become anxious about their own security. With anxiety comes nervousness, short-sightedness, and suspicion. Concern for others declines as people focus on ensuring they have a roof over their own heads. Activism and social advancement move to the back burner.

2023 also faces unprecedented demand for change in our society, particularly in our workplaces. Shifting generational attitudes, increased desire for work-life balance, political divisiveness, and a focus on “me” over “we” persists.

Even though these trends are reflections of our times and do not necessarily cause disruption, don't get complacent. That's exactly how disruption will ruin you.

To beat the house in 2023, proactively leverage technology, artificial intelligence, blockchain, web 3.0, and other tools. Make these Advantage Plays™ or become obsolete.

The game starts now. Can we deal you in?

The date of this report is January 13, 2023.



# TREND DRIVER #1: RECESSION

Recession is upon us. Many households and businesses struggle to make ends meet. People are making financial decisions in a scary, uncertain climate. Stress is at an all-time high. 2023 will see news outlets continue their non-stop coverage. The threat of recession has been looming for the past year. 2023 will see more economic turbulence come to the forefront.

We are not forecasting a traditional recession – and the economists are struggling to figure out exactly what to call our economic condition. Consumer demand is strong, employment is mostly robust, and the Fed is frustrated that its repeated interest rate hikes are not working fast enough. But the impact of uncertainty will prevail. We believe the economy has fundamentally changed in the wake of the pandemic. We are experiencing a reset, a recalibration, or a realignment of the economy - not a recession, regardless of its technical name. And unlike gravity, prices, especially wages, won't be coming down.

## 1. *Labor Relations Head for Rough Waters*

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This may be one of the most remarkable trends for 2023.

In times of economic expansion, company management and team members work in partnership to grow the organization. But during recessions, management often eliminates workers to tighten the corporate belt. Working conditions for the remaining employees get worse. In the past, workers were apt to grit their teeth and stay.

This is a different era.

2022 saw a predictable but unprecedented uptick in worker strikes, particularly in large multinational companies. We saw strikes by workers at Amazon, Starbucks, IATSE, UC schools, the New York Times, and more. 2023 will see continued labor actions. Workers are unhappy.

Your Advantage Play™ is to not be pennywise and pound foolish. Don't cut expenses so much that your workforce suffers. Make wise decisions that keep your working conditions intact. Pull your finance and HR teams together to do a true cost-benefit analysis on what you risk losing if you make hasty employment decisions. Today's employees do not tolerate poor working conditions, and they will strike. They will leave. When they leave, your recruitment and training costs will rise, and you will lose important institutional knowledge. Instead, find cost-savings elsewhere and go the extra mile to compensate your best workers competitively and keep working conditions desirable. You may spend more upfront while your competitors are cutting expenses, but you're playing the long game, like a true AP. Stay the course.

The Strategy:	Maintain the budget you need to ensure quality working conditions.
The Logic:	Cutting personnel expenses too much will cause bigger problems for the company.
Key Strategy Question:	Which non-personnel expenses can be reduced or cut to find savings for 2023?
SWIT:	What's the impact of this trend on our company, employees, suppliers, customers, and others?
WWWL:	Who are the likely winners and losers from this trend?
WDWK:	What don't we know that we need to know to fully apply this trend to our situation?

## 2. *The Broken Art of Economics*

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Classic economic theory is failing. Economists haven't gotten it right for the last several years, and 2023 will see more confusing and incorrect interpretations from them. Instead of evolving, traditional economists will dig their heels in even deeper to justify why the economy is behaving the way it is. And as people look for answers and ways to make money (or not lose it), they will look to trusted advisors for help, and they will be influenced by financial commentators.

“Economic expert” is the ultimate oxymoron. Contrary to popular belief, economists are not physical scientists. They are social scientists. But when it comes down to it, economics is more of an art. Sciences are governed by fixed rules, whereas arts are more forgiving and based on interpretation. Since economics is the study and interpretation of people's behavior, it's inconsistent and unpredictable. People are not entirely rational, and human behavior features few absolutes. Predicting what will happen with the economy is much more problematic than, say, the trajectory of a rocket.

So, your Advantage Play™ is to take economic commentary with a grain of salt. Consider the source and look for their hidden agendas. More than ever, do not trust any single advisor fully. Branch out. Diversify your advice. Don't put all of your eggs in one basket. Look for advice from users of the data rather than academics. The folks in the ivory towers have skewed perspectives.

Economic predictions are not guaranteed. Too many factors are uncontrollable. Pull in a wide range of resources and make your own informed decisions. There will be winners, and others—not so much. Use the guidance and knowledge from multiple advisors to help you hedge your bets. Never trust any financial prediction as a certainty.

For 2023, spread the wealth. Divide your assets wisely to protect yourself and business in case one investment, one prediction, or one strategy goes sideways. There is too much turbulence for any single advisor to know for sure so make sure you always have plenty to fall back on.

The Strategy:	Analyze multiple sources and spread your assets out, no matter what predictions the economists make.
The Logic:	The economy is never a sure thing, and traditional models yield inaccurate information. Protect your company and assets by hedging.
Key Strategy Question:	Which assets in our portfolio are too weighty? Which new assets should we add? Do we have any risky assets we need to hedge for or against?
SWIT:	What's the impact of this trend on our company, employees, suppliers, customers, and others?
WWWL:	Who are the likely winners and losers from this trend?
WDWK:	What don't we know that we need to know to fully apply this trend to our situation?



## TREND DRIVER #2: PANDEMIC

In 2020, all hell broke loose. Three years later, we are still figuring out the post-pandemic business world, but time runs out in 2023. Your company must embrace its new identity now. If you don't have new operating procedures and policies specifically for your company in the new post-pandemic world, develop them now. The days of one-size-fits-all are gone. Generic cookie-cutter formulas for success are out. Individual corporate personality and culture is in. Just like the personal computer evolved into a fully customizable consumer machine in the 1980s and revolutionized industry, 2023 will see companies evolving with totally new rules that work for them and each company will have its own rules. One size definitely does not fit all.

### ***3. Women and Others: Now is Your Time***

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The time is upon us for women, young people, people of color, and others who have been holding companies together in the background to step forward into the spotlight.

Companies desperately need new people, with innovative ideas, novel solutions, new perspectives, and new ways of solving problems. The way many “old white guys” (yours truly among them) have always done business has stopped working, thanks in large part to the pandemic.

This is not the same tired drum beat of the Diversity, Equity, & Inclusion (DEI) movement or the newer Belonging, Accessibility, and Justice (BAJ) crusade. This is different. 2023 sees a shift driven by what companies need in order to flourish in the long term. Vacuums will form where new and often different people will be required to fill in the gaps.

Your Advantage Play™ is to recognize that these populations are all are different in their own ways—and what they bring is valuable – so make room for them at the high roller's table because your company needs their ideas, their energy, and sense of purpose. This is not pandering to activists. This is leveraging the best available resources for the common good. This is about survival – and without new and different ideas, many companies will not survive. Will yours?

Older folks are going to have to bend to accommodate younger people. Many older folks who are deemed dinosaurs will be pushed out. The pandemic proved that there are new and often better ways of getting the work done. Let your younger and other workers express their insights and try out their innovative and creative solutions. Allow them to fail and try again. As long as the failures are not catastrophic, it's an important part of the learning process.

Elevate the women and people of color in your company. Let them drive the company and set the course for a new world full of new ideas. Future leaders look and think differently – which is necessary not because of the diversity movement, but because your business needs new people with innovative ideas, and a different perspective.

This is not voluntary. Present leaders will either elevate them or vacuums will catch you by surprise, and these people will grab the many opportunities the dinosaurs do not recognize. One way or another, like it or not, it's happening.

If you yourself are a member of these groups, you should make an Advantage Play™ of your own: anytime you see something going wrong in your company that you have a solution for, leverage the opportunity. Don't hesitate. Step right up, put your name on fresh solutions, and present them with gusto. Just make sure you get and keep your credit. Don't let others claim your ideas as your own. And as a business, do everything you can to protect these current ideas and voices from being poached by old-timers who may feel threatened.

- The Strategy: Build pipelines, infrastructure, and a culture that empowers new leaders with the best ideas to ascend the ranks and drive the company.
- The Logic: Your company needs new voices and perspectives to survive in 2023.
- Key Strategy Question: Who on our current staff needs a promotion strategy, to be at more tables, or is ready to lead now?
- SWIT: What's the impact of this trend on our company, employees, suppliers, customers, and others?
- WWWL: Who are the likely winners and losers from this trend?
- WDWK: What don't we know that we need to know to fully apply this trend to our situation?

## 4. *Trust Your Team – Go Agile*

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The effectiveness of traditional management is eroding. This trend began during the pandemic and will continue in 2023. If you're not evolving your management models, your business is eroding too.

Employees now see possibilities they did not previously, including working remotely. They produce high-quality and creative products and services at all hours, from all locations. But companies still clinging to obsolete management models feel threatened by giving workers this freedom. Some of them are hanging on by a thread now, many will severely downsize or close in 2023 due to lack of staff. Employees who are not happy with what their companies offer—including management and culture—have no problem quiet quitting. We saw this trend start in 2022, and 2023 will see it grow with labor shortages continuing.

Your Advantage Play™ is to either trust your employees or find new ones. Adopt a management style like Agile that allows your team the space they need to produce, and you get exceptional results. Create open and flexible environments where employees perform at the highest level. Face time is optional.

Of course, with “bossware” technology, companies can effectively spy on employees more intensely than if they were in the office, but this upsets team members more than just about anything else when they find out the business has legally installed it on their company owned equipment.

APs reject lackluster performance by rejecting lackluster management models. Create a culture that is dynamic, exciting, modern, and inclusive. On top of going remote, stop requiring workers to be at their desks 9-5 every day. Allow them to set their own hours. Empower them to take the lead on major projects. Stop micromanaging them. Make sure they know they are valued. You should throw management models that don't support this vision into the discard pile and never look back.

As a friend once told me, hire mountain climbers who are great at climbing mountains. And know that management's job is to point to the mountain they should climb.

The Strategy:	Give employees freedom to work how they choose.
The Logic:	Creating trust empowers workers to produce effective, creative, and innovative results.
Key Strategy Question:	What does the ideal working environment look like to our people? What can we do to create it?
SWIT:	What's the impact of this trend on our company, employees, suppliers, customers, and others?
WWWL:	Who are the likely winners and losers from this trend?
WDWK:	What don't we know that we need to know to fully apply this trend to our situation?

## 5. *Measure Outputs, Not Inputs*

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For white collar staff, the 40-hour work week is obsolete and irrelevant.

During the pandemic, millions of workers accomplished tasks, met and exceeded goals, and remained profitable while working less than 40 hours because they had no choice. This isn't a surprise. It's not like someone working 39 hours or 20 hours is unproductive. And similarly, we know plenty of people who don't get much done, even at 50 hours per week. People don't magically become most productive at 40 hours. Hours worked don't matter. Despite the evidence, many companies still use the 40-hour work week as the main metric that tells them their workers are doing their jobs. Consider a new way to determine that you are getting your money's worth.

The model started over a hundred years ago as a labor compromise. At the time, it was an improvement on the 100+ hour week in the 1700s and 70+ hours in the 1800s. We've built budgets, financial expectations, and compensation around 40 hours for so long, it's ingrained as a global assumption. But the pandemic finally broke the mold and created change for workers everywhere. We now know it's useless to measure, unless your goal is promote busy-ness.

Many bosses like the 40-hour work week and are keeping their company culture where it was pre-pandemic. But employees aren't having it. They want a new world where all that matters is their productivity, regardless of how or where they work. Some bosses are demanding people come back to the office and losing their workforce, while others are acquiescing, but feel like their employees are pushing them around.

Your Advantage Play™ is to measure output. Re-think, re-imagine, and re-build your organization to look at customers satisfied, products sold, or new ideas generated. Focus on productivity – not busy-ness. Identify what output matters most to your company and hold it most high. Tell your employees what the goals are, and let them decide how they will achieve them. Knowing their company trusts them to make the most of their time and doesn't require them to waste any highly empowers and motivates employees. This is real leadership.

The Strategy:	Bust the 40-hour work week.
The Logic:	All that matters is that employees do the work well, not how or where they do it.
Key Strategy Question:	What needs to happen so we can institute flexible hours at our company?
SWIT:	What's the impact of this trend on our company, employees, suppliers, customers, and others?
WWWL:	Who are the likely winners and losers from this trend?
WDWK:	What don't we know that we need to know to fully apply this trend to our situation?



## TREND DRIVER #3: UNINTENDED CONSEQUENCES

Even when you have the best intentions for solving a problem, there can be negative results you didn't anticipate. In some cases, the results are so bad, you wish you never tried to fix the issue. 2023 is seeing increased resistance and backlash against many movements that were supposed to help society.

### ***6. Embrace Abundance and Reward Merit***

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Our country has committed plenty of mean-spirited wrongs. Although we've spent a lot of the past 50+ years working to correct them, there is more work to be done. Many citizens still lack enough resources to pursue life, liberty, and justice fully. US capitalism is a tough system and given our social history, for some, our way of doing business makes life extremely difficult.

Currently, the liberal attitude is that resources are scarce. Many people believe that in order for one person to succeed, we have to take something away from another person. Not so. Abundance for all who work hard is the basis of capitalism. It is true, and no matter what the pundits say, scarcity is the reality for millions. But hard work can overcome the obstacles as long as successful people are properly compensated.

In 2023, your Advantage Play™ is to recognize that success is available to every contributor to our system. In fact, the economy is infinitely expandable, and everyone can succeed in our world if they put their mind to it. Of course, it's harder for some people and groups than others, but there are success stories from every culture that populate our country. Abundance is possible for all who go after and earn it.

Society as a whole does not benefit by having any group remain a permanent underclass. Successful people benefit the country in so many ways, and we should encourage, celebrate, and reward them. Management must be on the lookout for new talent, and cultivate it accordingly.

Create a strong and ethical meritocracy to keep your staff and company healthy. Help the people in your company who need help, but not at the expense of high performers. Use finesse and careful deliberation. Balance celebrating above-average achievement with providing properly earned compensation for standard work.

For example, salary transparency has a strong upside as demonstrated by professional sports: when staff knows everyone else's pay, people who are paid less align their performance with the high earners. Only the best players make it onto the field. This can greatly enhance productivity and company profits.

Similarly for professional speakers, an industry that I am deeply involved in, most of us know what each other charges. People on the lower pay tiers often wonder why they are paid less – because often their speaking and presentation skills are superior. But as they study the landscape, they realize that it's not just about skills. It's about gravitas, experience, magnetism, influence, and popularity. Studying high performers helps earlier stage speakers focus on what they need to do to develop in the future. There is a dose of realism built in. That's the plus side.

But be on the lookout for hollow attempts, or efforts that can harm the company in the end. There are significant unintended consequences to this idea. Research the best initiatives, keeping in mind that there are enough resources to ensure all of your employees are properly compensated according to their work. Make sure the ladder for advancement is well understood and accessible by those who are making it happen.

- The Strategy: Provide proper wages to all of your staff while increasing pay for high performers.
- The Logic: Meritocracy creates a culture of abundance, creativity, and innovation.
- Key Strategy Question: What new programs, incentives, or bonuses can we create in 2023 to recognize and reward high performance, without taking funds away from standard payroll?
- SWIT: What's the impact of this trend on our company, employees, suppliers, customers, and others?
- WWWL: Who are the likely winners and losers from this trend?
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## 7. *Black Markets on the Rise*

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Consumers will always find a way to buy what they want, legal or not. The question is, who is their supplier?

When the government increases regulations, legitimate companies struggle to provide high-demand goods and services. And that's when illegal markets take over to give consumers what they want but have trouble getting.

For example, the repeal of Roe v. Wade will not stop or likely even slow abortion, but it will move the procedure from professionally rendered to who knows what. The current political climate is changing behavior for the worse, with unintended consequences. 2023 will bring even more regulations to more industries. Underground economies will emerge where they never have before.

Your Advantage Play™ is to be proactive right now. Think about how your business is regulated, and what would change if regulations got tougher and you had to change or reduce your offerings. What would happen if you couldn't offer your products or services at all? Could you pivot quickly and effectively to prevent your business from having to compete with black markets or going under? If not, design a strategy right now to address this very real possibility.

**The Strategy:** Audit your company to determine how much regulation impacts the company.

**The Logic:** Planning ahead will keep the company from losing business to illegal markets.

**Key Strategy Question:** What else can our company manufacture if we had to pivot? What local, state, and federal legislation is on the table currently and how might it impact us?

**SWIT:** What's the impact of this trend on our company, employees, suppliers, customers, and others?

**WWWL:** Who are the likely winners and losers from this trend?

**WDWK:** What don't we know that we need to know to fully apply this trend to our situation?



## TREND DRIVER #4: DISTRUST

After a pandemic, impending recession, and seeing the dark side of policies play out, public trust is at an all-time low. People are making decisions that keep them safe from charlatans, thieves, and liars. Given the terrible disappointments brought about by government leaders, corporate greed, media bias, ballot turmoil, and the general spread of misinformation, compounded by specific trust breaking events such as the FTX crypto-currency debacle, Americans have reached the breaking point. Add to this the unfolding lesson we take away from our Congress.

George Santos won his seat in the House of Representatives by fraud, and he is demonstrating that lying to get a job is OK. And by backing him, the Republicans are showing us that power is more important than principles. We have to fix this - if not for our own sanity, think about what we are teaching our children. This has to stop, and the great citizens of our country want honesty and people they can trust. We would be well served to change our attitudes from one of pessimism and suspicion, to one of growth and abundance.

### **8. Values Win**

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The movement against large, religious values-driven companies, such as Hobby Lobby and Chick-fil-A, has grown in recent years, but 2023 will see values-driven companies overcome the backlash with unprecedented support and profits.

Like their values or not, they are sincere and consistent in their beliefs. They are steadfast in their worldviews. And their customers know they can count on them to always act according to their values, no matter what. We know where they stand.

And this trend is not limited to religious-oriented companies. Outdoor apparel companies such as Patagonia are deeply committed to environmental issues. Agree or not, this company is not blowing smoke. They put their money where their mouths are, including the donation of the owners' stock to an organization that will lobby for climate change. People like authenticity, sincerity, and truthfulness.

Conversely, consumers will view companies without deeply-held beliefs, those who instead go with the wind, as disingenuous and shallow. Expect many flip-flop companies to dump many of the ESG, BAJ, and DEI initiatives when they recognize that pandering to a particular constituency is no longer profitable for them. Last year, Disney found out the hard way that taking a politically popular stand doesn't always go your way. These companies that supposedly held beliefs of equality and justice for all will show they are smoke and mirrors, causing some customers to turn against them.

Your Advantage Play™ is to get extremely clear and specific about your company's core values and trumpet them proudly. Take a stand. Apply your values to everything in your operations; not just as a special t-shirt or insignia on your website. If you are not genuinely value-based, your customers will know. Don't worry that not everyone will like you. Not all customers can be your customers. Ignore haters or naysayers. Publicly shout about what is important to your company, and you will draw the right players to your table.

The Strategy: Align your business with values and strategies that are clear and easy to apply.

The Logic: To stay competitive in 2023, your values have to be front and center.

Key Strategy Question: Which values do we believe in so strongly that no matter what haters say, we can remain strong in our convictions? And where are the customers who have similar values as us?

SWIT: What's the impact of this trend on our company, employees, suppliers, customers, and others?

WWWL: Who are the likely winners and losers from this trend?

WDWK: What don't we know that we need to know to fully apply this trend to our situation?

## 9. *Bye-Bye Victims - Hello Problem Solvers*

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Blame culture has reached its peak. Everyone is screaming about how everyone else is wrong. There's so much noise that nobody can hear anything. Screaming, complaining, whining, moaning, and criticizing. We are drowning in hot air. This negativity won't stop by itself, so grab the upper hand now.

Non-wartimes may feel calm and stable, but a hidden danger lurks. When we don't have a common external enemy to focus on, we turn on each other. We divide into groups and point fingers at everyone else for whatever goes wrong. One political party blames another for passing (or not passing) legislation. One generation rails at the other generation for failing.

Your Advantage Play™ is to avoid it all. Do not blame, and don't allow your team to. It's absolutely wasted energy. Instead, focus on producing creative solutions. In times of financial crisis—like now—dump the victim mentality. We all face hardship. Don't wallow. APs cooperate and innovate. While others are playing victim, your Advantage Play™ is to take ownership by creating a strategy for moving forward.

We see the encouragement of the victim mentality slowing down. It's not good for victims and it's poisonous to society at large. Of course, we are not talking about people who are legitimately victims but rather those who see themselves as victims because something happened they are not happy about. Let's save our compassion for those who really need it.

The Strategy:	Stay out of the fray.
The Logic:	Use resources to get ahead instead of wallowing.
Key Strategy Question:	In difficult circumstances, how can we ensure our people focus on productive solutions?
SWIT:	What's the impact of this trend on our company, employees, suppliers, customers, and others?
WWWL:	Who are the likely winners and losers from this trend?
WDWK:	What don't we know that we need to know to fully apply this trend to our situation?

## 10. Generally, Be Careful about Generalizing

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More than ever before, consumers are impatient, demanding, and entitled because they are getting desperate in this financial climate.

We live in the age of instant gratification and tiny attention spans. We want everything now, now, now, and if we don't get it, we cry on social media. 2023 will see more consumers becoming financially distressed, and those who are already distressed will become desperate.

When consumers are desperate, they scream louder. They make someone else a scapegoat and attack them publicly. They rile others up. Unfortunately, many customers use this approach to get what they want—be it a refund, credit, or more. Companies might give them what they demand to make the PR nightmare go away, but only until the next desperate customer comes in.

Your Advantage Play™ is to take ownership of the problem and solution. Focus on nuance. Don't over-generalize. Give yourself and your staff a refresher course in an old skill: dialogue. Remember that? Devote time to brushing up on having real conversations with customers and others. Stop the cycle of throwing angry monologues back and forth. Talk and collaborate with customers to find solutions. When you approach others with respect and generosity, you can accomplish wonderful things.

Avoid polarization. It can be hard to deal with some people these days which is made worse by opinions, generalizations, and the absence of real facts. So don't allow your staff to engage in extreme drama. Train your teams to take a beat and finesse their way through difficult conversations when emotions are high. Make them masters of finding common ground. Not everything is black and white. Most conflicts are gray, and few are life or death to your business. And there are always at least a few different sides.

Take climate change as an example of a situation that is polarizing unless we work hard to find some common ground. I am not a scientist, but the planet is getting hotter, weather patterns appear irregular, and drought persists in more places. Storms are more ferocious. Most of us can probably agree that climate change is real in casual conversation. But when newscasters insist that humans are at fault, nearly half of the population resists, typically along political party lines, and our ability to discuss the issue is stifled. But the nuanced (non-generalized) explanation is that many factors contribute. The earth has climate cycles, and the current one features increased temperatures. Plus, human activity like emissions exacerbates the problem. When we look at all details, we can honestly discuss what is happening, develop workable solutions, and find some common ground.

- The Strategy: Take time for nuanced conversation and problem-solving.
- The Logic: Finding common ground and collaborating with customers prevents PR problems and preserves your relationships.
- Key Strategy Question: What training do we need to offer our staff to make them competent in nuance?
- SWIT: What's the impact of this trend on our company, employees, suppliers, customers, and others?
- WWWL: Who are the likely winners and losers from this trend?
- WDWK: What don't we know that we need to know to fully apply this trend to our situation?

## 11. Bandwagon Breakdown

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2023 will see our society's embrace of environmental, social, and governance (ESG) issues weaken.

We should still care about the environment and well-being of the world. We won't undo the progress we've made towards social justice and racial equality. But 2023 sees companies participating less in social bandwagon issues. The noise surrounding these issues dies down as new financial realities take precedence and clog up more of the news cycle.

In 2022, many bandwagon investors formed groups to target companies with certain ESG guidelines and protocols. This sounded like an excellent investment when it was popular, but the harsh reality is that idealism and financial performance aren't soulmates. When pressed, millions of Wall Street and retail investors prioritize the bottom line, and most investors don't see a positive correlation between their retirement portfolio value and social movements.

Take carbon credits. Wall Street insiders know they're a shell game. The intention is good, but they do nothing for the environment. Buying credits from a company that supposedly under-utilizes carbon to offset your overage is only a win for the intermediaries who make gobs of money trading the credits, such as an international seller of credits who should not have been eligible to sell by any standard. But many companies jumped on the carbon credits bandwagon early and lost in the end.

And after all of the hubbub around ESG, the environmental concerns that were so trendy in 2022 are going out the window in 2023. With war in Ukraine, Europe leads the switch back to coal in 2023, when we are expected to use a record amount of it globally. Idealism is out. Reality is in.

Your Advantage Play™ is to hedge your bet. Even if ESG dies down, a new socially driven initiative will undoubtedly take its place. Don't jump in right away just for looks, even if you see the masses doing it. Instead, if it matters to you, do something real within your company to actually address the problem. Do not spend resources on empty, showy ideas that someone is monetizing. Hang back. Let the rest of the pack join the cause and lose money. You go your own way. Innovate substantive contributions without wasting money. APs are critical thinkers who lead their company in doing what is genuinely good and right – not just what sounds appealing on social media.

- The Strategy: Be as informed as you can be from trustworthy sources about real solutions to societal problems.
- The Logic: Spending resources on pop culture trends too early can be a lose-lose.
- Key Strategy Question: How can we be better informed about social movements that we are considering joining?
- SWIT: What's the impact of this trend on our company, employees, suppliers, customers, and others?
- WWWL: Who are the likely winners and losers from this trend?
- WDWK: What don't we know that we need to know to fully apply this trend to our situation?

## 12. *Selective Enforcement*

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Selective enforcement breaks trust, creates confusion and frustration, and makes your customers feel suspicious. People like uniformity, consistency, and accountability. They want to know they are being treated fairly.

When leaders pick and choose which rules they will follow, and which they will impose on others but not follow themselves, it sets a bad precedent. Further, selective enforcement demonstrates insincerity. Following the rules in one situation but ignoring the same rules in another situation with different people makes the rest of us wonder whether you care about the rules at all. Successful leaders do their best to apply the rules as uniformly as possible or at least as uniformly as is reasonable.

Lots of the recent distrust of our government comes from our leaders' selective enforcement of the Covid rules. We all understood the need for rules whether we liked them or not. And we all can understand that the rules evolved over time as we better understood the medical threats we faced as a society. But when government officials apply one set of rules to large companies to the deliberate detriment of small ones, that seems unfair and it appears to support a hidden agenda. When those same officials set up rules and guidelines for the populous but completely ignore those same edicts for themselves, people wonder why they should follow them either.

Until May 2022, masks were required on airplanes for international travelers with proper paperwork and often vaccination records, while migrants continue to overwhelm our southern border, bringing potential disease and other problems with them. This is just one example of our government selecting which issue to focus on and which rules to enforce.

As more social movement fatigue takes over, 2023 will see consumers and business owners showing that same confusion and frustration. They are tired of the back and forth about what a socially responsible company should do. This will turn into anger and disinformation campaigns as people call out hypocrisy and contradictions. Consumers and business owners will distrust each other and their suspicion of one another will grow.

Your Advantage Play™ is twofold. First, enforce your policies uniformly. All rules must apply to everyone, all the time. And if you are not going to police your rules, abandon them. Secondly, be crystal clear with your stakeholders about how your company adheres to certain legislations and regulations. Don't fake it or try to cover anything up. Know where your line in the sand is. This is what consumers want.

If you are struggling with implementation, admit that to your customers. Honesty goes a long way in building positive and strong relationships with your community. APs also apply this concept to their own company policies when they design new ones. First, they ensure they make sense and actually accomplish the goal they want. Secondly, they communicate with them effectively. Finally, they enforce them consistently. And when they need to make changes, they do it swiftly and transparently.

The Strategy:	Enforce policies clearly and uniformly.
The Logic:	Being transparent and consistent establishes consumer trust.
Key Strategy Question:	What is our plan for communicating and enforcing policies?
SWIT:	What's the impact of this trend on our company, employees, suppliers, customers, and others?
WWWL:	Who are the likely winners and losers from this trend?
WDWK:	What don't we know that we need to know to fully apply this trend to our situation?



# BONUS TREND DRIVER: KILLER TECHNOLOGY

Technology keeps moving fast, but every once in a while, a killer app comes out that is destined to change everything. Spreadsheets created adoption of personal computers in the 1980s. Travel sites propelled the adoption of the internet in the 1990s. The next two decades are defined by the adoption of mobile technologies and compression of multiple devices into our phones. So, what's next for this decade?

## 13. Who Wrote This?

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Artificial Intelligence (AI) may be the killer app of this decade. Many tech companies call themselves AI, but few of them really employ that technology. Keep in mind that the definition is fluid and not everyone agrees on what it is, but when computers start coming up with ideas and writing them down for humans to consume, we are in a whole new ballpark – which is what is starting to happen now.

At the tail end of 2022, OpenAI, a new tech company formed by Elon Musk and others who pledged \$1 billion, revealed its last 7 years of work on AI called ChatGPT. Subsequently, Microsoft chipped in another billion, so this startup is real. Their product debuted in a free beta, and it's unlike anything anyone has ever seen. This is only the first generation of AI, but it will write papers, blog posts, reports and more on any topic you ask for. College students see a new way to shortcut essays, and if you ask the system to write a 200-word paper at the 5th grade level, it will – so you can imagine what will start happening.

You can try it yourself at: <https://chat.openai.com/>

I asked the system what it could do for us humans, and this is verbatim what it told me:

Here are some potential ways in which OpenAI's technology could be used to benefit humans:

1. Improving decision-making: OpenAI's machine learning algorithms and artificial intelligence systems could be used to analyze large amounts of data and help organizations or individuals make more informed decisions.
2. Enhancing productivity: AI-powered tools could assist with tasks such as data entry, scheduling, and other repetitive or time-consuming tasks, freeing up humans to focus on more complex and creative tasks.
3. Improving healthcare: AI could be used to analyze medical records and assist with diagnosis, help identify patterns in large amounts of data to inform treatment plans, or assist with tasks such as administering medication or monitoring vital signs.

4. Enhancing education: AI could be used to personalize learning experiences, providing customized content and feedback to help students learn more effectively.
5. Improving transportation: AI could be used to optimize traffic flow, improve safety, and make transportation more efficient.
6. Enhancing language translation: AI could be used to improve the accuracy and speed of machine translation, making it easier for people to communicate with one another across language barriers.
7. Improving customer service: AI-powered chatbots and virtual assistants could assist with answering customer questions and providing support, freeing up human customer service representatives to focus on more complex tasks.
8. Improving environmental sustainability: AI could be used to optimize resource use and reduce waste, helping to protect the environment and preserve natural resources.

Let's get ready for a wild ride, as this is just the beginning. As computers tackle our trivial tasks, people are going to have to think a lot more and add value in new ways. That's why my phrase of 2023 is "Raise the Bar". People and companies are all going to have to raise the bar on all that they do if they want to stay relevant.

The Strategy:	Develop a corporate strategy to apply this technology to keep your company in the game and stay relevant.
The Logic:	Your competitors are already adopting AI, and you will be passed by if you don't leverage it.
Key Strategy Question:	What creative applications can we use this technology for? How are our people going to add value in the future?
SWIT:	What's the impact of this trend on our company, employees, suppliers, customers, and others?
WWWL:	Who are the likely winners and losers from this trend?
WDWK:	What don't we know that we need to know to fully apply this trend to our situation?



# WRAP UP

## ***Go For It***

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Times are still tough in 2023, and it will continue this way for some time. But eventually, the best opportunities will emerge. Only Advantage Players™ will be ready to leverage them.

Sure, assets will shuffle, corporations will reorganize, and employees will migrate. We need new skills, new policies, and innovative ideas to move us through uncharted times. Even if progress is painful or uncomfortable at first, it's worth it to suck it up and keep going. It's only for the short-term.

In the longer term, expect a bright and vibrant future with new possibilities and potential. We will face steep challenges and obstacles. But don't lose sight of this: the Advantage Players™ will make it out of this year. They will join together at the end with other winners, businesses, and a society transformed by the recent events into a much better organized and efficient place to live and work. We are in the process of modernizing legacy systems and age-old ways of thinking. New paradigms are not easy to forge, but we have no choice if we are to succeed and thrive going forward. We have a lot to look forward to. I for one, am betting the ranch on it.

And this is why we say that for “Advantage Players™, winning is inevitable.”

## ***What Bullseye Capital Does***

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We help senior leaders at mid-sized and large companies avoid pitfalls others fall for and mistakes others make. We turn leaders into Advantage Players™ who operate at the top of their game, so they see what others don't see, do what other don't do, and think in ways that others don't think. Our clients know what's coming next, and companies want our help to turn as many of their leaders as possible into Advantage Players™.

Our keynotes, advisory, and related services provide insight and intel on unique ways to gain a competitive advantage, disruptive business trends, innovation, and growth strategies. We employ progressive initiatives that increase revenue, profitability, and overall company valuation.

## ***Briefly about Joel***

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An expert blackjack player, Joel is an Advantage Player™, literally and figuratively. He's beat casinos in Las Vegas and around the country in solo play and on teams. He's been spotted only once and was asked to leave after the house assumed, but could not confirm, that he was a card counter. But blackjack is only his beginning. He uses what he learned at the tables to propel businesses like yours to the top of their game and join the ranks of the Advantage Players™.

Joel's a longtime venture capitalist and hedge fund manager who lives in a Shark Tank world. His keynotes expose Wall Street insights to business leaders. He gives the Inside Track on high-velocity innovation for better, faster, and smarter profits. He empowers business executives and their teams to "Disrupt Their Competitors' Future".

As a hedge fund executive, Joel has been involved in acquiring, capitalizing, financing, or advising numerous entrepreneurial, venture, film, and real estate projects and companies aggregately valued at close to \$1 billion dollars. He has fine-tuned his ability to look into the future and identify trends. Fortified by the Advantage Plays™ he acquired as a professional investor, Joel works with clients to tackle the future with strength and optimism few others can muster.

## ***More about Advantage Play™***

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Building a fence around your business to keep out the best and brightest competitors is faulty logic. When casinos tried to ban Advantage Players™, a 1981 appeals court ruling in New Jersey, made it illegal to do so. This sparked a wave of changes to the game, most all of which can still be overcome by Advantage Players™, and every year, Advantage Players™ take millions from gambling halls.

But the unspoken nugget is that millions of gamblers around the world have turned over billions at the blackjack tables because a small number of Advantage Players™ have proved the game can be beaten. This has made blackjack the most profitable casino game in the world and the casinos have cashed in on the Advantage Players™.

Beating blackjack, like anything, takes dedication and hard work. Anyone can be an Advantage Player™ in business and in life, but few will do it.

Let us show your team how to compete at the top of their game. Being an Advantage Player™ is more than a skillset; it's an attitude, a habit, and a way of life.

### ***More Resources***

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Joel is the author of numerous white papers and the book, “Stop Hustling Gigs and Start Building a Business” available at: <http://bit.ly/stop-hustling>.

He also hosts the business strategy show “Your Advantage Play™, the Ultimate Competitive Advantage”, and an earlier show, “Profit from the Inside®, Strategies to Give Your Business the Inside Track”. Listen by going to: <https://lnkme.us/Podcast>

You may review video footage of Joel speaking, providing his “Money Minute” economic commentary, plus more at: <http://bit.ly/Joel-in-Action>

### ***Reach out to Joel***

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Contact us when your business needs a keynote speaker, advisory services, executive sounding board services, retreat facilitation, and mastermind groups for your key executives.

If you would like to speak with Joel, please use this link to access his personal calendar: To schedule, click here: <https://www.timetrade.com/book/V3RN6>

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# NOTES



