



Head & Heart is a collection of ideas, resources and frameworks to support your personal and professional development in leading yourself, others and organizations with head and heart.

Winter 2008

From the Editor

Dear Readers,

Change was our last theme for 'Head & Heart.' We now turn our attention to Execution. The word Execution gets used a lot by leaders. It has almost become jargon where we all assume the superficial meaning of 'getting things done.'

Larry Bossidy and Ram Charan remind us so powerfully: "Execution is not only the biggest issue facing business today; it is something that nobody has explained satisfactorily."

In this issue, we present some of our thoughts and experience to stimulate serious thinking and action on a subject that needs to be uppermost in our heads and hearts as leaders.

Enjoy and should you have any comments or ideas for future themes, please don't hesitate to give us a call.

Ed Norman

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Thought Leadership

The Execution Alibi

Trying to accomplish strategy without leaders who are enthusiastic and realistic about its execution is a hopeless undertaking. Instead of good news on the progress all you will get is alibis...

"Let's start again from the top," the detective said as he leaned over the table.

"I've got an alibi because I did my part to get our strategy executed. I presented it a couple of times and nobody had any questions for me – this means it must have been clear," repeated the exasperated Divisional Leader.

Some minutes later in another room, the detective leaned over the table and demanded, "Okay, Mr Regional Director, let's hear your story again."

"Like I said," began the Regional Director, "I have an alibi. We had absolutely no chance of executing this strategy. It was another blind, top down order, without any discussion concerning proper allocation of resources, people or learning needed to execute effectively."

"But you didn't share this with your Divisional Leader, did you?" pressed the detective.

"Well, no I didn't," stammered the Regional Director. "But everyone in our company knows, you don't question your superior when it comes to strategic plans. They come down from

the very top and those folks don't take kindly to feedback."

Does the following situation sound familiar? While most of us haven't been interrogated (at least not by a detective), every leader worth his or her salt has sat in a strategy execution review meeting and listened to the countless alibis of people who are being pinned down as to why they didn't execute the strategy effectively.

Effective strategic execution requires an interaction between leaders and followers that is both authentic and emotionally engaging. The four steps of the execution cycle: awareness, understanding, commitment and performance are cemented together through the social influence or stickiness of the leader-follower interaction. This ensures reaching stretch goals and true strategic execution.

If you see a gap between your strategy and execution, stop looking and listening to individual alibis and make the investment in authentic and emotionally engaging interactions. Only then you will truly reap the rewards of successful execution – case closed!

Dan Norenberg

Leading Self

Want to Execute Better? Own Your Plan!

W. Clement Stone, American best selling author, once said "No matter how carefully you plan your goals, they will never be more than pipe dreams unless you pursue them with gusto."

'Gusto' really is the key word. To develop this gusto for your goal you will have to leave your intellectual standpoint and dare to take a deeper look inside to find your personal and emotional connection...

I often hear people say, "The problem wasn't with the plan; the problem was in the execution." I disagree. I believe we set the stage for lack of execution with the goals themselves. Since it is the time of year for planning, let's re-examine the role the planning process plays in execution.



Unfortunately, creating a plan is often seen as a purely intellectual activity. Having pursued it far enough to determine that our plan is intellectually feasible and sound, the planning process stops and we switch to execution mode. Oops! We've missed the most important part of the process! The crucial question that we often do not ask ourselves is "Okay, I think I can

do it and the data shows it is possible, but do I want to do it in my head and heart?" There are so many questions behind this question: Are the behaviors required of me to execute the plan aligned with my values and personal strengths? What is my emotional energy when I think of achieving the goal? Can I take full responsibility and ownership of the goal, both intellectually and emotionally?

If the answer to any of the above questions is not a resounding "Yes!" then the execution is in trouble before it has really begun. Why?

Without full personal ownership of your goal and plan, there is little personal risk. It is **a** plan and not **my** plan. When we fail to execute a plan that was only an intellectual exercise, our failure to execute doesn't touch us at the emotional level, thus personal learning and change to improve are unlikely to occur. But with the risk of **full** ownership comes a great opportunity: to experience the joy of executing a plan and achieving a goal that really means something to us.

In my own goal-setting and planning process for 2008, I am taking the extra time to check my emotional engagement with and ownership of my goals and plans. I am creating a framework which enhances execution by identifying goals and creating a plan that looks good, sounds good and **feels** good.

Michael Couch

Point of View

Measures Matter

Using metrics to get feedback is crucial for great strategy execution. Abusing metrics leads to confusion, frustration and a whole host of undesirable consequences with resources being scattered here, there and everywhere. It takes intellect to design the best metrics and courage to stop using the wrong metric.

According to an article in Strategy and Leadership, 97% of organizations still tie their employee rewards to their financial performance, not their strategic plan. Is it any wonder then that the behaviors you get are not what you want?

Consider the customer service function and two different operational metrics for monitoring performance:

- the number of queries handled per customer service representative.
- the percentage of customers who are highly satisfied with the way their query was handled.

The first metric encourages volume-based behavior from the service representative. It works well for a strategy focused on operational excellence (that is, being as efficient as possible and minimizing costs). The second encourages quality-based behavior. It works better for a strategy focused on customer intimacy.

Getting strategy execution right means paying close attention to what you are actually measuring and why you are measuring it. It is this which dictates employee behaviors, rewards and, ultimately, how deeply employees engage with and commit to implementing your strategy.

Steven Hunt

Word Watch

Execution

John McKay, coach of the woeful Tampa Bay Buccaneers (a U.S. football team), when asked by a reporter what he thought of his team's execution replied, "I think it would be a good idea."

No major athletic team would go into a serious competition without a "game plan." However, it is almost inconceivable that this team would be victorious if it executed its "game plan" poorly, even though it might have superior talents and would be expected to win.

The same is true for organizations. Winners in business are those corporations who not only have a good, solid strategy, but more importantly, execute well. This is inherent in the verb "to execute" - one of its meanings is "to carry out fully, to put completely into effect."

Execution is, above all, a leadership discipline. While there are many leadership roads that lead to desired results, according to Peter Drucker, there is one thing that all successful leaders have in common: they execute effectively. Breakthrough leaders understand that execution is central to leadership and they know how to translate their visions and goals into actions which they then carry out fully.

The importance of a plan or a strategy must not be depreciated - if you want to move fast at least you have to make sure you are moving in the right direction. Still, an idea is worth nothing until it is turned into actions. Execution? I think it is a good idea.

Birgit Schmid

Leading Others

Building a Cathedral

"A rock pile ceases to be a rock pile the moment a single man contemplates it, bearing within him the image of a cathedral."

Antoine de Saint-Exupery

Like any business venture, building a cathedral does not only require visionary thinkers, skilful specialists and talented experts. First and foremost it takes someone with the ability to inspire the people involved by providing them with "the big picture" - someone who ensures that everyone identifies and relates with the same image of a cathedral.

How do you as a leader realize the vision of your cathedral?

Picture a group of tradesmen gathered around the main square in a medieval city. As a leader you walk up to a worker who is transporting stones and ask him what he is doing. His reply is "I'm building a cathedral." Another person is carefully setting the stones into a wall. "What are you doing?" "I'm building a cathedral."

These specialists have a very specific trade they are fulfilling, but when asked what they are doing they all see their contribution in creating an architectural monument. The whole had become more important than the individual part they provided.

We all want to build cathedrals and understand how our work contributes to the creation of something meaningful and significant. As an organization sets out to build its cathedral it needs every single person to embrace this vision and know that the success of the project is dependent upon their skills and commitment.

This is where the leader comes into the scene.

Convincingly share the vision or strategic goal with each employee and discuss how the individual can contribute to the whole. Does the employee see the cathedral or just a pile of rocks?

Patently listen to and help overcome the concerns and objections individuals may have over the goal or their ability to perform the required work. Assist in growing the individual's skill set and coach them to new heights of performance. Remove organizational barriers that will interfere with the individuals meeting the time and quality milestones. Show interest in the progress that is being made and provide feedback to support or modify the work. Demonstrate confidence



and trust in the individual that they will do their best. And do not forget to reward and recognize the work, which can range from a simple, but powerful thank you to a significant monetary reward.

As your organization sets out to build your cathedral, remember it can only be built with everyone's talent and commitment.

Clyde Moss

Leading Organizations

Organization Leadership: Execution

"Make no mistake: leadership is about results. Leaders at all levels make a difference to performance. They do so because they make performance meaningful."
Rob Goffee & Gareth Jones

What is the effectiveness of execution in your organization? In my experience, in the process of translating plans into results, a lot of potential gets **lost in translation**.

When Jeff Immelt, CEO of General Electric, says "Every initiative needs a metric," we can hear the passion of a leader who, having agreed something should be done, really wants it to be done. **We understand a metric and we hear an authentic human voice.** Immediately, we can feel attached to



this person and inspired to 'raise the bar,' go the extra mile to create a superb result. And let's be clear, execution in our increasingly competitive environments is not simply about getting things done to a predetermined metric imposed from above. It is about enabling people to understand the significance of what is required of them and enabling them to engage their heads and hearts, stimulate their

creativity and release their passion to take an otherwise ordinary successful performance to something really special. The two drivers, therefore, of effective execution are both **hard and soft**.

Two examples of execution **lost in translation**:

1. A soft culture organization, operating traditionally in a non-competitive environment, decides to develop a **performance culture**. A new CEO is hired and is given 'a **mandate**' to drive change. Execution staggers painfully slowly because the organization hears and resents the metrics and cannot hear the human voice.

2. Next is an example of **leader assumption**. A CEO wants to drive change but is not seeing the pace and urgency required. It turns out that he is assuming that his executives would behave like him. **Performance is assumed to happen**. He never gave them the chance to 'hear his human voice.' He had failed to give them the chance to make **change both intellectually and emotionally meaningful**. In reality, execution in this organization is happening at a dangerously slow pace.

Ed Norman

Leadership Facts and Figures

Executives report that improving their companies' alignment with their strategic plans, for superior execution, is the most important way in which the strategic planning process can be improved. However, only 52% of executives reported that those who execute strategy are involved in planning it.

McKinsey Quarterly, September 2007
Improving strategic planning:
A McKinsey survey

For more interesting **Leadership Facts and Figures** go to our Leader's Toolkit at http://www.nvision-learning.com/leadersedge_toolkit.php

Food for Thought

It is not enough to know, one must use that knowledge; it is not enough to want, one must also act.

J.W. v. Goethe
 (1749 – 1832, German writer)

Challenging Situations?

What challenging situation would you like to deal with in a future issue of Head & Heart? Get our perspective. Send us an e-mail at: headandheart@nvision-learning.com

We will of course ensure that your challenging situation remains anonymous.