WALKING TO DESTINY

11 Actions an Owner **MUST** Take to Rapidly Grow Value & Unlock Wealth

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CHAPTER EIGHT

Relentless Execution

> *"By thought the thing you want is brought to you, by action, you will receive it." —Wallace Wattles*

At the end of the day, knowledge capital is worthless if it is not expressed in action. Larry Bossidy and Ram Charan wrote in the book *Execution,* "Most often today the difference between a company and its competitor is the ability to execute. Execution is the greatest unaddressed issue in the business world today. Its absence is the single biggest obstacle to success..."

Working Man
Rush

I get up at seven, yeah
And I go to work at nine
I got no time for livin'
Yes, I'm workin' all the time

It seems to me
I could live my life
A lot better than I think I am
I guess that's why they call me
They call me the workin' man

Execution is more than a set of tactics. It is a **discipline;** a system that needs to be built into a company's strategy, goals, and culture. Ask yourself: Does my company regularly produce expected results? If not, you need better execution. If you are not producing results regularly, it means one of two things: (a) your team is not capable of making them happen (they don't have the skill, knowledge,

or willpower); or (b) you have misjudged the challenges they face to make them happen.

In my experience, most of you inherently know what would make your business stronger and what you need to do to accomplish that. Strategies are not often wrong. More often, the issue is that they fail to be executed. You may have failed to consider how to actualize the changes needed, the complexity of the change, the resources required, and the paradigm shifts needed to succeed. Ask yourself: Do I have a systematic approach to deal with setbacks, resistance, and constraints—physical, mental, and emotional—to overcome the hurdles to succeed? Many thought leaders have written about what needs to be accomplished to create a more valuable business. But when you ask them how to do it, the dialogue goes dead. Few spell out how or what they actually mean. According to Bossidy, you need to keep three things in mind:

1. No worthwhile strategy can be planned without taking into account the organization's ability to execute it.
2. Execution is a systematic process of rigorously discussing the hows and whats, questioning, tenaciously following through, and ensuring accountability.
3. You need robust dialogue, accountability, and follow-through.

A CULTURE OF RELENTLESS EXECUTION

In my companies, we live by a core value we call **relentless execution.** When choosing and setting priorities, we get into the details. Who will be responsible? What are our options? What are the deliverables? Where are the resources going to come from? What are the risks? What are the milestones that will demonstrate we are on track? Furthermore, our action plans are scoped within reasonable delivery timelines. Big projects are

broken down into incremental, 90-day periods (90-day sprints, we call them) of delivery, accountability, and recalibration. In other words, our system is built to be fast and flexible.

Today's business environment is always throwing curves at you. Granted, you need to set long-term direction with vision, purpose, and targets that you keep at the top of your mind. To stay connected to it, you should revisit that vision every 90 days. Does it still make sense or does it need to change given what you have learned over the last 90 days? As you implement the vision in 90-day cycles of improvement (called Quarterly Renewals), assess your accomplishments and disappointments, then align and recalibrate a new set of priorities for the next 90-day sprint. You need a fast strategy, with a continual loop of setting, executing, measuring, reconnecting, and recalibrating action every 90 days. If you do this, you have developed a culture of relentless execution.

With an execution mindset and strong human capital, you won't even have to tell your people what to do. Instead, you become a conditioning coach for leaders. You ask questions so that your team can figure out what to do on their own. As Bossidy writes in *Execution,*

> *"In this way she coaches them, passing on her experience as a leader and educating them to think in ways they never thought before. Far from stifling people, this kind of leadership helps them expand their own capabilities for leading."*

This is what Jim Collins was referring to when he emphasized "First Who, Then What." If you have secured the right talent, cultivating a culture of relentless execution is your next priority.

Execution needs to be practiced, and staff needs to be held accountable. Your management team and key employees have to be involved in

establishing priorities prior to executing them. People need to be educated and your management systems, like Value Acceleration, need to provide them regular feedback. Accountability does not mean that you beat your people up for missing goals. *Accountability is a learning process.* If your team made the goal, ask why. What did we do right? If you missed, why? What did we do wrong? Which assumptions were incorrect? Which resources were promised, but not provided? How can we do better the next time?

Your key role in this process is teacher. Good leaders regard every encounter as an opportunity to teach. With this in mind, consider your methods for acknowledging positive performance. You not only want to measure accomplishment; you want to influence behavior. If your company rewards based on achievement and accomplishing action (demonstrated by deliverables) and promotes people for execution, your culture will change.

Some staff just don't produce—ever. These people are the Bottom 10 and need to be changed out. But in most cases, not delivering on an action is due to choosing the wrong priority or some unanticipated problem, rather than lack of staff commitment. You may have estimated wrong or had another opportunity pop up that you needed to get on right away. These things happen. But when they do, it should not take you completely off course. This is why the Value Acceleration Methodology recalibrates every 90 days. Sometimes you absolutely do have to change your people, but most of the time, lack of execution is a systematic problem.

Execution is based in reality. Many years ago when I worked for The Sherwin Williams Company, I took on a project at the Morrow, Georgia, plant to improve cycle time by 20% with minimal investment in equipment and facilities. We started the process with analysis, selecting a sample of key products, setting standard cycle times for each stage of production, and standard wait times between each of these stages. We made assumptions based on the formulations and the equipment on the floor. Next, we began

to measure deviations to the assumed standard. The deviations were facts based in reality. We would sort through the list, focusing on the products that had the greatest deviations. We would meet with the floor crew to get their input to find out why—what happened? Then we would reset the standard, if appropriate, and run another series of deviations. We continued using this Learn-Practice-Test process for months, consistently narrowing down the causes and the number of deviations until we got them into reasonable range. By consistently looking at real data, challenging our assumptions, and being persistent, we were able to produce results and dial in the processing times. Within nine months, we accomplished our objective, improving cycle time with a fraction of the investment that would have been required to expand capacity by adding physical equipment and facilities. That was real value creation.

Execution requires discipline grounded in action. Following sequential steps to getting things done keeps you moving, and moving in the right direction. Taking the time to organize before you execute will help clarify your capabilities and determine what you should be executing first, second, and third, ultimately ensuring you are working on the right things.

THE IMPORTANCE OF PURPOSE

I can't emphasize enough the importance of vision and purpose. Your business is a living, breathing thing. It is driven by people who share your vision, and who create and execute processes and systems to deliver extraordinary services and products to your customers. These customers place a high value on the experience of doing business with you, not just your products and services. The way you do business is a reflection of your culture. This vision, alignment, accountability, and rhythm are the raw materials that make up that culture and the customer experience. If your team is connected to your vision, they will be more passionate, more creative, and more committed. **Vision sustains action.**

If you commit to a creating a culture of accountability, you will get things done. And if you don't get things done, you will be able to analyze why. Your metrics will reflect your priorities so that all of your employees understand your definition of success in clear terms. And finally, if you create routines, fostering better communication, providing guidelines for how things should flow and how people should behave, and you repeat these patterns until they become second nature, your company will be both effective and efficient.

Before goals comes purpose. Purpose expresses personal values, inspires and unifies the team, focuses action, and disciplines you to think strategically. When your company lacks purpose, good people leave. Purpose is energizing and energy attracts people who are willing to subordinate individual agendas to the group's agenda. Guys like Rayburn and Christman have purpose. That's why I have been willing to bust my butt for them. In *Managing the Dream,* Bennis wrote:

> *"All leaders have the capacity to create a compelling vision, one that takes people to a new place, and the ability to translate that vision to reality."*

Purpose is a reflection of your vision. In creating vision, you need to consider personal and financial goals, including your health, family responsibilities, partner and family situations, and community involvement, as well as the business life cycle, the market, and the source of your enthusiasm and passion. Start by asking yourself a simple question: **What does success mean to me?**

Wallace Wattles wrote in *The Science of Getting Rich,* "You must form a clear and definite mental picture of what you want; you cannot transmit an idea unless you have it yourself. Behind your clear vision

must be the purpose to realize it; to bring it out intangible expression. And behind this purpose must be an invincible and unwavering faith that the thing is already yours; that it is 'at hand' and you have only to take possession of it. You do not make this impression by repeating strings of words; you make it by holding the vision with unshakable purpose to attain it, and with steadfast faith that you do attain it."

Creating a compelling vision is a must! To test the strength of your vision, start by considering these four words: Belief, Passion, Opportunity, and Focus.

BELIEF

If you don't have a vision, STOP! Go develop one. If you do, challenge your level of belief.

- Do you really believe in it?
- Are you willing to sacrifice and invest in it?
- Are you willing to accept the risks to achieve it?
- Do you really believe it will pay off? Why?

Do some soul searching. Examine your motives. Why do you believe it?

First you have to believe it. Only then will others believe in it. Colin Powell once said, "Optimism is a force multiplier." Your belief in your vision and your ability to communicate it are a compelling force.

PASSION

Passion is compelling. Passion gets you through the difficult times. Passion gives you the resolve to persevere. And it makes what you are doing fun. It's not work if it's fun. Are you passionate about your vision?

OPPORTUNITY

What is the opportunity? Try to be as specific as possible in describing it.

- What will the organization look like in three to five years?
- What kinds of people are working for you?
- What kinds of customers are you selling to? How many? How much? Where?
- What products and services are being offered? Where in the market are you dominating the competition or can you dominate?
- How has your role changed?

Challenge your thinking. Do these things seem realistic? Why? Be as clear as you can be without overthinking it. But have enough specifics for it to feel real and to enable others to see what you see.

FOCUS

If you have been able to define the opportunity with enough detail, you are likely passionate and you really do believe you can do this. You are now ready to focus on how to get it done.

Focus takes the intangible and makes it tangible. Focus is needed to keep you on track. Focus defines the specific roadmap of activities needed to begin the journey. When developing your focused vision, consider these principles of growth:

- Growth is a result, not an action. Don't pursue growth; follow through on actions that will result in growth.
- Understand what you are getting into. Studies haves shown that each time a company doubles in size, the people, process, and technology complexity increases by a factor of 12. Ouch! In my experience, this is a major reason growth plans can't be sustained or companies experience choppy growth.
- Use the Business Planning Pyramid to think through your plan—you must have a plan.
- Are you capable of providing the right kind of leadership and do you have the right people in the right seats on the bus? Read more in the book *Good to Great* by Jim Collins.
- Having the right people is vital to leveraging your time and focusing it on growth. Your people will need to step up, and so will their people, and so forth.
- Invest in your people. Create personal and professional development plans to develop talent and promote as often as you can from within.
- Every manager must create more resources than they consume.
- Memories are short; reward incrementally and often.
- Use the Value Acceleration Methodology to create focus and capture the framework of your vision.
- Is your vision linked to your one-year objectives and quarterly priorities?
- Are your priorities clear? Have you aligned and set accountabilities with the management and personal planning teams? At this point, I'm assuming that you have the right team.
- Is the plan integrated into the daily, weekly, monthly, quarterly, and annual routines of the company and your life?
- What are two to three metrics that will demonstrate your plans are on track?

- Have you established monthly team accountability reports where core team members report progress on their accountable areas?
- Create a visual/storyboard which communicates the vision and progress to everyone in the company.
- Meet with your management and personal planning teams off-site one day each quarter and recalibrate. Are the goals still appropriate? How did we do? What did we learn? What must we start or stop doing? Use a facilitator so you can participate.

Your vision and purpose should be aligned with your core values. To ensure you have a true set of core values, stop right now and ask yourself: Can we specifically tell stories that demonstrate our commitment to our core values? Take a few minutes. Then express this in the statement of a brand promise. You should be able to express your brand promise on one sheet of paper by creating a few sentence statements for each of the following four questions:

Mission: What is our mission?
Reason to Believe: Why do we believe we can achieve it?
Proof: What proof do we have to back up this reason to believe?
Tone and Manner: What is the experience going to be like (behavior)?

Next, ask yourself: In which two areas of the marketplace can my company dominate? Focus on being the best at something.

In the old economy, companies tried to optimize balance between price and services. Most resided somewhere in the middle. But over the last several decades, companies have moved either left (to compete on price) or right (to compete on specialization).

Brand Statement (April 26)

Mission. We provide innovative, process-oriented professional services that help clients get better returns from their technology investments by improving organizational ability and aligning people and technology through business processes, creating tech-savvy organizations that make their businesses faster, more efficient, and more profitable.

Reason to Believe. We are professionally seasoned and experienced in managing complex technology portfolios for growing organizations. We have expertise in supply chain management systems and processes, process engineering, change management, project and program management, and strategy development. Our knowledge base encompasses multiple industries, best practices, and development of organizational learning programs.

Proof Statement. We have successfully delivered multiple package and custom software developments, ERP selections and implementations and participated in the development and implementation of logistics solutions for small and large organizations as senior members of executive management teams within organizations and in third party situations.

Tone and Manner. We provide people who are business solution-oriented, focusing on the customer, people, and processes before technology. We are problem solvers, practical, financially sensitive, persistent, energetic, and enthusiastic about what we do. We are "success junkies," thriving on challenge and the success of our clients.

Exhibit O: Brand Statement

The mass-market strategies of the left-moving companies have resulted in many of our big-box retail outlets of today, companies like Wal-Mart, Sears, and Home Depot. Their primary driver is price reduction. They offer an array of products as cheaply as possible, and capture as much of the consumer's dollar in one place as they can. But if you are not a big-box, like most of you reading this, you are unlikely to be able to compete on price. If you are a middle market business, your strategy should be specialization, where you compete on service and the deployment of knowledge capital. So again, ask yourself, considering that price is not an option, in what two areas can you dominate?

At the time they purchased Flexalloy, our corporate buyer was a $14 billion, multi-national organization. The business unit that purchased us was 20 times our size. The reason they wanted us so badly was for our specialization, which we produced through the application of knowledge. Nobody in the industry could distribute fasteners at the speed and quality that we could.

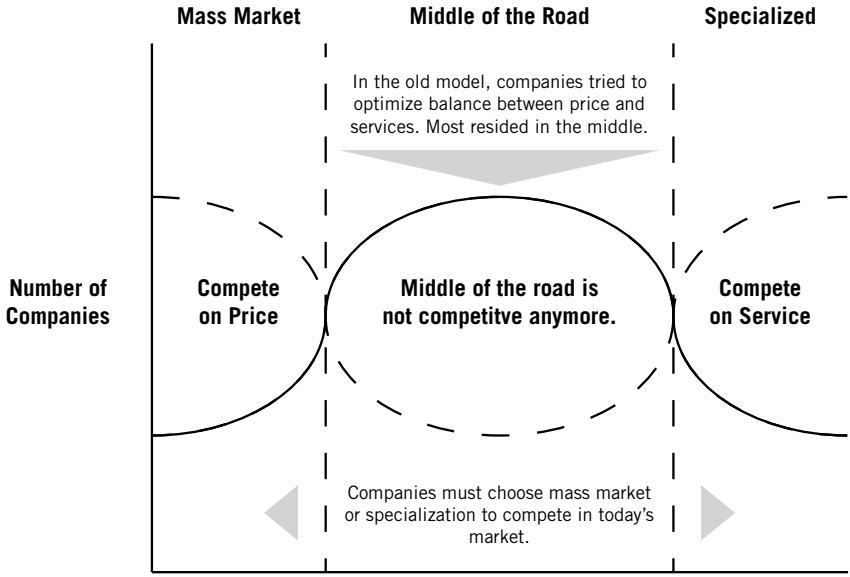


Exhibit P: Degree of Specialization

THE IMPORTANCE OF PLANNING—SETTING GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

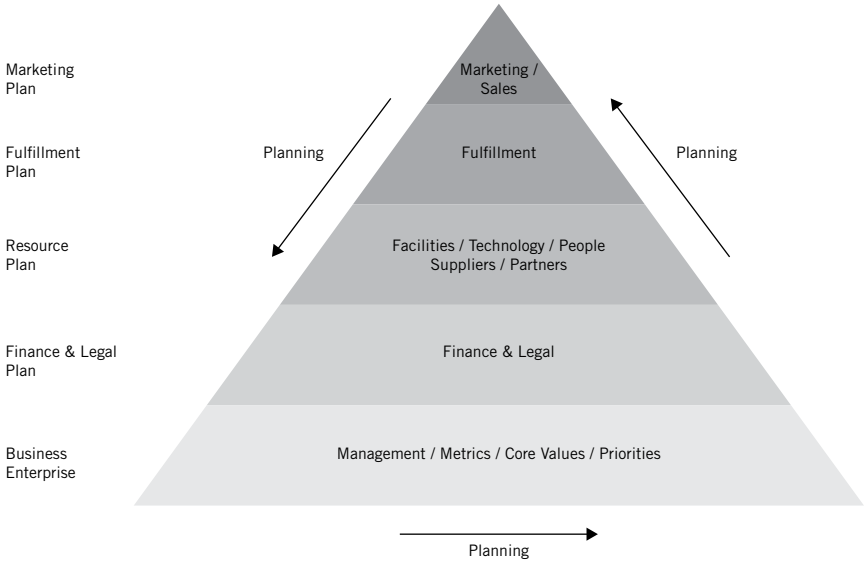
Goals, objectives, and targets should be set at three to five years, one year, and 90 days. The three- to five-year goals should be visionary, focusing on the competencies that you need to develop to reach your targets.

Ask yourself: What three to five capabilities or competencies does my company need to develop to reach our targets and achieve our vision? These competencies could be in any number of functional areas, including but not limited to: Customers, Marketing, Sales, Customer Service, Fulfillment, Operations, Human Resources, Information Technology, Facilities, Processes, Finance, and Legal.

I created a model called the **Business Planning Pyramid** to provide guidance on building integrated business plans that drive business value. It can help you figure out the competencies you need to develop over the next three to five years.

This pyramid will help you build integrated business strategies, right down to the specific sales channel if that's where you want to go. I also use this model to divide a company into its functional components and the value factors that drive you to be best-in-class. Furthermore, the model has metrics. You can score yourself in each of the categories on a regular basis to measure value creation.

Exhibit Q: Business Planning Pyramid



→ Each step broadens in scope and supports the steps above and across.

→ Plans are developed by sales channel which are uniquely defined based on differing functional process.

- There are five levels to setting a longer-term business strategy: Marketing Plan, Fulfillment Plan, Resource Plan, Financial and Legal Plan, and Business Enterprise Strategy. Each could be different based on the sales channel. Determine what is common and unique for each channel.
- Planning starts with the customer and flows down the functional model, then back up based on supporting resource capabilities, strengths, weaknesses, competitive advantages, and limitations.
- Implementation is managed by establishing themes which support functional strategies and cross functional areas. Then specific actions focusing on improving value factors are defined within themes.

- A matrix planning document can be used to define common and unique processes by sales channel.
- Ultimately, Finance and Legal determines the viability of the model based on financial capabilities and targets and legal considerations.

Always start with the customer and begin to move down the model. For example, who are your ideal customers? What are their demographics and psychographics? Why are they ideal for you? Sales and Marketing will define what is necessary to attract, land, and service the ideal customers. Then Fulfillment can respond by specifying what they need in order to fulfill the needs defined. Next, Operations can respond with what they need to have the product or service ready for Fulfillment. From there, you can define the resources required: people, IT, facilities, and partners. Finally, Finance and Legal can address the monetary and legal requirements.

At this point, you begin to see constraints. A key part of this process is making trade-offs between the functional groups, and between long-term and short-term actions. Finance may respond by saying, "We don't have the money for all that." So the process starts moving the other way, and you need to begin to consider trade-offs. If you can't get the resources that Operations and Fulfillment need to accomplish their goals, will they be able to meet the requirements of Sales and Marketing and the demands of the customer? If not, how do you need to reframe the strategy? What ultimate impact will this have on the customers?

It will force Sales and Marketing to more clearly define what they must have versus what they would like to have. With this knowledge, you can start moving back down the pyramid. You continue with this until the entire organization is in alignment. Finally, once you decide what the game plan is, you set integrated actions in each group, define the most important three to five actions that are critical path, (at the business enterprise level), agree to the management priorities and metrics that will give you feedback

on how you are doing, and also have a reality check that these actions are in alignment with your core purpose. This is done from both a business and personal standpoint.

THE WILL TO DO

A plan helps you prioritize, organize, and focus. But at the end of the day, it's still all about the will to execute. Peter Christman once said to me, "There are a lot of people that can do, but not a lot of people that will do." Value Acceleration is how you execute and deliver.

With your core purpose, your core values, your two areas of market domination, your brand, and the three to five competencies that need to be developed defined, you are now in position to turn the vision into reality. With the direction clear, focus on the next year and next quarter. Set one-year and 90-day business and personal goals and priorities. What three to five key actions will you complete in the next year to move the company and your personal planning toward the three- to five-year targets? With these one-year goals set, you can now create an action plan, both personal and business, around three to five key priorities to execute in the next 90 days. These are your "big rocks."

Everyone in business knows, whether we like to admit it or not, that an organization can only realistically focus on a few things at a time. I know there are 30 things that need to be done. But what are the most important five "big rocks" in the next 90 days that must be accomplished to move you toward achieving your one-year goals, which, in turn, will help you build the three to five competencies you need to develop to reach your targets and achieve your vision?

The *big rocks* analogy comes from a story about a professor who was teaching a group of high-powered, overachieving students about

the importance of setting priorities. During the class, he pulled out a one-gallon, wide-mouthed Mason jar and set it on a table in front of him. Then he produced about a dozen fist-sized rocks and carefully placed them, one at a time, into the jar. When the jar was filled to the top and no more rocks would fit inside, he asked, "Is this jar full?" Everyone in the class said, "Yes." Then he said, "Really?" He reached under the table and pulled out a bucket of gravel. Then he dumped some gravel in and shook the jar, causing pieces of gravel to work themselves down into the spaces between the big rocks.

Then he smiled and asked the group once more, "Is the jar full?" By this time the class was onto him.

"Probably not," one of them answered. "Good!" he replied. And he reached under the table and brought out a bucket of sand. He started dumping the sand in and it went into all the spaces left between the rocks and the gravel. Once more he asked the question, "Is this jar full?"

"No!" the class shouted. Once again he said, "Good!" Then he grabbed a pitcher of water and began to pour it in until the jar was filled to the brim. Then he looked up at the class and asked, "What is the point of this illustration?"

One eager beaver raised his hand and said, "The point is, no matter how full your schedule is, if you try really hard, you can always fit some more things into it!" "No," the professor replied, "that's not the point. The truth is: If you don't put the big rocks in first, you'll never get them in at all."

To focus and execute, you should set no more than five business and five personal actions that can completed in the next 90 days (big rocks). Once you decide what these are, ask who is going to champion the action, who needs to be involved, and what the specific deliverable is.

WORKSHOPS, NOT MEETINGS

> *Bossidy wrote, "A contemporary strategic plan must be an action plan."*

You don't set actions by having an untold number of "meetings." You need to think in terms of workshops, not meetings. What's the difference? The purpose of a meeting is to communicate information. But often, you don't get much more accomplished than that. A workshop has a deliverable and takes a different tone. In a workshop, which should be timed, you go beyond communicating. You robustly debate. You make decisions. You leave with a set of actions everyone is aligned to.

In a workshop, you gather ideas, write them down, hang them on the wall, and debate and agree on actions to be taken when you leave the room. Having a clear set of actions validates what you want to achieve, but more importantly, because it is based on reality, it indicates what you are likely to achieve. It takes the vision and brings it down to earth.

Your goal should be to complete your workshops in no more than two to three hours. Workshops lose effectiveness if they last more than three hours. People get burned out and their brains turn to mush. In the workshop, focus on three things:

- Avoid information overload
- Get agreement on next steps
- Develop relationships

AVOID INFORMATION OVERLOAD

There will be a lot of information pouring out in these workshops. You can manage this by setting an agenda and time limits. Don't let conversations go on and on. If necessary, keep a side board. If you get stuck on something, write it on the side board so that it can be addressed later. Perhaps schedule a "meeting" after the workshop to find out what all the fuss is about. It may or may not be important to the team. Clearly, the person who brought it up thought it was important, so you should at least address it. But try to keep the group moving toward its workshop deliverable.

GET AGREEMENT ON NEXT STEPS

First, everyone needs to realize that you cover different points of view, but at some point within the time limit of the workshop, you need to agree on the next steps. If the group cannot come to a consensus, the champion of the action has the final decision. As the owner, you may overrule the champions, but be careful. If you find yourself constantly overruling the champion, you probably have the wrong champion or you are a control freak. Both are bad. One of the ways I test myself is by what I call the "50% Rule."

My management team knows that as the owner, I reserve the right to make the final call on priorities. However, if we disagree and I am overruling you more than 50% of the time when we disagree, I probably have the wrong person as the champion or I am over-controlling. It's one or the other. I either have confidence in my staff's decisions or I do not. So, I monitor this. When I disagree with the staff, I ask myself: Have I been overruling them more than 50% of the time? If I am, I need to reflect on why and make a change.

Over the years, this rule has challenged me to trust my staff's decisions. At least 50% of the time, I'll run with their point of view whether I agree with it or not. Of course, I won't let them walk off a cliff. But I am willing to live with a few ill-advised decisions if they learn from them. In fact, this is the best way for them to learn. They are not always right, as they don't have the wisdom and experience that I do. And I realize and accept that I am not always right either. But most of the time, they *are* right and it has allowed me to feel more comfortable not being involved in every decision. This has allowed me more time to work on my business instead of in it. At the same time, it has helped them think more like owners instead of employees, work better as a team, back each other up, and accept the consequences of their decisions.

DEVELOP RELATIONSHIPS

These workshops allow your organization to develop respectful relationships. By respectful, I mean appreciating different points of view. The staff will not always agree because they have different points of view on the same subject. Uncle Freddie, my mentor at Sherwin Williams, called this "functional myopia." Everyone looks at the world from their point of view. Most of the time, there is not a right or wrong answer. The key to effective relationships is to try to open up your mind and see things from other points of view. I call this "stretching the rubber band." Who wants a bunch of people who think like robots? What you want is diverse perspectives and people who are willing to stretch the rubber band and consider solutions from different viewpoints. This is the beauty of having a diverse management team.

THE IMPORTANCE OF ALIGNMENT

Many organizations have the knowledge. But it's applying this knowledge that wins the day. You do this by having a system which integrates the application of knowledge that creates and sustains improvements. Having a great game plan isn't enough. If each member of the team does not act when the play is called, you don't move the ball downfield. Your team needs to be in alignment with the vision and internalize it into what they do every day.

Everyone needs to align with the top three to five priorities. Align your team in workshops, where you develop and set your top five personal and business actions. These workshops provide great learning and teaching opportunities, both from you sharing your wisdom and posing a lot of questions and from the team sharing its various points of view. It helps everyone see the company as a whole and how each functional group within the company fits into it. Your key employees will build relationships based on learning how to prioritize, choose, allocate, and assign resources to complete the action.

They will find this process energizing and their skills and capabilities will develop, which will grow your human capital. You will build customer capital, too, as employees will feel connected to how their actions ultimately affect the customer. It will build structural capital. Your strategy will be connected right down the specific actions that must be completed in the next 90 days and you will be able to specifically document and communicate to your successor the story of how you went from point A to point B. And finally, you will begin to build stronger social capital as your key employees build relationships, build confidence, and expand their capabilities. They will thrive off the energy created from succeeding as a team.

So with that, let me ask you:

- Can your staff articulate your company vision and values?
- Can they state two areas of the market where you want to dominate and proof points demonstrating your commitment to these?
- Have you established clear company and individual Standards of Performance? Does your staff receive regular feedback, including one-year and 90-day goals and objectives for the company and individually? Do you meet regularly to reconnect and recalibrate if necessary?
- Do they feel their individual goals and objectives are in alignment with each other's goals and objectives and the company's?
- Do you have learning and growth goals established (and included in their goals) to encourage them to build their competency? How much have you budgeted for professional development?
- Is there an internalized rhythm in the company that facilitates good communication on a regular basis?
- Is your staff connected with the expected financial performance of the company? Do they understand how their actions affect the company's profitability and value?
- Does your financial incentive system reward staff for creating value?

THE IMPORTANCE OF ACCOUNTABILITY

Years ago, my client's management team was doing a team exercise in which they wanted to associate a quote that described the character of each manager. To my delight, they included me and my quote was, "Is it done?" We all had a good laugh about it.

At every quarterly renewal, I had earned a reputation for asking the

simple question, "Is it done?" over and over. The reason I always asked was that I wanted the managers to own accountability. Done is done. You either met the goal or you didn't. Typically, you heard a lot of excuses.

Well, I almost got it done but this came up and that came up and I tried, but couldn't fully complete the task.

Missing the goal could be attributed to any variety of reasons. You didn't define the scope of the task properly. Something unanticipated happened that threw you off course. You didn't get the resources. You made the wrong assumptions. But the bottom line is, you got it done or you didn't. And you need to own that. It's hopefully not the end of the world. You should be exploring the reasons why you did not produce the desired outcome. It doesn't necessarily mean you are a bad person or bad manager. At the end of the day, it didn't get done. You still need to own it.

I will always remember receiving my first "marginal" score on a review from my first real mentor, "Uncle Freddie," at Sherwin Williams. I was a young hard-charger and took a lot of pride in being someone who could be relied on to "get things done." Fred had given me five objectives to complete. At my review, he gave me a marginal rating on one of the five things because I didn't get it done. Fred handed out his review in advance of the meeting with him so you could read it and prepare for the evaluation meeting. I remember being quite upset at seeing "M" next to one of my goals. "I'm not marginal," I remember thinking. At the meeting with Fred, I immediately went into all the reasons that were outside my control that prevented me from achieving the goal.

Fred agreed. There were several things that happened outside of my control that contributed to my inability to get that goal accomplished. So I calmed down and said, "So that means you are going to change the score, right?" He responded, "No, you didn't achieve it, so a marginal score is appropriate." I said, "C'mon, we just agreed that it wasn't in my control."

Fred responded, “Yes, we did agree on that. However, you either met the goal or you didn’t. Did you meet the goal?”

“Well no, but, but, but…” Before I could finish, Fred interrupted: “You were responsible and you are accountable. It’s that simple. You either accomplished it or you didn’t. You missed it, and therefore, I’m giving you a marginal.”

Fred continued, “I am not saying you are bad person or a bad manager. In fact, on all the other goals I gave you a High Standard. Overall, you did very well. And your overall rating is High Standard. You are a great manager and are getting better. But for that particular item, you failed. Own it.”

Setting goals, making promises, and keeping them are at the heart of accountability. Not only must you commit to the deliverable, but you need to be smart enough about your business obligations to understand how to choose priorities, set goals and objectives, and scope ways in which we are committed to achievement. Accountability is not only about delivering. It’s also about setting the scope of promises to be kept.

My most valuable managers are the ones that I can count on to keep promises. When they say they are going to get something done, I can trust that it will be done, and done to the standards that represent our brand. They don’t always achieve their goals completely. They make mistakes. They sometimes set goals that are too aggressive because they are high achievers. But they own it. Missing objectives, however, should not be about beating people up, although sometimes that’s needed too. Most of the time, it’s because you didn’t understand your business well enough to make the right choices and commitments. Making or not making objectives is an opportunity to learn. But you need metrics to establish the bar and to be able to quantifiably measure your ability to deliver on promises.

THE IMPORTANCE OF RHYTHM

Every company, like most people, has a rhythm to how it proceeds through the days, weeks, and months. There is a flow in your business. This flow reflects what it is like to work at your company, work with your company (tone and manner), and how you get things done.

Once you have prioritized your actions, aligned your team, and established metrics defining what success means, you need to build habits which reinforce the day in and day out, moment-by-moment routines of actually implementing them—that's execution. These routines need to produce outcomes that demonstrate the team's commitment to completing the prioritized actions. This is where you get into the real nitty-gritty process of actually doing, not just thinking. Accomplishing these actions requires your teams to work well together by communicating regularly, collaborating on their own, creating opportunities to focus not only what needs to get done but when it gets done, the steps to get it done, actually doing it, and producing the outcome.

Vision, alignment, accountability, and rhythm are the foundation for relentless execution. But at the end of the day, you still have to execute. You have to deliver. You have to get things done. Execution is how the game is won. Execution alone can be your competitive advantage. You need a fast and flexible system to facilitate disciplined execution. Value Acceleration is that system. If followed and reinforced, with committed resources, Value Acceleration will produce results. Execution will convert your vision into reality.

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Walking to Destiny provides a roadmap and concepts which, when adopted, can increase readiness and attractiveness as business owners approach their exit. Chris Snider delivers keynote speeches, trainings, and workshops surrounding the topics of Master Planning and the Three Legs of the Stool, the Four C's, the Five Stages of Value Maturity, and Relentless Execution. This education is for:

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Chris Snider is a frequent speaker in Chicago, Cleveland, New York City, San Francisco, San Diego, Las Vegas, Phoenix, Dallas, South Florida, St. Louis, Milwaukee, Atlanta, Los Angeles, and New Orleans. Discounts on travel are available for back-to-back bookings.

VOICE OF THE INDUSTRY

Christopher M. Snider, CEPA, CEO and president of the Exit Planning Institute, creator of the Value Acceleration Methodology™, and managing partner of Snider Premier Growth, is recognized as a thought leader and trendsetter in the field of value acceleration and exit planning. With a message that resonates with entrepreneurs across the country, Chris is a sought-after speaker for many major companies and trade industries, and the associated organizations that are dedicated to serving the transition and growth needs of business owners. He built his career as a key value growth integrator for major companies, including The Sherwin Williams Company, FedEx Logistics, Nike, Dell, and Textron. Finding passion in changing middle market business owners' lives through rapid growth projects, Chris emerged a game-changer, noting a milestone project with a family-owned private company that he helped grow from $90 million to over $240 million in three years and successfully selling to a multi-national strategic buyer. Now with a wealth of experience and a proven value acceleration system, Chris has established a family investment company with his son, with ownership stakes in eight lower middle market businesses.

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