

Major Pitfalls to Exceeding World-Class Part 2

By Harold Chapman

FAILURE TO EXECUTE

Last month we discussed the negative effects of disunity and what the lack of direction can have on a team and business. It is extremely important to have a team that is unified and headed in the correct direction. The success of a company is largely dependent upon the leadership team's ability to unite and lead in a common direction. However, it is not enough to be unified around the direction of the company and what actions need to be taken to effectively move the company in that direction, the team now has to begin MOVING. This leads to the third pitfall- the pitfall of failing to execute. In addition to the lack of unity and direction, the team may lack a system for achieving the business need. The team may believe publishing the business goals is enough to empower everyone to meet those goals. This is typically not the case. It will be necessary to narrow the agreed upon focus. With a narrowed focus, a unified team has a better chance to execute with excellence. However, too many teams still take on more than they can implement and do a poor job at accomplishing the goals. These teams have created a vision and strategy, and even plan to advance the strategy, but fail to implement. The plan sits on a shelf in a nicely organized three-ring binder. This failure to execute is the result of overtasking the team. During the planning meeting, the team will agree there are only a select few initiatives for the upcoming year but continue to pile on more tasks during the year. Sometimes it becomes necessary for leadership to say, "That is a great idea, but we aren't going to do it." How disappointing is it to have a plan that appears to achieve the goals only to have it sitting on a shelf somewhere?

"IF YOU FOCUS ON EVERYTHING, YOU WON'T BE GOOD AT ANYTHING."

There is a parable of a farmer who owned an old mule. The mule fell into the farmer's well. The farmer heard the mule braying (or whatever mules do when they fall into wells). After carefully assessing the situation, the farmer sympathized with the mule but decided that neither the mule nor the well was worth saving. Instead, he called his neighbors together and told them what had happened...and enlisted them to help haul dirt to bury the old mule in the well in an effort to put him out of his misery. Initially, as the dirt hit the old mule's back, he became hysterical! But as the farmer and his neighbors continued shoveling, a thought struck the creature. It occurred to the creature that every time a shovel load of dirt landed on his back...HE SHOULD SHAKE IT OFF AND STEP UP! This he did, blow after blow. "Shake it off and step up...shake it off and step up...shake it off and step up!" he encouraged himself. No matter how painful the blows, or distressing the situation seemed, the old mule fought panic and just kept right on SHAKING IT OFF AND STEPPING UP! It wasn't long before the old mule, battered and exhausted, STEPPED TRIUMPHANTLY OVER THE WALL OF THAT WELL! The dirt designed to bury him actually blessed him...all because of the manner in which he handled his adversity. There are many teams today that need to "shake it off and step up" to the challenges set before them rather than succumb to the burial of the urgent yet unimportant initiatives for the business.



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LACK OF DISCIPLINE

The final pitfall to becoming world-class is the lack of discipline required to maintain what has been established. It reminds me of a conversation a friend of mine had with a Japanese gentleman in Toyota City, Japan. When my friend asked the Japanese gentleman if he believed Japanese people were smarter than American people, the gentleman replied with a resounding NO, and continued, “Americans are some of the most innovative people on the planet. However, the Japanese people are more disciplined than Americans. Americans like to create systems and then not follow them.” I think there is a lot of truth in that statement. As Americans, we like to innovate and find better ways to do things. As soon as a task is presented, we immediately think of ways to do it better. However, this can’t be acceptable when providing a product or service. The customer expects a certain product or service. If the customers fail to receive what they have come to expect, they will not come back. However, in many cases the internal customer (next process, sister-company, or affiliate) may not have a choice. These folks are held hostage by a poor internal supplier. For example, what if you went to Chick-Fil-A and the sandwich tasted differently each time? Would you keep coming back? Franchises are a great example of what standardization can do for a product or service. Being a franchise may not be the goal of your business, but consider the possibility of having to create 500 businesses exactly alike. That may motivate you to standardize extremely well. This deep-rooted desire to continually make the job easier, if not managed properly, may pose a challenge for leaders in their desire to create standardization within the company. The challenge can only be overcome by having the discipline to check the process and solve the problems being uncovered. This cannot be done from behind a desk in an office. The old saying “no news is good news” isn’t true for those leaders looking to create the discipline required to go beyond world-class. If a leader’s goal is simply to make the pain go away, then running a world-class business isn’t in that leader’s future. We can move toward world-class only if we sustain and further improve what we have implemented in a controlled manner. If the expectation is that we will continually improve, then sustainment isn’t an issue. If one knows they are expected to take that next step toward True North soon, going backwards would fail to be an option. If the desire to strive forward is missing, measures may be taken to look good vs. really be good. Eventually, the curtain will fall and the truth will be revealed.

Would you consider your team united? Is there clear direction for the team? Is the team tasked with the right initiatives? Does the team have the power to say NO to new initiatives in order to help them execute with excellence? Has the leadership team developed the discipline to do what it says it will do? If you answered NO to any of these questions, Drive, Inc. can help. We utilize experienced professionals that can effectively lead your team through the process of becoming world-class and beyond. For a no-obligation introduction meeting, please contact Paul Eakle at paul.eakle@driveinc.com or 865-323-3491.

