



*“There are basically two types of people. People who accomplish things, and people who claim to have accomplished things. The first group is less crowded.”*

Mark Twain

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There is no magic potion or secret to being a strong and effective leader, but there are some guiding principles, attributes and skills that are fundamental to successful leaders everywhere.

They know who they are and where they are going. They are authentic. They set the pace and direction for the organization and lead by example. They are people of strong values, vision and strategy - taking the organization to higher levels of sustained success. And most importantly, they are people of *action*, of *execution*.

They develop a leadership culture within their organization focused on execution - providing a specific set of behaviors and techniques that are taught and mastered in order to gain and sustain a competitive advantage.

More than a tactic, execution is a discipline and a system. It is built into a company's strategy, goals, and culture, with the leaders of the organization deeply engaged.

*“Execution is the great unaddressed issue in the business world today. Its absence is the single biggest obstacle to success and the cause of most of the disappointments that are mistakenly attributed to other causes.”*

Ram Charan

*What the CEO Wants You to Know and Boards that Work*

According to Ram Charan and Larry Bossidy in their book *Execution* (2002), a lack of focus on the discipline of execution is the main reason companies fall short on their promises. It explains the gap between what leaders want and what they deliver.

When execution is a central part of a company's strategy and goals, and is the priority of its leaders, a culture develops that links together the three core processes of business - the people process, the strategy, and the operating plan.

This culture of execution, of *action*, allows leaders to translate the broad-brush conceptual understanding of the company's strategy into an action plan for how it will manifest: who will do what in which sequence, how long those tasks will take, how much will they cost, and how they will affect subsequent activities.

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*“Being busy does not always mean real work. The object of all work is production or accomplishment and to either of these ends there must be forethought, system, planning, intelligence, and honest purpose, as well as perspiration.*

*Seeming to do is not doing.”*

Thomas Alva Edison

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The heart of execution lies in the *three core processes* - the people, the strategy, and the operations - which every business uses in one form or another.

In a 10-year study of winning companies, professors William Joyce and Nitin Nohria found four primary management practices that directly correlate with superior corporate performance, as measured by total return to shareholders: execution, strategy, culture, and structure (*What Really Works*, 2003).

However, more often than not, these core processes stand apart from one another like silos. What is needed is:

- ❖ Robust dialogue to surface the realities of the business.
- ❖ Accountability for results discussed openly and agreed to by those responsible for getting things done.
- ❖ Rewards for the best performers.
- ❖ Follow-through to ensure that progress tracks to the plans.

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*“Do, or do not.  
There is no try.”*

Yoda



*“It is not only for what we do that we are held responsible, but also for what we do not do.”*

Moliere

### **Robust Dialogue**

An execution culture requires robust dialogue that brings reality to the surface through openness, candor, and informality. When mistakes are made, openness is preserved and blaming avoided. The information is used for course correction. Candor and honesty foster creativity and ultimately lead to competitive advantage and shareholder value.

### **Accountability & Emotional Fortitude**

Accountability requires emotional fortitude. It takes a special kind of confidence to encourage and accept strengths and vulnerabilities, to be firm with people who aren't performing, and to handle the ambiguity inherent in fast-moving, complex organizations.

Bossidy and Charan point out four core qualities that make up emotional fortitude:

- ❖ Authenticity
- ❖ Self-awareness
- ❖ Self-mastery
- ❖ Humility

So, how does a leader in charge of execution avoid being a micromanager caught up in the details of running the business? Seven essential behaviors form the building blocks of execution:

1. Know your people and your business.
2. Insist on realism.
3. Set clear goals and priorities.
4. Follow through.
5. Reward the doers.
6. Expand people's capabilities.
7. Know yourself.

It's critical that leaders, executives and managers within an organization understand the "discipline" of execution.

It is not simply a matter of trying harder or paying more attention to details, execution involves a specific set of core processes built on a foundation of leadership behaviors... it's a culture unto itself.

### *Enjoy the journey...*

If someone were to show you a path and tell you that it led to greater success and happiness in all areas of your personal and professional life, would you take it?

The path exists for everyone, yet few choose to take it. Those who do, tap into the potential that is within them. They do not let circumstances direct their actions, warp their attitudes, or dampen their desires.

They do not let others set their goals, they do not let the world conform them to its image, and they never accept mediocrity. They develop their talents and abilities to their fullest potential. They uncover their passions and pursue them with discipline, perseverance and zeal – and they enjoy the journey – knowing they are the captain of their own ship.

Think about the path you have chosen and the journey you are on - in your life and in your work. Are you tapping into all the potential of who and what you want and can be?

*“A little knowledge that acts is worth infinitely more than much knowledge that is idle.”*

Kahlil Gibran:

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*Roxanne Kaufman  
Principal/Coach*

*ProLaureate*

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