

Execution: The Discipline of Getting Things Done

Execution (ek si kyoo shun), n.

1. *the process through which goals become achievements*

2. *a means for turning strategy into reality*

Planning is a waste of time without execution. Ditto for strategy. Execution is a systematic process of rigorously discussing how's and what's, questioning, tenaciously following through and ensuring accountability, according to Execution. It's a systematic way of exposing reality and acting upon it.

Let's face it. Most companies don't face reality very well. That's why they can't execute. Bossidy and Charan assert that execution is the great unaddressed issue in the business world today. It's a discipline that is relatively unexplored. But in this fast-paced world of change, the only way to survive is to adapt and, well, change. We change by addressing reality. By laying out a plan for future success and executing the plan effectively.

Great companies are great at both planning and executing. That is, they make achievable plans and do the work necessary to turn them into accomplishments. For these achieving companies, planning and executing are a part of what they are. It's a part of their culture. It's how they do things. If you want your company to grow and succeed, you must build a culture of execution.

It starts with the leader. An organization's ability to execute, or the effectiveness in which it executes, is set by the leader. An organization can execute only if the leader's heart and soul are immersed in the company. That's because execution requires a comprehensive understanding of the business, people and competitive landscape. The leader is the only person in a position to achieve that understanding. And only the leader can make execution happen, through his or her deep personal involvement in the substance and details of execution.

In summary, the leader controls the three keys to getting things done:

1. Culture: Establishing the intra-company environment and how business is conducted.
2. People: Picking the right people and getting them in the right positions.
3. Strategy: Establishing how the strategic direction of the company is set and reviewed.

A culture of execution is one in which the following exist:

- Truth: All employees in the organization seek out truth — truth in the competitive position of products and services; A culture of execution is one in which the following exist
- Courage: All people have the courage to acknowledge truth (reality) and the resulting implications.

- Trust: All employees trust that they are safe to honestly and factually express their feelings, beliefs, opinions and suggestions.
- Participation: All employees participate in discussions of what the realities are and what strategies make the most sense for the company.
- Personal Responsibility: All employees are willing to accept individual responsibility for their piece of the overall plan.
- Reward the Achievers: All employees know that execution is what is needed from everyone, and those who execute skillfully will be rewarded.

In establishing a culture of execution, the leader sets the tone by asking the tough questions that everyone needs to answer. Then, the leader manages the process through which the information is debated and decisions are made.

Only the leader can set the tone of the dialogue in the organization. Dialogue is the core of culture and the basic unit of work. How people talk to each other absolutely determines how well the organization will function. Is the dialogue stilted, politicized, fragmented or butt-covering? Or is it candid and reality-based?

Through robust, open and honest dialogue, the organization can set realistic goals. It is important for these goals to be set by the group, in a group setting. The group must also ask what human, technical, production and financial resources are needed to execute the strategy. Can the strategy be broken down into doable initiatives? Has everybody agreed to what can be done? Will be done? Who will do what? How successes and failures will be shared?

“The desk is a dangerous place from which to see the world.”- John le Carré