

## **EXECUTIVE EXCELLENCE**

***“When CEO’s fail, it’s rarely for lack of smarts or vision. Most unsuccessful CEO’s stumble because of one simple, fatal shortcoming.” Fortune, June, 1999.***

What are the real reasons that would cause a CEO, or a leader at any level, to fail within a company? According to Fortune, it is *“bad execution, not getting things done, being indecisive, and not delivering on commitments”*. In a nutshell, it is as a result of not executing the strategic plan. The root issue lies around the fact that leaders are not successful by themselves. Their success lies within their ability to empower their people to commit to excellence and execute the plan. There a number of key factors involved. Let’s look at the most critical ones on three different levels.

Corporate:

- 1) *The vision and mission have not been clearly communicated throughout all levels of the organization.*

This is the acid test of communication in your organization. To test this factor in your organization, ask a front line staff member what the vision and mission are, what they mean to them, and what their role is in accomplishing them as set out by the strategic plan.

- 2) *Executive and management staff are not aligned with corporate objectives and are not working as a team.*

This scenario is very common for a number of reasons. When a number of acquisitions and mergers or re-structuring take place, the team is comprised of members from mixed cultures, divisions, or regions. Rarely do companies take the time to allow their new teams (or “old” teams that have been through tremendous changes) to regroup and build the trust factor back into their relationships. The value this provides is so far-reaching, it is difficult to place a monetary value upon it, other than to say that to have the leaders aligned would fulfill corporate objectives in a more efficient, timely and professional manner. This benefit has been the most consistent feedback we receive after an Executive Excellence Retreat. They are experiencing fear for their careers, creating a culture of personal agendas and low trust. If this is the scenario at the top of your organization, how does that reflect down into your organization at the front line level, and how does that affect the company’s ability to perform at the end of the day?

- 3) *Ownership and authority levels are delegated up through the organization, leaving the masses un-empowered to make decisions and exercise accountability.*

If you were to ask any manager, “What is your greatest challenge?”, 90% would respond “lack of time”. We have observed that leaders who learn to delegate down into their organizations and coach their people to “take responsible staff action”, have the time to work on their strategic objectives, and move their divisions forward. They report that the time they spend with their staff is creative problem solving, not crisis management, instead of rescuing their staff from their own problems.

One manager put a sign on his desk: DBMP – BMS. (Don’t Bring Me Problems – Bring Me Solutions). The upside to this is that staff development occurs when they are made accountable, and they too, will commit to performance excellence.

Leader:

- 4) *The leader may not be a good match in terms of skills, attitudes, values, personality, or company culture.*

While a leader may in fact be very capable, older, slower-moving companies hire “movers and shakers” because they recognize the need for change; however, the company culture does not support it, and the staff is not prepared for them. They are then deemed a “failure” and move on when their “style” doesn’t match the environment, or the agenda has not been made clear from the beginning.

5) *The leader may be very capable; however, the people are not accepting the new leadership style.* When a company recognizes a need for change – whether it is technology, processes, or culture – any change that will essentially affect everyone from top to bottom -- they seldom prepare the people on how to deal with the changes before they implement them. We “create the monster”, if you will. Staff are feeling insecure, floundering, and fearful (we have a great fear of the unknown), and will deal with it the best way we can, even if the responses are reducing morale and lowering productivity. The most common response is to take the conformist view – “we’ve always done it that way around here”, and it will prevail to justify resistance to new ideas, direction, and yes, the leader.

6) *The leadership style may be different from that of their predecessor, or dictatorial, not delegating to allow for personal empowerment at all levels. Leaders need to continually be developed and upgraded with current skills and techniques.*

Are your leaders managers or leaders? Are their skills up to date? Are you hiring, identifying, and retaining top performers? Companies embrace the idea of “continuous improvement” in terms of processes and the area of IT without question, and yet the decisions made by its leaders have the greatest impact on the bottom line. A current succession and development plan for the leaders of today and tomorrow should match the current definition of a leader in today’s marketplace.

Staff:

7) *Staff are not “buying in” to the necessary changes it will take to ensure objectives are met.* Staff who are not fully informed or committed to personal excellence when executing their daily duties, or who do not understand their role in the plan, will have a massive impact on company performance. Change instills fear, which paralyzes creativity and productivity. It is essential to prepare staff for the changes before they actually occur. Mergers and acquisitions are a prime example. At a time when company costs are at their highest from the purchase, the return on performance will be at its lowest. By preparing people to accept the changes, performance can be returned to normal levels as quickly as possible.

8) *Low motivation and morale to commit and implement the strategies, causing low productivity.* Typically, 67% of people are not properly matched to their jobs due to poor hiring decisions. This means that although they may enter the position with a high motivation, they will eventually lose interest and become very complacent instead of motivated and stimulated. As a new leader in an organization, it would be worthwhile to assess the talent pool and ensure that people are placed in areas that will tap into their true potential. This alone will foster higher job satisfaction, and of course, higher productivity and retention.

Of all the factors that can have a positive effect on the future as a leader, we believe that personal growth is the greatest. We can talk about sales growth, company growth, but all of this will probably not happen without personal growth.

How leaders choose to change and control themselves will determine the effect they have on others. **Their leadership ability is the lid that determines their effectiveness and their potential impact on the organization.** How they choose to respond to change will determine their personal and professional growth. Whatever they accomplish will be restricted by their ability to lead others.

Successful leaders are lifetime learners. There are leaders who are preparing themselves (and their organizations) for change, and there are those who are setting themselves up to be victims of change.

Learning and personal growth are at the heart of an individual's or organization's ability to adapt to a rapidly changing environment. The key question is: **“Does our rate of internal growth exceed the rate of internal change?”**

Managers can maintain direction, but they cannot change it. To move people in a new direction, you need to influence them and you need to lead them. Proof of leadership is found in the success of your people. Who you as a leader attract into your organization/department/division is not determined by who you want, it is determined by who you are. When you have done the work to connect with your people, you can see it in the way the organization functions. There is incredible loyalty and strong work ethic within the team.

Then, the vision of the leader becomes the aspiration of the people. The impact is incredible, and with enough momentum, and effective leaders, any kind of change is possible.

Take the leadership quiz for your organization:

1. On a scale of 1-10 how would you rate the strength and effectiveness of leadership in your organization? If less than 8, why?
2. How are you identifying the leadership potential within your organization? Do you have a proven success pattern?
3. What is your continuous development plan for your current and upcoming leaders?
4. How strong is the “trust factor” within your executive or management team? Are they aligned with corporate objectives and each other?
5. Have there been or will there be major changes within the organization? How have you prepared your leaders and staff to deal with the changes?
6. What is low morale and poor job matching costing you in productivity?
7. How effectively has the vision and mission been communicated throughout the organization? Does each staff member understand the role they play in this plan?
8. Does your management team suffer from the “delegation up” syndrome when staff are not taking responsibility or being accountable for meeting objectives and deadlines?
9. In your opinion, how is the conformist mindset affecting the company's ability to move forward by holding onto ineffective methods, rituals, cultures, and values? What would happen if this mindset were open to changes?
10. How effective are your leaders in truly connecting with the people?

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