

Getting things done

Five tips to fostering urgency and discipline in your company's execution

The difference between good companies and great companies is an ability to get things done and to execute religiously on promises. Having outstanding business models, being innovative and selling the best technologies isn't enough. I see this time and time again when buying from businesses or consulting for them.



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Being creative and getting things done is a powerful combination of skills and capabilities that you rarely see in leaders or organizations. When they possess that combination, they are usually unstoppable — like Netflix, Chipotle, Amazon, 3M, Grainger and ARDEX.

Most companies struggle with one of the two dimensions. That typically leads to the tolerance for mediocrity and a diluted customer experience despite having exciting offerings or business models.

So, what is behind this lack of attention to deliver excellence and execution? I would propose it is complacency with success and growth. Some organizations adopt the position that they are uniquely differentiated, provide great value, and that customers will come and buy anyway. That may work in the short term — until a competitor emerges and forces them to shape up.

If your organization lacks a sense of urgency and a discipline of execution, here are five tips:

1. Create a culture of accountability. There are different levels of accountability: individual, work groups, teams and organizational. Execution requires organizational accountability where silos are broken down and team members help each other accomplish greater outcomes. It requires collaboration, teamwork and solidarity built on a strong, shared vision.

2. Manage projects and tasks. Project management professionals can help keep projects on track and tasks accomplished. It's surprising how project managers boost your ability to get things done. If you cannot afford a full-time PMP, get someone PMP certified as soon as you can for a great ROI.

3. Prioritize and simplify. Poor execution might be a symptom of too many priorities, projects or initiatives. If you want to give people the chance to get things done, make a point to work on what is essential.

4. Track and measure execution. You can only improve what you measure. Define the right execution-oriented key performance indicators and set up trackers. You can use software that specializes in project or task management, your current customer relationship management solution or Outlook.

5. Learn from failures and continuously improve. Reliable and mindful organizations pay attention to details and learn quickly from failures. Customer complaints, service breakdowns and product quality issues become opportunities to learn lessons. Celebrating successes are important, but learning from failures is critical.

Being differentiated and innovative are musts in today's environment. However, success in strategy and business model innovation requires strong discipline, and a focus on execution is essential for survival. Organizations should pay equal attention to the creative and disruptive sides of their business models, as well as to excellence in execution of critical business model components. This is the difference between good and great. ●



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