

Achieving Results

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Harnessing Willpower to Move from Ideas to Action



With our constant stream of emails, voicemails, meetings, conference calls, pages, faxes and so on, it is a minor miracle that any of us can accomplish anything. With our Blackberrys surgically implanted into our hands, our time is sliced so thinly that we never have the focused time to develop the big-picture perspective required for an action plan, let alone the time to execute it.

“Daily routines, superficial behaviors, poorly prioritized or unfocused tasks leech managers’ capacities—making unproductive busyness perhaps the most critical behavioral problem” in business today, contend Heike Bruch and Sumantra Ghoshal in their book *A Bias for Action*.

For so many of us—whether CEOs for major corporations, small business owners or solo-entrepreneurs—there is a fundamental disconnection between knowing what should be done and actually doing it. Calling this disconnection the “knowing-doing gap,” Stanford University researchers Jeffrey Pfeffer and Robert Sutton pose the question: “Why does knowledge of what needs to be done frequently fail to result in action or behavior consistent with that knowledge?”

Is there anyone in business today who hasn’t wondered the same thing?

The answer, argue Bruch and Ghoshal, is both simple and profound. They sum it up with the term “willpower.” The problem they say is not that managers’ time is sliced, but that their intention or “volition” is sliced as well.

Getting things done requires two critical components: energy and focus. And both are at risk in the modern workplace. Building a bias for action in yourself and your organization requires developing and reinforcing the skills to become a “purposeful” or “volitional” manager. These are people who can consistently

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As the new year begins, it is a great time to reflect on our past successes as well as those things we planned to do but somehow fell short. As we look forward to 2008, what will be different? Is it time to actually take action on those goals? How about making a New Year’s Resolution to actually do something to keep your resolutions?

How can a coach help? A coach can help you step back and see things as they are with a different perspective. A coach can help you identify and address the things that are getting in your way. A coach can help you be accountable and take action. If you are satisfied with the way things are, then you’re probably not ready for a coach. But, if you’re ready to embrace the change you need to make 2008 and extraordinary year, give us a call. It would be our pleasure to help you achieve the extraordinary.

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achieve their objectives by making an unconditional commitment to their goals and then leveraging the power of that intention to overcome the obstacles in their way, whether their own doubts or the bureaucracies within their organizations.

“Purposeful action-taking depends on engaging the power of the will,” according to Burch and Ghoshal. “Not only does willpower galvanize your mental and emotional energy, it also enables you to make your intention happen against the most powerful odds: distractions, temptations to move in a different direction, self-doubt, and negativity. Willpower is the force that strengthens your energy and sharpens your focus throughout the action-taking process.”

Burch and Ghoshal identify four key steps that form the basis of successfully taking action:

- Form your intention. To work, your goal must appeal to you emotionally and be something you can define concretely enough so you can clearly visualize its success.
- Commit unconditionally to your intention. This is the key step, which the authors liken to “crossing the Rubicon,” Caesar’s irreversible decision that led to his conquest of Rome.
- Protect your intention. Once you have made your commitment, you have to protect it from forces both within yourself and your organization.
- Disengage from your intention. Unlike Caesar, your Rubicons aren’t life-and-death affairs. You have to define your “stopping rules,” the point of success—or failure—from which you walk away and take up the next challenge.

From the commitment comes both the emotional energy and the focus that are critical to your success. In short, the process of getting things done in business is pretty much the same as in any other aspect of life: The only things that get done are those that you genuinely believe in, and believe will get done.

Principal Reasons Businesses Fail

- Inadequate or no management system
- Lack of purpose, vision and mission
- Poor planning, procedures, reporting and review
- Over-dependence on specific individuals
- Poor segmentation of markets and clients
- Goals not established or not well-communicated
- Lack of competitive and market intelligence
- Inadequate set-up and working capital
- Absence of quality programs
- CEOs having great technical or professional skills, but insufficient business and management skills

US Census Bureau

Achieving Better Work-Life Balance

First, define the term balance. So often, people seeking “balance” end up with a life something like both sides of a scale dragging the ground behind them. I suggest thinking of work-life balance as a Teeter-Totter, which is certainly possible to balance but is much more fun when it “seesaws” back and forth. In fact, that is the purpose of a teeter-totter!

It’s important to become less concerned with balance and more concerned with purpose and focus. Purpose comes from service, and you may have more than one purpose, for each of the vital few key roles you serve in life. When you have done the work necessary to discover your purpose then, and only then, will it become possible to have an “On-Purpose” day. Purpose gives your day focus and meaning; it shapes your goals, your decision-making, and your use of time.

Your purpose throughout the day may be to focus on the needs of your customers, then in the evening shift to the needs of your spouse, getting kids to hockey and dance classes, then to reading from a great book before bedtime.

Once you are clear on your purpose(s) in life, focusing on JUST the important things becomes possible – there is hope and it’s fun!

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