



## Make Things Happen

In business the most fundamental source of competitive advantage is the ability to identify improvement opportunities and put them into practice faster and more effectively than anyone else in your market. Why? Because if you are the fastest mover you'll soon provide better products and services than your competitors, with better margins, whilst reacting more quickly to changes in your market.

It's rare to find a business short of improvement ideas, but many lack the ability convert ideas into reality; a process involving five steps:

- Choice: select the best ideas and park the rest
- Engagement: get people on board and focussed
- Implementation: process change, training, testing, roll-out
- Reinforcement: make sure there's no slippage
- Review: to improve next time

Unfortunately many businesses are awash with incomplete initiatives and yesterday's fads, but lack the decisiveness to formally kill them off or the focus to properly complete them. Too often in the weeks after implementation, standards and disciplines slip, and performance gains become blunted. Therefore of the five steps listed above the most important is reinforcement: the ability to fully embed improvements to ensure there will be no regression back to the old ways.

Consequently, making your business more competitive is primarily about completing numerous tasks, both small and large, for to advance from the present state to an improved condition just a matter of getting things done. Future success is created by what you achieve today, not what you might do tomorrow. So break every idea down into the things you must start doing, stop doing, and continue doing in order to achieve the desired outcomes. Each of these actions must then be properly worked-on and thoroughly completed. Whilst thinking and talking may be prerequisites to choosing the right course of action, progress does not happen unless you start something and complete it.

In great businesses teams, managers, and staff exhibit a pragmatic bias for action and make things happen. Therefore, the best way to measure the performance of a manager is by assessing whether they are making things different and better. If from one period to another there is no discernable progress, then that manager is simply not adding value.

However, do not interpret this bias for action as a licence to become a singularly task-orientated manager concerned only with the completion of tasks and unconcerned about the motivation, loyalty and capability of staff, because task-orientated managers are effective only in the short-term. Achieving results in the medium and long-term can only be done with the support of engaged, motivated, organised, and able staff who understand the aims of the business and how they can help achieve those aims. Without staff like this a manager will find that they are attempting, and indeed failing to achieve their goals all on their own.

Therefore the effective manager is one who is both task-orientated and people-orientated, and has mastered a potent combination of talents and skills:

- Engaging people in the aims of the business so that they commit their energy and imagination to their role.
- Identifying and prioritising the tasks and projects that will improve the business.
- To move past thinking and talking to making things happen.
- Developing motivation toward the task at hand.
- Organising resources to make progress.
- Ensuring that completion is final.
- And the ability to envision what comes next.