

CHAPTER

1

Why Your Team Cannot Execute and How to Fix It

The Challenge

Leaders have a tendency to spend immense amounts of time creating goals and strategies. Many mark the start of a new year with a fresh vision to unite and excite their organization. All too often, however, their results miss the mark as the months wear on and the latest campaign fizzles into the most recent failed flavor of the month, so to speak. Why does this seem to plague many leaders? At the end of the day, conceptualizing vision and strategy is easy compared with the execution prowess necessary to convert them into results. In reality, the last thing most organizations need is another goal they will miss because their people cannot execute, oftentimes simply because they were never taught how. Ask a leader to outline his or her step-by-step execution process, and you will likely receive a blank look or hear general palaver like: “We hold meetings, prioritize strategies, and follow up.” Rarely, though, will he or she have a series of

sequential actions that comprise an execution blueprint. Leaders do the best they can but still fall short of where they could be, and often should be.

MAX Is the Rx for Execution

Master the art of execution (MAX) is that step-by-step execution process for more effectively converting your vision and strategy into results. The five steps will be covered in depth over the next several sections. Although the following description of the five steps will not mean much to you yet, be encouraged by their simplicity:

Step 1: Get TUF!

Step 2: MAX it!

Step 3: MAP it!

Step 4: RAM it!

Step 5: Prune it!

MAX is more than a process; it is a skill set that will make you more valuable as a teammate. It is a structure you can take into almost any endeavor, department, or industry and immediately begin to improve results. Similarly, you can use it to achieve personal goals as well. In many respects, MAX is nothing new. Weight loss companies have used similar principles to help their clients achieve results, and many consultants across the continents have taught different versions of these principles for decades. You will notice, however, that MAX is unique in using these five particular principles in the sequential manner in which I present them throughout this section. The MAX system also stands out in that what I present is essentially easy to apply and nonacademic.

The need for my company, LearnToLead, to spend more time teaching execution principles evolved after years of observing what differentiated our elite clients from those who worked hard and had great intentions but repeatedly fell short of their potential. This need became particularly clear as I taught my most popular workshop, the Strategy Summit.

Now in its second decade, my annual three-day Strategy Summit is consistently ranked as our most helpful workshop offering of the

year. I traditionally teach this course in the fourth quarter to help clients prepare for the upcoming year. The format is simple:

- The first day covers how to create a compelling vision that unites and inspires the team for the upcoming year.
- Day two covers strategies to reach that vision. I present dozens of sample strategies and teach the implementation principles to ensure they succeed.
- On the final day I teach tactical execution (how to convert the strategies into results).

Because a significant number of attendees return each year with their leadership teams to once again plan the upcoming year, they are comfortable sharing with each other their biggest challenge with the process. Those enterprises that are most frustrated with the past year's results consistently sound the following chorus: "We started the year with a vision people were excited about, and the strategy was sound. We knew *what* we needed to do; we simply didn't do a good enough or consistent enough job of getting it done. In a nutshell, we did a poor job of executing." If you have ever said something similar, cheer up. You are well on your way to solving your execution woes once and for all.

What's Next?

- Resolve up front to close the gap between knowing and doing. You may *know* many of the principles in this section but still end up missing the mark because you do not *do* them consistently, if at all.
- Embrace consistency. Even if you are executing some of the disciplines in this book, you may not be doing them consistently enough to maximize your results. By the time you finish the final chapter of this book, *every day means every day* (EDMED) will become a valuable addition to your vocabulary and culture.
- Involve other teammates in the MAX journey, because regardless of how great you are, you cannot do it alone. You need others on the same page—others speaking the same language and creating peer-pressure accountability for the five disciplines of MAX throughout your organization.

- Keep an open mind and find reasons why MAX can and will work for you, rather than dismissing aspects because you believe your situation is unique.
- Look in the mirror. Be prepared to look reality in the eye and deal with it. This will be key as we delve into the book's second strategy, "Get the Leaders Right!"
- Understand that no process will save you without getting the leader(s) right, the culture right, and the team right (strategies two, three, and four). MAX is maximized when driven forward by effective leaders, supported by a strong culture, and executed by high-quality people at all levels within an organization.
- Accept that for a process to work, it does not have to be complicated or extraordinary; often, what is simple, concise, and ordinary works extraordinarily well when implemented consistently and with excellence.
- Contemplate the potential difference in results when you, and everyone on your team, are more focused on maximizing results each day through more focused execution—which is exactly what the next section will explain in detail.

Parting Thought

Most of us have fallen short of enough goals during our lifetime to understand that execution is where results really happen. In addition, common sense tells us that the most effective processes or systems in life should naturally have the fewest steps. MAX, then, in many respects, is simply a structured and sequential set of principles that helps us execute by addressing what we know has been missing from our approach and by organizing what we already intuitively know is best. *See? It's not rocket science!*