

LAURA STACK

Author of *WHAT TO DO WHEN THERE'S TOO MUCH TO DO*

EXECUTION

IS THE STRATEGY

How Leaders Achieve
Maximum Results
in Minimum Time

EXECUTION
IS THE STRATEGY

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EXECUTION **IS** THE STRATEGY

How Leaders Achieve
Maximum Results
in **Minimum Time**

Laura Stack



Berrett-Koehler Publishers, Inc.
San Francisco
a BK Business book

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Berrett-Koehler Publishers, Inc.

235 Montgomery Street, Suite 650
San Francisco, CA 94104-2916

Tel: (415) 288-0260 Fax: (415) 362-2512 www.bkconnection.com

Ordering Information

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Printed in the United States of America

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Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

[insert here]

First Edition

18 17 16 15 14 10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

Produced by Wilsted & Taylor Publishing Services

Project manager Christine Taylor *Copy editor* Nancy Evans
Designer and compositor Nancy Koerner *Indexer* Andrew Joron

› To Dianna Booher

A second mom, a sister,
a dear friend, and a mentor
wrapped up in one.

Thank you for your inspiration
to keep writing, your words
of encouragement, and your
never-ending love and support.

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EXECUTION
IS THE STRATEGY

Strategic Planning Is So Yesterday, But Execution Is Always in Style

INTRODUCTION

You did your off-site strategy session, enjoyed the golf outing, and then took off on vacation. You're feeling well-rested, glowing with a sense of accomplishment. But it's been four weeks, and you still haven't briefed your directors and managers on your stellar strategy. So what do you actually have? *No* strategy. It's a nice thought; it looks good; you crossed it off your list. But here's the reality: You are General Custer, and five thousand Indian ponies are bearing down on you from all directions. Your troops don't know what to do. Dust fills their eyes—and yours.

If you want to avoid a massacre, don't put down this book. In it, you'll learn how to arm your troops more effectively and execute strategy on the front lines—because you can't fire their guns for them.

THE FOUR PREMISES OF STRATEGY

Like the old gray mare of legend, strategic execution just ain't what it used to be—a point that hit home repeatedly as I conducted interviews with high-level executives in a number of industries.

John Alberto, Senior Vice President of Human Resources at Combe, Inc., started our interview with this warning: “I’ll begin by telling you my bias on strategic plans: they’re a waste of time. You prepare a strategic plan and then put it on the shelf, while the real world passes you by. When you pull it out, everybody says, ‘We didn’t do any of that.’”

You may recognize Combe as the manufacturer of personal care products like Just for Men, Sea-Bond, Brylcreem, and Aqua Velva. Alberto said,

In the 1990s, we used to do five-year strategic plans all the way down to fairly detailed financial numbers. These would include a whole host of things related to the brands, the marketing of the brands, where we would go around the world with different brands, plus a five-year view of new products.

Frankly, if after a year or two the plan still had some validity, it would be surprising. Later, we shortened it to three-year strategic plans with less detailed financials. Then a funny thing happened, at least in the consumer products industry: the lifespan of a chief marketing officer became about eighteen months. The lifespan of CEOs tends to be about three years, so a three-year strategic plan didn’t work either.

Ideally, a strategic plan serves as a vehicle for continually reminding executives and other organizational leaders to evaluate the direction of their businesses according to their overall goals. But, as Alberto can attest, this doesn’t always happen. Why? Because there’s barely enough time to stop and take a breath anymore—much less implement a tool that may be stale before it’s a month old.

Today leaders lean on their team members—the troops on the front lines—to help them make solid, reliable decisions on how to best execute the objectives that advance the ultimate organizational strategy; hence the title of this

book: *Execution IS the Strategy*. This strategy builds on four basic premises that I call interdependency, fluidity, speed, and validity.

I doubt anyone reading this book will disagree with these premises, because you've observed the truths in your business. Let's take a closer look at them and see how they affect strategic execution.

THE FOUR PREMISES OF STRATEGY

1 *Interdependency.* Strategy and tactics are part of the same over-arching process, with an inherent relationship.

2 *Fluidity.* Strategy must be more flexible in its tactics now than in the past.

3 *Speed.* Strategy must be executed more quickly than ever before to be effective.

4 *Validity.* Strategy must still be appropriate and strong, or none of the first three premises matters.

Interdependency

Understanding how goals, strategies, and tactics interrelate can be confusing, so let's lay out some operational definitions.

A *goal* is something you want to accomplish within a specific time frame (sometimes interchangeably called a strategic objective or a strategic priority). *Strategy* is your long-term plan or alternative methods of accomplishing that goal. *Tactics* are the short-term actions required to fulfill a selected strategy. *Execution* is the process of moving

from the statement of a goal to the completion of a tactic. In its most simplistic sense, I define execution as moving from a goal to a check mark. Efficient execution is the shortest distance between a goal and a check mark. Effective execution, then, is the most profitable outcome of the distance between a goal and a check mark. Efficiency and effectiveness aren't always the same thing, as you know. In this book, you'll note my bias toward efficiency, and in most cases I'll assume you have an effective strategy. I am not a strategist; I am an efficiency expert.

Let's say your goal is to get to your office safely and quickly. One strategy may be to "avoid traffic jams." Potential tactics for accomplishing this strategy may include biking to work, leaving early to avoid traffic, checking the traffic on your GPS before setting out, taking the back streets, riding the bus, or hopping on the subway or light rail. Depending on the intersection of these tactics and a variety of other factors (road conditions, weather, distance, convenience, hassle, etc.), your tactics may vary daily.

A carpool might allow you to work during the commute (an efficient use of time), but you're limited in your flexibility to leave early (and therefore not very effective). If you plan to head to the Great American Beer Festival in downtown Denver after work and enjoy a few beers while there, you may decide taking the light rail to and from downtown that day will be the best way to accomplish your goal. In addition, deciding a month in advance that you'll take the local E-470 bypass to the airport won't work if you wake up that day and find it under construction. You'll need to implement an alternate tactic to execute your strategy in the moment. In other words, tactics can vary daily and, in fact, by the minute. This variation is the essential problem of trying to plan a strategy further ahead than a few months, because our environment changes so quickly.

During my tenure on the board of the National Speakers Association (I was the 2011–2012 NSA President), I participated in many “strategic planning” sessions. NSA board members would determine where the association should be in three years and give the staff its marching orders, all the way down to the tactical “to-do” plan. We would really get into the weeds with all the detail. The following year, NSA staff members reported what they actually did, which wasn’t what we board members (in our infinite wisdom) had dictated. The staff reacted to opportunities that often weren’t in the plan. They were the ones with their feet on the street and their ears to the ground, so this was perfectly appropriate. Telling them what to do from afar wasn’t the best strategy. We were paying them to think.

Perhaps in your organization, once upon a time, leadership considered strategy and operations to be separate functions, just as we did. Sometimes leadership still does. Senior executives conducted “Strategy” with outside consultants during week-long, cabin-in-the-woods retreats, and “Operations” was the downstream piece. The leaders would decide what to do going forward, and the troops would carry out their wishes.

Alberto explained Combe’s current process this way:

Today, the executive team meets to put together broad financial goals. We do a SWOT analysis—the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, threats—and then we take it down to our key categories. We look at gaps, and then, from those gaps, we come up with our strategic priorities. The process ends up taking fewer than two days. Most senior execs have been in the business a while, so they get it. The gaps are quite obvious.

The question then becomes, “How do we execute against the gaps?” Before, we’d go away for a week and sit around doing a lot of talking. We’d have a leader—sometimes an outside person—take us through the process. Now, it’s much

shorter and much quicker. Things revolve around growth at the top-line level, which then flows through all the way to the bottom line. We have checkpoints about three times a year, which take around two hours.

When an organization sees an opportunity or realizes a threat, it can't apply the same old change process that worked years ago. That process is no longer capable of winning in today's fast-paced business environment. By the time you've written your strategic plan and the printer has cooled down, it's already out of date. Goals, strategy, tactics, and execution should be part of the same dynamic process—implementing long-term priorities through short-term, daily operations.

Fluidity

As a leader, it's important to articulate the organization's strategy clearly—indeed, you must be specific in your definition of what constitutes “success.” That said, the strategy itself must be extremely fluid in its tactics, so that the frontline workers are encouraged to determine how best to achieve it. You'll realize better results if you create an agile culture full of flexible, strategic thinkers who remain focused on the overall goals and the roles they play in achieving them. They must be willing to both entertain and implement new tactics for doing so, even with minimal warning.

In today's business world, leaders usher in change by fostering risk-taking and creativity. Operations adjust to achieve strategic priorities dynamically, often creating the future in the moment. Company leaders lick a finger and stick it in the air to determine where the winds of change are blowing. From there, they quickly shift direction to catch the breeze and fill the sails. In an effective change process, leaders communicate the organization's strategic priorities directly to all team members. They in turn share

their ideas on how to make it happen, and the team drives it through.

I've had the privilege of working with Microsoft for many years as a productivity speaker, trainer, and coach. One of my clients is Mike Howard, Chief Security Officer for Microsoft, who recently explained how this shift occurred in his organization.

A decade ago, we were creating three- to five-year plans and trying to map those out top-down. In the last few years, we've moved toward a one-year plan. We map out our priorities, accountabilities, and the execution strategy year after year, regularly updating it to match reality and course-correct if necessary. It's now all the same process.

Some multiyear projects may bleed over, certainly, into other years. For example, I challenged my team to drive a social media strategy for global security. One of my groups has been executing off that, and certainly, that's a multiyear plan. I set the general parameters of where we should be going and get the buy-in from the leadership team.

Usually, we do that through a couple of off-site meetings a year, along with our monthly Strategy Sync meetings. We map out current and new strategic priorities and how to move forward at the same time. Then it's up to team members to actually execute off this strategic vision. As they do, the strategy takes shape. We see opportunities and move quickly toward the best ones. The only time I would ever reengage in that process of their execution would be if I saw something going in the wrong direction. That's rarely the case. I provide the overall vision; team members actually figure out how to get there.

Workers have actually been innovating in this way for many years, but leaders haven't always been good at asking for it or realizing it. They're now saying, "Wow, maybe I'll just get out of their way and let them take me where we need to go." As Mike Howard pointed out, there must still be a leader to articulate the vision—that is, leaders should set the priorities—and workers should tell them how to get there.

The Modern Business Leader's Job

- >** Listen to the folks who execute, make their work easier, and support them in continually finding and pursuing new strategies.
- >** As leader, you're the disturber, the cheerleader, the coach, and the #1 supporter of your team.
- >** You enable your team to lead the charge.

As a leader, it's up to you to design a culture in which your people are willing to step up and take that initiative. Most workplaces, no matter how enlightened, still require a great deal of work to create such a culture, and thereby instill the needed behaviors to make this change. But that work is necessary, even critical, because it all comes down to this: your team must be free to determine how to best achieve success. That means they need the tools, training, and guidance to achieve well-defined success criteria.

Speed

I hardly need to point out how much faster the business environment changes today than it did even a few years ago. In response to the speed of change, workplace strategy needs to evolve much faster now than in the past. Achiev-

ing maximum results requires faster goal-setting and organic strategic execution. Your commitment to fostering agile, adaptive execution will make it easier to reshape organizational priorities in the moment.

For example, my office manager, Becca, recently attended a webinar on online strategy for small businesses. In typical Becca fashion, she immediately shot me a memo with what she learned and what we should do. For example, the presenter pointed out a current trend of using photos to reflect brand and personality versus the old staid headshot. Instead of asking permission, Becca took the initiative and sent me a meeting invitation with an appointment with our photographer for a photo shoot. (“Is she trying to tell me something?” I wondered as I accepted.)

The webinar presenter also said our websites should be relationship-oriented, mobile, and commerce-ready for handheld devices. In our one-on-one meeting later that week, Becca briefed me on the changes we were making to our site, outlining her plan in ten minutes. She would direct our marketing consultant to work on the site map, ask our IT guy to outline the move to WordPress, and get three proofs from the designer to review. I asked her the price tag, blinked, and gave her the thumbs-up. And that was it.

From a tactical perspective, a new “eureka” opportunity may suddenly bubble up and alter the focus and time expenditure of your strategic plan. One of my strategic priorities is to “Build The Productivity Pro, Inc. brand.” I didn’t know our company’s website needed an overhaul to support that strategy, but *boom*, we’re executing Project Revamp Website. This didn’t happen because “it was time to do strategic planning.” Rather, a team member made the decision organically when it became obvious a tactical change was necessary to support the strategy.

She came to me for resources and approval, and I got out of her way.

As a result, I had to push other tasks back in favor of this new project—that's where your team often needs your support. Periodically, leaders get together for a reality check on direction based on the movement in their areas. They share what they're working on, adjust the course if needed, and take off again.

Admittedly, because I head up a small firm, I can make decisions independently and turn on a dime, so my team can execute more quickly than a Fortune 500 company can. However, my clients in large corporations want to model this nimbleness, because it's absolutely necessary for their success. Don't just tell me, "That's the way it is around here." Nothing makes me crazier, and nothing fails faster.

Here's what leaders must tell their team members: "When you think of a great idea or come face to face with a new opportunity, don't wait three weeks to tell me about it in our next meeting. Get on the phone with me now." If you do a good job communicating the vision, their thoughts and actions begin to align with your organization's strategic objectives. Empower your team to act quickly! Never be too busy to hear about an idea or an improvement.

Validity

The best leaders have a vision for the future, which arrives daily. To quickly implement great ideas, you must do these two things well:

1. Identify the strategic priorities that will drive the business forward.
2. Take action on them quickly by leveraging your people and resources.

A huge caveat: You still must have a viable strategy, one that can actually achieve quantifiable goals within your constraints of time and cost. You also need to keep an eye on how well it's working, so you can refine your course as needed.

For example, as an author, the demise of Borders bookstores in late 2011 saddened me. What happened? Unlike its competitor Barnes & Noble, Borders failed to properly account for the risks presented by online book distribution. It's not that Borders didn't have a strategy; its strategy just didn't work well. The changes were coming, the writing was on the wall, and its leaders recognized the need for a strategic shift. However, they chose a bad strategy. No amount of fast action will get you out of trouble if you're speeding in the wrong direction. Clearly, Borders simply couldn't react fast enough. It stood by watching as other companies nibbled on the edges of its market and ultimately shut it down.

The Bottom Line Is Simple

- There is no shortage of good ideas.
- It's not about who has the best ideas.
- It's about who executes their good ideas best.

FOUR KEYS TO EFFICIENT STRATEGIC EXECUTION

THE L-E-A-D FORMULA™

L = LEVERAGE

Do you have the right people and drivers in place to achieve your strategic priorities—ones that allow you to execute your strategy when the rubber hits the road? If not, you have a talent/resource issue.

E = ENVIRONMENT

Do you have the organizational atmosphere, practices, and culture that will allow your employees to easily support your strategic priorities? If not, you have a cultural/engagement issue.

A = ALIGNMENT

Do your team members' daily activities move them toward the accomplishment of the organization's ultimate goals? If not, you have a communication/productivity issue.

D = DRIVE

Are your organization's leaders, teams, and employees agile enough to move quickly once the first three pieces of this list are in place? If not, you have a speed/agility issue.

FOUR KEYS TO EFFICIENT STRATEGIC EXECUTION

After more than twenty years of helping leaders create high-performance cultures and accelerate growth, I've identified four crucial factors that must be in place for a leader to execute strategy efficiently. Without these elements, execution can fail—even when you base it on a mature, effective strategy. The four keys to efficient strategic execution—Leverage, Environment, Alignment, and Drive—represent solutions to these failures and form the L-E-A-D Formula outlined in this book.

The L-E-A-D Formula represents the real-world implementation of interdependency, fluidity, speed, and strategy (the four premises outlined at the beginning of this introduction) as they relate to on-the-spot, flexible strategic execution.

Most leaders find their organization is weak in one or two areas. The Execution Quotient Assessment that follows this introduction will help you determine which of the four keys you need to strengthen in your own individual business. The assessment shows you where to find the information in this book. When I'm invited to speak at a corporate meeting, I ask the audience members to take the assessment online, so I can compile the cumulative scores. When the audience sees the perceptions of the overall group, its leaders can take action as a whole.

LEADERSHIP ROLES AND DEVELOPMENT OPPORTUNITIES

Each of the four keys to efficient strategic execution has a corresponding leadership role and development opportunity that can be seen in the following chart.

LEADERSHIP ROLES AND
DEVELOPMENT OPPORTUNITIES

L

LEVERAGE

Leadership Role
Engineer: Build It

*Development
Opportunity*
Talent/Resources

E

ENVIRONMENT

Leadership Role
Mechanic: Fix It

*Development
Opportunity*
Culture/Engagement

A

ALIGNMENT

Leadership Role
Conductor: Steer It

*Development
Opportunity*
Communication/
Productivity

D

DRIVE

Leadership Role
Bulldozer:
Knock It Down

*Development
Opportunity*
Speed/Agility

ORGANIZATION OF THIS BOOK

The L-E-A-D Formula's four keys correspond with the four sections of this book, to help you readily identify which key might represent your biggest leadership challenge. Each section has three chapters, so if you hosted a book club with your team, you could discuss the book in three months (see www.ExecutionIsTheStrategy.com for complimentary discussion and leader guides).

Key 1: Leverage explores how to employ the concept of leverage to apply a stronger force as a leader, strengthen your “levers” (employees), and improve your “fulcrum.”

Key 2: Environment explores the importance of shaping an agile, responsive organizational culture, encouraging change hardiness in your team members, and engaging employees.

Key 3: Alignment shows you how to convince team members to care about your goals, define what those goals will be, and determine how to get there.

Key 4: Drive focuses on your team's path to productivity. It includes how to remove obstacles from their paths, speed things up, and remove time wasters.

Keep this in mind: Leaders should work with their people to build effective business strategies in real time. You may not have time for strategic planning as such, but you should always make time to build an organizational culture that's adept at strategic execution.

By the time you finish reviewing each of the four keys, you'll see that execution really *is* the strategy that will propel your organization forward in today's fast-paced business arena.

▶▶ Visit www.ExecutionIsTheStrategy.com to receive complimentary bonus material, videos, articles for reprint, worksheets, and book club materials. ◀◀

The Execution Quotient (EQ) Assessment

The purpose of this EQ assessment is to provide insight into your current strategic execution process as you prepare to read this book. The assessment is organized by the four sections of the book, corresponding to the keys of the L-E-A-D Formula™. Each chapter and question has a focus that is highlighted in bold and repeated in the scoring section.

After you take the assessment, transfer your scores to the following Score Sheet to analyze them further. You can also take the assessment electronically at www.ExecutionIsTheStrategy.com and e-mail the results to yourself.

TAKING THE ASSESSMENT

Answer each question using the following scale:

- 1 = to no extent
- 2 = to a small extent
- 3 = to some extent
- 4 = to a considerable extent
- 5 = to a great extent

KEY 1: LEVERAGE

Chapter 1: Maximize Your Input Force (Leadership)

1. To what extent do I **delegate** my authority as effectively and widely as possible? Do I refrain from doing what others on my team are capable of doing?
 1 2 3 4 5

2. Do I guide and oversee the work of my team? Do I avoid micromanagement and demonstrate **trust**?
 1 2 3 4 5

3. Do I lead by example? Do I **model** the behaviors I expect from others?
 1 2 3 4 5

- SUBTOTAL _____

Chapter 2: Strengthen the Beam (Employees)

4. To what extent do I identify and hire high-performance workers? Do I know what attributes are needed to meet my future **talent** requirements?
 1 2 3 4 5

5. Do I take the time to **coach** my team members? Do I connect them with experienced mentors?
 1 2 3 4 5

6. Do I consistently provide my team members with the **training** they need to increase their personal performance? Do I invest in my key talent?
 1 2 3 4 5

- SUBTOTAL _____

Chapter 3: Improve the Fulcrum (Resources)

- 7. To what extent do I provide my team with the **equipment** they need to do their jobs better? Do they have the right technology?
1 2 3 4 5

- 8. Do I emphasize **cross-functional thinking** among my team members? Do we work to coordinate goals with other departments and employees?
1 2 3 4 5

- 9. Do I outsource tasks that others can do more inexpensively or effectively? Do I seek **partnerships** to “fill in the blanks” with expertise I lack?
1 2 3 4 5

- SUBTOTAL _____

KEY 2: ENVIRONMENT

Chapter 4: Shape the Culture

- 10. To what extent do I foster an environment of **excellence** on my team? Do I encourage everyone to always give their best?
1 2 3 4 5

- 11. Do I build a firm foundation of **accountability** in my team? Do I emphasize the importance of reliability?
1 2 3 4 5

- 12. Do I encourage a **collaborative** atmosphere within my team? Do I embrace mutual learning and community to maximize success?
1 2 3 4 5

- SUBTOTAL _____

Chapter 5: Encourage Change Hardiness

13. To what extent do I embrace change as it occurs and roll with the punches? Do I actively seek out **openness** and usher in change?
- 1 2 3 4 5
14. Do I create a nonpunitive climate of **risk-taking**? Do I encourage innovation and creativity?
- 1 2 3 4 5
15. Do I emphasize **continuous improvement** for myself and my entire team? Do we always strive to get better?
- 1 2 3 4 5
- SUBTOTAL _____

Chapter 6: Ensure Engaged, Empowered Employees

16. To what extent do I drive engagement among my individual team members? Do I encourage people to take **initiative**?
- 1 2 3 4 5
17. Do I reinforce our **joint** responsibility to accomplish our team's goals? Do I demonstrate how individual output contributes to everyone's success?
- 1 2 3 4 5
18. Do I empower my employees to **own their jobs**? Do I provide them with what they need and get out of the way?
- 1 2 3 4 5
- SUBTOTAL _____

KEY 3: ALIGNMENT

Chapter 7: Take Your Team on a Mission

19. To what extent do I understand what **motivates** each team member to perform at a high level? Do I understand that people contribute discretionary effort for different reasons?
- 1 2 3 4 5
20. Do I show genuine **appreciation** for hard work? Have I discovered what would be meaningful to each person?
- 1 2 3 4 5
21. Do I keep a clear picture of our goals in front of my team? Do I continually **communicate** excitement for our mission?
- 1 2 3 4 5
- SUBTOTAL _____

Chapter 8: Plan for Goal Achievement

22. To what extent do I establish clear performance **expectations** for each person? Do team members know precisely what they should be doing?
- 1 2 3 4 5
23. Do I work with my team to establish a plan to achieve our workplace goals? Is our **project planning** and management seamless?
- 1 2 3 4 5
24. Do I ensure that the day-to-day operations of my team will achieve our long-term goals? Do we merge strategy and **tactics**?
- 1 2 3 4 5
- SUBTOTAL _____

Chapter 9: Measure Your Progress

25. To what extent do I tie each person's goals into our **performance management** system? Do we track the accomplishment of individual goal attainment?
- 1 2 3 4 5
26. Do I measure my team's performance at regular intervals? Do we jointly **review our key milestones** on a routine basis?
- 1 2 3 4 5
27. Do I create advance plans for potential crisis? Do I prepare for **contingencies**?
- 1 2 3 4 5
- SUBTOTAL _____

KEY 4: DRIVE

Chapter 10: Remove Obstacles from the Path

28. To what extent do I remove the obstacles that slow my team's execution? Do I work to clear **roadblocks** when necessary?
- 1 2 3 4 5
29. Do I reinforce the need for **urgency** and efficiency? Do I encourage my team to "turn on a dime"?
- 1 2 3 4 5
30. Do I **make speedy decisions**? Do I keep over-collaboration or perfectionism from slowing us down?
- 1 2 3 4 5
- SUBTOTAL _____

Chapter 11: Add Enablers to the Equation

31. To what extent do I help my team members eliminate workplace distractions? Do I give them time to think, be strategic, and **focus**?
- 1 2 3 4 5
32. Do I create team **protocols** to ensure efficient communication? Do we follow consistent guidelines for instant messaging, e-mail, and conference calls?
- 1 2 3 4 5
33. Do I work to **eliminate** activities that fail to support our strategic priorities? Do I understand that what we don't work on is as important as what we do work on?
- 1 2 3 4 5

SUBTOTAL _____

Chapter 12: Eliminate Time Wasters

34. To what extent do I encourage team members to accomplish tasks in order of **priority**? Do I keep people focused on results, not activity or busyness?
- 1 2 3 4 5
35. Do I spend **meeting time** productively? Do I keep attendees focused and stick to the agenda?
- 1 2 3 4 5
36. Do I encourage a reasonable **work/life balance**? Do I understand that overwhelmed people hit a point of diminishing returns?
- 1 2 3 4 5

SUBTOTAL _____

EXECUTION QUOTIENT SCORE SHEET

Copy your scores and subtotals from the previous sections and add them up to find your grand total. See the scoring categories below to interpret your score.

KEY 1: LEVERAGE

Chapter 1: Maximize Your Input Force (Leadership)

1. Delegation _____
 2. Trust _____
 3. Modeling _____
- SUBTOTAL _____

Chapter 2: Strengthen the Beam (Employees)

4. Talent _____
 5. Coaching _____
 6. Training _____
- SUBTOTAL _____

Chapter 3: Improve the Fulcrum (Resources)

7. Equipment _____
 8. Cross-functionality _____
 9. Partnerships _____
- SUBTOTAL _____

KEY 1 SUBTOTAL _____

KEY 2: ENVIRONMENT

Chapter 4: Shape the Culture

10. Excellence _____
 11. Accountability _____
 12. Collaboration _____
- SUBTOTAL _____

Chapter 5: Encourage Change Hardiness

- 13. Openness _____
- 14. Risk-taking _____
- 15. Continuous improvement _____ SUBTOTAL _____

Chapter 6: Ensure Engaged, Empowered Employees

- 16. Initiative _____
 - 17. Joint goals _____
 - 18. Job ownership _____ SUBTOTAL _____
- KEY 2 SUBTOTAL _____

KEY 3: ALIGNMENT

Chapter 7: Take Your Team on a Mission

- 19. Motivation _____
- 20. Appreciation _____
- 21. Communication _____ SUBTOTAL _____

Chapter 8: Plan for Goal Achievement

- 22. Expectations _____
- 23. Project planning _____
- 24. Tactics _____ SUBTOTAL _____

Chapter 9: Measure Your Progress

- 25. Performance management _____
 - 26. Review milestones _____
 - 27. Contingency plans _____ SUBTOTAL _____
- KEY 3 SUBTOTAL _____

KEY 4: DRIVE

Chapter 10: Remove Obstacles from the Path

28. Roadblocks _____

29. Urgency _____

30. Decision making _____ SUBTOTAL _____

Chapter 11: Add Enablers to the Equation

31. Focus _____

32. Protocols _____

33. Elimination _____ SUBTOTAL _____

Chapter 12: Eliminate Time Wasters

34. Prioritization _____

35. Meetings _____

36. Work/life balance _____ SUBTOTAL _____

KEY 4 SUBTOTAL _____

GRAND TOTAL: KEYS 1–4, QUESTIONS 1–36 _____

Scoring Categories

151–180: **Congratulations!** You have a deep and effective understanding of strategic execution and know how to achieve it. All you need to do is fine-tune a bit. Keep up the good work!

121–150: **You need a few tweaks here and there.** You're on the right track! Strive to improve any question where you gave yourself less than a "5." Give yourself credit for what you do well and acknowledge where you can improve and save even more time.

91–120: **Average.** You're "middle of the road," which isn't bad,

but it's a bit boring. You're not the worst, and you're not the best. But who wants to be average? Work on kicking up your strategic execution efforts a notch, so you can get more done and produce stellar results!

61–90: Major overhaul required. You'll need to get serious about changing the way you handle your strategic execution, from setting goals through strategy to execution. Stop working so hard on the wrong things. Select one item on this list every two to three weeks and work on systematically improving your competence level.

36–60: Danger! Your productivity and strategic execution skills need a jumpstart, stat! Both your job and your organization's future may depend upon it, so start working hard on the right things right now.

How to Use Your Scores

Compare your total scores for each section of the book to determine which L-E-A-D factor is the weakest link in your process. Within each particular key, you can delve deeper by comparing the chapter subtotals, thereby better understanding which topic you've expressed a weakness in. Even more useful is looking at the individual questions within each chapter for the lowest scores; in fact, those represent your best places to start. This is very much a bottom-up method of continuous improvement (another concept I focus on in this book).

As you study each chapter, especially those where you've scored poorly, think about how you can improve your process. If your weakest part of the L-E-A-D Formula is Leverage, where does the greatest weakness fall: in Leadership, Employees, or Resources? For example, if you've got a full slate of 5s except in the Resources chapter (chapter 3), where you drop to 4 on Equipment, 2 on Cross-functionality, and 3 on Partnerships, then it's clear

where your first efforts at improvement should lie: with Cross-functionality. Make a sincere effort to think beyond your desk, to break up information silos on your side of the divide, and to reach out to other groups in a collaborative, mutually beneficial manner. Then you can start working on your Partnership flaws, before polishing up the Equipment issues, gradually bringing everything up to a 5.

Once you're happy with your new results, move on to another unsatisfactory function and work on bringing it up to par. While I would normally tell you to focus on improving what you're already good at—that is, pushing your scores from good to great rather than wasting time on things you don't do well—the functions I discuss in this book represent exceptions to that rule, because these are the conditions under which successful execution can flourish. They're so fundamental that they require the maximum level of competence you can bring to bear, in order to strategically execute on the spot so well and so automatically that you ensure the survival of your team.

As you put new concepts successfully into play, return here occasionally and retake the assessment to determine how much you've improved. You should see improvement relatively quickly, and you may not recognize that original you a year from now.

Leverage



LEVERAGE

Leadership Role
Engineer: Build It

Development Opportunity
Talent/Resources

When I was a kid, my younger brother Paul—who later graduated from college with a degree in

mechanical engineering—taught me how using a lever could make building a snowman easier.

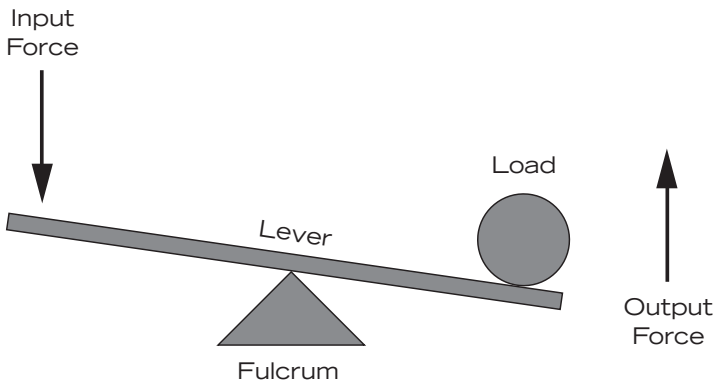
My father is a retired Air Force colonel. I grew up on the Air Force Academy in Colorado Springs, so I'm used to snow and lots of it. I remember one particularly big snowstorm that closed school and delivered perfect snowball-making snow. Paul and I naturally decided to make an enormous snowman.

We started with a huge base. Then we rolled a middle snowball nearly as large, and quickly discovered it was

so heavy we couldn't lift it. So my clever brother grabbed our Radio Flyer wagon and a wooden 2×8 beam from my father's shed. Using the wagon as a fulcrum and the board as a lever, he lifted the middle snowball onto the base snowball while I guided it. After that, finishing our snowman was easy.

In the strictest mechanical sense, a lever is a simple machine with a rigid beam that pivots on a fulcrum or fixed hinge to magnify an input force, so the resulting leverage or output force can move heavy objects.

The concept of leverage fits equally well in the workplace, where applying it can facilitate smooth, on-the-spot strategic execution. The same basic components of leverage used to move a snowball apply to any business system. You can leverage physical and financial assets, experience, skill sets, specialized knowledge, and relationships to get the right people in the right roles. This means using the right tools to squeeze every bit of productive work from your team. It's also the epitome of learning to do more with less—a powerful principle in today's resource-poor workplaces.



An efficient organization is one that operates with leverage already in place:

- The Effort/Input Force = the leader (you)
- The Lever/Beam = the worker (employee or team)
- The Fulcrum/Pivot = the enabler (tool or resource)
- The Load/Object = your organization (what you're trying to move with your strategy)

The interaction of these components is said to create leverage. Depending upon the strength of your strategy, the leverage created (the output force) can move the object (your organization). If the interaction of this simple machine with its component parts creates enough leverage, your organization will move where you want it to go. Without the right parts in place, movement will be much more difficult.

Put another way, the ability to lift the “snowball” in your organization requires increased input force. This is achieved either through a stronger leader, a longer and stronger beam (team members), or a fulcrum of more appropriate size, height, or position (tool or approach), or perhaps even a lighter snowball.

You'll find it well worth the effort to develop or acquire the authority to leverage your resources and assets at will, not to mention those of your allies and partners. Why? Having the ability to apply the right amount of force at just the right time allows you to take advantage of fast-moving opportunities that may knock only once.

LEVERAGE IN ACTION

My two sons Johnny and James love to eat at the Chick-fil-A near our home. So I was delighted when Roger Blythe, Vice President of Business Analysis at Chick-fil-A,

called upon me to work with his team at an upcoming department meeting.

When we chatted about the concept of leverage, Blythe told me,

There's a lot of conversation around here about how to move more quickly. Even though we're not under the pressure of bad financial results, we do constrain ourselves around the resources that we add every year. Our desires to continuously improve and add new features and services typically exceed the resources we can add in any given year, so there's a built-in mechanism that forces us to try to become more efficient.

In my own area, we try to create as much clarity as we possibly can about the goal and what we're trying to accomplish. Then we hire wonderful people—really smart, bright people who are engaged—and we give them a large amount of freedom and flexibility in executing that plan.

When you have the right people in the right roles and the right tools in place, the leverage gained makes implementing your strategic priorities far easier. So don your engineer hat, and let's explore ways to build this simple machine so you can help your team execute with greater agility.

Maximize Your Input Force

CHAPTER

1

As Archimedes once said, “Give me a lever long enough and a fulcrum on which to place it, and I shall move the world.”

How do you get more power into your lever? Simple. You have to be a stronger leader. But what, precisely, does that mean in today’s world? Not what it once did, that’s for certain. The modern era’s simpler information exchange, better communications, and increased mobility have altered perceptions of leadership in interesting ways.

Motivational expert Ken Blanchard points out, “In the past, a leader was a boss. Today’s leader must be a partner with their people. They can no longer lead solely based on positional power.”

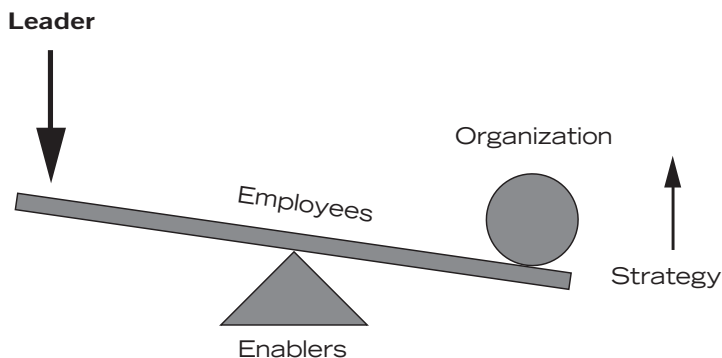
I couldn’t agree more. Modern leaders can’t afford to be autocrats, because by the time they decide on a strategy, it’s usually out of date. No single individual can keep up with everything in real time. Instead of trying to, the intelligent leader delegates his or her authority as effectively and as widely as possible, encouraging both risk-taking and

creativity. That allows the team to transform the organization from within.

Think of it this way: as a leader, you work for your team members. They don't just work for you, although the organizational chart may suggest otherwise. Don't think of yourself as belonging to a different class than your team members just because the categories seem so clear-cut on paper. You all relate to each other along a continuum rather than as separate boxes. (Rare exceptions occur in high-security situations or during war, when compartmentalization is required.)

So why bother even having a leader? Because you need someone to articulate and guide the team's mission and vision. The modern leader exists less to tell people what to do than to urge them to do what they already know they should. Rather than controlling every worker's daily activities, you serve as a nucleus for your team members to rally around. You're a catalyst triggering ideas and action, allowing people to succeed without getting in their way.

Let's consider a few of the many ways you can maximize your input force.



GIVE YOURSELF A HAND!

You have a staff for a reason. Ideally, each team member on your staff possesses talents, knowledge, and abilities that combine to form the extra hands Mother Nature didn't give you.

Speaking of hands, here's a helping HANDS approach to keeping your team properly aligned with organization strategy—without tipping you over the edge into overwork.

1. *Handpick your people.* Select each with an eye for the skill set he or she brings to the table, aiming for a little overlap with other team members, but without too much redundancy. Once they're on board, get to know them well. Determine their weaknesses and strengths, consider how they might work best together, and decide which tasks should go to whom.
2. *Assign duties carefully.* Meet with your team leads and parcel out the range of tasks they have authority over. Define the limits of their authority carefully to avoid duplication, but make sure there aren't any cracks for tasks to fall through.
3. *Nurture initiative and innovation.* In a memorable scene in the 2011 film *Captain America*, a sergeant tells a group of soldiers out on a run that if one of the men can retrieve the flag from atop a tall flagpole, he'll get a ride back to the barracks. After several soldiers fail to climb the pole, wimpy Steve Rogers takes a look at it, pulls a pin at the base, and pushes it over with his foot. He retrieves the flag and trades it for his ride back to the barracks. Give your people the opportunity to surprise you with their solutions to tasks you assign.
4. *Don't abdicate!* Delegation is not abdication. Carefully consider how much authority to delegate with

the responsibilities you parcel out, but never give it all away. Keep a high-level eye on both team and individual workflow. Intervene if someone doesn't live up to expectations or fouls the works. Do whatever you must to repair an individual's productivity before the whole team's productivity falls apart. As the leader, you bear the ultimate responsibility for every team member's success and failure.

5. *Study the results.* Has delegation reduced your task list to a manageable length? If not, intensify your efforts. Resolve to handle only the high-value items you do best or must do as part of your job. In addition, determine how your delegating has affected the team's workflow process. Do you have a well-oiled machine on your hands, or does it move forward in fits and starts? If the latter, rethink who does what and how, and clear the obvious blockages.

Delegating work forms the backbone of any managerial time management strategy, so learn to do it well. You can multiply your hands and extend your brain, thereby accomplishing much more than you ever could alone.

JUST SAY NO TO YOUR INNER CONTROL FREAK

Having a forceful personality provides certain advantages in a competitive workplace. It can help you work your way up the ladder more quickly than you otherwise might. But fair warning: if your favorite management slogan is "my way or the highway," expect a few delays in your drive to the top.

You can survive with this attitude, but nobody loves a control freak. Your team will never give you 100 percent if you disempower them, hover over their shoulders, or constantly disparage their abilities or judgment. They will ei-

ther resent you or get so nervous they won't be able to do their jobs correctly. And if you're always poking into their business, you won't get your job done, either.

Control freaks in leadership positions crush creativity, drive depression, and kill camaraderie. All of these weaken your lever's input force. Worse, they also block the kind of frontline development and immediate execution of strategy that success depends on. So let's check on your micromanagement tendencies. Read through these questions carefully and answer them honestly.

- Do you often find yourself standing over employees' shoulders directing their work?
- Do you regularly redo employees' work, even as a form of "instruction"?
- Do you second-guess your employees' decisions on a daily basis?
- Do you require an approval or sign-off on every task, even minor ones?
- Are you convinced of the truth of the old saying, "If you want something done right, you've got to do it yourself"?
- Do you work twelve-plus hours a day?
- Do you recheck the work of those you're responsible for?
- Do you have a hard time focusing on the big picture and drown in minutiae instead?
- Do you get involved in little \$12-per-hour details?
- Are you insatiably curious, so much so that you just have to know what's going on behind the scenes?

If you answered “Yes” to more than a couple of these questions, then you have micromanager tendencies. You must fight them! If you answered “Yes” to many or all of them (or pretended you didn’t), then I have bad news for you: you’re already a micromanager.

Micromanaging drives a stake through the heart of employee productivity; it’s as simple as that. It’s as much about fear as it is about control. Micromanagers are not necessarily on a power kick; rather, they mistrust everyone. They’re afraid if they don’t “ride herd” on the team, everyone will make catastrophic errors. Afraid of the consequences of letting go, they hold on to as much of their power as they can.

The result? You create a stifling environment, in which both your time and the employees’ get wasted. Micromanaging fails right up and down the line. Not only does it exhaust everyone involved, it’s ultimately counterproductive and drives away the best workers.

Furthermore, even when done with the best of intentions and the lightest of touches, micromanaging interrupts people. If you poke someone a half-dozen times a day and ask how far they’ve gotten on an assignment, you can’t expect them to get very far. When they have to answer you, it drags them out of their focus. In fact, employees often tell me their manager is their biggest distraction, always swooping in and checking on them, rendering them unable to get anything done.

Given that, where do attention to detail, intelligent oversight, and high professional standards break down and mire you in the trap of micromanagement? It all hinges on trust. When you surround yourself with competent, well-supported people and trust them to do their jobs, micromanaging isn’t a problem. But when trust goes out the win-

dow, micromanaging springs up like a weed. When lurking and criticizing happen incessantly, both productivity and employee morale go down the drain.

A REAL-WORLD EXAMPLE

I once did training for the vice president in charge of the call center at a large telecom company. She cited overwork and burnout on her team and called me in to help.

Upon further exploration, *she* proved to be the biggest culprit. I know this seems like common sense, but many leaders simply can't see how they're contributing to crazy-making. It quickly became clear why this vice president felt she had no time to think about strategic issues. She insisted on attending meetings that were also attended by the director and manager of that department. She had employees copy her on every e-mail about issues they were resolving internally with customers, so she'd be "in the know."

Clearly, it's unnecessary to have three levels of management represented in each meeting. The vice president should excuse herself, release the appropriate level of authority to her managers, and instruct them to report the results. (Unfortunately, no one was recording action items, because everyone was in attendance.) She should explicitly tell those she trusted to resolve customer escalation issues without copying her on e-mails. She only needed to know about the results in the closeout ticket.

THE BIG T: TRUST

How do you develop the level of trust in your employees that's required to inspire productivity and empowerment? I believe it starts with self-awareness. If your organization suffers from low productivity, don't automatically blame

your employees; take a look at yourself first. If you don't trust your people to do their jobs well, ask why. Did you make poor choices when you hired them? Are you still learning how to maximize their skills and abilities? Are you paranoid someone will take your job? Have you failed to provide the proper training? Realize that if your involvement is so crucial to your current role that you're irreplaceable, then you can't be promoted. That's why you should always be grooming a successor.

As the architect of your team, it's up to you to choose the right materials for the job and put them together in the most structurally sound way. So in ridding yourself of your micromanaging tendencies and bringing your organization up to snuff, your first task (ironically) may be to take an even closer look at your team members and their abilities. Assess how each contributes and what you can do to maximize those contributions. Then develop an action plan to train or coach them to increase their productivity, thus tightening their fit in the general workflow of the organization.

You may find it necessary to replace individuals who aren't doing well enough, just as you would put aside low-quality tools in favor of better ones. While that may sound cruel, if a few have advanced beyond their competence level, you can't keep covering for them. After all, that's what micromanaging is all about—trying to do others' jobs because you think they can't.

The truth is, you can't afford to waste time or energy watching over those who are already supposed to know what they're doing. If you delegate responsibilities appropriately, prepare your employees for their jobs, and give them everything they need to do them, you won't need to ride them. Trust that they can do their work, wind them

up, and let them go. Show them you have faith in their ability. You won't be able to execute strategy efficiently if you don't.

If they're unworthy of your faith, then, yes, you'll have to take corrective action, which is for the best. Even if you fear someone might fail when faced with certain job challenges, trust in that person to have the ability to solve those challenges. How else can they ever learn and grow?

When you rely on your employees and prove they can rely on you to back them to the hilt, you'll establish a high level of loyalty and discretionary effort. At the same time, make sure the organization's mission, vision, and goals are clear to everyone. Set basic ground rules, determine who reports to whom and how, and then turn your attention to your own tasks. Learn to trust—but verify.

How much do you need to verify? That depends on an employee's previous performance, experience, and skill level. Basically, though, if you've done all you can to bring competent people on board, your role is simple. Believe in them and let them do their jobs, checking in occasionally and correcting course as necessary.

When you hire capable, engaged people and trust in their competence, you've got the enviable position of being a hands-off manager. If they know what they're doing, it doesn't matter how they do their jobs, as long as they do so legally and ethically. If they need advice, trust that they'll ask. If certain employees show signs of falling flat on their faces, let them. They'll either learn quickly or wash themselves out due to incompetence. Be encouraging, yes, but know that you can't do everything—or even most things—for them. That way can be ruinous for all involved.

Remember, when you trust, you're not abdicating your responsibilities; you're simply using other people's talents

to get things done. Trust is the heart of delegation. As a leader, you don't just represent another layer between consumer and product. Rather, you direct and expedite the workflow, while providing the resources necessary to stimulate performance.

BARKING ORDERS IS NOT COMMUNICATION

Once trust becomes a permanent part of your methodology, your biggest challenge will be how to communicate priorities to those on your team. This may require different levels and types of communication for each person; again, it's up to you to determine what's best.

Sometimes leaders get so busy running around, dashing off e-mails, and barking directions that they completely fail to communicate. If you don't get the need for communication, let me assure you, your employees do. And here's what they'd like to say to you about it.

1. *Listen.* Start taking the opinions of your teammates seriously. Don't assume you always know better than they do. Success comes more easily when you leverage other people's experience, skill sets, relationships, and creativity. Don't expect to have all the right answers.
2. *Talk.* Get to know your team members on a personal level, so you can better understand their motivations. Speak to them openly and show that you value their roles in achieving the organization's strategic goals. Be sure to overcommunicate priorities: you can't tell them what you expect of them too often or too much.
3. *Let go.* Leadership isn't about retaining every bit of power. You may be loaded down with responsibilities, but your leaders expect you to pass on most of your

assignments to others, so do so. Then, within the limits of their authority, let your subordinates delegate some of their duties. That helps make everyone accountable for the success of the team.

4. *Get back to work.* As a leader, you have a duty to provide direction, set priorities, and work toward goal alignment along with the rest of your organization. If you try to do that along with everything else, you won't be able to do any of it well. So start trusting people to do their jobs while focusing on your own strategic priorities. Measure your personal progress by the movement of the team itself, not a to-do list of firefighting tasks that someone else should take care of anyway.

What's your true talent as a leader? It lies in your ability to recognize what to do to encourage, support, and motivate your employees so they can execute effectively and efficiently—without strangling their initiative or engagement in the process.

SHOW THEM THE WAY (EVERY DAY)

As a leader, you're also a teacher—both in the leadership-by-example sense and in the instructive sense. As Ralph Waldo Emerson once said, “What you are speaks so loudly, I cannot hear what you are saying.” Employees learn partly by watching you and partly by receiving instruction. Unless you're a spymaster or a military commander, never ask anyone to do what you aren't willing to do yourself. That includes behaviors such as:

1. *Arriving late and leaving early.* Ever had a boss who rolled in at 10:00 A.M. and then left at 4:00 P.M., after telling everyone to stay late to hit the big deadline?

I suspect you didn't find that inspiring. Don't demand excessive hours on key deadlines if you won't put them in yourself. But on the opposite end of the scale, if you regularly work twelve-hour days, don't expect people to work as long as you do unless there's a valid reason. Long hours do not contribute to greater productivity.

2. *Sitting back during emergencies.* Sometimes you'll need to lend a hand to prevent the team from being overwhelmed. So rather than hang back when your people are floundering, offer to help. When an unexpected challenge emerges, rise to it. Put your back into it until you meet the deadline. Obviously, don't make a habit of pitching in; save it for crunch-time and emergencies, or you're back to micromanaging.
3. *Playing favorites.* You'll inevitably like some employees more than others, but you can't let favoritism sway you. Dole out discipline and rewards when people deserve them, whoever they may be.
4. *Not practicing the Golden Rule.* Treat others with respect and dignity, the way you'd like to be treated. The leader who builds buy-in through polite direction engages the workforce more effectively than the one who bullies people.

As a leader, you set the gold standard and must remain above reproach—not just most of the time but all the time. Otherwise, why should anyone listen to a thing you say? While we're all fallible human beings, leaders are held to a higher standard and must work hard to achieve a decent balance. Still, some leaders go off track, so keep a good head on your shoulders and be willing to roll up your sleeves whenever the circumstances warrant.

THE FINAL WORD

I recently heard a word used I'd never heard before and had to look it up: "defenestrate." (In general, I recommend eliminating words from your vernacular that people have to look up. It's not impressive; it's annoying.) Defenestrate means to throw a person or an object out the window. Now that you know the meaning, it's appropriate to apply it to what you have to do with many long-term business strategies as they grow stale.

In some industries, any strategy more than a few months old is outdated by the time it reaches the people who actually make things happen. That means you have to move rapidly from idea to execution or risk eating the competition's dust.

As the leader, you shape the overall vision for your team, communicate and agree on tactics, and let your team take it from there. Don't adopt a purely hands-off approach, but don't micromanage either; that's a recipe for catastrophe. Your people need the freedom to do their jobs as they see fit. Trust them to tell you what they need to do to achieve your vision. That's where true leadership lies—not in strait-jacketing your people with inflexible rules and hidebound strategies.

Now that you've maximized your leadership input force using the methods described here, let's move to the next part of the leverage equation: strengthening and lengthening the beam—your team members.

About the Author



Laura Stack, MBA, CSP, is America's Premier Expert in Productivity™. For more than twenty years, her seminars and speeches have helped professionals, leaders, and teams accelerate individual and team performance, execute effi-

ciently, and improve output in the workplace. Laura uses both high energy and high content to educate, entertain, and motivate audiences to produce greater results at work. Her company, The Productivity Pro, Inc., provides productivity training to successful companies around the globe to help attendees achieve Maximum Results in Minimum Time®. Laura was the 2011–2012 president of the National Speakers Association (NSA) and is the recipient of the Certified Speaking Professional (CSP) designation, NSA's highest earned designation.

Laura is the best-selling author of six productivity books published by Random House, Wiley, and Berrett-Koehler. Her books have been published in more than twenty countries and translated into many foreign languages, including Japanese, Spanish, Korean, Chinese, Taiwanese, Italian, and Romanian. Laura is a columnist for *Success* magazine, and her popular weekly electronic productivity newsletter has subscribers in thirty-eight countries.

Laura has been featured nationally on the CBS *Early Show*, CNN, NPR, and Bloomberg, and in the *New York Times*, *USA Today*, the *Wall Street Journal*, *Entrepreneur*, and *Forbes* magazine. Laura has been a spokesperson for Microsoft, 3M, Skillsoft, Office Depot, Day-Timer, and Xerox. Her client list includes top Fortune 500 companies, including Starbucks, Wal-Mart, Aramark, Bank of America, GM, Wells Fargo, and Time Warner, plus government agencies such as the Internal Revenue Service, the United States Air Force Academy, the Census Bureau, the U.S. Senate, and the Department of Defense.

Laura lives with her husband and three children in Denver, Colorado.

Educational Resources from Laura Stack and The Productivity Pro[®], Inc.

BOOKS

*What to Do When There's Too Much to Do: Reduce Tasks,
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(Berrett-Koehler, 2012)

*SuperCompetent: The Six Keys to Perform at Your Productive
Best* (Wiley, 2010)

*The Exhaustion Cure: Up Your Energy from Low to Go in
21 Days* (Broadway Books, 2008)

*Find More Time: How to Get Things Done at Home, Organize
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*Leave the Office Earlier: How to Do More in Less Time and
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