# 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**

# WELCOME TO THE
# *EXECUTION IS THE STRATEGY* BOOK CLUB!

Congratulations on taking the next step to improving your organization's strategic execution process! Your participation in this program demonstrates your organization's willingness to invest in your future, and your contribution of time to this program will help you go even further.

Whether you're a manager, salesperson, or individual contributor, the skills you gain from this book club will help you grow exponentially and achieve even higher levels in your career. *Execution IS the Strategy* will give you proven methods to achieve maximum strategic execution in this era of constant change, where last month's strategy—much less last years'—has already gone stale. This guide will help you execute in the moment using whatever strategy works best, so you can achieve breakthrough results and greater productivity.

Typically, you will meet 12 times with your group (your leader will determine how frequently your club will meet). You'll be discussing one chapter per meeting.

Before each book club meeting, I recommend you:

1. Watch the online video that corresponds with that chapter. Register for the free video series at [www.ExecutionIsTheStrategy.com](www.ExecutionIsTheStrategy.com).

2. Read one chapter every couple days (it's potentially difficult to absorb a chapter in one day).

3. Answer the discussion guide questions in this manual as you complete each chapter, while the content is still fresh in your mind. Questions may cover your personal observations, interpretation, possible applications, or the implications for your particular job, team, or organization.

4. Come to each book club meeting fully prepared—don't try to "wing it." Scheduling conflicts arise, but do your best to be consistent in attending. You'll find that careful preparation will greatly enrich your learning and time spent in group discussion.

5. Participate! Your leader and small group facilitators will not be lecturing; rather, they will encourage you to discuss what you learned and how to apply it.

6. Stick to the topic being discussed; listen attentively; and engage all participants.

# Introduction: Strategic Planning Is So Yesterday, But Execution Is Always in Style

You've done 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 help them 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. 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 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*.

It builds on four basic premises: 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 look at them more closely and see how they affect strategic execution.

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 matter.

**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 Successful Strategic Execution

In more than twenty years of helping leaders create high-performance cultures and accelerate growth, I've identified four key 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 LEAD 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, then 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, then 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.

---

The LEAD Formula represents real-world implementations of 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 weaker in one or two areas. When you take the assessment that follows this introduction, you'll determine which key(s) you need to strengthen in your own individual business. When I'm invited to speak at a corporate meeting, I ask the audience members to take the assessment online, so I can compile their cumulative scores. By seeing the perceptions of the group overall, leaders can take action as a whole.

## The Four Roles of a Leader and Leadership Development Opportunities

Each of the Four Keys has a corresponding leadership role and a leadership development opportunity:

| Key | Principle | Leadership Role | Leadership Development Opportunity |
|-----|-----------|-----------------|-----------------------------------|
| **L** | Leverage | Engineer: Build It | Talent/Resources |
| **E** | Environment | Mechanic: Fix It | Culture/Engagement |
| **A** | Alignment | Conductor: Steer It | Communication/Productivity |
| **D** | Drive | Bulldozer: Knock It Down | Speed/Agility |

## Organization of the Book

The LEAD Formula's Four Keys correspond with the four sections of *Execution IS the Strategy*, to help you readily identify which Key might represent your biggest leadership challenge. Each Key has three chapters, so if you hosted a book club with your team, you could discuss the book in three months. For complimentary discussion and leadership guides, see www.ExecutionIsTheStrategy.com.

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

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

Part 3, "Alignment," shows you how to convince team members to care about your goals, define what the goal will be, and determine how to get there.

Part 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 always make time to build an organizational culture that's adept at strategic execution. By the time you finish reviewing this book, you'll see that execution really is the strategy that will propel your organization forward.

# KEY 1 SUMMARY: LEVERAGE

| **L** | Leverage | Engineer: Build It | 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.

# CHAPTER 1 SUMMARY
# MAXIMIZE YOUR LEADERSHIP INPUT FORCE

In the leadership leverage machine, your input strength is nothing less than your leadership ability. You get more power into your lever by becoming a stronger leader. Today's simpler information exchange, better communications, and increased mobility have changed the meaning of "leader." Here's how you can take advantage of the recent reset in business attitudes:

1. **Accept that the dictatorial days are over.** The most effective leaders no longer just hand down pronouncements from on high; they act as partners with the front-line workers responsible for execution.

2. **Delegate your authority widely.** You can't keep up with everything in your field, especially if you're not on the front line making it happen daily. You're better off delegating your authority as effectively and as widely as possible, encouraging creativity and risk-taking on the part of individual team members—allowing them to transform the organization from within.

3. **Work for your team.** In a sense, you work for your team just as much as they work for you. You're the facilitator, the visionary, and cheerleader everyone looks to for encouragement to do what needs to be done to move forward quickly. You're the rallying point, a catalyst triggering ideas and action, allowing people to succeed without getting in their way.

4. **Speed up your execution process.** In most modern industries, any strategy more than a few months old is outdated. An executive team can no longer make decisions years in advance and expect them to survive exposure to reality. As we recover from the Great Recession, it's no longer possible to survive without being lean, mean, and *fast.* Otherwise, you risk eating the competition's dust.

5. **Give your team members the freedom to do their jobs.** As the leader, 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; so-called "Management by Exception" fails on too many levels. But don't micromanage either. Let your team apply their past experience to the situation, combining it imaginatively to create innovative new approaches.

Trust your team to tell you what they need to do to achieve your vision, and then get out of their way. That's where true leadership lies—not in straitjacketing people with inflexible rules and hidebound strategies. A looser approach sets you up for the next step in maximizing the productivity of your leverage machine.

# Questions to Consider from Chapter 1

1. Why does a dictator style of management no longer work?

   _____

   _____

2. What job functions or tasks do you perform that others could do less expensively?

   _____

   _____

3. What's your real role as a leader?

   _____

   _____

4. What's the most important leadership ingredient in team performance? Why?

   _____

   _____

5. Why do you need to be lean, mean, and fast these days?

   _____

   _____

6. What's the most effective way to model the behaviors you expect from others?

   _____

   _____

7. As you shape the overall vision of your team, should you consider a hands-off approach? Why or why not?

   _____

   _____

## My Key Learning, Ah-Ha, Objective, or Take-Away from Chapter 1

9

# CHAPTER 2 SUMMARY:
# STRENGTHEN THE BEAM

Once you've optimized the force you apply to the strategic execution lever, you'll need to make sure the lever itself can handle the force before you apply it too vigorously. In our leverage model, the lever's beam represents your employees, both individually and collectively.

The best way to strengthen the beam of your organizational lever is to have the right people in the right places, armed with the skills they need to execute in the moment and get the job done. It's up to you to strengthen each team member's ability to execute strategy in every way possible.

1.  **Balance talent and hard work.** Find the person with the right strengths needed to maximize the Personal Return on Investment (PROI) for each job on your team. Talent is a wonderful thing, but let's face it: it's useless without that American Dream, can-do attitude. Your people must consistently reach beyond their grasp in ways that benefit both themselves and the company. It's critical to recruit and hire talented hard workers, but often effort trumps talent.

2.  **Spot the high-performers right away.** Learn to recognize the difference between high performers and average workers at a glance, so you don't waste time on plodders. They may be good people, but you succeed best by hitching yourself to a star.

3.  **Mentor newbies**. Even the strongest beam may crack if it's too green. Place new employees with experienced workers to mentor them and show them the ropes. Invest time providing new team members with the coaching they need to gain more seasoning and excel in their roles.

4.  **Invest in training.** When you add new people to the team, make sure they get any additional training or knowledge needed to maximize their efficiency and execute more effectively. As fast as business moves, this won't be a one-time thing, so check in with each team member occasionally to see which skills they need to hone or add.

Once your beam can handle your input force, it's time to experiment with changing the position and height of your fulcrum, so all the elements of your leverage machine lock together into a smooth, powerful whole that produces like never before.

# Questions to Consider from Chapter 2

1. How can you identify high-performing workers?

   _____

   _____

2. What's the best way to strengthen the beam of your organizational lever?

   _____

   _____

3. What does that "lever" consist of in this context?

   _____

   _____

4. What's the most important key for meeting your future talent requirements—even more so than talent?

   _____

   _____

5. Why does coaching and mentoring new employees matter? Why not just let them sink or swim?

   _____

   _____

6. In what way is training an investment for your organization?

   _____

   _____

7. Why is training necessary in the first place?

   _____

   _____

---

**My Key Learning, Ah-Ha, Objective, or Take-Away from Chapter 2**

# CHAPTER THREE SUMMARY:
## IMPROVE THE FULCRUM

To take full advantage of workplace leverage, strive not only to strengthen yourself and your employees, but also to reposition or even replace your fulcrum. The fulcrum is the hinge or pivot a beam acts against to multiply the input force. It could be a handy rock, a log, or a seesaw pivot point. At work, a good fulcrum should be the right size, height, and position to work most effectively with your productivity machine.

So how do you make sure you're using the correct fulcrum to coax maximum leverage from your system?

1. **Equip your team members with the right tools**. Provide employees with laptops, software, smartphones, fast Internet—whatever it takes to maximize their productivity. In fact, let them provide their own tools if they want. If someone is willing to use their personal equipment or their own time for *your* benefit, you'd have to be crazy to say no.

2. **Provide unrestricted access to your resources.** Similarly, let your employees link their personal tools into your intranets and archives. Don't respond like so many shortsighted, paranoid leaders do, restricting access to company resources. It's inefficient to require them to use and attempt to sync between multiple devices.

3. **Outsource to experts**. Outsourcing is simply a form of subcontracting, where you hire people to do something you can't economically do in-house. That may include anything from washing windows to handling the bookkeeping or fielding tech support calls. With the Internet, you can quickly reach right around the world to develop these relationships—or just as far as next door.

4. **Develop new partnerships.** Share resources with other teams, seek new alliances with other organizations, and maximize your vendor relationships.

5. **Be careful about what you cut.** Short-term cuts to lighten the load may seem viable now, but they could prove disastrous in the long term...especially if they deprive you of skilled employees and resources you'll need later. Rather than resort to drastic surgical measures, find ways to increase your team's productivity instead.

You have many options for improving the fulcrum of your team leverage machine, as noted above. Done correctly, you'll enjoy long-term results that will put your team consistently ahead in the marketplace without worrying about loss of quality, value, or reputation.

# Questions to Consider from Chapter 3

1. What does your organization's leverage fulcrum consist of?

   _____

   _____

2. What items can you give your people to help them maximize their productivity?

   _____

   _____

3. Should you allow an employee to use their own technology to heighten productivity? Why or why not?

   _____

   _____

4. Why is it so important to reach out to new partners and other teams?

   _____

   _____

5. What sort of tasks should your team consider outsourcing?

   _____

   _____

6. What's the best way to lighten your team's or organization's load?

   _____

   _____

7. Why is it best to avoid deep surgical cuts when trying to save money during a difficult time? What can it hurt?

   _____

   _____

## My Key Learning, Ah-Ha, Objective, or Take-Away from Chapter 3

# KEY 2 SUMMARY: ENVIRONMENT

| **E** | Environment | Mechanic: fix it | Culture/Engagement |
|---|---|---|---|

Effective execution depends on establishing a productive, supportive work environment. In turn, a successful work environment depends on workplace culture. A company's culture guides discretionary behavior, picking up where the employee handbook leaves off. It's defined by what happens when the CEO leaves the room.

Ideally, you should encourage an organizational environment in which employees strive to "own" their jobs in the best sense of the word: where they take initiative to align themselves with overriding strategic goals, pitch in enthusiastically, collaborate gracefully, and innovate without permission or fear of reprisal.

So, are you:

1. Creating a culture that helps employees feel confident, capable, and in control of the outcome of their work?
2. Building an atmosphere that encourages and accepts change?
3. Engaging and empowering people to do their work, without excessive oversight?

These critical environmental factors ensure commitment to the company's core mission and vision, which results in greater productivity over the long term. So don your mechanic's hat and get ready to fix anything preventing your team from achieving your goals.

# CHAPTER 4 SUMMARY
# SHAPE THE CULTURE

Employees make hundreds of independent decisions every week without consulting their superiors. What guides them? Organizational culture. It tells them how to respond to workplace situations, from handling unprecedented service requests to whether or not to risk telling the boss a new idea.

Many senior managers struggle with this concept, because they find it difficult to define. Culture is like a cloud: You know it's there, but it's nearly impossible to grasp. How do you come to a consensus on culture, and then get dozens, hundreds, or even thousands of people to think and act the way you've agreed on? You don't, really: culture evolves over time. But you can direct its evolution. Keep these things in mind while doing so:

1. **Develop an attitude of excellence for your team to follow.** Refuse to accept good enough as good enough. Make personal integrity your touchstone. Walk the talk and show them how it's done.

2. **Lay a foundation of accountability.** Everyone must accept both credit and blame for the results of their actions. A non-punitive environment will make this easier to encourage. Most people perform better when held accountable for their results.

3. **Build a culture of action and teamwork on your accountability foundation.** People must work together to make execution happen, and take calculated risks to improve their processes or projects—even knowing they might fail.

4. **Slash through the red tape.** Your team needs the time and uninterrupted focus to maximize production. Remove bureaucratic hurdles so they get plenty of both.

5. **Emphasize an atmosphere of community.** Collaboration, consensus, and mutual help all encourage a cooperative culture where everyone works together without excessive friction, remaining open to multiple perspectives and opinions.

You can't just say you want your culture to be agile, accountable, and top-quality, and then expect it to happen. What matters most is the synergistic combination of attitude and action in the workplace. Culture is not a goal to be mandated; it's the outcome of a collective set of behaviors. Dedicate yourself to developing those desired behaviors, instill them in your team members, and let those rules guide them as they meet change head on. Their weapon? Instant execution.

# Questions to Consider from Chapter 4

1. What is the best guide for employees in their day-to-day decision-making?

   _____

   _____

2. When is good enough NOT good enough?

   _____

   _____

3. On a scale of 1-10, with ten being high, how would you rate the culture of excellence on your team? Do you even foster one?

   _____

   _____

4. How accountable and reliable are your team members?

   _____

   _____

5. What are the chief factors limiting their accountability and reliability?

   _____

   _____

6. On a scale of 1-10, with ten being high, rate the culture of community on your team.

   _____

   _____

7. What, if anything, can you do to raise your culture of community rating?

   _____

   _____

**My Key Learning, Ah-Ha, Objective, or Take-Away from Chapter 4**

# CHAPTER FIVE SUMMARY:
# ENCOURAGE CHANGE HARDINESS

The only constant in business is change. One way or another, waves of transformation constantly flow through most organizations as they fight to get or stay ahead in the competitive global marketplace. So keep these pointers in mind while dealing with change:

1. **Don't make changes for change's sake alone.** We've all experienced the "new broom sweeps clean" effect, suffering as a fresh leader came onto the scene and changed everything just because he or she could—regardless of how well the existing system functioned. Whenever this happens, chaos reigns and productivity plummets, and sometimes it never recovers.

2. **Accept change as inevitable.** Many changes are desirable, so greet change as a friend; go with the flow, and view it as an opportunity to grow and learn. Conservatism has its place, but if you refuse to change, you may end up breaking when you need to bend.

3. **Roll with change as it occurs.** Otherwise, old inefficiencies may pile up until work grinds to a halt or the latest opportunity passes you by. What doesn't grow either stagnates or rots. Like the dinosaurs, you'll die if you can't evolve.

4. **Spark innovation**. Seek some levels of change at the creative level. Encourage risk-taking. This often results in profitable new ways to conduct business, or in inventive new products and services. Make incremental improvements when necessary, and take quantum leaps when possible.

5. **Bounce back quickly.** When a change unexpectedly knocks you flat, get up immediately and do what you can to take advantage of it. Flexible entities survive the storms, while those too old or slow to respond to what's coming over the horizon may shatter.

6. **Don't let fear hold you back.** Face change head on and take the risks you think will put you ahead when the change-wave has passed. Once you've crashed through the fear barrier, there's no telling what you can accomplish.

We live in a dynamic world. A line graph tracking change in the last few centuries manifests as a steep parabolic curve with no end in sight—and the billions of vibrant personalities comprising humankind make it all the more chaotic.

# Questions to Consider from Chapter 5

1. What is the best way to react to change?
   _____

   _____

2. Have you ever experienced the "new broom sweeps clean" effect? How did it make you feel?
   _____

   _____

3. Do you encourage innovation and creativity? Why or why not?
   _____

   _____

4. How can you improve your team's willingness to take profitable risk?
   _____

   _____

5. What's the first thing should you do when change knocks you flat?
   _____

   _____

6. Do you have a culture of continuous improvement in place within your team? What can you do to improve it?
   _____

   _____

7. What, if anything, is holding you back from facing change?
   _____

   _____

**My Key Learning, Ah-Ha, Objective, or Take-Away from Chapter 5**

# CHAPTER SIX SUMMARY:
## ENSURE ENGAGED, EMPOWERED EMPLOYEES

When you have a lot at stake or a very high interest in an outcome, you're more likely to do a better job (or at least try to). Your team members feel the same way. If they don't enjoy their work, they won't be motivated to spend discretionary effort on the strategic goals you set for them. Wouldn't you rather be surrounded by people in whom you have the full trust and confidence that they will get things done?

Your team will have more ownership in their work if you encourage them to take initiative, improve processes, and make last-minute changes vital to timely execution. Here are some simple, common-sense ways to achieve that confident competence:

1. **Increase your ratio of engaged to disengaged employees.** This requires not only personal strength but flexibility and empathy as well. If you end up with competent employees who make you and your organization shine, it's worth every bit of effort.

2. **Give people reasons to try harder.** You can apply a variety of factors to the manager/employee relationship to encourage engagement, but the most important seem to be to (a) trust in their abilities and judgment; (b) provide opportunities for training and growth; (c) keep the communications lines open; and (d) show them how their efforts contribute to organizational goals.

3. **Be there for them.** Schedule regular one-on-one meetings with each of your team members, have "open door" periods of availability, and get down in the trenches to visit rather than hiding behind your desk.

4. **Motivate.** Ultimately, employees work hard for you because they choose to. Give them reasons to excel: motivations like monetary rewards, time off, praise, and promotions for those who produce. Make consistent efforts to influence team members in positive ways, varying your attempts with each person to see what works best.

5. **Empower your teammates.** The worst thing you can do as a leader is jealously hold onto every smidgen of authority that comes with your job. Instead, commit to empowerment, delegating your authority as widely as you can. Make it clear you appreciate initiative. But remember: ultimate responsibility for your team's actions always belongs to you.

If you can persuade your team members to give you more of their discretionary effort, productivity will skyrocket—and you'll be walking on sunshine.

# Questions to Consider from Chapter 6

1. On a percentage scale, how would you rate the level of engagement on your team?

   _____

   _____

2. Do you encourage people to take initiative? If not, why not?

   _____

   _____

3. Whose responsibility is it to encourage the team's goals?

   _____

   _____

4. How often should you meet with each crew member? Is a yearly evaluation sufficient?

   _____

   _____

5. How often do you make a sincere effort to show each employee how their output contributes to team success? Have you ever done it?

   _____

   _____

6. What's the best way to empower your people to do their jobs?

   _____

   _____

7. Who bears the ultimate responsibility for your team's success?

   _____

   _____

**My Key Learning, Ah-Ha, Objective, or Take-Away from Chapter 6**

# KEY 3 SUMMARY: ALIGNMENT

| A | Alignment | Conductor: steer it | Communication/Productivity |
|---|-----------|---------------------|----------------------------|

Like a conductor of a symphony, today's leader is out front watching what's going on, keeping everyone on the right track, steering team members toward the organization's strategic priorities, and listening to their best ideas on how to get there.

Alignment means your strategic priorities and the day-to-day operations of your team are synchronized. Their tactics are carrying out your strategies.

The old "command and control" structure no longer works. As I pointed out in my recent book, *What to Do When There's Too Much to Do*, there's a constant pressure in the business world to do more and become more productive, creating a rush to cram even more work into the limited time we have and the minutes we save.

Ironically, the only way to accomplish more is to do less. That is, to cut back on less productive and less profitable activities in favor of what matters most and achieves a greater result. In this book, I elevate this central concept to the leadership level. All people who are successful, innovative, and creative want to do more and more. But down that route lies strain, fatigue, burnout, family issues, and even death (as expressed in the Japanese concept of *karoshi*).

As leader, you have to take a hand in helping your team members harness their overachiever tendencies in a positive way, so you can maximize productivity and maintain it at a reasonable level. While you'll always have to work hard, it's best to focus on the outcome, which must align tightly with overarching organizational goals as well as your team's goals.

To accomplish this, pick a small number of goals to work on at a time—or the law of diminishing returns will come into play. Your people already have their regular daily activities to handle. If you add too much to their plates, they may feel defeated and give up, so work within the limits set by reality. Better to hit three goals solidly than twenty halfway. Have you heard Voltaire's classic adage, "The perfect is the enemy of the good"? Trying to do too many things too well often results in the paralysis of analysis, a sort of mental vapor lock in which you accomplish nothing significant.

Remember, whenever you say "yes," to something, you have to say "no" to something else. Realizing that, help your team focus their finite energy and time on activities that will support your strategic priorities. This may involve setting reasonable limits and ending one failing project to make room for a better one.

As a leader, how can you accomplish this? Begin by helping your people internalize the rules of alignment based on thoroughly knowing the goals themselves. It's the day-to-day action that moves the needle, so make sure that what your team is doing right now will get you to where you need to be.

Specifically, your team members need to know:

- *Why should they care?* Why is the mission important and compelling to them?
- *What is the goal?* What are they expected to achieve, so they know when they've arrived?
- *How do we get there?* Who's responsible for what? What's the timeline for completion? How will you measure milestones and otherwise keep track of progress? What will other team members do to help? What rewards (intrinsic or extrinsic) will they receive? How will you hold them accountable for the desired results?

In this part of the book, we'll look at answers to those key questions.

# CHAPTER SEVEN SUMMARY
## TAKE YOUR TEAM ON A MISSION

Your ability to clearly articulate your strategic priorities depends on understanding why you're here and what you're trying to accomplish. That's all that really matters in the work environment. To create a motivated, empowered team, each member has to care about where they're going and why they should bother. Invite your employees to go on a mission with you, keeping these things in mind:

1. **Teach the value of the organization's priorities.** Help your team members understand why your strategic priorities are important, whether at the team, department, division, or company level.

2. **Show them why what they do matters.** To align team effort with the company's needs and make team members more willing to execute your strategy on the fly, emphasize how their efforts fit within the overall scheme designed to move the organization forward. Spell out why their success and productivity matter to you and the company—and explain the consequences of failure.

3. **Demonstrate why what they want matters**. Acknowledge that the realignment effort may well mean more work for them, at least in the short term. But at the same time, they'll have more freedom to achieve than they ever have before.

4. **Emphasize the positive.** The whole "Execution IS the Strategy" concept allows you and your team to grab the ball on the bounce and immediately drive toward the end zone, without getting tangled up in the web of a long-term plan that's outdated the instant it's published.

5. **Accept the new reality of leadership.** Smart leaders partner and collaborate with their team members, outlining the vision, facilitating their work, and urging them on. Sculpt the plan and polish it up brightly, laying out the deadlines and the broad outlines before giving team members the ball and letting them run with it.

Your team won't care about much more than their paychecks unless you inspire them otherwise. If you can get them sincerely interested in achieving the organization's goals, then come the end of the quarter, you might just make it to your industry's equivalent of the Super Bowl.

# Questions to Consider from Chapter 7

1.  What factors determine how well you can articulate strategic priorities?
    _____

    _____

2.  On average, how often do you discuss the team's and organization's strategic priorities with each team member?
    _____

    _____

3.  Why does it matter that you do the above?
    _____

    _____

4.  What percentage of your workers know why what they do matters?
    _____

    _____

5.  Do you work with your team members, or do they just work FOR you? If the latter, is your stance effective?
    _____

    _____

6.  Is your workplace team motivated to succeed? Why or why not?
    _____

    _____

7.  What can you do to cheer on your team?
    _____

    _____

**My Key Learning, Ah-Ha, Objective, or Take-Away from Chapter 7**

# CHAPTER 8 SUMMARY:
# PLAN FOR GOAL ACHIEVEMENT

Good strategic alignment consists of practices that connect organizational strategy with employee performance as fully and directly as possible. When you properly align your organizational structure, your employees act as strategic enablers of company policy, mission, and vision—all working from the same standards toward the same ends. This chapter looks at useful strategies for getting your team into alignment and keeping it there.

1. **Share your goals.** Only when you willingly share your goals with everyone *and* set up procedures to make sure people stay on track can true alignment occur. Goal-setting can no longer be limited to the C-suite. When your strategic priorities trickle down, work with your team to determine how best to get there.

2. **Clear the air.** People mistrust or distrust the ambiguous—so be crystal clear about what your team members should be accomplishing in their daily activities. When you communicate your expectations, you're more likely to get what you want, and everyone becomes more productive and effective.

3. **Remove obstacles to alignment.** Make every effort to clear bottlenecks, break down information silos, cut redundancy, limit confusion, and otherwise maximize productivity.

4. **Work toward coherence.** Maximal alignment requires a high level of coherence, made up of the proper measures of communication, education, and oversight.

5. **React as the situation requires.** Let front-line employees take the ball and carry it forward when the solution is obvious to them. This is especially necessary when the rate of change doesn't allow time for classic goal trickledown from the top.

6. **One size does not fit all.** How much of each ingredient you should add to your "alignment recipe" depends on the nature and size of your organization and the performance management tools available to you. Determining the right amounts requires careful testing, undertaken with a clear-eyed willingness to learn.

In the game of business, we keep score with dollars. Profit represents the real-world manifestation of the combination of drive, focus, and efficiency we call productivity. That means ensuring that your team members stay busy at what matters and in ways that move everyone toward the prize.

# Questions to Consider from Chapter 8

1. Who should be involved in workplace goal-setting?
   _____
   _____

2. How often do you share the team and organizational goals with each of your team members?
   _____
   _____

3. Why does crystal-clear communication matter so much in the workplace?
   _____
   _____

4. What are the components of the workplace coherence?
   _____
   _____

5. How is workplace coherence like a laser?
   _____
   _____

6. Write down an example of a process in your workplace that works best when you let your front-line employees carry the ball with minimal interference.
   _____
   _____

7. Why does it matter that you share your goals and authority with team members?
   _____
   _____

**My Key Learning, Ah-Ha, Objective, or Take-Away from Chapter 8**

# CHAPTER NINE SUMMARY:
## MEASURE YOUR PROGRESS

You must link strategic planning and goal setting, with everyone on the team having goals that support the plan *and* each other. Not only do all involved have to perform the day-to-day tactical tasks that drive the operation, they also have to work on the higher-level, strategic goals as well—the parts that will eventually become their daily work. Along the way, they must constantly assess whether the tasks they complete in the short term will get them where they need to go in the long term.

This chapter takes a closer look at the process in the context of metrics, and how they might apply to your organization.

1. **Plan your course.** Once you've (a) achieved buy-in, (b) set goals, and (c) made efforts to align those goals with your organization's, you must decide how you and your team will get there, and what to do when you wander off-course. If the actual destination changes, be prepared to plot a new route.

2. **Keep an eye on your instruments.** Track metrics like cash flow, budget and schedule, quality of work, hours worked per process, customer satisfaction, and return on investment. Once you have those instruments in place and have a good idea of your overall situation, you can add and subtract specific metrics as conditions require. Guard against excessive controls, lest they stymie innovation.

3. **Let your team members run plays their way.** Your people will never improve, either as a team or as individuals, if you don't relinquish some of your authority to them, get out of the way, and let them do things as they see best. Your job is to offer vision and guidance; theirs is to get the work done.

4. **Recognize the difference between strategy and tactics.** Strategy is long-term planning; tactics are the short-term methods and tools you use to accomplish your strategy. Maintain a firm grasp on the difference, while educating your employees on the distinction as well.

5. **Encourage accountability.** Accountability is a team linchpin; it links all of you at all levels, helping your people take serious ownership of their jobs while you exercise the ultimate responsibility. It's a heavy load, falling mostly on your shoulders. Step forward, take up the challenge, and use it to carve your own niche out of the business jungle in your own style. Let your people do the same, within the broad guidelines you set.

6. **Slay the dragon of complacency.** Few things can kill an organization more effectively than a false sense of security. Thus, always hope for the best but plan for the worst you can imagine.

7. **Conquer crises.** You can't plan for everything, but you can put generalized crisis plans into place that trigger when an applicable emergency occurs. Be flexible, and use the SLLR method to respond: Stop, Look, Listen, and Respond. Don't hesitate to involve others when you need their help, and conduct post-mortems after the fact so you're better prepared for the next crisis.

Remember, no battle plan survives contact with the enemy. Whatever happens, you and your crew must be ready, willing, and allowed to adapt on the fly. With enough effort and the right tools, you can eventually build a voluntary culture of accountability in which you don't have to ride people to get them to do the right things at the right times. Then you can execute your strategy instinctively, no matter what happens.

# Questions to Consider from Chapter 9

1. Has complacency ever damaged one of your projects?
   _____

   _____

2. What is the best way to prepare for any crisis that arises, even though you can't prepare for every contingency?
   _____

   _____

3. Could you organization respond quickly and effectively if a giant meteor exploded above your city, as happened in Chelyabinsk, Russia in February 2013?
   _____

   _____

4. How does strategy differ from tactics?
   _____

   _____

5. Who bears the ultimate responsibility for everything that happens with your team?
   _____

   _____

6. Is your workplace a non-punitive one, allowing risk-taking? If not, why not?
   _____

   _____

7. What are three of the Check Six Measures you should keep your eye on constantly?
   _____

   _____

**My Key Learning, Ah-Ha, Objective, or Take-Away from Chapter 9**

# KEY 4 SUMMARY: DRIVE

| **E** | Environment | Mechanic: fix it | Culture/Engagement |
|-------|-------------|------------------|---------------------|

As a leader, your greatest importance may lie in clearing the way forward for your team members. This typically involves smoothing out the speed bumps and removing any obstacles that block task execution, particularly the procedural ones. Think of yourself as a bulldozer, or, better yet, as a lineman on a football team protecting the ball carrier as he advances.

In a workplace context, you might guard your people from bureaucratic red tape by taking it on yourself, while making sure they have sufficient resources and facilities to get their work done. Your team must drive, push, move, and speed toward the goal with a sense of urgency. You're there to help them maintain the momentum.

Small businesses often have an easier time keeping momentum going than large corporations. The reason is simple: momentum is about growth and the ability to move forward. Smaller businesses can move more quickly, like speedboats; large organizations resemble cruise ships, and are harder to turn on a dime.

As a leader in a large organization, you might have encountered obstacles or tremendous setbacks in the past. If you feel defeated or frustrated, it might be difficult to remain passionate, forward-looking, and hopeful. That's when building momentum feels like one more thing you have to do. And that's when, instead of embodying momentum, you see obstacles instead.

How can you eliminate whatever flies in the face of momentum and your team's forward drive? How much faster would your team be if they:

- Learned how to handle e-mail more efficiently?
- Found more time to think strategically?
- Weren't distracted by technology?
- Didn't spend so much time in meetings?
- Stopped being interrupted so frequently?
- Prioritized tasks better and stopped being reactive?

You be the judge—and the bulldozer.

# CHAPTER 10 SUMMARY
# REMOVE OBSTACLES FROM THE PATH

As it relates to a system or machine, efficiency is defined as "achieving maximum productivity with minimum wasted effort or expense." As it relates to people in the workplace, it's achieving "maximum results in minimum time"— the trademark and tagline of my firm, The Productivity Pro, Inc.

Time is the most costly component of human capital. As a leader, one of your jobs is to make it easier for your people to succeed more quickly. You can act as team bulldozer by knocking over anything that interferes with their accomplishment. Here's how:

1. **Challenge people to work though processes more effectively.** This may involve everything from finding time to think more strategically, to switching from a reactive approach to a proactive one, to using sticky notes as a way to diagram a process and try to cut out steps.

2. **Instill the need for speed into your team.** You can increase your culture's agility by reducing time-to-market and cycle speed for all essential processes, to avoid having to eat your competition's dust. Eliminate any internal processes that don't add anything of value to the customer.

3. **Encourage continuous improvement.** Concepts like Lean, Sigma Six, or Kaizen establish a means to eliminate waste and up productivity through consistent improvement. Establish a mindset of always getting better.

4. **Speed up your decision-making process.** Avoid the paralysis of analysis. Establish guidelines for making decisions, especially those involving strategic execution. Sometimes seconds count.

5. **Short-circuit groupthink.** A team of yes-people is useless. While close collaboration remains a must, listen to everyone's opinions, including those of the quieter group members. It's too easy for a few assertive individuals to take control of the team.

6. **Avoid perfectionism.** You and your team are human beings. Rather than trying to be perfect, adopt a realistic approach in which you take advantage of human energy, initiative, and action to implement strategic execution in the moment.

All teams include someone who makes things easier for others to do their jobs. On a football team, blockers protect the quarterback and receivers. In the white-collar world, the team leader is the one who eliminates the obstacles, from crushing groupthink, to speeding up decision-making, to being a realist rather than a perfectionist.

# Questions to Consider from Chapter 10

1. In what way are you like a bulldozer for your team? Cite a specific example.

   _____

   _____

2. What is the "paralysis of analysis"?

   _____

   _____

3. Have you or your team ever suffered from the paralysis of analysis? How did you handle it?

   _____

   _____

4. In what ways have you challenged your people to work more effectively recently?

   _____

   _____

5. What is groupthink, and why is it so dangerous to the strategic execution process?

   _____

   _____

6. Which processes has your company adopted to eliminate waste and encourage productivity (e.g. Six Sigma, Kaizen, ISO, etc.)?

   _____

   _____

7. How should you approach perfectionism?

   _____

   _____

---

**My Key Learning, Ah-Ha, Objective, or Take-Away from Chapter 10**

# CHAPTER ELEVEN SUMMARY:
# ADD ENABLERS TO THE EQUATION

In addition to smoothing the way for your team by removing procedural obstacles, it behooves you to facilitate their work in other ways as well. The less time they have to waste, the easier it will be for them to maximize their productivity and their ability to execute in the moment. The enablers I suggest in this chapter include:

1.  **Employ the THINK method**. Urge your team members to better themselves by Taking care of their health, Honing their memories, Improving focus, Nourishing their brains, and leveraging Knowledge as power.

2.  **Keep technology up-to-date**. The right equipment—such as fast computers or double monitors, the right software—such as instant messaging and webcasting, and the right equipment—such as video conferencing, can all increase productivity when used correctly. Just be sure to strike the proper balance; weigh the pros and cons of any new technology before adopting it, and be vigilant in its application.

3.  **Triage the non-urgent.** Trim away anything that doesn't contribute to strategic execution. If the biggest problem is hidebound attitudes and out-of-date strategy, take an ax to it! When cutting, look for long-term advantages, not short-term profits—and realize you'll have to remove something for everything you add, or you and your teammates risk stress and overwork.

4.  **Clear communication.** Keep your phrasing and delivery as clear as possible to maximize productivity. Be assertive and straightforward; never hem and haw. Use simple language and avoid jargon. Immediately acknowledge any communications you receive, and require acknowledgment from those you communicate with. Let them ask questions until they understand what you need. Time is money, so waste as little of it as you can.

Keep a tight grip on the realization that you're primarily the visionary and facilitator on your team. It's rare that you'll be the one down there on the front line making it happen, so do everything you can to make life easier for those responsible for execution. The easier it is for them the move forward, the more productive you'll all be. You'll do more with less work and shine while doing it.

# Questions to Consider from Chapter 11

1. What are the five components of the THINK process?

   _____

   _____

2. Who acts as the visionary and facilitator on your team?

   _____

   _____

3. If you were to remove some tasks from your to-do list, what would go first?

   _____

   _____

4. According to a recent study, how many more ideas does instant messaging usually result in per session, as opposed to email?

   _____

   _____

5. How can you employ clear communication to enable more efficient production on your team?

   _____

   _____

6. How should you approach the adoption of any new workplace technology?

   _____

   _____

7. What should concern you most when triaging your team's workload?

   _____

   _____

---

### My Key Learning, Ah-Ha, Objective, or Take-Away from Chapter 11

# CHAPTER TWELVE SUMMARY:
## ELIMINATE TIME WASTERS!

How much of the average worker's day is spent doing things that have nothing to do with furthering their work? It varies according to the person and job, but you know it happens. Time wasting—whether deliberate or not—may be the most pervasive obstacle to productivity in the white collar world. Just as you would smooth your team's way by removing procedural obstacles and providing methodologies and technologies that propel them forward, it's up to you to chop out the time wasters, too.

Here are some ways to help you and your team recapture your time.

1. **Root out procrastination**. This may be the worst time waster of all. We all procrastinate sometimes, whether because we feel overwhelmed, fear failure, dislike a task, don't want to run out of work—or know we'll be overwhelmed with work if we prove too efficient. Make it clear to your team that these are bogus excuses and help them move forward with productive work.

2. **Know what not to do.** It's important to quickly decide what to do next. But it's equally important to decide what *not* to do next. Choose the appropriate course of action by design, not by default, to maximize your productivity as a unit.

3. **Know what must come next.** Prioritize, prioritize, prioritize. Use a to-do list to formally define what to do each day and perform the most vital activities first or during your peak energy period. Allow lower-priority items to fall off the end of the list if you run out of time; practice purposeful abandonment when you must.

4. **Limit your meetings.** Set specific time-lengths for meetings and stick to them. Don't let anyone go off on tangents or take more time than they need. Don't go to meetings without clear objectives, and limit the number of people you invite to yours. Otherwise, they'll proliferate and stifle productive momentum.

5. **Give your people time to be strategic enablers of business.** If your team members are always running around from meeting to meeting, interrupting each other, and returning to an overflowing inbox, they won't have time to focus on high-value tasks. Workers need time to think without other people interrupting. They must balance the need to be available with the need to concentrate. It's a delicate balance, but one you can help them achieve by setting team protocols.

6. **Eliminate distractions.** Implement practices that help people focus on their work, not the noisy office: Provide cubicle doors, ban hallway discussions, turn all desks away from the doors, and allow the use of noise-canceling headsets.

7. **Embrace work/life balance.** Our predecessors chose eight hours as the ideal work day, because after eight hours, fatigue and stress cause productivity to decline. Working too long is hazardous to your health and relationships. If you want to maximize productivity, don't let people work too long or hard without going home or taking time off.

Open your mind, maintain your health (both mental and physical), limber up, and rededicate yourself to winning the productivity race. Push yourself to do what you must when you must, avoid what you must, and shave wasted time right out of your team's schedule.

# Questions to Consider from Chapter 12

1. How can you help your employees become strategic enablers of business?
   _____

   _____

2. What are three ways you can limit wasted time in meetings?
   _____

   _____

3. What's the worst time waster of all?
   _____

   _____

4. Have you ever procrastinated on a project? If so, why? (Please be honest; you're not being graded!)
   _____

   _____

5. Name two or three simple ways to decrease workplace distraction for your team members—and yourself.
   _____

   _____

6. What must you NOT do when choosing your next task?
   _____

   _____

7. What MUST you and your team do when choosing tasks, in order to stay on track?
   _____

   _____

## My Key Learning, Ah-Ha, Objective, or Take-Away from Chapter 12

# CONCLUSION

*"No battle plan survives contact with the enemy."*
—Helmuth von Moltke the Elder, nineteenth-century Prussian field marshal

It doesn't matter how good a leader you are if you can't execute your strategy right now, in the moment, in a way that fits conditions as they currently exist—not as they existed five minutes ago, or five months ago, or five years ago. That kind of lag time might have been acceptable once, but the Great Recession and the banking crisis have reset our collective business reality. Today, the only logical strategy is the one that facilitates implementing your task, product, service, or offer in the smoothest, fastest, most cost-efficient way possible.

To reiterate the central thesis and title of this book, execution *is* the strategy that will allow you to remain relevant, innovative, and competitive in the global marketplace of modern business. As a leader, your goal should be to produce results in the form that most pleases your stakeholders and end users, while being consistently achievable by your employees. Admittedly, bringing those two requirements into equilibrium can be challenging.

Not to put too fine a point on it, but only results matter in the end. As a leader, it's your duty and privilege to implement and execute strategies that produce maximum results on every level of the business ladder. If we can't profitably produce, no amount of good intentions will help us.

If you find yourself choking on your competitors' dust, you can't achieve anything worthwhile unless you change your behavior, both as an individual and as an organization. Despite occasional stumbles, wise leaders have begun to realize this truth and act on it.

### Strategic Planning in the Now

In recent years, companies scrambling to keep up with the frantic pace of our brave new world have changed the way they conduct strategic planning. We've always practiced strategic planning at some level, of course, and we still need it today; but what we meant by the term as few as five years ago barely resembles today's reality. This should come as no surprise in an era when last month's smartphone can't run this month's apps.

Once upon a time, strategic planning was a leisurely process, hidebound and bureaucratic. Some managers still treat it as such; worse, they see strategic planning as something mysteriously created by senior executives and/or outside consultants. They perceive execution as little more than the downstream part of the process. The senior

leadership decides what to do, while staff members take the decision and run with it along a very narrow, predetermined path, complete with detailed financials.

We know this process doesn't work well anymore. More often than not, an entire market suddenly shifts, or an employee comes across an opportunity that must be seized in the moment, requiring operational action that in turn alters the strategic direction. So at the end of the year, when (and if) the plan is reviewed, what the executors actually did is often not what the leaders outlined. Companies must adapt on the fly to fit current realities; if they fail to adapt, the company takes a hit. Enough hits, and it'll be down for the count.

## Strategic Planning Belongs on the Front Line, Too

Leaders still play a crucial role in strategy, because someone must communicate the goals and priorities to the workers. But today's business world is too unpredictable to straitjacket your front-liners with last year's strategies. Keep the following principles in mind as you proceed with your strategic planning.

*Think Around Corners*

I could fill another book with things no one thought would ever happen but did anyway—and almost always suddenly. The *Challenger* and *Columbia* space shuttle tragedies. The fall of the Berlin Wall in a matter of days. The collapse of the Soviet Union soon after. CDs and DVDs, which revolutionized data storage and entertainment, as did cloud storage later. Guns N' Roses even released its album *Chinese Democracy*.

Everything is in a state of flux, more so than at any other time in history. Futurists tell us everything will only move faster, such that we can't predict with any clarity what business will be like forty or fifty years from now. Back in the 1950s and 1960s, few people foresaw the modern desktop computer revolution—not even computer experts. Imagine what modern leaders will completely fail to foresee today, simply because we can't imagine how or to what extent things will change.

Clearly, the old-fashioned three-to-five-year strategic plans don't work anymore. At best, you can only plan a year or so ahead, and even then, you'd better review your strategy quarterly, monthly, weekly, even daily in some cases. Office Depot is an example of a company that caught on to this quickly; in first quarter 2009, the company began reviewing its annual budget monthly, a practice resulting in several profitable mid-course changes thus far. Many companies have followed suit.

*Exercise Serious Agility*

In today's business environment, you can generate better results if you engage your workers and create an agile corporate culture full of strategic thinkers. The military realized this long ago. The officers don't do the physical work or even decide how to do it; their job is to tell the non-commissioned officers (NCOs) to get it done. The NCOs pass the work down the line; whoever the buck stops with has to figure out how to best accomplish the task. The idea is to just do it and not worry about the planning. Despite common misperceptions, the military has never wanted brainless killers who automatically and thoughtlessly execute their orders. They want well-trained people who can think on their feet and figure out the best way to accomplish a goal.

The same goes for business, especially as we manufacture strategy daily on the front lines. Workers must be empowered to take ownership of their jobs, engage without fear of censure, and act on what they know best without waiting for permission from the chain of command. Many battles have been lost, both in warfare and in business, to slow decision making by home-front leaders. They had no idea what life was like on the front line, or what strategies were required to win the battle where and when it was actually occurring.

*Accept Your New Leadership Role*

Rather than simply issuing orders and expecting team members to follow them blindly, encourage them to do what they already know they need to do. Accept the fact that, despite your leadership role, they're the ones at the sharp end of the stick. Don't lose sight of the fact that modern leadership is more of a partnership than ever before. Work may not be a democracy, but it's definitely not a dictatorship anymore. Circumstances change too fast.

Be the change leader when you must and the visionary when you can. Give your team all the facts they need to advance, and allow them a free hand to shift course and goals quickly. Let them tell you the best way to achieve your priorities—and get out of their way. Maintain the conversation as a positive feedback loop. That way, they know that what works best is constantly added to and strengthens the workflow system.

*Engineer Behavioral Change*

A big part of your role is getting your team to accept the desirability of change, constantly and consistently. They must be willing to turn on a dime and start doing things differently whenever it's necessary for the team and organization.

The only way you can effectively change strategic execution is by compelling behavioral change among those who work for you. Business as usual has become a dead-end street

lined with empty houses. While you can attempt to change strategic execution with the stroke of a pen, what really works is winning the hearts and minds of the people on the front line, so they'll engage sufficiently to make the changes necessary to keep their jobs—and yours.

*Remain Vigilant*

Think that's an exaggeration? The global economy has begun to shift in a big way, moving further toward equal distribution between East and West than ever before. As China, India, and other nations make inroads into Western-style standards of living, the Fortune Global 500 has changed significantly. Management consulting firm McKinsey & Company estimates that, by 2025, 45 percent of all Fortune Global 500 companies will be based in emerging nations.

What does that mean for you? It's imperative to keep a constant eye on the horizon in this era of rapid business evolution. You should optimize your business networks to include more emerging marketplace connections, so you can ease into the market change as it occurs. Keep a close eye on both your customer base and your competition, note how their compositions are changing over time, and be prepared to realign your strategy to take advantage of those changes. If you belong to a particularly large organization, consider decentralizing so that at least some of your corporate centers are located in emerging market centers, such as Singapore, Brazil, or China.

You not only have to be prepared for change, but you also have to understand, well in advance, what type of change will most likely occur—so you won't be blindsided by unexpected events.

*Couple Wishful Thinking with Positive Action*

As hard-nosed as business people appear to be, we're still susceptible to wishful thinking. Consider it an occupational hazard, especially when the money's rolling in in seemingly endless quantities. But simply wishing for something hard enough won't make it come true, no matter how many celebrities and self-anointed gurus tell you so. So just saying you want to improve your strategic execution is meaningless. You must couple desire with positive action for it to matter.

Now, I'm not saying that being a cheerleader, thinking positive thoughts, and shouting, "Go, Team!" isn't a good start. Indeed, it's absolutely necessary—as long as it motivates you and your team toward something more concrete.

The reality of the last few years has left us shaking off the last remnants of our fantasies as we move into the future, if only because many of their proponents have fallen by the

wayside. Their fate has made it clear that we have no choice: if we don't face reality as it is, reality will eat us alive.

*Charge in the Right Direction*

Hard work and high-speed action don't matter one iota when they're pointed in the wrong direction or otherwise poorly executed.

Years ago, a well-meaning California-based environmental action group saved the lives of two seals that had been injured in accidents. After months of surgery, physical therapy, and rehabilitation, the group decided it was best to release them at the Farallon Islands off the coast of California, where there was a large population of seals for them to join. They failed to realize that the waters around the Farallons were frequented by the seals' apex predator, the great white shark; indeed, the "Devil's Teeth," as the islands were nicknamed, were famous for the size of their sharks, some of which rivaled the fictional Jaws of Steven Spielberg's film.

Within minutes of their release, the monster fish ate both seals in front of horrified witnesses. One commentator pointed out that the environmental group's actions were the equivalent of lovingly healing a man of a broken leg and then kicking him off a cliff. (If all this seems familiar, it's because the Discovery Channel recently used a variation of the scenario for its premiere Shark Week commercial of 2013.)

My point is, reality trumps naive optimism and good intentions every time. The seal team spent a huge amount of money and effort to save the two seals and then completely flubbed the final execution (an especially apt word here).

If you're enthusiastic about your business outlook and spend many hours planning how you're going to achieve your goals, that's great—as long as you combine all that with actual action designed to put your team, department, or organization at the front of the pack, pointed in the proper direction. Business is no longer just dog-eat-dog; it's more shark-eat-shark. You have no choice but to combine optimism with cautious, properly oriented implementation designed to meet change head-on. Otherwise, you may end up as the next Snuffy the Seal.

## Realize That Execution *IS* the Strategy

Today's leaders cannot effectively dictate how to execute strategic priorities anymore; only those who execute can, because everything changes so rapidly. That said, as a leader, you're still responsible for clarifying goals and creating and organizing the strategy, so people know what they're shooting for and have some general way to get there.

Further, you can't accept that a goal has been set until the execution team has adopted it. Never blame your people for failure of strategic execution. If you haven't clarified your objectives well enough that they can name them at the drop of a hat, then how can they know what they need to do in order to achieve maximum results? If they're not sure what they're doing, they'll just go through the motions, stay busy, and keep their heads down.

So step in to show them point by point what they must accomplish and why it matters—and then take steps to reduce the whirlwind of daily work so they have time to execute the bigger goals. Make them accountable for their results, employing accurate means of measuring performance. Offer the right rewards—and, most of all, allow them to adopt flexible operational plans to fit the current reality. Do all this, and they'll achieve wonders for you.

### Shift Your Mental Model

Strategy is no longer chiseled in stone; it has become as flexible and changeable as life itself. We still need leaders to articulate the mission, vision, goals, and strategy, while the team defines the tactics, which shapes the strategy, as leaders make the course corrections, in a continuous cycle.

Most important, leaders hold us to the core values that define our organizations. Many business leaders of our era have forgotten this. If we fall prey to corruption, self-centeredness, and poor management, we pave that highway straight down. If we keep twisting our core values so far out of alignment that the public no longer trusts us, we're sunk. If we're so busy fighting our own systems that we accomplish nothing of value, we're doomed.

In today's business world, execution itself is the only strategy that matters. A decent strategy, brilliantly executed, will trump a brilliant strategy, poorly executed. As leaders and followers form tighter partnerships, the companies with the stellar strategies that follow the principles of the L-E-A-D Formula will maintain the conditions necessary to hurtle forward. Don't lose sight of what truly matters in the day-to-day battles. Execution truly is the strategy that will propel your organization to success.

Go to www.ExecutionIsTheStrategy.com to receive complimentary bonus material, videos, tip sheets, and book club materials.

# Educational Resources by Laura Stack

Screenshots of Microsoft Outlook Inbox and Tasks tricks: www.TheProductivityPro.com/Laura

Strategic Execution one-year weekly video series: http://theproductivitypro.com/leadership-videos/

Subscribe to our weekly one-minute productivity video training series "The Productivity Minute"! http://www.theproductivityminute.com/

Link with Laura http://www.linkedin.com/in/laurastack

Follow Laura on Twitter: http://twitter.com/laurastack

Become a Fan of The Productivity Pro®: www.facebook.com/productivitypro

Sign up for The Productivity Pro weekly newsletter: http://theproductivitypro.com/subscribe/

Subscribe to Laura Stack's blog: http://www.theproductivitypro.com/blog/

Laura's website has over 150 free articles for download: http://www.TheProductivityPro.com/articles

Microsoft Outlook 12-hour online video training: http://www.TheProductivityPro.com/Outlook

FREE downloadable worksheets, checklists, and resources: http://theproductivitypro.com/free/

Take the quizzes FREE from Laura's books: http://theproductivitypro.com/quizzes/

Get a FREE tip of the day via email: http://theproductivitypro.com/tip-of-the-day/

Resources for purchase (books, CDs, DVDs, self-study audio, video training, MP3s etc.): http://theproductivitypro.com/products-page/

Laura's YouTube channel: http://www.youtube.com/theproductivitypro

# LAURA STACK, MBA, CSP

### Speaker ☼ Author ☼ Consultant



## President and CEO

Laura Stack, MBA, CSP, Laura Stack is America's Premier Expert in Productivity™. For over 20 years, her seminars and speeches have helped professionals, leaders, and teams accelerate individual and team performance, execute efficiently, and improve output in the workplace. Her company, The Productivity Pro, Inc., provides productivity workshops around the globe to help attendees achieve Maximum Results in Minimum Time®. Laura was the 2011-2012 president of the National Speakers Association.

## Keynoter

Laura presents over 80 practical, high-energy keynotes and seminars each year on improving output, lowering stress, and saving time in today's workplaces. She is one of a handful of professional speakers whose business focuses solely on personal productivity topics. Laura is a high-energy, high-content speaker, who educates, entertains, and motivates professionals to improve workplace performance. She has earned the Certified Speaking Professional (CSP) designation, the highest earned designation given by the National Speakers Association.

## Author

Laura is the author of five bestselling productivity books published by Random House, Wiley, and Berrett-Koehler, most recently *Execution IS the Strategy*. Laura's books have been published in more than 20 foreign editions, and she is a featured columnist for *Success* magazine.

## Recognized Productivity Expert

Laura has been featured nationally on the CBS Early Show, CNN, NPR, Bloomberg, 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.

## Clients include

| | |
|---|---|
| Starbucks | Sodexho |
| Tyco | Ball Aerospace |
| Wal-Mart | Quest |
| Cisco Systems | U.S. Bank |
| KPMG | McDonald's |
| Nationwide | Nestle |
| MillerCoors | EMC |
| Sunoco | Oppenheimer |
| IBM | Time Warner |
| MCI | Wells Fargo |
| Sprint | Visa |
| Enterprise | RE/MAX |
| Lockheed | Denver Broncos |

## Spokesperson

| | |
|---|---|
| Microsoft | Xerox |
| 3M | Day-Timer |
| QVC | Office Depot |