

You Can't Get To Extraordinary Driving With The Brakes On

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Extraordinary accomplishments - The results of focused, driven people assimilating resources and doing their best to make something happen to create change. Change that benefits customers, change that improves results for the business and in some cases profound changes that improve the world and the lives of many people.

In too many cases however, such accomplishment is more difficult than need be. The very people who create the expectation for extraordinary accomplishment, sometimes unwittingly create or maintain the barriers that make it more difficult.

In over seventeen years in business, we have seen a bunch of extraordinary accomplishments. Here's the short list of factors we've seen persistently over the years that make it feel like you're driving with the brakes on when trying to achieve an extraordinary accomplishment.

Information doesn't flow.

It is just simply too difficult and time consuming for a leader to get essential, timely, accurate information from an SME (subject matter expert) in another department. Information is persistently needed, but doesn't flow in an accurate and timely way. What helps? Be sure your team chartering process builds the right cross-functional team at the outset. Identify all influencers and build the communication channels and relationships early so they are functional in the many crunch times. If there is an individual who is a persistent barrier to info flow, confront them to resolve and get creative to gain cooperation. Escalate the effort as necessary. Teams focused on extraordinary accomplishment need a Senior Exec sponsor who can, when necessary, be called on to break communication log jams.

Decision paralysis.

Chain of command and egos get in the way of good decisions being made quickly at the correct level. This is frequently a trust and control issue. Accountability and authority don't match up. What helps? If you are a senior leader and expect a subordinate leader to make it happen, then get clear on the expected outcome, agree on the principles and parameters and the unique and infrequent situations when you must be involved in a decision. Then, get out of the way and let this smart competent leader you hired make it happen. Don't micromanage and that includes not second guessing his/her decisions. Remember a primary role of a leader is to grow other leaders.

Unanticipated Derailers.

Contingencies are not anticipated and when something goes south or an assumption proves inaccurate, the team loses excessive time and momentum. What helps? Make it a habit to challenge



assumptions and build some contingency for the ones that are softest. Build a flexible team with the ability to move quickly as circumstances change.

Competing and confusing priorities.

The assignments are made. There is a team of good people. The extraordinary accomplishment that is supposed to be the outcome is a primary accountability for one person and at varying points on the priority list of other team members. Cross-functional teams are the essential norm in most cases. Overload is also the norm in most organizations. "Just do it," "Make it happen," are fine and good, and that's what high performing leaders do. What helps? If you are the executive sponsor, you may need to get real and change/clarify priorities. You may need to run interference with your exec level peers to ensure the right energy and involvement from across the organization.

Ambiguity causes the chicken without a head syndrome.

To progress on an extraordinary accomplishment, significant decisions have to be made with the best available data. Frequently, that data is not as much as you would like. Some leaders are good at gut level decisions; some freak out without a wealth of adequate data. What helps? Be deliberate and realistic about what decisions absolutely require more data and which don't. Where is the risk too high to make a decision on gut feel (i.e. big health & safety issues) and when will you take your best shot and move on?

Calculated optimism v calculated pessimism

There are always self-appointed soap box criers of doom. These folks focus on all the reasons why we are going to fail. The problem here is that they are sometimes people with significant skill needed for success. These folks like to describe what failure will look like in preparation for being able to say, "I told you so." What helps? Recognize that they may require more finesse than a simple trip to the woodshed because their engagement and contribution is essential. Calculated optimism and the overwhelming viral passion of the top dog is the power that keeps the dream alive. Keep energy and passion visible, active and profound and celebrate incremental successes.

You're a leader, the one in charge, the place where the buck stops.
for a look in the mirror.

Here are a few questions

- Why is the person who was hired with all the characteristics of high achiever not making extraordinary accomplishments? First, try answering this question without criticizing the individual.
- What about the business structure, policy and/or culture enables and what impedes extraordinary accomplishment?
- What about collective senior leadership behavior enables or makes it difficult for people to make extraordinary accomplishments?
- Do you know what your peers and subordinates would say that you should stop, start or continue doing in order to enable extraordinary accomplishments?



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