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EXECUTION EXCELLENCE AND ENERGY

Managers are on a treadmill. It is a daily grind towards execution excellence. Driven by competition, internal and external, they get up earlier and work later; desperately seek skills and competencies; design systems and structures; invest in technology; build hierarchies and then try to flatten them; create, monitor and avoid controls; set budgets and targets with shorter and shorter review dates; clutter the day with meetings about what happened yesterday, constantly try to find blame for the past and predict the future; cut costs; cut payrolls and cut corners.

Managers are on a treadmill and it moves faster and faster. They are lonely, live a divided life, and demand more compensation - in the form of bonuses, huge salaries and stock options - for the sacrifices they are making. Could this be “danger money”?

Yet the awful truth is that the organisations they are managing are standing still or even going backwards. Execution never becomes excellent - it remains mediocre. There seem to be very few exceptions.

There are more team builds and strategic planning sessions. There is more effort and most often no sustainable benefit. There is more command and more control and less response.

Ernst & Young published bleak research findings amongst which are the observation that 66% of strategic decisions taken never get implemented. A study in the United States amongst senior and top management showed that 69% didn't know what their company's vision, mission or objectives were; and they didn't care! Franklin Covey has a process for measuring execution excellence and in most organisations they find it to be worryingly low. However, levels of stress, burnout and divorce keep climbing. A recent finding published in the United States suggested that almost a third of the population was clinically depressed.

Why? Why? Why? Because we have lost our balance – personal and organisational. Because we have forgotten that getting things done and finding the energy to do them are both essential. We have to balance them. We have forgotten that willing human energy gets things done far quicker, far better and far cheaper than power and punishment. But you can't buy it – leaders have to earn it. It's not that competence, structure, systems, budgets, bonuses, authority and order are wrong. Far from it, they are essential and they all require management – lots of it. But without willing human energy they are futile.

A modern racing yacht has all of these features – design, competence, structure, process and the captain has to have authority too. But without wind it doesn't move and any auxiliary motors it may have are not enough to feel its true potential. To feel it “in the groove” only the lightest touch on the tiller is needed.

The most exciting thing for an organisation is the prospect of a high energy team of high energy individuals on a sustainable basis! To a yachtsman it's a steady 50-knot wind from the right quarter; to a glider pilot it is a powerful thermal. To a human organisation it is positive human energy.

COLIN HALL
January 2005