

ENABLEMENT

The “Make It So” Decision



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Possibly you have heard this word: enablement. It started gaining some traction in 2013 within the business topic of sales. In 2014 “sales enablement,” much like social selling grew in popularity among noted sales gurus or experts.

The meaning behind this word is not new at all. Unfortunately, as in the case with many contemporary business buzzwords, the meaning has been complicated or corrupted by those who wish to expand their own pocketbooks.

Enablement is a noun and is related to the verb “enable.” The simple, dictionary definition of this word, enable, is “to make able.” Now doesn’t that sound rather simple? In business, the goal is “to make able” all operations of the organization. Another way to view enablement is through this question: “What barriers exist that prevent your people ‘to make able’ all operations?”

What so many people in leadership roles fail to realize is that this word

can be the lynchpin to having a high performance work culture. When people, the greatest asset of any business, have been granted the capacity “to make able” what they need to do to move themselves, and therefore the organization forward, amazing results are possible. Of course, this presumes you have the right people in the right seats using the right talents making the right decisions in the right time frame within the right environment for the right results.

In December of 2013, Zappos embraced enablement solidly into its culture with the announcement of a Holacratic organizational structure whereby the usual hierarchical structures were eschewed. Without bosses, all employees have been enabled to do what they need to do. This type of culture may not work for other organizations because this was not an overnight decision or a quick fix but, rather, one made based on an evolving

high performance culture. Firms that walk the Holacratic path have already demonstrated how to work around conventional organizational structure.

Possibly one of the best guides to better understanding this word, enablement, is the 5 Star Model as developed by Jay Galbraith and referred to in past articles in this publication. Galbraith and his team recognized the importance of alignment. Without interconnecting alignment between strategy, structure, processes/systems, rewards, and people, companies face gaps. These gaps prevent results and therefore drain profits.

Simply speaking, misalignment is the absence of or poorly done enablement. Barriers have been constructed that prevent these five functionalities from working together in the most efficient and effective manner possible. People are simply not able to do what they need to do.

Strategy Enablement

If we understand the essence of a strategy to be a thought process utilized to deceive the enemy, then the concern becomes how to enable or make our strategy do what it is supposed to do. The most prudent action would be an organizational assessment to determine where there are gaps not only in strategy but within the other organizational functionalities.

First, conduct a thorough organizational assessment where information is freely shared and executive leadership receives the truth without any whitewashing or fear of retribution by the respondents. Then leadership has clarity on gaps and what needs to be done first. Leaders may realize they are part of the problem because the majority of any gaps in any business begin and end with executive leadership.

Structure Enablement

Organizations have two types of structure: 1) the common organizational flow chart (internal) and 2) physical buildings and/or websites (external). Both of these structures work together or should work together “to make able” operations. As noted earlier, Zappos eliminated bosses within its organizational flow chart and created a flat organizational structure.

Technology restructured business. This restructuring has given rise to the single or home office. With 70 percent of all small businesses being sole proprietors, websites have become, for many, their external source for business. Yet the external structure, be it a website or a brick and mortar store, still must “make able” all day-to-day business activities. When websites do not work or create barriers for the visitors, businesses suffer. Search engine optimization is essential “to make able” your website to be found by your ideal customers.

With continual change due to technology and the marketplace, executives need to walk through the organization and experience it through the eyes of internal and external customers to truly understand its current structure. This “customer walk” may reveal information not necessarily found in an organizational assessment.

Processes/Systems Enablement

“To make able” all processes and systems requires documentation of those same processes. Most small businesses fail to document their processes. If they do document their processes, many then forget to update those same processes.

Probably the most obvious process, when it comes to people, is streamlining

job descriptions. For people “to make able” requires them to know what they are supposed to be making able. Job descriptions that have not been updated in the last one to two years let alone ones that have never seen the light of day for the last 20 years are profit barriers.

Additionally, when it comes to succession planning, the absence of

documented processes will not make the sale of the small business any easier. Instead, there will be more barriers in the way of the sale. Succession planning is all about “to make able” someone to buy your business or take over your role as CEO or President.

Sales is a process. Your sales process should enable your salespeople to sell your product or service, your solution. It will also enable your ideal customers to buy your solution while retaining them for future sales or referrals.

Rewards Enablement

Compensation of employees goes beyond the salary and extends into many other reward channels. These channels included benefits, bonuses, recognition, and even job promotion.

Again, what prevents people from the ability “to make able” is a poor compensation structure. Non-performers being rewarded at the same level of performers is probably the most common barrier to enablement. Add favoritism into the mix, and people are discouraged in their efforts “to make able” sales, customer relationships, and overall workflow.

People Enablement

There is much written about people enablement from the annual Gallup Poll on workforce engagement to the annual survey conducted by Manpower specific to employees seeking new employment. This one functionality is where “disablement” is more often seen by both internal and external customers.

For the last several years, the Gallup Poll on workforce

engagement has been fairly consistent about the impact of enablement within organizations. Approximately one in four employees is actively engaged with two in four only engaged. This leaves one in four actively disengaged. This disengagement barrier to enablement comes with a hefty price tag of \$370 billion annual cost to the U.S. economy.

Assess

Leverage the power of this simple word begins by assessing where you have gaps that prevent your people from “making able” the opportunities they witness on a daily basis. If you think assessing takes time, you are correct. Failure to invest this time may result in wasting precious profit dollars and still have those misalignment gaps.

Clarify

From your assessments, as you will probably require more than one, you will gain clarity on how to better “make able” your organization for your employees and other stakeholders. The goal is to gain crystal clarity before taking any action. When a lack of clarity is present, this helps to explain why most execution fails. People either cannot see the target or are looking at the wrong target.

Execute

The ability to execute strategy along with day to day business functions continues to be one of the most pressing challenges being faced by executives within the smallest of the small businesses to the largest of the large organizations. Successful execution is the end result of enablement. When everything is working together like the gears of a fine Swiss watch, the organization thrives, people are happy, and profits grow.

To Be the Year

If you want 2015 to be the year of notable improvement, then consider these questions:

1. Have I assessed my firm in the five areas as identified by the Galbraith 5 Star Model?
2. Have I assessed myself as a leader along with my executive team?
3. Do I, as a leader, fear enabling (“to make able”) my people?
4. Do we have a goal-driven strategic plan that is continually updated to ensure enablement?
5. Are our values clearly articulated and shared to ensure we are “making able” the right decisions?
6. How can we further enable our organization to be more efficient and effective such as through “lean thinking?”
7. Is our culture truly one of enablement or disablement?

By taking these questions and answers to heart, your business may become one where people are truly engaged. Yes, enablement is a powerful leadership and organizational belief. Now you must decide if you are ready for this challenge—are you truly committed to *Star Trek’s* Captain Picard’s vision to “make it so”? **N**

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Your sales process should enable your salespeople to sell your product or service, your solution. It will also enable your ideal customers to buy your solution while retaining them for future sales or referrals.