



HOW TO MAKE IT SO

By Leanne Hoagland-Smith, M.S.

LEADERSHIP IS TRULY THE LYNCH PIN FOR EFFECTIVE AND SUSTAINABLE WORKPLACE CULTURE.

Star Trek: *The Next Generation* fans will remember one of the often-repeated commands by Captain Picard: “Make it so.” His command was one of execution to the members of his team.

The command came after a decision was made. Sometimes this decision was gathered from collaboration with his executive team, and other times, Picard went with his gut.

For those in executive leadership roles, “making it so” is probably the greatest leadership challenge. How does a leader get his or her team to consistently execute towards the desired results? First, leaders should respond to this question:

What barriers are preventing the execution of my commands or of those from my executive leadership and management teams?

Years ago, noted business management expert, Peter Drucker, observed that “[workplace] culture will eat strategy for breakfast.” Since he spoke those words, business strategy has

improved. Now workplace culture has moved from eating strategy to eating execution for breakfast, lunch, dinner, dessert, and all snacks in between.

Workplace culture is probably the number one barrier to effective, “make it so” execution. Ongoing research regarding workplace engagement continues to suggest up to 70–75 percent of the employees within any organization are not fully engaged. They do not give eight hours of work for eight hours of pay. This is a dramatic drain not only on productivity, but with employees’ internal attitudes about themselves, their fellow employees and management as well.

For example, digital skills are part of today’s workforce, yet a Harris Poll, conducted in the summer of 2014, revealed one in three U.S. workers do not believe they are proficient in the use of technology tools required to do their work. This research also uncovered only one in 10 American workers believe they have mastered the technology tools they need to do their jobs.

Sales research continues to reveal that even Customer Relationship Management systems (CRM) still are not consistently used by salespeople. The reasons include a learning curve—not being proficient with the tool—to just not wanting to use the tool.

According to the Harris Poll, the digital skill gap is killing productivity and is costing the U.S. economy \$1.3 trillion annually. If the workplace culture is one of resistance to change, unwillingness to learn new tools, and not up to pace with current technology, then the culture will be a barrier to execution.

Workplace culture is not just one area where a quick fix can be applied to make things “right.” Rather, it is a reflection of the following areas within all businesses from the smallest, solo entrepreneur to the Fortune 100 firms.

LEADERSHIP is truly the lynch pin for effective and sustainable workplace culture. Those in leadership roles are the captains of the ship. Like the character of Captain Picard and other real life leaders, these individuals know first how to lead themselves before they lead others.

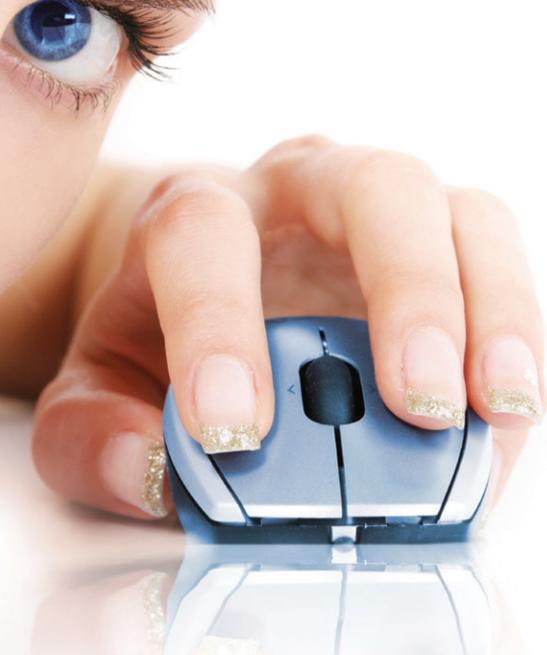
STRATEGIC PLANNING is where pre-determined execution, “make it so,” begins. When the workplace culture knows where the ship is going, then everyone is rowing in the same direction with the same force.

BUSINESS RESULTS are the outcomes of strategic planning and leadership. Of course, many times, the desired business results are not communicated to the workforce. Then the desired business results and execution become a hodgepodge of disconnected activity. The authors of *Fail-Safe Leadership: Straight Talk About Correcting the Leadership Challenges In Your Organization* identified this disconnected activity as misalignment. Efficient and effective execution happens when all activities are in alignment like the gears of a fine watch.

HUMAN RESOURCE FOCUS will continue to shift from compliance and job employment applications to being a key member of the executive team.

Since people are responsible for execution, a strategic focus on human resource will become even more essential. Now even the smallest firms will begin to embrace the use of psychometric assessments to find the right people and invest in executive coaching and ongoing development.

MEASUREMENT, ANALYSIS, AND KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT is a weak area for many in business. Small business owners to mid-size business executives fail to invest the time to analyze and reflect on data. In some instances, ignoring the data makes for bad decision-making and leads to ineffective execution. The workforce knows the decision is



DIGITAL SKILLS ARE PART OF TODAY'S WORKFORCE, YET A HARRIS POLL, CONDUCTED IN THE SUMMER OF 2014, REVEALED ONE IN THREE U.S. WORKERS DO NOT BELIEVE THEY ARE PROFICIENT IN THE USE OF TECHNOLOGY TOOLS REQUIRED TO DO THEIR WORK.

bad. Thus, the workforce may become less engaged and have even more negative attitudes about “those dummies in management.”

PROCESS MANAGEMENT is another area that impacts culture because of this one word: change. Today's business world is moving at what appears to be close to the speed of light. Skills are rapidly changing. From 1942 to 1973, workplace skills lasted 31 years. Then technology entered the marketplace big time, and the life span of workplace skills began to diminish. In 2014, the life span of workplace skills has been reduced to less than two years.

Continuous improvement is embedded within process management. Those in executive leadership roles must look to how to continually improve business results. Many of those improvements will be directed to some technology tool as well as proven improvement process such as Six Sigma, Lean, or Baldrige.

CUSTOMER AND MARKET FOCUS is where sales and revenue happen or don't happen. Ignoring the voice of the customer to market trends is especially dangerous. Customer service research continues to reveal how costly it is to acquire a new customer instead of retaining an existing one. Additionally, those unhappy customers have no problem telling everyone about their bad experience. In this age of social media, bad customer reviews and complaints are even more dangerous than just 10 years ago.

SUSTAINABILITY is about how green your environment is. Many small businesses that grew into larger operations understood conserving resources. They practiced sustainability.

Today, many millennials entering the workforce have established sustainability practices. These individuals view sustainability as a criterion for accepting a position. Some research suggests there are millennials who will take a lesser salary with a firm with much stronger sustainability and proactive environmental policies than a firm offering a high salary and limited environmental policies.

REFER A FRIEND is a quick way to determine if your workplace culture is truly positive and proactive. Using the Net Promoter Score, employees can be surveyed on how likely they would be to refer a friend to your organization. If your employees will not refer a friend, this does suggest there are significant execution barriers within your organization, probably starting with leadership and strategic planning.

WHAT'S A LEADER TO DO?

As an owner or executive, have you ever had this thought: *Why don't people just do their jobs?*

This thought is quite prevalent among my clients, regardless of industry. Understanding the impact of these areas as workplace culture barriers is key. Each of these areas, separately or in combination, can be discovered throughout the organization or just limited to specific departments. In either instance, the end result is failed execution.

When those in leadership positions fail to recognize culture may be the hidden obstacle to people just doing their jobs, they may commit considerable resources of time, money, emotions, and actions to correcting the wrong problem.

One hint is to listen for this comment: “We don't do things that way.”

If the goal is to “make it so,” then consider these two questions, which I have asked the majority of my small business to corporate clients.

1. CAN ALL OF YOUR EMPLOYEES QUICKLY NAME THE TOP THREE GOALS FOR YOUR BUSINESS IN PRECISELY THE SAME ORDER?

Over the years, the response to this question has been a hesitant, “Probably not,” by over 95 percent of the mid-size to small business owners I have asked. A negative response suggests leadership and strategic planning are at least two of the obstacles keeping effective execution from happening.

If your people cannot quickly respond with the top three goals of your company, then, as it has been said before, “Houston, we have a problem.”

2. DO ALL OF YOUR EMPLOYEES KNOW HOW THIS BUSINESS MAKES AND KEEPS MONEY?

This is a question I have only been asking for the last five years, when I realized there existed misalignment between strategy and execution. When employees do not know how a business makes and keeps money, this suggests leadership and process management are barriers to executing existing strategies.

The U.S. economy continues to integrate itself into the world economy with competition increasing, so this is the time to strengthen your workplace culture. Failure to take such action will have your next “make it so command” echoing in the empty hallways. **N**

Leanne Hoagland-Smith is THE People and Process Problem Solver. As a thought leader who challenges the status quo, her thousands of articles and active social media presence earned Leanne the position of judge for the 1st 2015 North American Women in Sales Awards. Follow her on Twitter @CoachLee.