

# Advance praise

*“Our world is facing uncertainties never seen before. Designing winning strategies, as tough as it can be, is only part of the challenge facing senior management. The most difficult part is to continuously translate our strategy into superior performance at all levels of our organisations. That’s what this book is all about: tips and tricks to get things done”*

**G rard Mestrallet** | CEO | GDF SUEZ

*“This book absolutely nails the three things every manager needs to know about strategy – execution, execution, execution!”*

**Bill Saubert** | Regional Business Leader Australia/New Zealand | MasterCard Advisors

*“Strategy Execution Heroes is a wonderfully written and well-organised book with a clear commonsense approach to strategy implementation. It is a must-read for any manager regardless of position or years of experience”*

**Michael Benavente** | Managing Director Watches | Gucci

*“Organisations have become very aware that much great strategy is lost before it’s turned into performance, mainly as a result of poor execution skills. This book is a significant step towards addressing that gap: it takes strategy to the manager level, providing practical everyday recipes to make sure that the ‘big picture’ does not remain a boardroom abstraction”*

**Bruno Lanvin** | Executive Director, eLab | INSEAD

*“Strategy Execution Heroes provides leaders with a practical strategy execution how-to guide which includes a brilliant summary of Jeroen’s personal experiences combined with an extensive collection of best practices from leading experts in this field”*

**Martin Jensen** | Head of North America LTE Services | Nokia Siemens Networks

*“Strategy Execution Heroes is a refreshingly different approach to strategy implementation. In an extremely pragmatic and actionable way, it puts managers and their individual roles at the centre of the execution pathway rather than the organisation and its systems. Well worth reading!”*

**Michel Hofland** | Finance Director | L’Oreal

*“Strategy is a fascinating field, but time and time again we see brilliant strategies fall down due to poor execution. Strategy Execution Heroes really hits the spot by showing what can be done to drive successful execution. I highly recommend this book to strategists and business leaders striving for maximum impact”*

**Bart Sweerman** | Senior Director Internet Business Solutions Group | Cisco

*“Even the best strategy is worthless if you are unable to get it implemented. Execution is key and Strategy Execution Heroes explains how to do it”*

**Matthieu Crépey** | Former Retail Director | L'Occitane

*“This book takes a refreshingly different approach to Strategy Execution. Most importantly, it is hands-on and presents new perspectives on known problems. Inspiring input for practitioners!”*

**Prof. Dr Frederik Ahlemann** | European Business School Germany

*“Strategy Execution Heroes takes a different approach to all other books that I have read on Strategy Execution. Most importantly, it focuses on the manager and his individual role in the implementation of strategy rather than on the organisation. A breath of fresh air!”*

**Thilo Kusch** | CFO and Board member | Magyar Telecom

*“This book is a compelling read that drives right to the heart of successful and flawless strategy execution. Many other strategy books float in the clouds of organizational theory, but this is what we really need – practical, specific and hard-hitting direction and real-life advice”*

**Jeffrey Stephen Kehoe** | Regional Head Bancassurance Asia | AXA

*“Practical, structured and with proven advice; exactly what a manager needs”*

**Karel Van Eetvelt** | Managing Director | UNIZO

*“Strategy Execution Heroes helps you build the foundation to champion and communicate strategy within your company. And it contains great insights from well known executives that I found immediately helpful for my organisation”*

**Phillip Shoemaker** | Director Applications Technology | Apple

*“Strategy Execution Heroes gives a pragmatic series of hands-on tips and tricks to help implement your ideas. Not all of them fit my situation. However, those which do are absolute breakthroughs!”*

**Armin Knapp** | Senior Controller | Salzgitter AG

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# STRATEGY EXECUTION HEROES

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**BUSINESS STRATEGY IMPLEMENTATION AND  
STRATEGIC MANAGEMENT DEMYSTIFIED**

**A PRACTICAL PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT GUIDEBOOK  
FOR THE SUCCESSFUL LEADER**

**Jeroen De Flander**

the performance factory | *it's all about  
strategy execution*

## - Strategy Execution Heroes -

Business strategy implementation and strategic management demystified:  
a practical performance management guidebook for the successful leader

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Dedicated to my parents,  
*Marie and Wilfried,*  
my heroes



## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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Jeroen De Flander is a seasoned international Strategy Execution expert, top executive coach, seminar leader and highly regarded keynote speaker.

Jeroen has helped more than 15,000 managers in 16 countries master the necessary execution skills.

He is co-founder of *the performance factory* – a leading research, training and advisory firm which is solely focused on helping individuals and organisations increase performance through best-in-class Strategy Execution.

For several years, he was the responsible manager worldwide of the Balanced Scorecard product line for Arthur D. Little – a leading strategy consulting firm.

The 50+ companies he has advised on various strategy execution topics include Atos Worldline, AXA, Base, Bridgestone, CEMEX, the Flemish and Belgian governments, GDFSuez, Honda, ING, Johnson & Johnson, Komatsu and Sony.

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To book Jeroen to speak at your next event or to run a strategy execution seminar for your company, please contact him through his website [www.jeroen-de-flander.com](http://www.jeroen-de-flander.com).

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## ABOUT THE EXPERTS

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Strategy Execution is a vast domain that required choices to be made about topics covered. It also meant that one person alone could not have the expertise to cover all the topics. The following five experts have therefore contributed to this book.

Each of them helped me in the writing process by delivering content and challenging ideas. A summary of their experience and credentials follows.

***Dr. Peter Scott-Morgan*** is acknowledged as the foremost authority on communication and change behaviour. Combining complementary expertise in management science, sociology and information technology, he is the best-selling author of six non-fiction books. He has taught MBA courses at the London Business School, the Rotterdam School of Management and the ADL School of Management at Boston College. He is in constant demand as a speaker, consultant and teacher and has given over 1000 speeches, presentations and workshops around the world. His book *Unwritten Rules of the Game* was voted one of the top 25 business books in the year of its release.

***Sir John Whitmore*** is regarded as the world's best coach and founder of performance coaching. He has written five books on sport, leadership and coaching, of which *Coaching for Performance* is the best known having sold 500,000 copies in 17 languages. Honoured with the President's Award by the International Coach Federation (ICF), rated the number one business coach by *The Independent* newspaper and as having had the most impact on the coaching profession by the UK Association of Coaching, John is one of the leading figures in the international coaching community. He is a pre-eminent thinker in leadership and organisational change and works globally with leading multinational corporations to establish coaching management cultures and leadership programmes.



**Volker Voigt** is an acknowledged initiative management expert. He is a well-known speaker on project events and co-author of a number of books on the subject. For several years, Volker was Arthur D. Little's responsible manager for developing and applying project management methodologies in large and complex client projects. In 2000, he founded Cataligent, a leading provider of web-based enterprise project systems which today has 5,000+ users worldwide. Some of the companies that use the software are Lufthansa, Adidas, Vattenfall, Thomas Cook, Bertelsmann, US Postal Services, AGCO and Korea Thrunet.

**Vincent Lion** is an expert in strategy, innovation and technology management with a focus on the related competences' development. He teaches MBA courses at Solvay Business School, United Business Institutes and the University of Novi Sad in Serbia. As a management consultant, he helps leading companies like KBC, GDFSuez and Belgacom design and implement ambitious strategies and build the supporting competence centres. His workshops on developing strategic, innovative and technological competences are widely recognised as achieving exceptional business results.

**Koen Schreurs** is a Strategy Execution expert who specialises in aligning individual performance to the business strategy. As former Managing Director of GITP Belgium – a leading HR consultancy – he has an in-depth knowledge of individual performance management. His background as management consultant within the Arthur D. Little Strategy & Organisation division has provided him with the expertise and experience to forge the links between individual and organisational performance. He is co-founder of *the performance factory* where he heads up all surveys and benchmarking projects and related R&D efforts. His professional clients include Allianz, AstraZeneca, Bayer, Bridgestone, Brussels Airport, DeltaLloyd, GDFSuez, ING and the Belgian Government.



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# Superman on a 'Strategy Rescue' mission

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**S**uperman, otherwise known as Clark Kent, flies into the office. Instead of his usual red cape, he has decided to wear his three-piece grey pinstriped Armani suit. *"It just seems more appropriate"* he had thought while getting ready that morning.

Superman is reacting to a 'failing strategy' distress call from 53-year-old Mike, CEO of Magnatexx, a large pharmaceutical company. It was the 267th call he had received in the two weeks since starting his new sideline – the 'strategy rescue' programme.

When he arrives at Magnatexx, Superman immediately identifies the execution issues and takes over the role of all managers. In no time at all, Magnatexx obtains the desired competitive advantage and performance starts to peak. And everyone lives happily ever after.

This story seems too good to be true. And it is.

But you don't have to be able to fly like Superman, scale walls like Batman or become green and super strong like the Incredible Hulk to turn a great strategy into great performance.

*You need performance-driven managers who master Strategy Execution.*

Strategy Execution is no longer ‘the gap nobody knows’, the title of the first chapter of the best-seller *Execution*. Thanks to the authors Bossidy and Charan, Strategy Execution pioneers Kaplan and Norton, several leading articles in respected business magazines such as *The Harvard Business Review* and a host of research, organisations have become very aware that much great strategy is lost before it’s turned into performance mainly as a result of poor execution skills.

The performance gap is known. And it’s time for companies to close it.

This book will help you get the job done. *Strategy Execution Heroes* will help you to:

1. Approach Strategy Execution from a manager’s perspective.
2. Align individual and organisational performance in a simple, easy-to-communicate, sexy Strategy Execution framework.
3. Communicate your strategy effectively.
4. Set great objectives for yourself and your team members.
5. Coach others through the implementation maze.
6. Simplify your Strategy Execution process.
7. Select, manage and deliver your strategic initiatives.
8. Set up a development platform to boost the execution skills of others in the organisation.
9. Turn Strategy Execution into a competitive advantage.

In short, this book will help you get the execution job done. But don’t expect complex theories or fancy words. *Strategy Execution Heroes* gets right to the point and won’t waste your time. It will:

- *Boost your learning* with 250+ practical tips revealed by senior executives from BT, Coca-Cola, Lockheed Martin, eBay and many others.
- *Inspire your thinking* with useful insights from top experts such as Sir John Whitmore, Dr Peter Scott-Morgan and Prof Vincent Lion.
- *Put your action plan on the right track* with 27 valuable downloads.

So whether you are a future manager preparing for the challenge, a manager in the field or an experienced senior executive, get ready to boost your execution skills. Become a Strategy Execution hero and turn your great strategy into great performance.



# Start your journey

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**D**ear Reader,  
You are about to start discovering *Strategy Execution Heroes*. To help you get the most out of this experience, I have added some comments and suggestions.

**1. *Download supporting material.*** This book contains more than 250 tips, which you will find on almost every page. And you can download even more supporting material including self-assessments, examples, extra tips, reading lists and workshop guidelines.

For your convenience, I've added an overview of all 27 available downloads on page 9. The downloads themselves can be found at [www.strategy-execution-heroes.com/downloads](http://www.strategy-execution-heroes.com/downloads). Your access code is the fourth word on page 126.

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Where you see a box such as this one with a ↓ in front, supporting material is available at the website [www.strategy-execution-heroes.com/downloads](http://www.strategy-execution-heroes.com/downloads)

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**2. *Be inspired by stories from the field.*** Six senior executives from different fields and industries share their visions of Strategy Execution.

At the end of each of the chapters in Parts 2 and 3, one of them gives you tried and tested insights to inspire your actions.

There's a short overview of all the senior executives involved on page 8, along with the page references.

3. ***Follow your 'learning' logic.*** The first two chapters provide a general overview. You don't necessarily need to read them *per se* to understand the others – although, of course, they will help if you're fairly new to Strategy Execution. So feel free to start reading from the beginning, or alternatively with the chapter that intrigues you the most. It's up to you.
4. ***Remember the 80/20 rule.*** This book is loaded with ideas and suggestions. But not all of them will have the same impact when executed.  
Be selective. Pick your battles. And direct 80 percent of your energy to those 20 percent of the ideas that you think will boost progress. Most of the key sections have self-assessment downloads to help you direct your focus.
5. ***Study alone, with a coach or a whole group.*** Embark on a self-study course, involve your coach or discuss your findings with colleagues. I have indicated where team discussions would be appropriate. For some of them, workshop templates are available for download.
6. ***Embark on a learning journey.*** I'm delighted that you are ready to get reading because it means you are interested in Strategy Execution, my passion. I'm certain that the book will help you after the first read, but in order to maximise your learning experience, you should read it more than once. Embark on a learning journey and keep your copy close to hand as your Strategy Execution travel guide.
7. ***Keep up-to-date and exchange ideas.*** Strategy Execution is a vast area in constant evolution. Stay up-to-date with the latest developments, collect more tips or exchange ideas with fellow Strategy Execution devotees. There are a number of ways to keep yourself on top of the game:



- *Join Linked SE (Strategy Execution group)*, the official Strategy Execution group on LinkedIn, the premier professional network on the internet. Go to [www.linkedin.com/groupRegistration?gid=2325487](http://www.linkedin.com/groupRegistration?gid=2325487).
- *Subscribe to the performance factory newsletter*. Go to [www.the-performance-factory.com/register](http://www.the-performance-factory.com/register).
- *Write to me*. I would be very interested in your Strategy Execution tips and suggestions. You can drop me an email at [jeroen@jeroen-de-flander.com](mailto:jeroen@jeroen-de-flander.com) or use the contact page on my website [www.jeroen-de-flander.com/contact](http://www.jeroen-de-flander.com/contact).

Jeroen De Flander  
[www.jeroen-de-flander.com](http://www.jeroen-de-flander.com)

## **Senior executives sharing their views of Strategy Execution – an overview**

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## Overview of the 27 available downloads

1. *The Strategy Execution Barometer®: research report* – a summary.
2. Link your objectives with the next level up – a template.
3. Interesting leadership resources.
4. How to give effective feedback – tips.
5. *The Pyramid Principle* – training module.
6. A great communication model – training module.
7. Great books on writing – a list.
8. Improve your podium performance – tips.
9. Evaluate the quality of your strategy communication – a checklist.
10. Build a professional strategy communication plan – ‘how to’ guide.
11. High-quality coaching questions – examples.
12. Select the right coaching tips – a checklist.
13. Score your Strategy Execution process – self-assessment.
14. Boost your Strategy Execution process – guideline overview.
15. Boost your Strategy Execution process – workshop format.
16. Write a great performance story – an example.
17. Write a great performance story – workshop format.
18. Best-in-class initiative management – a checklist.
19. Best-in-class initiative management – workshop format.
20. Interesting project management resources.
21. How to set up a strategy office – tips.
22. Score your management development mistakes – self-assessment.
23. Create a solid development platform – a checklist.
24. Create a solid development platform – workshop format.
25. Define your future capabilities – workshop format.
26. High-quality competency dictionary – an example.
27. A Strategy Execution master class – agenda.

Downloads available at [www.strategy-execution-heroes.com/downloads](http://www.strategy-execution-heroes.com/downloads)



GET TO  
KNOW  
THE 8



# A new mathematical enigma: performance $0+0=8$

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*“However beautiful the strategy,  
you should occasionally look at the results”*  
– Sir Winston Churchill

*“Don’t measure your performance by what you have  
accomplished, but by what you should have  
accomplished within your capabilities”*

*“Strategy Execution is all about realising the full  
potential of your strategy – and not limiting yourself  
to only 50, 60 or 70 percent”*

**I**magine you run a removals company. And every day, of the 100 boxes you move for your customers, you lose 60 of them. How long do you think you would stay in business?

Or imagine you are a tennis player. And every match you play, you hit every other ball into the net. How many matches do you think you would win?

According to research published in *The Harvard Business Review*, “Companies realise only 40-to-60 percent of their strategies’ potential

*value*". The rest is lost on the way or never makes it over the net.

The numbers don't look great – and over the last 10 years many companies have started to realise that it takes much more than a great strategy to be number one in their industry. You need to turn that great strategy into great performance.

That's where Strategy Execution comes in. It bridges the gap between brilliant strategies and superior performance. Led by Balanced Scorecard inventors Kaplan and Norton and best-selling authors Bossidy and Charan, Strategy Execution has become a fast-growing bleep on the radar screens of top executives.

But simply appearing on that radar is not enough to make it happen. Each company, large or small, needs to master crucial Strategy Execution skills.

In Chapter 1 we look at where companies lose performance and zoom in on how sound Strategy Execution can help.

## **How much potential performance are you losing?**

So Strategy Execution is no longer the black hole that drains performance. Organisations today are aware of the performance lost through bad Strategy Execution.

But in order to take the next step – to close that gap – organisations need a more detailed view on *exactly* where they are losing performance.

Knowing that your organisation loses between 40 and 60 percent of its strategic potential on the execution highway between the city 'strategy' and the city 'performance', is an interesting fact but doesn't really help solve your problem.

Nine years ago, I started collecting detailed Strategy Execution data as I was fascinated by the implementation black box that was costing organisations millions.

Today, the database managed by *the performance factory*, is probably one of the largest Strategy Execution databases in the world, with data from more than 1100 companies, 29 industries and 36 countries.

On the site [www.the-performance-factory.com](http://www.the-performance-factory.com) you can download a free



summary or buy the Strategy Execution Barometer®, a detailed benchmark report that will compare your implementation strengths and weaknesses with your industry peers and the overall market.

Here are some interesting facts. Of all respondents:

- 15 percent believes that the strategy is the wrong one for their company.
- About one-in-three – 30 percent – receives no information on how to execute the strategy.
- Only 61 percent is convinced that the strategic initiatives are staffed with the right people.
- As few as 27 percent believes that the strategic initiatives are being managed correctly.
- 27 percent doesn't receive any individual feedback.
- 17 percent indicates that performance isn't monitored.
- 38 percent indicates that poor performers don't face any consequences.
- 18 percent is unable to explain how to translate the strategy or set individual objectives.
- 27 percent receives no training on essential management skills.
- Only 57 percent do not question the objectivity of appraisals.

In short: the results indicate that initiative management is the weakest link in the execution chain, followed by strategy communication and skills development. The complexity of the Strategy Execution process comes in fourth place.



**Performance download 1. *The Strategy Execution Barometer®: research report* – a summary.**

## What's in a name? Strategy Execution defined

Strategy Execution can be defined as 'all the actions necessary to turn your strategy into success'. But this short definition won't help you very much in getting a better grasp of the discipline.

So let's go beyond this single-line explanation and take a broader look at Strategy Execution. Here are 12 insights:

1. ***Strategy Execution is a vast area with blurred borders.*** It includes several processes – from budgeting to evaluating individual objectives, and involves all functional domains.
2. ***Strategy Execution is a discipline of its own.*** Making strategy work isn't the same as strategy making. It's a different game with its own rules, potential pitfalls and best practices. Four important differentiators are:
  - *It involves everyone.* From the CEO to the blue-collar worker, everyone is involved in executing the strategy. Their roles might be different, but all individuals contribute to the organisation's execution effort.
  - *It takes much longer.* You can build a strategy in a few weeks (or months at the most) but the execution can take several years. It's a sprint versus a marathon.
  - *It demands short- and long-term thinking.* While executing, you need to manage your long-term implementation plan *and* worry about the nitty-gritty actions you will take tomorrow.
  - *It requires a specific skill set.* A different game demands different skills. The most important strategy skill by far is analytical thinking, whereas executioners particularly benefit from strong objective setting and people skills such as communication and coaching.

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*“Execution is a specific set of behaviours and techniques that companies need to master in order to have competitive advantage. It's a discipline of its own”*

– Ram Charan and Larry Bossidy, *Execution*

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3. ***Great Strategy Execution requires a great strategy.*** Even if Strategy Execution differs greatly from strategy building, it cannot

exist without it. In fact, a great execution can never compensate for a poor strategy.

4. ***Strategy Execution requires your attention from the start.*** And the start is the strategy formulation phase. Execution isn't something you worry about after you have already finished crafting your strategy.

You need to think about the implementation challenges *at the same time* you design your strategy.

Here's an overview of the five most important implementation hazards to think about while developing your strategy. To give you a head start, I have included for each one, the key question(s) to ask during the strategy design phase:

- ***The existing culture.*** Strategies that demand a large cultural shift are doomed to failure as cultural change is very hard to accomplish. Ask yourself: 'How big is the culture change needed in order to execute the new strategy?' and 'Is the required change realistic?'
- ***The existing power structures.*** Each organisation has its own power structures, invisible at the surface and part of the 'unwritten rules' within the organisation. But they *do* exist. And they *will* influence your execution capabilities. Pose the following questions: 'What are the current power structures in our organisation?' and 'How will they impact the implementation of the strategy we are developing?'
- ***The ability to change.*** Each strategy will demand a change effort. And I can tell you the effort is always bigger than you anticipate at the start. Ask yourself: 'How much change can our organisation handle?'
- ***The maturity of the execution process.*** Once finished, the strategy will use the existing execution processes in your organisation. Upgrading is possible but takes time. So ask yourself: 'What's the current maturity of our execution capabilities?', 'Is there a need to upgrade?' and 'How long will the upgrade realistically take to accomplish?'
- ***The maturity of the Strategy Execution skills.*** Related to previous. Processes need skilled people to operate them. The questions

to ask: ‘What’s the current maturity of the manager’s execution skills?’, ‘Is there a need to upgrade?’ and ‘How long will the upgrade realistically take to accomplish?’.

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*“Culture eats strategy for lunch, every day”*

– Dick Clark, CEO, Merck

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5. ***Strategy Execution has a strong timing sequence.*** You don’t do everything at the same time. One thing happens before the other, and the order is important.
6. ***Strategy Execution requests a seamless integration between organisational and individual performance.*** You can look at performance from either an organisational or an individual perspective. But in order to realise your strategy, a connection between both is crucial. Most will agree with this statement, but few will actually make it happen.

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*“Building a visionary company requires one percent vision  
and 99 percent alignment”*

– Jim Collins and Jerry Porras, *Built to Last*

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7. ***Strategy Execution demands clear responsibilities.*** Strategy Execution takes place across different organisational levels. Depending on the size of the company, these include the overall company level, one or more intermediate levels – usually called division, department or team – and the individual level.

In large organisations, you can have up to 10 different parties involved, including corporate functions, functional lines, regional structures and countries. In addition, within each of these structures, responsibilities are often dispersed among the departments of human resources, finance and strategy and the various leadership teams.

Pretty easy to lose some of your strategy in this structure, wouldn't you say?

So in order to make it work, you need to define clear responsibilities for all parties involved.

**8. *Strategy Execution requires horizontal alignment.*** Building on the previous point, I'd like to stress the importance of a strong horizontal collaboration between business and support departments. Their relationship should go beyond the annual budget and monthly operational meetings.

**9. *Strategy Execution needs heroes.*** Managers are the most important players in the execution contest. In fact, strategy remains a paper exercise without managers taking the right actions and fulfilling their roles. They contribute content, are the links between organisational levels, and act as performance role models.

And this requires the right attitude. Execution isn't something *others* should worry about. Each manager should:

- Acknowledge the importance of Strategy Execution.
- Understand what Strategy Execution is all about.
- See execution as an essential part of being a leader.
- Know how to maximise their crucial role in the whole process.
- Develop the necessary Strategy Execution skills.

On top of that, senior managers need to put the necessary processes in place to ensure that all managers in the organisation become execution heroes. This is a challenge in itself.

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*“Strategy Execution isn't something other people should worry about while you are doing something far more important”*

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**10. *Strategy Execution asks for measurement.*** In many organisations, Strategy Execution is still a black box. You throw your strategy in one end and performance comes out the other end. But nobody really knows what did the trick. It's impossible to say what worked

and what didn't. Even worse, companies change things for the worse because they don't know the key elements of their execution success.

So, as with all other business activities, organisations need to measure their performance. It's time to open the implementation box and see what's inside. Here's how:

- *Find the strong and weak points of your execution process.* If possible, compare them against your competitors. Evaluate the complete process or zoom in on one or two steps. Do the exercise for the organisation, one or more divisions, or start with only a small team.
- Once you have gained these insights, *focus your energy on those things that matter most* for the organisation. In other words, set priorities.
- *Don't forget to keep doing what you do well.* Once you've identified your strong points, make sure you keep them best-in-class.
- *Have a long-term perspective.* It takes time to build capabilities. Small organisations should count on 18 months to become best-in-class. For a large multinational, it can take up to three years to get there. Your measurement approach should take the long-term into account.
- *Set intermediate goals and measure your progress.* While you do want a long-term measurement perspective, you also want to define and track intermediate targets.

**11. Strategy Execution is a resident.** Constantly changing environments, customers, competitors and employees require Strategy Execution to be an ongoing process. It should be institutionalised within the organisation: a permanent activity – part of the organisation's culture and DNA – that is driven with persistence and discipline.

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*“After a business implements a strategy, competitors will react, and the firm's strategy will need to adapt to meet the new challenges. There is no stopping point and no final battle. The competitive cycle continues on perpetually. Produce and compete or perish”*  
– Thomas Timings Holme

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**12. Strategy Execution is on its way to maturity.** Robert Kaplan and David Norton started a new management revolution in 1992 with the introduction of their Balanced Scorecard concept.

Originally launched as a new way of measuring strategy, taking into account other measures rather than merely the financial ones, the Balanced Scorecard quickly became the instrument that made managers think harder about the implementation of their strategy.

And today, more than a decade later, Strategy Execution has grown out of its infancy and is on its way to maturity.

## **The 8 - a unique Strategy Execution framework**

Strategy Execution or performance management is a complex process. In fact, it's a mix of several processes – and the ideal process picture is different for each organisation.

But even with a different mix, each best-in-class performance management process should include some basic building blocks. Luckily, many of them are readily available within most organisations. They include:

- Tried and tested approaches for reviewing a strategy.
- Strategy cascade tools, the Balanced Scorecard being the best-known.
- Techniques to structure, execute and monitor strategic projects.
- A proven approach to set, monitor and evaluate individual objectives.

What is lacking however, is a simple framework to integrate and align all of these different building blocks.

And that's where the 8 comes in. It combines the most important building blocks into a coherent image.

The 8 doesn't cover all of the ins and outs of the Strategy Execution process. It's not supposed to. It's not a rigid step-by-step instruction. But it does provide a necessary, simple framework for Strategy Execution.

You can make your execution framework more complex if you prefer. For the organisational cycle in particular, there are some sophisticated models around. Kaplan and Norton describe one in their latest book *The Execution Premium*. You can find a second one that also includes organisational structure impacts in *Making Strategy Work* by Hrebiniak.

While I like the insights that these conceptual models provide, their complexity makes them unsuitable as a day-to-day Strategy Execution framework for the whole organisation. I believe a Strategy Execution framework for all managers and staff needs to be simple, highly recognisable and sexy. (Think like a marketer and make it stick.)

I'm aware that you will lose some of the nuances, but that's a choice you need to make. Besides, it doesn't mean you have to over-simplify your Strategy Execution process. You can use the 8 for communication purposes and keep a more detailed version to be known only by those who have to organise the process.

Not convinced yet?

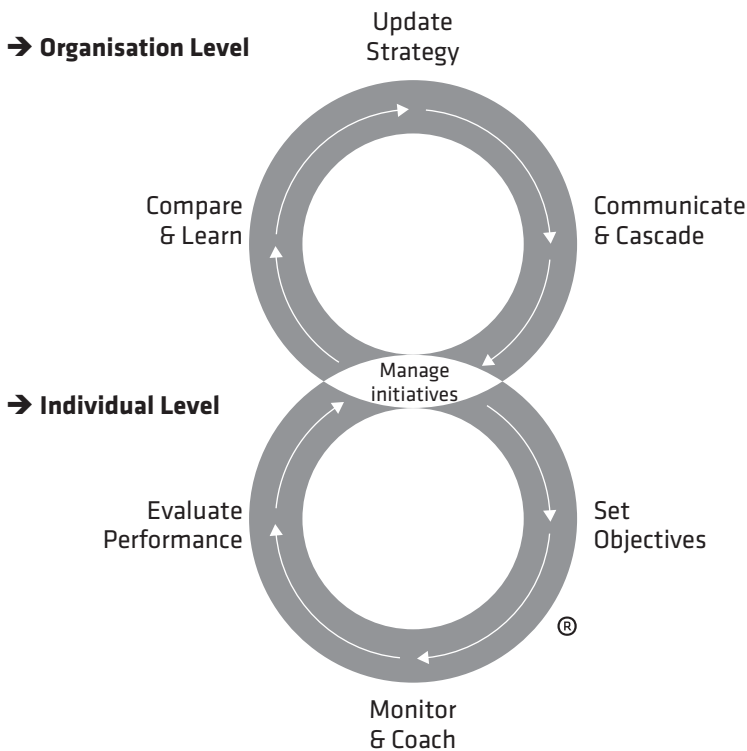
Here are two 'content' arguments:

1. The 8 shows the importance of aligning individual and organisational performance, one of the most important things you can do to improve your success rate.
2. The 8 gives initiative management the attention it deserves (read 'needs'). International research from *the performance factory* shows that initiative management is the single most important execution problem that companies face. In other words, it's the place where most performance is lost.

So, if you look for a simple, highly recognisable Strategy Execution framework that emphasises the link between individual and organisational performance and gives initiative management the importance it deserves, go for the 8.



**Figure 1.** The 8, a unique Strategy Execution framework



## The 8 – crucial building blocks

Here is an overview of the different building blocks:

### *1. Review and update your strategy*

Your strategy is the long-term action plan designed to achieve your vision. Depending on the industry you are in, it maps the road your company should take for the next 3-to-10 years. It's designed to help you gain the competitive advantage over your industry peers.

On a regular basis, usually annually, a company needs (and wants) to update its strategy based on changes in its competitive environment and on the Strategy Execution feedback from the previous cycle.

The execution framework includes strategy updates as they take place on a regular, recurring basis at all levels of the organisation. It excludes the real strategy work, conducted only once every three-to-five years at the top of an organisation.

## ***2. Communicate***

As soon as your strategy (or strategy update) is finalised and approved by all stakeholders, you should focus on strategy communication. Transparent and easy-to-understand communication creates the necessary understanding and engagement for the new, adapted strategy.

It is essential to use all available communication platforms. One big strategy event and a single strategy email are not nearly enough. Use other meeting platforms, discussion groups, informal and formal encounters, performance management sessions, intranets, websites, screensavers, coffee rooms, noticeboards etc. to communicate the strategy. *You cannot over-communicate your vision and strategy!*

Pay attention to the quality of your strategy communication. Senior managers as strategy ambassadors, in particular, should be especially careful about how they communicate. In addition to the content itself, tone of voice and presentation skills are essential elements in transferring content and creating the necessary enthusiasm for others to pass on the message. Make sure you don't kill your strategy with poor-quality, uninspiring communication.

## ***3. Cascade***

When you cascade your company's strategy, you break down the objectives into smaller chunks for the next organisational level. The process stops at the smallest unit level – often teams. In the end, the size of your organisation will define the size of the cascade.

It is crucial to achieve *macro alignment* between all the objectives – horizontally and vertically – in your organisation. You can achieve better alignment by aiming for MECE – Mutually Exclusive and Collectively Exhaustive. This simply means that everything from the level below (strategy, initiatives, objectives, etc.) should add up exactly to the level above, without any overlaps. This may sound logical

and easy, but practice shows that many companies have a difficult time linking levels correctly.



**Performance tip.** One of the reasons companies find it hard to get the macro alignment right is the complex matrix of responsibilities. Strategy Execution accountabilities are often blurred and spread across an organisation.

In large organisations, you can have up to 10 different parties involved, including corporate functions, functional lines, regional structures and countries. In addition, within each of these structures, responsibilities are often dispersed among human resources, finance, the strategy department and the various leadership teams.

When your macro alignment doesn't seem to be working, start by taking a look at the complexity of the Strategy Execution accountabilities and reduce where possible.

On a *micro level*, you need to balance your objectives across perspectives. The four traditional perspectives are: financial, customer, internal processes and people. But you can always add other dimensions as appropriate. The Balanced Scorecard is the best-known method.

In addition to the balancing act on the macro and micro levels, you need to select the right indicators – often called Key Performance Indicators or KPIs – to track the objectives and define appropriate targets.

#### ***4. Compare and learn***

Your strategy is a hypothesis. It's your best estimate of the route to success... but it's still an estimation.

It's crucial to take some time at the end of a cycle to go back and check your hypothesis, to compare your initial strategic assumptions with what you have learnt from the reality of the Strategy Execution cycle that is being completed. By doing this, you will put yourself in the forefront – research shows that only 15 percent of companies take this step.

But at the same time, make sure that you don't just look at your strategy: study your Strategy Execution capability as well. All too often, we see companies jumping automatically to change their strategy because they did not reach their projected performance. But, upon examination, there is nothing wrong with their strategy. The problem is the execution. So don't forget to challenge your implementation capabilities as well!

This 'compare and learn' step will help you verify your hypothesis (read 'review your strategy'), update your strategy, and fine-tune your execution efforts and capabilities accordingly.

### ***5. Manage initiatives***

Initiative management is the activity in which your dreams run up against reality, where your strategy meets operations and where resources are added to the strategy formula. It's one of the most difficult Strategy Execution steps and therefore the point where implementation often goes wrong.

Initiative management is all about selecting, prioritising and executing the right strategic initiatives: those actions that will lead to the realisation of your strategy.

### ***6. Set objectives***

Setting individual objectives is one of the best things you can do to improve performance – yours, your team's or even that of an entire organisation.

The positive impact of goal setting is one of the most widely researched and scientifically validated aspects of today's organisational science. Two key researchers of goal setting and task motivation theory are Edwin Locke from the University of Maryland and Gary Latham from Toronto University.

Link all individual objectives with the overall strategy. If you don't, you might end up with great individual objectives ... but of no use to the organisation!

Also, focus on the way you secure agreement on the objectives. It's the quality of the objectives – including the link with the overall company strategy – *and* the acceptance of these objectives that will make your individual objective setting a success.

### **7. Monitor and coach**

Regular coaching motivates people and dramatically increases their chances of success. It also simplifies the final performance evaluation. In fact, regular coaching is far more important than the formal review meeting somewhere around the middle of the year.

Providing feedback in the right way – a key coaching skill – is a crucial step in boosting performance.

Performance coaching is a relatively new, but rapidly growing, knowledge field. The leading authority is Sir John Whitmore, author of *Coaching for Performance* and sparring partner for Chapter 5 on coaching.

### **8. Evaluate performance**

Most organisations conduct a formal performance evaluation at the end of the individual performance management cycle. Ideally, the evaluation should answer the question: 'Are the individual performance objectives achieved?'. Be sure you make an honest assessment. Several techniques can help you.

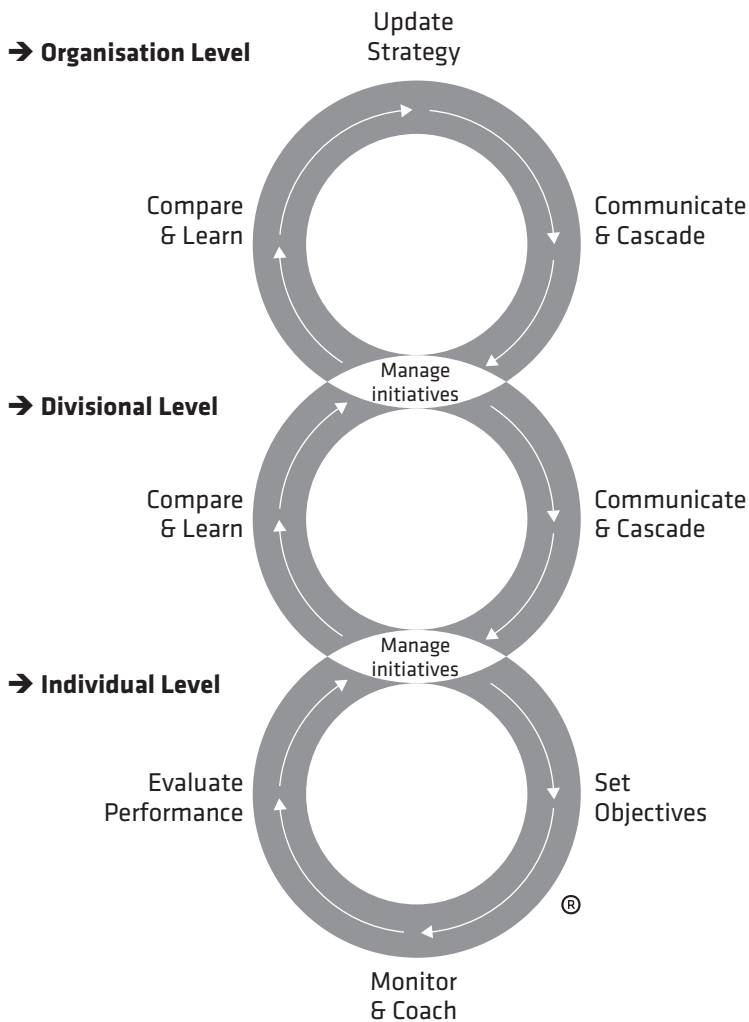
Although it's important to link performance to remuneration, performance evaluation should be a separate process.

## The extended 8

Large organisations need several steps to cascade the overall strategy to the individual level. The cascade runs down through business units, functional lines, departments and teams.

For communication purposes, it helps to change the visual. Here's an example:

**Figure 2.** The extended 8, an example



## **Strategy Execution: your next competitive advantage?**

In his best-seller, Jim Collins concludes that strategy doesn't separate the good from the great, execution does. Research from Kaplan and Norton indicates that companies with a formal Strategy Execution system have a two-to-three times better chance of success as those who don't have such a system.

Strategy Execution is a new, emerging competitive battlefield that starts to get more and more attention.

Are you a player in the execution game? Or merely sitting on the sidelines?

Don't limit yourself to your strategy alone to set yourself apart in your industry. Bring your Strategy Execution capabilities into play and turn them into your next competitive advantage.

## PERFORMANCE TAKEAWAYS

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- Sound Strategy Execution bridges the gap between a great strategy and great performance.
- Strategy Execution is a vast area with blurred borders; a discipline of its own, with its proper skill set.
- In comparison to strategy making, it involves everyone, takes much longer and requires a short- and long-term focus.
- Strategy Execution requires a great strategy to start from and lots of management attention during the strategy formulation phase. A company's culture, power structure, ability to cope with change, quality of the execution process and skills managers, all influence the ability to execute any chosen strategy.
- A Strategy Execution framework orients managers to take the right actions at the right time.
- The 8 is a simple, visually strong and easy-to-communicate Strategy Execution framework that combines individual and organisational performance.
- Thanks to pioneers like Kaplan and Norton and Charan and Bossidy, Strategy Execution isn't the black hole it used to be. Today, most organisations are aware that poor Strategy Execution creates a performance gap.
- So the key question is not *if* there is a gap but *how* it will be closed.
- Unfortunately, due to the complexity of this challenge, companies continue to lose 40-to-60 percent of their strategic potential during the execution phase.
- Organisations need to start by understanding in more detail where the Strategy Execution process leaks performance. A benchmark can help tremendously.
- Strategy Execution offers new chances for creating competitive advantage. Make sure you are the first in line to fully exploit the opportunity.



*And the answer is? 'A new mathematical enigma: performance  
0+0=8'.*

The title refers to individual and organisational performance alignment. Alone, each cycle doesn't offer the organisation any value. Connected, they do.

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*"In a 4x100-metre relay race, one runner starts before the other,  
but in the end it's the sum of the four runners that  
determines performance"*

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# Challenge 3: Coach: Become a 3% member

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*“The best time to make up your mind about people is never”*

– Katharine Hepburn in *The Philadelphia Story*

**I**n 1999, a tall man walks into a room packed with people. He asks ‘Who wants to be coached?’. Many glance surprisedly at each other. This isn’t what they had expected.

After a few seconds of complete silence, people respond by raising their hands. Then the tall man starts asking a series of questions for each person to answer in silence on paper.

The session took 40 minutes and, at the end, more than 75 percent of the people in the room answered ‘yes’ to the question ‘Have you been coached?’.

I was in the room that day and... one of that 75 percent. From that moment on, I became a coaching adept. Our coach, the tall man, was David Hemery, John’s colleague and the 1968 Olympics 400-metre hurdles gold medallist. If you aren’t a coaching fan yet, I hope you will be after reading this chapter.

Strategy Execution is made up of many, MANY individual execution efforts – an infinite to-do list taken up by different people at different times.

Performance coaching helps this process by creating the necessary commitment with the individuals involved to move these actions forwards. In other words, coaching creates engagement to get things done.

This chapter provides a clear overview of the key elements of coaching and gives proven tips to upgrade your coaching skills. It will also provide you with ideas on how coaching can benefit the organisation.

## **What every performance-oriented manager should know about coaching**

- Coaching is a relatively new field. Although Socrates launched some of the basic principles of modern coaching some 2000 years ago, it has only become well-known over the last two decades.
- In these last 20 years, coaching has had a meteoric rise in popularity. Eighty percent of UK organisations are investing in one or more forms of coaching and the International Coaching Federation is attracting record numbers each month.
- To this day, there is no single agreed upon definition for coaching. Some are straightforward, others are fancy.
- My favourite coaching definition is by Tim Gallwey, John's former business partner and author of several best-selling books on coaching in sport. It goes like this: *“Coaching is unlocking a person's potential to maximise their own performance. It's helping them to learn rather than teaching them”*.
- Be careful not to mix performance coaching with counselling. Coaching is work-related, proactive and focused on conscious or just below the surface things. Counselling is a whole different ball game. It's non-work-related, rather reactive and concerned with the core beliefs of an individual. You can do more harm than good by mixing them up.

In his article *The Very Real Dangers of Executive Coaching* (*Harvard Business Review*), Steve Berglas pinpoints the risks – and unfortunately – the practice of unschooled coaches who enter into more psychotherapy issues with their coachee than they can competently handle.

Make sure you do not make the same mistake. If you suspect a work-related issue has deeper origins, call in a professional with the

necessary skills. If you are on the receiving end, make sure you have a profile that fits your needs.

- Coaching is all about unlocking future potential performance rather than evaluating and judging current performance. It's based on the belief that individuals want to and can do a good job. If, deep down, you don't believe this, coaching is probably not for you.
- Performance coaching is not so much about passing on individual performance objectives, but rather a technique to take away the barriers that prevent individuals from actually taking on and delivering against these objectives.
- Coaching is also a way of managing rather than a tool to use in a variety of situations such as planning, delegation or problem solving. It's a different way of viewing people – a far more optimistic way than most of us are accustomed to – and results in a different way of treating them.
- There are many coaching methods. The good ones will help you as a coach to facilitate learning rather than to direct it. Questioning techniques and active listening are your primary means to do this.
- Everybody can become a coach. It's a skill that requires only time and effort to develop. It's probably harder to give up instructing than it is to learn to coach.
- Most companies today invest in coaching to improve individual performance. But more and more companies realise there is so much more to gain if they can harvest the individual benefits to improve the overall company performance.
- There is no single ideal way of measuring the coaching ROI for companies – although many claim to have the best.

## **Grow Me: Coaching individuals with the best-known coaching model in the world**

There are dozens of coaching methods out there, some better than others. The good ones will help you as a coach to facilitate learning rather than to direct it.

GROW – originally conceived by Graham Alexander and further perfected by John – is probably the best-known and appreciated coaching technique in the world.

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**The GROW model**

G – Goal setting

R – Reality

O – Options

W – Will

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Unlike other techniques, it is much more than a toolbox linked to an acronym. It's an approach, a philosophy which helps you create the right context to help individuals transform their potential into peak performance. And I believe that's exactly the reason for its success.

It's my objective here to outline the main points. If you would like to know more, you should get yourself a copy of John's book *Coaching for Performance*.

**The essence of good coaching: create awareness and build responsibility with the performer**

You can achieve limited success by diligently following the GROW road map explained in the book. But without subscribing to the underlying coaching philosophy however, you will fall short of what is truly possible.

The essence of good coaching is all about you, as a coach, helping your coachee to increase awareness and take responsibility. Of course, the process is important since it brings structure to the conversation, but it should not be the cornerstone of your coaching. Creating awareness and responsibility are.

Frame your coaching in the context of awareness and responsibility and it will improve drastically.

**Awareness: collecting high-quality relevant input**

Our minds can only process a limited amount of information at the same time. We have a mechanism in our brain that filters all incoming

signals and only those considered important come through. It would be impossible to function without it.

This selection process takes place automatically without any conscious effort. You don't have to do anything. You can however feed your brain better input and influence the importance given to certain inputs.

By being aware – or in other words by tuning your senses and engaging your brain – you are in control of the quality of input that your brain receives and the importance it is given.

### **So how does this relate to coaching?**

Performance coaching aims to increase performance – the output. The output increases when there's better input. And you improve input through awareness.

So if you can help your coachee to increase awareness and thereby help to collect better input, you dramatically increase the possibility of increased output. (I will talk about responsibility – the other crucial element needed for success – in the next section).

As a coach, you cannot tell someone to become aware. It's up to the coachee to direct and engage his brain through focus. By asking the right questions however, you can facilitate this process.

Let's do a little exercise on input quality and awareness to make it more concrete. I will be your coach.

Here is your assignment. I would like you to have an animated, mutually interesting discussion with someone about coaching and Strategy Execution within the next three days.

To do this, you will need to identify the person and have a conversation about the coaching. The better you manage the input – in this case the choice of the individual and the content preparation – the more chance you will have of reaching the objective – that is, having a mutually interesting discussion with someone about coaching and Strategy Execution in the next three days.

I could tell you to select the best possible candidate or to read this chapter twice in order to get a good grasp of what coaching is all about... but I will not raise your input quality and therefore will have no impact on your success.

In order to help you, I need to increase your awareness.

Let's see if I can do that by asking you some questions. It would be great if you could write the answers down.

- Who would be the five people that could be interested in knowing more about coaching?
- On what page do you find information about coaching that gets you excited?
- What would be the best way to also get one or more of the five people you identified excited?
- How do you find out what they would like to learn about coaching?
- What other chapters could help you prepare?
- In what way can you use this book to get the conversation about coaching started?

These questions make you think and automatically engage you in the exercise. If you have taken the time to reflect on each question, you should have a much better idea as to who to talk to (one crucial input element) as well as some ideas on what you want to talk about (the other crucial input element).

So by asking you these questions, I have hopefully enabled you to raise your awareness and facilitated the collection of better quality input for the assignment.

One final remark: besides awareness, there's also self-awareness. If awareness is 'knowing what is happening around you', self-awareness is 'knowing what you are experiencing at this moment'. It's another brain and body process that you have at your disposal to collect valuable input.



**Performance tip.** You might also want to explore self-coaching. Sport activities are a great place to start. If you are into tennis, skiing or golf, you could get yourself one of the series of Tim Gallwey books, *The Inner Game of...*

It's great and fun to read.

I've improved my skiing tremendously and picked up new angles on coaching at the same time.



So what are you experiencing at the moment? Still thinking about the exercise? Enthusiastic to have those discussions? Hungry (one has to eat)? Curious to read on?

This auto-feedback – available for you at all times – helps you take better decisions.

So take a moment to evaluate the input signals from your brain and body, read on, continue to work on your assignment... or grab something to eat!

### **Responsibility: the performer's choice to take ownership**

Responsibility is the second important performance coaching concept. When you truly accept responsibility for your thoughts and actions, you will raise your commitment to them. And this inevitably leads to better performance.

Your performance will not improve when you are ordered or expected to be responsible – or even if you are given responsibility. You might do the job to avoid an implied threat or punishment but your performance is unlikely to be optimised.

So what do you require to create responsibility?

You need to have a choice. And with choice comes responsibility.

Let's return to your assignment. Imagine for one moment that the person you talk to doesn't react as enthusiastically as you had hoped. Who will you blame?

Me probably, as I asked you to take action. This illustrates where you currently see the responsibility lying. As long as you blame someone else, there is no real sense of ownership.

As a coach, by asking questions, I can help you with the reflection process but the final decision is up to you. It always is, even if that choice is to take no action.

So, to conclude, merely telling someone to be responsible for something does not make them feel responsible. That comes with choice. Offering choice is a fantastic trigger for responsibility.

So, it's up to you. Please decide if, and how, you want to take the assignment further. And if you choose to do so, please let me know the result. I would appreciate the feedback.

## **Ask the right questions, in the right order and... listen to the responses**

You know now that the best way to develop and maintain the ideal state of mind for performance is to build awareness and responsibility. They are the two key elements that your coaching should focus on.

Asking questions – rather than telling – is the best way to mentally engage your coachee. And as you are looking for the highest possible engagement from your coachee, asking questions therefore becomes your most important means of communication.

‘But what questions do I ask?’ might be the next question on your mind.

Well, your questions need to evoke awareness and responsibility with your coachee. Random questioning will not work.

Effective questioning can be broken down into two parts: asking the *right questions* and asking them in the *right order*. For the former, have a look at tips in the next section. Several of them will help you to ask the right questions. I will explain the questioning order below.



**Performance download 11.** High-quality coaching questions – examples.

But before I move on to the sequencing framework for questioning, let me point out one other crucial point.

### *Interact!*

Yes, that’s it. Interact. Coaching is like dancing the salsa: one person leads but the dance evolves due to the interaction between the two dancers. This makes each dance unique, even if you always dance with the same partner.

Coaching is the same. Each coaching session, whether formal or informal, is unique, even if the coachee is the same. It’s all about human interaction.

So, as a coach, you should be leading the overall conversation while expecting interaction. A good coach will follow the coachee’s chain of thought while also monitoring how that relates to the overall subject and coaching process.

A good coach switches off the autopilot. Be flexible and respond to the coachee's verbal and non-verbal communication of the coachee. The better you are engaged, the easier it is to react.

One way to engage yourself further is to listen to yourself. Not in a bizarre way, but by being self-aware.

In the back of your mind, ask yourself these questions: 'How am I reacting?', 'Am I judging?', 'Am I leaning forwards or backwards?' or 'Am I trying to find a solution myself?'. This questioning will keep your mind on the game and increase your awareness. It demands, as with all skills, some practice to do everything simultaneously. But in the end, it will make you a far better coach.

### **A sequencing framework for your questions – GROW**

The GROW coaching model offers the coach a simple, yet powerful, framework. It helps you to structure your interaction with your coachee.

When the coaching is formal, always start with the first stage, even when you cannot precisely define the goal. You can always return to the first stage when both of you have gained more insight from the other stages.

When the coaching is informal, it's usually a good idea to initially follow the coachee's lead by asking a few questions to trigger more detail, than move into the sequence.

The conversation can start at any one of the four stages of the GROW model. A coachee might begin by telling you about something s/he wants to achieve (Goal), a current problem (Reality), a new idea for improving things (Options) or by outlining an action plan (Will).

By itself, the particular order of questions will not help you to become a great coach. Each question should aim to increase your coachee's awareness and responsibility. It's the combination of context and sequence, along with lots of practice, that will make you a better coach.

### **G for Goal setting: define the short- and long-term goals**

The most important part of the first coaching phase is to define and agree upon one or more goals that the coachee wishes to achieve. Ideally, you

should establish a clear goal for the coaching session itself *and* a long-term performance goal.

Make sure that you and your coachee know what the objective of your conversation is, even when you are coaching informally. It's important to give value and direction to any discussion.

There's a whole chapter on individual objective setting, as it is not only a crucial stage for performance coaching but for Strategy Execution in general. Goal setting is one of the most researched elements in organisational science. I believe every good coach needs a solid understanding of the topic that goes beyond knowing what SMART stands for. For more information, see Chapter 3.

### **R for Reality: explore the current situation**

The most important criterion for examining the current situation is objectivity. Most people think they are objective but in reality they are not. Nobody is. Absolute objectivity doesn't exist. We can only have partial objectivity.

There are many things that can and will cloud your, and your coachee's objectivity including opinions, expectations, fear and prejudices. But the more we aim to be objective, the more we will be.

So it's your challenge to come as close as possible to reality, by-passing as many distortions as possible. As a coach, you should help your coachee to remove as many false assumptions as possible.

Explore the real nature of the problem by asking your coachee to describe their perceived current reality. This is an important step. Too often, people try to solve a problem without fully considering their starting point – and often they are missing some of the information they need to solve the problem effectively. All too often, as your coachee tells you about his current Reality, the solution starts to emerge.

### **O for Options: identify and evaluate different action strategies**

Once you and your coachee have explored the current reality, it's time to explore what is possible – meaning all the potential options, behaviour or decisions that could lead to the right solution.

Help your coachee to generate a long list. Your objective as a coach

during the Options stage should not be to find the right answer, but to help your coachee identify as many different ideas and solutions as possible. You don't want any obstacles like preferences, feasibility or need for completeness blocking the brainstorming process. At this point in the process, it's the ideation – the creative part – that provides the real value.

So, as strange as it may seem, focus on quantity rather than quality and feasibility. It's from this long inventory of creative possibilities that actions will be chosen during the next stage.

### **W for Will: what will you do by when?**

The purpose of this final phase is to transform a discussion into a decision, using the outcomes of the three previous coaching steps. Again, you will be guiding your coachee through a series of questions.

By examining the current Reality and exploring the Options, your coachee will now have a good idea of how s/he can achieve their goal. That's great, but without ownership to kick-start and drive future actions, it has no value. So you need to help your coachee to take responsibility and commit to action. As you want to maximise chances for success, you need to examine any potential obstacles, discuss ways of overcoming them, agree on the resources needed and the nature of further support.

So, the fourth phase demands that the coachee takes several decisions. Remember: the coachee takes the decision, even if that decision is to take no action at all. The coachee always maintains choice and ownership.

## **Thirty tips to become a better performance coach**

Now that you have learnt the art of questioning within the context of awareness and responsibility, here are some practical coaching tips to boost your coaching.

There is no one way of coaching all individuals in all situations. The list below is therefore incomplete and even has some contradictory tips. But they have all been tested and will be useful for you as a coach somewhere along your growth path.

You might want to read a section at a time, highlighting or taking notes as you go through them.

As your coaching evolves, so will your needs for further development. It might therefore be a good idea to run through this list every few months. You will see that, after some time, certain tips will hold no mystery for you anymore and others will attract your attention and reveal different nuances over time.



**Performance download 12.** Select the right coaching tips – a checklist.

1. **Ask open questions.** Asking closed questions (read ‘questions with yes/no answer’) prevents people from thinking. Asking open questions causes them to think for themselves.
2. **Make your coachee think.** Ask open questions that demand your coachee to focus more than usual to give accurate answers.  
Here’s an example: ‘Can you summarise in three headlines the added value of awareness and responsibility for your coaching activities in the future?’ rather than ‘What do you remember from the previous chapter?’.
3. **Don’t be judgemental.** Ask open questions that demand descriptive, non-judgemental answers. This way, you avoid causing self-criticism or damaging your coachee’s self-esteem.
4. **Resist the Why? question.** Asking why often implies criticism and triggers the coachee’s analytical thinking process. And analysis (thinking) and awareness (observing) are two different mental processes that are virtually impossible to combine to full effect.  
So aim for questions that start with words such as what, when, who, how much and how many.
5. **Keep it short.** Make your coaching questions clear and unambiguous. It helps when you limit yourself to one brief question. And listen for the response before launching a new question.
6. **Go on a trip.** A useful metaphor for the GROW model is the plan you might make for an important journey. First, you start with a map

that helps your coachee decide where they are going (their Goal) and establish where they currently are (their current Reality). Then you explore various ways (the Options) of making the journey. In the final step, establishing the Will, you ensure your coachee is committed to making the journey.

7. ***Go undercover.*** You don't need a formal coaching session to raise someone's awareness and responsibility. In fact, most coaching takes place unsolicited, with the coachee unaware of the process. The coached individual will simply think that you were being particularly helpful and considerate. This means that every conversation you have becomes a potential testing ground – a learning experience – to improve your coaching skills.
8. ***Ask for, and be open to feedback.*** Everybody learns, even the best coaches. So do ask for feedback from your coachee. Besides the positive learning experience for you, it has the extra benefit for improving the relationship. You increase the chances that your coachee will be more open to feedback when s/he is next on the receiving end as feedback is becoming part of the way you interact.
9. ***Set goals at the start with a self-evaluation form.*** I have mentioned before how important it is to begin the coaching process, formal or informal, with a clear definition of what your coachee would like to achieve. Using a self-evaluation form helps this process tremendously. There are many lists on the internet, or if you can't find one that suits your needs, build one. With as few as 10 questions you can offer your coachee your first added value.
10. ***Don't let the good guys get away.*** When coaching for performance, you aim to improve certain performance shortcomings of your coachee. But remember, it's not all bad all of the time. I'm sure you can find several good, even great, behaviours that your coachee possesses.  
But without the proper attention, s/he might not be aware of them, or even worse, adds them to the list of behaviours that need to change.

Make sure you identify those positive behaviours and help your coachee leverage them. It's a great way to stress the positive *and* help your coachee reach goals faster by building on existing strengths at the same time.

**11. *Coach only on first-hand data.*** When you know the coachee, you probably have more information available. You might, for example, have heard something from a colleague.

And I know it's tempting to use that information, but be aware that using it will often have a negative impact on your coaching relationship – whether the information is correct or not.

So stick to what you hear directly from your coachee.

**12. *Dig deeper.*** Ask your coachee open questions that will make him reflect. You should be able to detect it from their body language such as a pause before answering or a raising of the eyes.

When you ask questions solely from the normal, conscious level of awareness, you may be helping your coachee to structure his thoughts but you are not probing for deeper levels of awareness.

But when your coachee has to really dig deep to find the answer, new awareness is created. And once found, the input becomes conscious and readily available for the coachee to use.

**13. *Coach or tell?*** Whether or not to opt for a coaching approach depends on your situation at a given moment. If timing is the most important criterion in a specific situation, such as in a crisis, doing the job yourself or telling someone exactly what to do is probably your best option. If quality matters most, you will get the best results with coaching for high awareness and responsibility. If learning and retention are crucial, coaching is again your best choice.

**14. *Before you start, ask yourself what you want to get out of it.*** Don't confuse or fool yourself by pretending to coach when you are actually doing something different. If you want to teach, then go and teach. If you want to sell, then do so. But don't use coaching as a



means to something other than for what it is intended. It might give you the desired outcome in the short-term but will always backfire and create more problems at a later stage.

**15. Understand what makes people tick.** There is no need to complete a psychology degree before you can start coaching. But as coaching is all about human interaction, it's useful to have a basic understanding of what drives human behaviour.

**16. Use homework.** It gives your coachee more time to collect high-quality input and creates responsibility. And it will give you more coaching time and a solid starting base for your next session.

**17. Delegate coaching.** Evaluate carefully the amount of time you allocate to coaching. In some situations you can delegate particular coaching jobs to others.

**18. Coach the coach.** When delegating a coaching job to someone else, you are stimulating that individual to apply and build their own coaching skills. It further enriches your own coaching practice as you are approaching coaching from a new perspective.

Even after years of coaching, I still find it refreshing and rewarding to coach coaches.

**19. Don't feel guilty about providing input.** Just because you read somewhere that a coach should not delve into the content, doesn't mean that you can't provide some input. You just need to be careful with your timing and delivery method.

A good time to offer your knowledge or experience is when you recognise that the coachee has exhausted all possibilities during the Option phase – the 'O' from GROW.

Ask the following question: 'I have some more options and ideas. Maybe you would like to hear them?' You can style the question to your liking, but do make sure that it's clear to your coachee that you are momentarily stepping out of your facilitating role.

When providing your input, make it as short as possible. Try

to put it all into one phrase. You don't want to be talking for the next 10 minutes.

If you have more than one session and know the topic, you can write your tips on paper and get a feeling for the tone and directness of the message.

Remember to make it clear to your coachee that your input should be treated in the same way as his/her own options and ideas.

**20. When you don't know the answer, admit it.** A no-nonsense approach will help you build a relationship of trust. It is extremely damaging to that relationship to go back on something that you supported during a previous session. If you don't have the answer, say so and offer to find it by the next session or possibly earlier.

**21. Two might be better than one.** You may find it easier to coach two people at the same time. It might sound strange as, like most people, you probably have the image of coaching as a strictly one-to-one process. But it's rewarding to look beyond that preconception.

I found that coaching two people at the same time can reduce tension and provide a great opportunity for role-playing.

**22. Describe versus evaluate.** You should use, and encourage your coachee to use descriptive, rather than evaluative words. The more specific and descriptive words and phrases become, the less criticism they tend to carry, and the more productive the coaching will be.

So don't just tell a speaker his presentation was poor or inadequate – this will only make him feel bad. He wants to know that the presentation was clearly structured, brief but rather monotonous and pitched at too low a level for the audience.

Remember that description adds value, criticism detracts.

**23. Coach your boss.** You probably won't get very far by telling your boss what to do. But applying some of the coaching principles and coaching upwards can increase your success rate dramatically.

**24. *Go back and forth.*** The GROW methodology helps you structure your coaching conversation. It gives a proven, logical sequence to your questions.

But even though there is a sequence, you need to go back and forth between the different steps.

You might start with a vague Goal that only becomes clear after examining the Reality in some detail. It will then be necessary to go back and define the Goal more precisely before moving to the Options. Even a clearly defined Goal might prove itself wrong or inappropriate once the Reality is clear.

Similarly, when listing the Options, it's important to check back if they help to move towards the desired Goal or not.

And finally, before the Will is finalised, it's crucial to see if the action plan, once realised, achieves the Goal.

**25. *Don't over prepare.*** Too much preparation destroys your flexibility. Develop a general road map for your next session rather than a detailed, step-by-step instruction manual.

**26. *Build your communication skills.*** These are crucial. Coaching is all about human interaction. Make sure you master a basic communication model. It's better to have a thorough understanding of one model that you can actually apply in practice rather than have only a theoretical background on a few of them. Chapter 4 can help.

**27. *Don't strive to put everything into a single session.*** If your coachee is motivated for the next session, it's often a first sign that something positive has been put in motion.

**28. *Just do it.*** Often your coachee will say something like 'When I started the presentation I gave a short introduction. Then it all blocked'.

Instead of talking about something, I often find it useful to ask the coachee to replay a certain situation. It makes it more concrete and offers a great opportunity to test out some of the Options.

When your coachee is able to do a successful role play exercise, the motivation, self-belief and learning curve receive a huge boost.

**29. *Provide quick and easy feedback.*** Here's a simple but effective feedback method you can use all the time. It's called LCS – which stands for Like, Concern, Suggestion.

Start by saying something you liked, then add your concern and end with one or more suggestions. Here's an example: 'I'm happy you have almost finished reading all these tips. But by only reading them, I'm concerned it will not boost your coaching skills as it is more important to actually put them into practice. So I would suggest picking your three favourite ones and thinking about how you could use them in the assignment I gave you earlier'.

**30. *Everything your coachee says is important.*** It's your job to find out how it is important.

## **Grow Us: Coaching from a company perspective**

What would happen if all managers in your organisation integrated coaching in their day-to-day behaviour in a consistent and qualitative way?

The benefits would be enormous, wouldn't you agree?

But you'll probably also agree that, while the benefits would be enormous, the road to get there might be quite long and prove to be a real challenge. Even though coaching has seen a great boost, it is still very much seen *and* used as an individual development intervention.

Let's be very clear. Coaching on an individual basis offers many benefits but there's a next step your organisation can take. And this step can really boost your Strategy Execution. But to reap those benefits, coaching needs to evolve from individual performance coaching to collective performance coaching.

You achieve this by introducing the coaching principles into the management style of all managers. In other words, coaching as your organisation's predominant management style. The 'manager as a coach' who helps

colleagues remove individual barriers to facilitate strategy implementation.

In the next section, you will discover five actions that will help your organisation transform into a coaching company.

## **Five actions to take coaching to the next level in your organisation**

Here are five interventions that you as a manager can take to help your organisation take coaching to the next level.

### **Action 1: Develop and communicate a shared vision on coaching**

As I have said before, there is no single, agreed upon, clear coaching definition. When you look closely at what people in your organisation mean by the word ‘coaching’, you will surely find a wide variety of definitions and approaches.

Take some time to collect these different ideas, definitions and models that exist in your organisation. Select the one you consider to fit best with your organisation or merge the best ones.

Remember to keep it simple and focused on what’s important – the context of responsibility and awareness.

Once you have an agreement on the overall coaching framework and definition, your next challenge is to communicate it. You can pick up some tips and advice from Chapter 4.

### **Action 2: Create a coaching culture**

The old ‘carrot and stick’ management style is past its prime. More and more companies realise people perform better when they take on responsibility because they want to and not because they have to.

It’s a growth path for each individual, and the company as a whole, to move from hierarchy to self-responsibility – from a one-way street to a two-way communication highway.

This transition doesn’t happen overnight.

In their book *Coaching, Mentoring and Organisational Consultancy*, Peter Hawkins and Nick Smith describe the seven different stages in the evolution of a coaching culture. They can help you

identify where your company is at today and give you an idea on the next steps to aim for.

Here they are:

- *Stage 1.* The organisation employs coaches for some of its executives.
- *Stage 2.* The organisation develops its own coaching and mentoring capacity.
- *Stage 3.* The organisation actively supports coaching endeavours.
- *Stage 4.* Coaching is a norm for individuals, teams and the whole organisation.
- *Stage 5.* Coaching is embedded in the HR and performance management processes of the organisation.
- *Stage 6.* Coaching is the predominant style of managing throughout the organisation.
- *Stage 7.* Coaching is ‘how we do business’ with all our stakeholders.

### **Action 3: Understand and solve the drama triangle**

Coaching is, in most cases, a conversation between two people, a one-on-one human interaction. But the benefits shouldn’t be limited to those two people in the room. Coaching should add value for the organisation as well.

This creates the need for a three-way partnership between the organisation, the coachee and the coach. This desired partnership is often called the drama triangle – with the coachee being identified as the victim, the organisation as the persecutor and the coach as the rescuer – as it provides a major challenge to get to a win-win situation.

Be aware of this challenge and discuss it with your colleagues. There are several actions you can take to solve or reduce these tensions. Here are some of them:

- Make sure coaching is not just a nice to have for some key executives but rather a cornerstone of your development approach.
- Organise regular joint meetings with internal and external coaches.
- Focus coaching expenditure on those areas where it can make an organisational difference.

- Develop metrics to measure the coaching added value for the organisation.

#### **Action 4: Implement a coaching development platform**

Coaching is a skill that anyone can learn. It just requires time, effort and some persistence. If your organisation is serious about coaching, it's a good idea to have a structured development approach – a coaching development platform. Have a look at Chapter 7 for a detailed explanation.

#### **Action 5: Coach the coach**

If you want people to learn and apply coaching, use a coaching approach. I have found that being coached to learn coaching is a great way to progress quickly.

And once you reach a certain maturity, coaching others on coaching gives your learning curve yet another great boost.

It might be helpful to have a coach-the-coach programme institutionalised in your organisation.

## **A view on Strategy Execution by Douglas Johnson-Poensgen, Vice President Business Development, BT**

### ***What do you consider to be the most important Strategy Execution challenge for an executive team?***

I believe a top team has quite a few crucial execution challenges. Here's my list:

- *Change the shape of the boat.* When you choose a new strategy, you need to change the way you work. Or in other words, a new strategy demands, in most cases, a different operating model. The boat that got you to your current destination most probably won't get you to the next one. This means that the challenge for an executive is not only to think about the next destination and the journey ahead, but also to make sure that the boat is capable of making the desired trip.

- *Don't rock the boat too much.* Changing an organisation demands a thoughtful approach. It requires a careful balance between enough movement to get things moving forwards and too much movement to make the boat tip over and sink. It's the job of the executive team to trim the boat (read 'organisation') in such a way that the speed is there, but not enough to tip it over. And this demands a great deal of execution experience, a thorough knowledge of the organisation and a solid execution plan.
- *Make clear choices.* A diversified business can increase stability of income. While some businesses get into trouble in certain market conditions, others thrive. The levelling between generates cash flow stability. But a diversified business tremendously increases the execution complexity. The 'one size fits all' approach doesn't apply anymore. Just think about the IT challenges and I'm sure you will know what I mean.

So, while at first sight, from a strategic perspective, diversification seems a simple choice, taking the execution challenges into consideration makes it much more difficult. So when executives think about a new strategic direction, they need to take into account the execution challenges that create choice. This needs to happen right at the start.

- *Engage your people.* Engagement doesn't come by itself. It demands hard work. And I believe an executive team has two focus areas to create that important employee engagement. The first thing the executive team needs to focus on is translating the complex strategy into an easy story: one that is simple and compelling and captures the essence of the new direction of the organisation.

Secondly, the story needs to come to life. And this only works through visible leadership. Leaders should be in the front row, set the example and invest lots of time involving the rest of the organisation.



- *Kill perverse incentive systems.* In order to implement your strategy, you want your people to behave in a certain way. It's crucial that your incentive systems reinforce the good behaviour and punish the bad ones, and not vice versa. Let me give you an example. If you want to excel in customer service, you don't want to reward your sales people on revenues alone, as they will be tempted to undersell and accept whatever the customer wants. Easy acceptance by the sales team creates delivery problems at a later stage. By rewarding the sales team based on gross margin results, they will be less tempted to undersell and motivated to involve the delivery team to check if the solution requested is actually feasible. Bring realism into the sales process.
- *Avoid complex financial transfer mechanisms.* There are quite a few organisations that have their own currency, just like in Monopoly. But unlike the game, the complex financial transfer mechanisms demand an army of accountants to track the internal financial streams.

And while these financial streams can have a positive impact on the sense of ownership, transfer mechanisms are often a heavy burden for the organisation. The issues – extra work and turf wars – quickly outweigh the benefits. I would advise on keeping the internal trading to a minimum, especially below the business unit level.

***What Strategy Execution advice would you give to an ambitious manager?***

1. ***Don't ever forget the customer.*** Your company exists thanks to your customers. Make sure you keep them at the centre of all your actions.
2. ***Get external input.*** The world doesn't stop at your company door. Make sure you keep a broad scope by finding out what other companies are doing, collecting best practices, following industry leaders' current thinking and reading books.

3. ***Make a difference.*** Be like FedEx: ‘No matter how hard the challenge, we make sure we deliver’. Become known as a manager who makes things happen and delivers against his/her promises. Start building your execution reputation early in your career. Too many managers lose precious time working on their ‘talking’ skills but forget the delivery part. While this might work in the short run, it’s deadly in the long-term.
4. ***Value people who make a difference.*** This builds on the previous tip. While being focused on high-quality delivery, learn to identify others with the same skills and focus. Build a network of people who get things done. Try to get those profiles into your team and make sure you reward them appropriately.
5. ***Build thinking and action skills.*** Don’t stick to one silo on your way to the top. Make sure you regularly shift between ‘strategy’-oriented jobs – like strategic planner and ‘execution’-driven functions – such as sales or operations. You will never gain those valuable ‘crossover’ insights if you stick to one lane.
6. ***Practice visible leadership.*** Visible leadership is key to creating engagement to move things forwards. For some, it comes naturally but most of us have to learn it on the job. Start your practice early and refine it along the way. It’s a great skill that will serve you well throughout your career but especially when you reach the senior level in the organisation.
7. ***Always remember the 1/3 rule.*** This might be my most important advice. Let me explain my point with an example. Imagine you have one year to turn a business around. You don’t want to spend more than 33 percent of your time on the strategy and planning phase. So without any further planning, you know when you should start the execution phase. This approach ensures that there is enough time available for executing the great ideas and avoids analysis paralysis.

***Based on your experience, what's a classic Strategy Execution mistake?***

The biggest execution problem is actually a strategy problem. Great execution can only be built on a great strategy. Without a great strategy, there will be never a great execution. You need to make certain that the starting point is okay. This requires making quite a few tough choices. One typical error is to get going without having made these crucial decisions in the hope that they will get clearer down the road during implementation. But they never do. And by that point, it will be too late.

***Looking at Strategy Execution from a 'business development' point of view, what is the most important topic for you?***

I would call the most important topic 'free the entrepreneur'. And I believe it's a crucial one for everyone in the organisation, not only business development.

I learnt in the army that no plan survives contact with the enemy. This means that you can spend all the time and money in the world on planning as changes will always be necessary. But the key point is that when certain parts of the plan don't work as intended, it's up to the people in the field to look for alternatives in order to win.

Organisations spend much time and money on making the best possible plans. And you know upfront that not everything will go according to plan. But you do want your employees to take on the execution responsibility, to take ownership for delivering the strategy. And when something doesn't go as planned, to look for alternatives in order to get the job done.

It's important to define clear flexibility guidelines – you don't want everyone running around in all directions, but within these guidelines you need employees to focus on the overall intent and think like entrepreneurs.

## PERFORMANCE TAKEAWAYS

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- Coaching is a great skill to boost Strategy Execution. It helps remove performance barriers and creates action engagement to take the strategy forwards.
- Coaching is a skill, a technique, that everyone can learn with practice and persistence. There's only five percent theory, the other 95 percent is practice.
- Your main objective is to raise your coachee's awareness and responsibility.
- Questioning is your main instrument to achieve the above.
- The order in which you pose your questions is important. The GROW model helps you to get the sequence right.
- The GROW coaching model offers the coach a simple, yet powerful, framework. It helps you to structure your interaction with your coachee.
  - G for Goal setting: define the short- and long-term goals.
  - R for Reality: explore the current situation.
  - O for Options: identify and evaluate different action strategies.
  - W for Will: what will you do by when?
- Ask the right questions, in the right order and... listen to the responses.
- Coaching is also a way of managing.
- There is no one way of coaching all individuals in all situations.
- To get the most out of coaching for your organisation, you need to work on moving from individual performance coaching to collective performance coaching. Focus on the following five actions:
  - Action 1: Develop and communicate a shared vision on coaching.
  - Action 2: Create a coaching culture.
  - Action 3: Understand and solve the drama triangle.
  - Action 4: Implement a coaching development platform.
  - Action 5: Coach the coach.
- If there is one point you should remember, it's to ask the right questions to raise awareness and responsibility.

*And the answer is? 'Coach: Become a 3% member'.*

A few years ago, I participated in a large research project. One of the most notable conclusions was that managers believed themselves to be poor coaches. Only three percent believed themselves to be excellent. The result was quite striking, not only because of the low number, but because the same group of managers was far more positive about other skills such as decision taking and strategy development.

