

“The Four Obsessions of an Extraordinary Executive”

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Notes by Dave Kraft

If everything is important, then nothing is. Identify a reasonable number of issues that will have the greatest possible impact, Organizational health is often neglected because it involves facing realities of human behavior that even the most committed executive is tempted to avoid. The question to ask is what is the one thing I do that really matters to the firm? Letting more than three months go by between formal feedback sessions is irresponsible.

Discipline one is: *Build and maintain a cohesive leadership team*

The essence of a cohesive leadership team is trust marked by an absence of politics. Leaders higher in an organization can fail to work out minor issues, usually out of a fear of conflict. Cohesive leadership teams, on the other hand, resolve their issues and create environments of trust. Meetings need to be passionate, intense, exhausting, compelling, vital and never boring. Cohesive teams fight about issues, not personalities. One of the best ways to build trust is “getting naked;” letting their colleagues see them for who they are. No pretension. No positioning. Once a team has achieved some level of cohesiveness, its ability to maintain it rests on its willingness to continually address core issues. Cohesiveness at the executive level is the single greatest indicator of future success that any organization can achieve. Talking about a colleague who is not present is not gossip. Gossip requires the intent to hurt someone.

Discipline two is: *Create Organizational Clarity*

Eliminate confusion about company identity, direction, strategy, objectives, roles and responsibilities. If people are having a difficult time making decisions, refer to company values, mission and strategy. Organizational clarity is about agreeing on the fundamental concepts that drive the organization. It is important at all levels to provide a common vocabulary and set of assumptions about what is important and what is not. Questions that need to be asked are:

1. What behavioral values are irreplaceable and fundamental?
2. What are our goals this month, quarter, year, next year?
3. Who needs to do what for us to achieve our goals?

The healthiest organizations identify a small set of values that are particularly fundamental to their culture; lie at the heart of whom they are. Every decision that a company makes should contribute to or be a function of its strategy. One method is establishing a thematic goal for a period of time. For example, this is the year our organization will... Beneath a thematic goal there should be major strategic goals that span the organization and support its overall theme. Focus on the areas that matter most and avoid making every possible topic an area of equal importance. Getting specific about exactly what needs to be achieved is one mark of a healthy organization. Strategic goals need to be aligned with an organization's permanent measures of success. Each strategic goal will have many sub-goals, and ownership for each of those should be explicit. Without clear ownership, accountability becomes difficult, even within the best teams. Engage in constructive conflict about who is best suited for which roles.

Discipline three is: *Over-communicate Organizational Clarity*

If you don't get clear on the strategy piece, your goals and roles aren't going to be aligned.

Be cohesive, be clear, over-communicate, reinforce. Success is not so much a function of intelligence or natural ability, but rather commitment to the right disciplines. Once the executive team has achieved clarity, communicate that clarity to everybody else. Embrace the three most critical practices of effective organizations:

1. Repetition-Get use to saying the same things again and again, to different audiences, and in slightly different ways
2. Simple messages-What we need to deliver is clear and uncomplicated messages
3. Multiple mediums-Use all types of media to convey key messages

Take five minutes at the end of staff meetings and ask the question, what do we need to communicate to our people?

Discipline four is: *Reinforce organizational clarity through human systems*

Human systems include things as: Interviewing, hiring, managing, performance, rewarding, letting people go. Constantly realign work and behaviors around the direction and values of the organization.

No amount of intellectual prowess or personal charisma can make up for an inability to identify a few simple things and stick to them over time.