

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

Execution

Done is better than perfect.

— Sheryl Sandberg

PEOPLE COME UP WITH ideas all the time, but the hardest thing to do is to get people behind those ideas, and then to execute them.

Sandberg's idea that a launched product is more desirable than a better product that only exists theoretically is at the heart of the nano-second business culture of our globalized economy. It's about having the gumption to just move with an idea before someone else does, or before it's too late.

Execution means knowing what needs to happen, when. What are the details that need to come together? Who is accountable for what?

When you start to shift gears in execution, reality kicks in, along with the fact that ideas are coming to fruition. I believe this is when fear often rears its ugly head. What if we're wrong?

This idea of realism, I believe, is what keeps us from moving forward with ideas ... the fear that it may be the wrong path.

Simply ask yourself, is this project or idea going to be successful? Are we doing the right thing?

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PERFECTIONISM HINDERS EXECUTION

Remember: don't get stuck in the deep mud. Nothing needs to be perfect and nothing can ever be perfect. Perfection-pursuit paralysis is one of the biggest hindrances when it comes to execution.

After a keynote address in Cincinnati, an audience member came to speak to me. He said he was experiencing dissatisfaction at work. He had been with his company for five years and felt he hadn't accomplished anything. It's a shame. He was bright and energetic and he had wonderful ideas, but no one at his company was interested. What a waste! Human talent truly is our greatest and most irreplaceable resource and we waste it every single day.

Imagine what a manager or department head would say if they discovered that employees were making thousands of unnecessary document copies a month? Of course! The practice would be halted immediately. So why do we routinely ignore the waste of human talent? Isn't human ingenuity and problem solving worth at least as much as a case of copying paper?

The greenhouse approach is all about creating an environment in which intrapreneurship can flourish. Intrapreneurs always need to be moving forward, reaching farther. And that aspirational energy and goal-oriented mindset is *affective*; we want to breed an environment where enthusiastic and energetic people can operate and collaborate to produce great work. Conversely, a "different day, same task" environment easily becomes a business culture norm that is toxic to all.

So what does that have to do with perfection-pursuit paralysis? Just this: things need to get done. Innovation is key, but it is not enough: an innovation that works beautifully on the drawing board but can't make it past the first hurdle is a colossal waste of energy, time, and talent. Hurdles and roadblocks that restrain implementation need to be lowered. Does that mean that in the spirit of going faster and faster you take shortcuts and compromise on quality? No, never! Never compromise when it comes to quality. *A commitment to quality is non-negotiable.*

What we are talking about are myriad institutional and psychological barriers in a company that restrain goal-directed momentum. Water will run naturally down a slanted drainpipe. But if it hits a clog, it backs up, and that creates massive problems at both ends. Think of innovation as a clean pipe free of any restrictions. Ideas will flow through it like water.

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Anxiety about perfection is a closed loop. It's one of the psychological barriers we create for ourselves to immunize us from regret. The greenhouse approach, however, is designed to minimize the opportunity for regret by creating systems that maximize performance — and always with an eye to quality-maintenance. Look, most of us would agree that if we are asked to do something in a rush, it increases the likelihood that we will make mistakes.

Remember that famous slogan spoken by Orson Welles many years ago: “We will sell no wine before its time!” Don't confuse speed, however, with increased performance. Asking a person to do the same redundant task over and over does increase the chances of a crash and burn. The idea is to speed things up by innovating: maybe there is a different way to perform the same task . . . only faster?

Take Instagram as an example.

According to experts, Instagram was not perfect when it was launched, but it was a strong enough product that it gained a huge amount of attention anyway. Instagram's developers continued to adapt Instagram's features and offerings as they went along. And as they did, they stuck to their one central concept — allowing people to share beautiful photographs using their mobile phones.

Within eighteen months of launching, Instagram was sold to Facebook for one billion dollars.

What might have happened had the developers waited until Instagram was perfect before launching? What if they got stuck in perfection paralysis?

Timing is everything, and done is better than perfect.

Here are some rules of thumb for execution.

- **Timing is key.** Because the world is moving so fast, timing is of the essence. If you don't move, someone else will, or your audience may lose interest. While the details are important, you cannot get bogged down in every little thing; you need to know when to move.
- **Being able to pivot is important.** When you are in the guts of a project and you realize something is not quite right, you may

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need to change course. Often, when we are in execution mode, the thought of changing directions can be scary and some may be reluctant to do so. But being able to make changes and decisions quickly and efficiently while you are in operating mode is crucial.

- **Staying close.** Staying close and engaged when you are operating is very important. You need to be constantly monitoring and looking outside to see how things are resonating in the market, to know if changes need to be made, if modifications are necessary, or if you need to add any new resources, skills, etc.

You must have the ability to redirect during the execution phase. If something isn't working, you have to be able to pivot and change directions. Ride the wave, don't let it pull you under.

BEFORE WE MOVE ON

In order for companies and businesses to be able to survive and thrive, they must be able to adapt during times of change. We're back to Darwin, okay? As business leaders, we must rethink change and see it for what it is — a constant force that we must work with and not against. We must be constantly observing and learning, ready to pivot and change with the tide instead of fighting against it. A sick or weak buffalo is dinner for the hungry lion. You don't want your company on the menu, do you?

Remember these four things as we navigate the next industrial revolution.

1. Be keenly aware of the current situation within your company.
2. Look closely at your products and services, and determine if they'll continue to serve your changing demographic or if adjustments must be made (my model will help you with this).
3. Re-imagine change and learn how to ride the wave.
4. Provide your teams with the knowledge and technology they will need to help your company be successful.

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THE SEVEN GUIDING PRINCIPLES: RECAP

Let the seven guiding principles be your North Star. Let's recap.

1. Relevance

Stay connected to your audiences. Tap into their psyche like Zara has done. Recruit trendspotters to help you see where your industry is going, and researchers to help you get there. Think about big brands like Sears, Blockbuster, and Sony. They all had one thing in common: they struggled to remain relevant in times of change. At this time, only one of those brands still exists. Will Sony be able to keep traction in the changing world of music? Time will tell.

2. Creativity

Scientists George Land and Beth Jarman proved that non-creative behaviour is learned. Their testing has shown that we lose our creativity as we grow older. But I believe that creative thinking is still within us. Creativity is one of the things that separates humans from machines. If humans want to remain relevant throughout the fourth industrial revolution in which AI and quantum computing are going to make much of our work irrelevant, we must harness our creative thinking powers and contribute our brilliance to the world of machines.

3. Speed

We live in a rapid-fire world when it comes to business. If you don't bring new products to market quickly, competitors will. Zara beautifully demonstrates the importance of speed when it comes to innovation. In fact, Zara has conquered this principle so well that it has changed the model upon which high fashion operates. It's difficult for large companies to be agile and to move quickly, but speed is a principle that must be embraced by all companies that wish to survive.

4. Clarity

To get what you want in business or in life, you have to be clear in your goals. Without clarity you will be unfocused and have trouble communicating your thoughts. You need to have company clarity,

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clarity within your teams, and clarity with individuals. Clarity is a hand-in-glove thing. You must be clear on your goals and objectives and what you want individuals to be doing. Lack of clarity means your people are confused, and confused people are unproductive.

5. Accountability

You must re-imagine accountability and use it to empower your teams to do their best work. Help your teams understand that other people are depending on their work and that their work as individuals affects others. When teams have clarity, accountability is not difficult to achieve. Everyone should know exactly what their priorities and deliverables are and how their work feeds into other people's work to create output. If you are delayed, others will be delayed.

6. Experimentation

We've looked at how some of the best innovations and discoveries have been accidental, not the result of planned, deliberate experimentation. That teaches us that in business we should be open to the idea of experimenting. Perhaps when companies rethink the rules, there will be more time in the workday to be creative, to experiment, and to play. We learn from trial and error, and this should be a part of how we approach work.

7. Execution

We know that timing is everything in business, particularly in today's work environment. If we don't move quickly, an idea can become old, fast, and if you don't do it, someone else will. The important thing to keep in mind is that while you execute, it is good to pivot, to change direction if need be. If some aspect of your business isn't working, there might be another aspect that's doing extraordinarily well.

HOW TO USE GUIDING PRINCIPLES

Guiding principles are philosophies, personal beliefs, and values that guide your company through all of its goals, thinking processes, and work. It is these principles that create cultural norms so that everyone understands what is important and how they should be approaching their work. These

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ideas will influence people and the decision-making process through all levels of the company. As indicated previously, all of these ideas are based on intrapreneurial mindsets and creating a culture of intrapreneurship. To create a credo for companies around these ideas, start with a simple question: "What if?" What if we shifted our thinking, our mindset, based on all of these ideas? What would the outcome be? What can it be?

* * *

These guiding principles will help you and your company to grow and to thrive. In the next section, I will discuss my model, which will help guide you through a variety of challenging, creative projects facing your company. The four phases of the model are: problem identification, ideation, execution, and reflection. Keeping these phases in mind, I will demonstrate how to work through applied learning and provide guidance for developing teams of intrapreneurs. This is where you'll see your greenhouse start to bloom.

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