

Book Title: Execution: The Discipline of Getting Things Done

Authors: Larry Bossidy and Ram Charan, with Charles Burck

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Summary

This book is by two authors, Bossidy and Charan, with many years of experience as a CEO and as an advisor respectively. Their years of contributing at different companies provided many relevant case studies for all chapters. These real cases provided evidence for, and reinforced the importance of execution.

The book is presented with texts, followed by each author's input and own experience. This method of presentation is well-organized and draws the reader in, to peek into what goes on behind the successes and failures of corporations.

Besides just best practices, the authors also pointed out pitfalls to avoid by sharing how individuals or organizations failed to execute. The authors also tabled some questions for corporate leaders to reflect upon.

This book is organised into 3 sections

- i. the importance of execution
- ii. the building blocks
- iii. three core processes of execution

Execution Defined

The authors defined execution as a gap between aspirations and results that paces everything and is a set of behaviour and techniques to gain competitive advantage for the company. As a discipline, it is an essential component of strategy-making and must include

- i. discussions
- ii. questioning
- iii. following through of plans
- iv. accountability

Leaders should be engaged in execution and it should be a core component of the company's culture. As the authors had highlighted, the absence of execution is the single biggest obstacle to success, and the cause of disappointments. Strategy fails due to poor execution, and it leads to situations whereby thinking breaks down and goals are not met.

Behaviours, Framework, People

The book emphasised with examples from companies like Xerox, Lucent and EDS to demonstrate the importance of execution in achieving results. As observed, many leaders do not know what needs to be done to convert vision into specific tasks and follow through, as details tend to bore them. Moreover, many miss out the fact that execution is not just the stuff leader delegates. Hence Bossidy and Charan came up with three building blocks of execution.

Firstly, there are seven essential behaviours of a leader that form the first block. A leader must

- i. know the people and the business
- ii. insist on realism
- iii. set clear goals and priorities
- iv. follow through
- v. reward the doers

- vi. expand people's capabilities
- vii. know himself/herself

Secondly, the framework for cultural change must be created as behaviours are beliefs turned into action. The aim of changing behaviours is to produce results.

And finally, the right people must be in the right jobs and hence it is the leader's job to focus on people selection.

Processes: People, Strategy, Operations

The three core processes of execution suggested in the book refer to the people, strategy and operations process. The people process is the most important of all as they provide the framework to determine an organisation's talents. I agree with this as I feel that people form the core of an organisation. Without them, strategies cannot be implemented, and operations cannot be carried out.

Assessment methods such as leadership assessment summary, continuous improvement summary and succession depth and retention risk analysis were suggested to develop the leadership pipeline.

Meanwhile, the strategy process defines where a business wants to go, and the operating plan provides the path for people.

Tech Companies Are Doing It Too

Some of the case studies quoted were technology companies. For example, the authors mentioned how

Dell out-competed Compaq by putting the right people in the right jobs, and how Nokia was able to increase its dominance in the market.

Key Lessons

Before reading this book, like many other people, I can only define execution as "getting things done". However, the book has taught me much more, and I can now better understand the principles behind the success of strategies.

In all, I have learnt that to ensure execution, one must be disciplined to complete tasks on time and this should be instilled in one's behaviour, if not, results will never match promises.

I have also discovered that delegation should not be the lone job of a leader. Instead, a leader has to be part of the whole strategy itself.

With the concept of "follow through" being repeated in several chapters of the book, I find myself agreeing that it is indeed crucial for execution.

Conclusions

In my opinion, there could have been more dialogue between the authors to keep me engaged. Their points were written separately. Fortunately, I was glad to see their main ideas in point form, making the book easier to read, and the concepts easier to comprehend.

Lastly, I do hope that I will be able to apply the relevant ideas in my work and also that I will be able to improve this discipline of getting things done.

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