



Dear Friend,

The Busyness Trap

When I booted up my computer this morning, I found a reminder for a meeting tomorrow night that I didn't even know I had. The last thing I wanted was another meeting on an already busy day. As I thought about my schedule...my busy schedule..., I was hit with the fact that busyness doesn't always equate to productivity. None of us wants to be busy just for the sake of being busy. Our desire is to be productive, successful, fruitful.

So, is there hope if you find yourself (or your organization) looking like that hamster, running hard on his wheel but getting nowhere? Yes, change is possible. However, it must be planned, and it may be painful.

Making the shift from being *busy* to *productive* starts with taking a good, hard look at yourself and your situation. Consider:

1. What is on my plate? (Don't be selective; list everything.)
2. Does each task or responsibility play a part in advancing my (or my organization's) overall mission? If not, why am I doing it?
3. What is the tangible result I gain from each task or responsibility? If none, again, why am I doing it?
4. Does each task or responsibility bring me fulfillment, or does it fill me with dread? Why?
5. If it has to be done, am I the right person to do it, or would the mission be better served by using my time in another way?

This exercise will give you a sense of the activities to be kept on your plate, those that can be passed on to someone else, and probably some that need to be eliminated entirely. But, that's the easy part. Now, you have to take action.

Just as a gardener is merciless in clearing away weeds and pruning plants in order to yield a beautiful garden, you'll have to do the same with your schedule. On a daily basis, evaluate your calendar. Prioritize activities; decide what has to be done and what should be done, if possible. Don't hesitate to cut out things that don't bring you closer to your organizational, professional, or personal goals. Often those are things you really hate doing, but sometimes they're things you love or are attached to doing. Also, seek balance. Be careful of trying to do too much; even too much of the right things can drain you.

Finally, be vigilant. It's easy to slip back into the trap of just being in a hurry. So, take time each day to plan your time. Remember, the intent is to be focused and fruitful!

For more help with developing and carrying out effective time strategies, contact me (inquiries@execadvantagellc.com or 301-280-5950).

All the best,

June

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Providing Opportunities for Employee Engagement

Employees who have a passion for what they do are practically self-engaging. In other words, they seek out reasons to stay engaged in their jobs and with the company. But what about those employees who aren't quite as passionate, for whatever reason? The fact of the matter is that you can lead them down the road to engagement just by providing *opportunities* for them to do so.

Many times, employees don't need a reason to become engaged. What they really need is the chance to become engaged. Below are five ways you can provide opportunities to do just that.

Recognize the accomplishments of employees and celebrate them. -- Both parts of this initiative are important. By both recognizing *and* celebrating, you not only increase engagement and retention, you also build a greater sense of camaraderie among the members of your team.

Celebrate traditions within the organization. -- This is another way to increase both engagement and camaraderie. This could be an annual awards dinner, or it might be something as simple as a summer picnic or Christmas party.

Initiate a mentoring program. -- Once again, you're accomplishing two

Arrows Connected by Boxes: Focusing on Your Real Opportunities

Summary: The real opportunities for your organization's growth and profitability lie not in the boxes of your flowcharts but in the arrows that connect them.

Throughout my career I've diagrammed perhaps 500 or more processes -- office workflow processes, manufacturing processes, thought processes, software processes, you name it.

From a distance, they all look about the same: variously shaped and positioned boxes (representing events, activities, people, output, decisions, etc.) and arrows (representing process flow and associations).

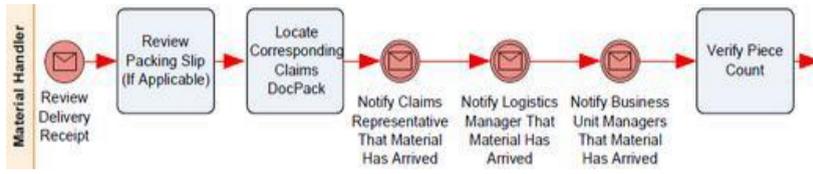
Processes and their diagrams can be simple -- such as an inner-departmental process -- or quite complex -- such as a "Quote-to-Cash" process in a custom manufacturing environment.



Regardless, the flowchart boils down to boxes and arrows. I think it's fair to say that most of the attention is typically given to the boxes. Is it because they are prettier? Because they are easier to identify? Easier to recognize? Contain better labels? In reality, your greatest opportunities for growth, cost reduction, return on an investment, and innovation is in the arrows.

Arrows are deceptively simple splatters of ink. But consider what they contain for a moment.

Take a simple example, part of a Claims Receiving process (we'll call the circled envelopes "round boxes"):



Now ask the following questions for each arrow:

1. How does the Material Handler move from one box to the next?
2. What decisions must be made?
3. What information does the Material Handler need to perform this step properly?
4. What are the ramifications of not having the correct information?
5. What skills and knowledge are necessary to perform this step well?
6. What are the ramifications of not having the adequate skills and knowledge?
7. What attitude is necessary to perform this step well?
8. What are the consequences if the Material Handler has a bad attitude?
9. What could slow down movement from one box to the next?
10. What could speed up movement from one box to the next?
11. What if progression between these boxes is omitted altogether?
12. How much time and money is spent between one box and the next?

Do you see the importance of the arrows? Many more such questions could be asked, and a different process would elicit different questions. This is a relatively low-impact example, too. Plug in your own, and ask the questions that matter.

The point is, it is the arrows, rather than the boxes, that provide the most opportunity. The arrows contain knowledge, information, data, culture, methods, conflicting priorities, procedures, policies, talents, technologies, attitudes, materials, time, costs, and a whole lot more.

The arrows of your organization are its lifeblood. Look there to increase your profit.

- JB Bryant
Senior Consulting Strategist
Strategic Alignment Group LLC

How Important Are Small Businesses to the U.S. Economy?

Small firms -

- Represent 99.7 percent of all employers
- Employ half of all private-sector employees
- Pay 44.3 percent of the total U.S. private payroll
- Generated 60 to 80 percent of net new jobs annually over the last decade
- Create more than 50 percent of non-farm, private, gross domestic product (GDP)
- Are employers of 39 percent of high-tech workers (such as scientists, engineers, and computer workers)
- Are 53 percent home-based and 3 percent franchise businesses

Sources: U.S. Bureau of the Census, U.S. Department of Commerce, International Trade Administration



goals at the same time. With this initiative, you're facilitating a knowledge transfer between employees, in addition to bolstering engagement and retention.

Create a cross-training program. -- Most employees want to sharpen their skill set and increase their abilities. They also want to know that they have room for advancement within the company. This will accomplish both objectives.

Involve employees in decisions (whenever possible). -- Of course, this might not be feasible in all situations. However, by involving them in the decision-making process, they'll feel more a part of the company.

Evaluate your company and the culture that it offers. Are you providing opportunities like the ones listed above? Are there areas in which you should improve or make a more concerted effort? By simply providing opportunities for your employees to become engaged, you might be surprised by how readily and easily they do so -- with no further prompting from you.

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"Business, more than any other occupation, is a continual dealing with the future; it is a continual calculation, an instinctive exercise in foresight."
~ Henry R. Luce

"Obstacles are those frightful things you see when you take your eyes off your goal."
~ Henry Ford

"In the absence of clearly defined goals, we become strangely loyal to performing daily acts of trivia."
~ Unknown source

About Executive Advantage

At Executive Advantage, we are committed to providing results-based business and management consulting, leadership development, and coaching support. We partner with business leaders to build healthy, well-functioning organizations, where goals are met and people thrive. We also partner with individuals to create professional (and personal) lives with clearer direction, improved results, and greater balance.

To learn more about Executive Advantage, contact us at inquiries@execadvantagellc.com.