



Here's What I Want You to Do...

I've worked as a consultant for many years now, and there's one phrase that is sure to cause my eyes to roll (whether I can openly show it or not):

"Here's what I want you to do...."

So, who typically utters this emotion-provoking phrase? It's usually a prospective client—a business owner, leader, or someone seeking coaching support (often for another).

Why my reaction, you ask?

Well, the speaker recognizes that there's a problem. (And that's good!) The speaker grasps that the problem isn't being resolved by the solutions that have been attempted thus far. (And, that's perceptive!) But, by golly, if the speaker knew exactly HOW to correct the matter (which is the unmistakable implication behind the "Here's what I want you to do" statement), then WHY is this person talking with me, and WHY hasn't the person already taken his or her own advice? (*Okay, breathe, June...breathe!*)

In case you haven't noticed, this kinda drives me crazy.

I'll admit that the "Here's what I want you to do" statement is a spark for my own personal crazy. But, as I've worked with folks over the years, trust me, there are some recurring themes.

So, let's devote the next two issues of **EA Insights** to those interpersonal challenges that just drive us batty. (If you wish, shoot me a note to share some of your pet peeves. You can always reach me at jmickens@execadvantagellc.com.) But, this month, let's tackle the madness caused when someone chooses to "fly by the seat of his or her pants".

Come and join me for some craziness and, I hope, also a little relief!

All the best,

June

June Melvin Mickens
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Are YOU Driving People Crazy? Part I: Flying by the Seat of Your Pants

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Quotes

"If I don't think about it, it won't drive me crazy."

~Aaliyah

"Like all good things, it takes planning and creativity."

~Nina Atwood

"Our lack of discipline let us down and it does annoy me."

~John Brain

"We have no practices at all. We just wing it. It's spontaneous. No one knows what to expect. Everything's off the wall."

~Garth Brooks

*"Whatever he's going to do, he isn't going to tell us anytime soon. *** It's in his interest to keep his options open."*

~Steven Cohen

"We're probably going to have to play it by ear. That's not necessarily the preferable way to go. But it's not something where we have a choice."

~Paul DePodesta

"I just take it as it is. I don't let it frustrate me. I just try to work around it. [O]ur theme is, there's certain things in life you can't control, so let's just make the best out of them."

~Maggie Dixon

"Lincoln was not a good impromptu speaker; he was at his best when he could read from a carefully prepared manuscript."

In case you haven't noticed, working with other people is no joke!

As much as we enjoy interaction and camaraderie, we find our gray hair count increasing daily because of the quirks and, well...the humanness... involved in engaging with others.

This month we look at the first installment in the "Are YOU Driving People Crazy?" series. Let's consider the madness caused by folks who "fly by the seats of their pants".

Does this sound familiar to you?

Person 1: "Let's sit down and plan out how we're going to tackle what's coming up."

Person 2: "Um, I don't know. I don't want to get locked into anything. Let's just play it by ear and keep our options open."

Okay, I know you KNOW them. In fact, you may BE one of them.

Call it what you will—"keeping your options open", "playing things by ear", "staying loose". Whatever the label, operating this way can present a challenge for others AND for the results to be accomplished.

A Closer Look at *Winging It*

What's behind it?

Everybody's different. However, "wing it" folks typically fall into one of three camps—the plate spinners, the image breakers, and the fearful. Here's a quick note about each.

The Plate Spinners -- Plate spinners are people who are super busy. They're moving from task-to-task and place-to-place at warp speed. And, to prevent their heads from exploding, they handle only what is needed for the next thing. Or, they often hit just the surface, getting only what's absolutely necessary to fulfill responsibilities at the next pit stop and then keep going. Either way, it often drives those around them crazy.

The Image Breakers -- Image breakers usually are folks who are very intentional about their desire to build a flexible environment. Somewhere along the line for them, though, the notions of *structure* and *flexibility* locked horns. As a result, anything that hints of formality becomes translated as rigidity and receives overt or covert pushback. And, it breeds craziness.

The Fearful -- Sometimes the "winging it" pattern is seen among the fearful. You see, some prefer to "go where the wind blows" because of a reluctance to put plans into place, especially publicly, that they might not be able to fulfill. Though they may be playing things close to the vest for self-preservation purposes, they also are driving folks around them bonkers.

What's the benefit?

Clearly, there are benefits to living life with a "play it by ear" mindset. If that were not so, folks wouldn't do it. So, consider a few of the reasons. "Playing it by ear":

- encourages flexibility
- fosters innovation
- allows super-busy people to handle responsibilities at the level and in the timeframe that supports their bandwidth
- keeps things light and not too formal
- prevents embarrassment and self-depreciation when plans don't pan out.

The benefits, indeed, exist.

What's the harm?

Subscribing to a pattern of "going with the flow" also has some harmful side effects. And, many of the challenges harken back to the fact that OTHERS are involved. Think about it; when you make it a habit of not providing others with a roadmap for where you are supposed to be going *together*:

- They must follow blindly (or attempt to read your mind), which heightens their anxiety and uneasiness because they don't have a good sense of what's next.
- They're unable to fully contribute their thinking or creativity to produce the best possible overall product.
- They're prevented from planning out their own work, not to mention the other aspects of their lives (especially if they don't function optimally in reaction mode).
- And, they're learning from your model, which fosters a *culture* of "winging it".

Helpful Tips

Though maybe a teleprompter could have helped that."

~David H. Donald

"I apologized to my team for my lack of discipline[.] It reflects poorly on the program and I think we have a good program."

~Mark French

*"I know where I'm going, but I don't know what I'm going to do. *** I haven't made any plans. I'm just going to play it by ear."*

~Jeff Gordon

"The very best impromptu speeches are the ones written well in advance."

~Ruth Gordon

"Living creatively is really important to maintain throughout your life. And living creatively doesn't mean only artistic creativity, although that's part of it. It means being yourself, not just complying with the wishes of other people."

~Matt Groening

"You learn by experience, and overcoming setbacks make you stronger and means you are prepared for any eventuality. Now I am who I am, slightly batty in some ways, but in other ways fairly level-headed."

~Damon Hill

"Everybody has creativity in a different way. The trick is to figure out what your strength is. There are so many different ways of expressing ourselves."

~Heather Kent

"Planning is bringing the future into the present so that you can do something about it now."

~Alan Lakein

*"It could be one to two days, or it could be seven to 10 days. *** We'll play it by ear."*

~Grady Little

"Productivity is never an accident. It is always the result of a commitment to

So, what can you do?

Well, for those of you who ARE “wing-it masters”, I suggest the following:

Observe how the rest of the team works best and, when appropriate, reserve your “fly by the seat of your pants” episodes for projects or tasks that are yours and yours alone. You may have learned to work very well this way. You may expect this level of chaos for yourself. The reality, though, is that, in a project involving others, you’re unlikely to produce the best results when “impromptu” is the primary means of functioning. So, if the results (or the process to achieve them) aren’t what you envisioned, it may be time to do a little adapting.

Remember the shades of gray. Though the word “plan” has four letters, it’s *not* a dirty word. Strive to achieve the best that a mix of planning and flexibility have to offer; incorporate opportunities for, and the encouragement of, innovation into your roadmap. The two need not be at opposition.

Don’t condone bad behavior. Let’s call it what it is; be honest. Don’t label as “flexibility” what really is “laziness”, or “fear”, or “overbooking”. Now, this may not be the case in all instances; however, when it is, ‘fess up and straighten up. Again, others are involved. They’re impacted by the way you operate; they’re watching how you function; and they’re learning from you...whether you intend for that to be the case or not.

And, for those of you who ENGAGE WITH “wing-it masters”, here are some thoughts:

Decipher as much of the road map as possible. “Going with the flow” may be second nature for the person you’re working with, but that does not mean that you must adopt that approach too. Do your best to corral as much information about direction, strategy, desired outcomes, and timing as possible from your colleague so that you can understand the gist of the project and of the role you’re slated to play in it.

Don’t forsake the work style that makes you most effective. Even if your colleague has in mind that you all are going to “build this plane as you fly it”, you need not throw all caution to the wind and grab both your tool belt and pilot’s cap. Be sure you understand how you work when you are most productive. And, if that involves some level of planning, don’t let your colleague’s “wing it” tendencies prevent you from stepping back and drafting a few schematics for that plane you all are crafting. Try sharing those thoughts with your colleague for comment and refining. But, at the very least, use that planning to set as much direction as possible for the work that will become your individual responsibility.

Don’t condone bad behavior. When it is possible, have the difficult conversation in the way that is most appropriate for your relationship with your colleague. Seek to understand what’s behind the person’s behavior at this time. Do your best to help him or her see the effects—on the work, on the team, and on you. And, be willing to assist in bringing about the habit change that will make the situation more bearable—and more productive—for all involved.

Is “going with the flow” having a detrimental effect of your workplace or on you? Could you use some help to get to the bottom of it and to turn things around? Why don’t you let **Executive Advantage** help you move forward? Contact us today to explore how we can partner with you. We’re here to help you build your thriving [career or business](#).

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*excellence,
intelligent planning,
and focused effort.”*
~Paul J. Meyer

“Organizing is what you do before you do something, so that when you do it, it is not all mixed up.”
~A.A. Milne

“Know thyself. Really think this through before you make a commitment to a lifestyle and work style you just may not be suited for.”
~Laurie Rozakis

“Without leaps of imagination, or dreaming, we lose the excitement of possibilities. Dreaming, after all, is a form of planning.”
~Gloria Steinem

“The idea that I’m trying to get across is that we’re always planning for the future. And the future arrives, whether we want it to or not.”
~Eric Taylor

“You can’t rely on luck. I’ve had some stages in my career where I’ve said we’re going to wing it, and we’ve always ended up in trouble.”
~George Thorogood

“Planning is thinking beforehand how something is to be made or done, and mixing imagination with the product[.]”
~Paul Williams

“It was frustrating. Coach told me...that we were going to wing it. Coach called option one...and I called timeout because I knew I could not run the play.”
~Richie Williams

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.

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