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## "Quotes"

*"The statistics on sanity are that one out of every four Americans is suffering from some form of mental illness. Think of your three best friends. If they're okay, then it's you."*

~Rita Mae Brown

*"When a wise man is advised of his errors, he will reflect on and improve his conduct. When his misconduct is pointed out, a foolish man will not only disregard the advice but rather repeat the same error."*

~Guatama Buddha

*"Indecision and delays are the parents of failure."*

~George Canning

*"Ninety-nine percent of the failures come from people who have the habit of making excuses."*

~George Washington Carver

*"All pain is either severe or slight. If slight, it is easily endured. If severe, it will without doubt be brief."*

~Marcus Tullius Cicero

Dear Friend,

## Insanity

When I was a little girl, one of my favorite cartoons was "The Flintstones." Although I didn't grasp much of the grown-up humor, I loved the show nonetheless.

One character always caused me to double over with laughter. You guessed it. Dino was high on my list. That big, silly, purple dinosaur, and the even larger bones with which he fought, just did me in. Dino had an uncanny knack for snagging a bone that was far too wide for the doorway he needed to navigate. And, those super-sized bones were what prompted his struggles...and my giggles. (Though, with Dino, the doorway typically wound up on the losing end of things.)

Looking back, I wonder why Dino persisted, especially with such unnecessary effort. Why didn't he gnaw on his bones outside? Why didn't he find smaller ones? (Okay, so maybe that wasn't so easy when the only choices came from prehistoric beasts.) Why didn't he just turn his bones slightly to prevent his frustration, Fred's yelling, and another busted doorframe?

Dino didn't change because he, like we, functioned out of habit. You see, we get used to doing something a certain way and, even when it's not working quite as we wish (or even when it's totally out of whack), we don't make a change. Instead, we become poster children for the definition of "insanity": doing the *same* thing but expecting a *different* result.

So, what does it take to break the insanity cycle? Sometimes the greatest motivator for change is pain.

Well, Dino, my friend, keep reading. In this month's **EA Insights**, we consider change approaches that can help you to improve your organization's operations. Here's to better results, greater serenity, and fewer damaged doorways.

All the best,

*June*

June Melvin Mickens  
Executive Advantage, LLC

## I'll Change...When It Hurts Enough

June Melvin Mickens  
Executive Advantage, LLC

I meet many business leaders. As we talk, and as I share what we do at **Executive Advantage**, invariably the conversation turns to some area in which they're struggling. It may be a challenge with people. It may be a difficulty in setting direction, communicating it to the people who



must carry it out, or translating strategy it into real action. At other times, it's some nagging problem that they've not really been able to identify; but, what they do know is that the challenge is costing time, money, customers, or peace of mind.

Focus on that third area for a minute. It's interesting what people tend to do when they sense a problem but can't figure out what's really happening? They ignore it. ("There's time. It's not bad enough yet.") They shift it. ("If our people were working harder, this wouldn't be an issue.") They miss it. ("Sales are down. Let's boost our marketing.") What these approaches often fail to do, though, is to solve it.

When businesses face operational challenges, quick fixes rarely hit the mark. With that in mind, my recommendation is: Instead of "knee jerk", try "step back". That is, pause (with unbiased support, if possible) to determine what's really going on and to develop a targeted way to correct the situation. (Why isn't the process working? What pieces can be salvaged? Where is change needed? How do you address the underlying cause and not just the symptoms?)

So, when something's awry in your operation, consider whether any of these approaches may be in order:



**Eliminate errors and variation.** Is the challenge rooted in the number of mistakes being made? Does the process, and its quality, vary by staff member? In either case, simplifying the process may make a significant impact on your results.

**Minimize delays.** Delays cost...in so many ways. Processes that are taking more time than necessary are ripe for improvement. So, consider ways to scale back the time.

**Maximize the use of assets.** An out-of-control process saps, rather than safeguards, an organization's assets. And, that's the case whether the asset is equipment, facilities, material, or the most valuable of them all -- staff. To turn things around, step back, and see if you can spot unproductive uses of your assets. The goal should be to increase the amount value-added, proactive activity in the organization by removing waste.



**Think user-friendly.** Does your problem stem from a process that's just too hard to implement? After all, who can remember all 1,000 steps? Who can process documents in quadruplicate 100 times a day? You get the drift. If the process is cumbersome -- for the internal users or the external ones -- people will just give up (or they'll take shortcuts along the way), and that causes problems. The bottom line is this: Results improve when you develop or change your process to keep the user in mind.



**Be adaptable.** I hear someone saying, "But, it *used* to work! What happened?" And, that may be the point. It's not that it's a flawed process; it's that it's a process that hasn't kept pace with the change around it. Don't be so rigid that your approaches can't grow and change to meet customer or user needs and expectations.

In a nutshell, by developing or adapting processes with these factors in mind, you offer your organization a competitive advantage. Solid processes enable you to function smart and lean. And, they allow you to be ever conscious of the needs of the people at the center of your business -- the customer as well as the staff member who's your representative to the world.

So, what operational problem is vexing you, and is the pain great enough for you to make that change?

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*"We've been trying to do this thing one way for a long, long time, and it doesn't work."*

*The definition of insanity is to continue to repeat the same behavior and expect different results.*

*~Chuck Madden*

*"If you make a mistake, it's not a mistake. It's your own variation."*

*~Lynn Seaberg*

*"Defer no time; delays have dangerous ends."*

*~William Shakespeare*

*"As we move ahead, [we are] committed to continuous improvement in costs, revenue and operations to optimize our resources and sustain competitive margins. We have achieved a great deal in our restructuring to reposition this company and build upon our assets... We can be better.*

*We are in a very competitive industry, and we take nothing for granted."*

*~Glenn Tilton*

*"The first step, when creating best practice standards, ...is to understand what they actually need and want. This...is just one example of how [we are] embracing users' views and applying this knowledge to create a user-friendly environment."*

*~Paul Walsh*

## 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 [online](#) or at (301) 280-5950.

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