



"I Don't See It!"

As a youngster, I spent a lot of time with my maternal grandmother. I guess you could say that Grandma and I were "buds." We cooked together (and ate everything we cooked). We colored together. (Imagine Grandma and me on the floor, making masterpieces out of volume after volume of coloring books.) We even engaged in countless hours of one of Grandma's favorite past times - watching soap operas. (And it's taken me years to wean myself off of the lives and loves of Grandma's daytime friends.)

Besides the things we did together, there were some important roles I played in Grandma's life. One of those was gopher...or should I say "go-fer." I'd go fer (I mean "for") items for Grandma throughout the day. Though she lived in a small apartment, there always seemed to be a needed item somewhere other than where she happened to be at any given moment. In those instances, I was summoned into duty. Sometimes I found the object quickly, but other times I was left with no alternative but to shout back..."Grandma, I don't see it!"

After calling out directions to the exact location, often without success, Grandma would move from her comfortable position and walk straight to whatever it was I had been dispatched to find. Then, without fail, she would shake her head and repeat words that ring in my ears to this day. "Girl, if it had been a snake, it would have bit ya!" True, so true.

If you're like me, there are times when you, too, struggle with a matter but, by golly, you just don't see it (whatever "it" is). That can be the case for us as individuals. It also can be the case for us in our companies or other organizations. But, beware, because what you don't see can hurt you. It may not be a bite from Grandma's proverbial snake. Instead, for you, it may be the bite of lost customers, revenue, profit, time, or sanity!

And so, this month's and next month's editions of **EA Insights** are dedicated to gaining perspective, and our focus will be gaining perspective about your business. We'll start with seeing things from the management perspective, and in October we'll follow with thoughts about getting the picture from a staff perspective. It's our hope that these articles help you to begin recognizing the matters that might be right in front of you, but that you may be missing. Believe me, that could mean all the difference to easing your pain or to propelling your work to the next level.

All the best,

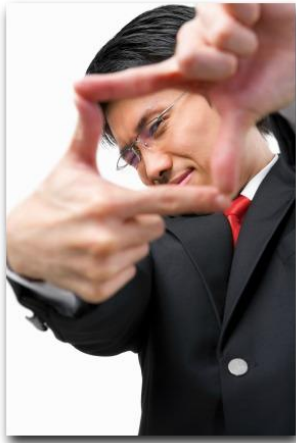
June

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The Big Picture View of Business (Pt. I) Seeing Things from a **Management** Perspective

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It's so easy to get caught up in the day-to-day challenges of business - whatever that business is - that you lose perspective. That is, you're not able to see what's working well, much less understand why it's functioning that way. And, not seeing the successes can prevent you from continuing or expanding upon such positive endeavors, from replicating them in other parts of your operation, or simply from acknowledging the good work and/or innovation of those responsible.



The other extreme also is true. A lack of perspective can inhibit your ability to recognize and, consequently, to tackle problems. That can result in unintended sparks erupting into full-fledged wildfires. What's the outcome? You eventually experience a revolving door of talented people, an exodus of loyal customers, diminishing revenue and/or profit, and an ever-burgeoning headache.

While it may be impossible right now to come out of the weeds completely, it is absolutely essential for every leader periodically to step back, take in the big picture, and put things into perspective. However, if you want this exercise to be meaningful, it requires *release*...release of your preconceived notions, release of your biases, release of your pet projects or favored policies, and release of your ego. If you truly want to take the pulse of your operation, if you want a realistic outlook on which to build for the future, then you must be open to an honest assessment of what's happening around you. Not only must you seek to be candid, you must both allow and expect those around you to be candid as well.

Next month, we will examine the type of valuable feedback about your organization's functioning that you can get from staff generally. Let's begin this discussion, though, by looking at what should be Level 1 in any organizational self-assessment - an exploration of the **management** aspects of the operation. At assessment time, it's very easy (and definitely not as threatening) to begin analyzing and tinkering with the lower levels of the shop. However, what's happening in the units, or among individual staff, often has its roots - good or bad - in some management decision, practice, or avoidance.

For that reason, as we work with Executive Advantage clients, we facilitate their efforts *first* to investigate, and then to develop concrete

In This Issue

[The Big Picture View of Business: Seeing Things from a Management Perspective](#)

[What Should We Cover?](#)

["Quotes"](#)

Quick Links

[EA Home Page](#)

[About Us](#)

[News](#)

[Contact Us](#)



"Quotes"

"Nothing remains great without a capacity to change and to accommodate the conditions of a changing world."
~John Ashcroft

"He recognized more quickly that he was wrong and he could change courses[.] You need to identify if you're on the wrong course and correct it - and not give up."
~Sophia Collier

*"When you have a performance like we had, everything needs work[.] We have to go back and re-emphasize fundamentals and try to get good at the basics. ***
When you have trouble, you identify what the problems are and try to fix them."*
~Romeo Crennel

"What he's doing is elevating the perspective of the leadership of this department and [saying,] 'I don't know the answers to these questions, but they're on my mind and I want them on your mind too.'"
~Larry DiRita

"Basically, our mission is to identify the problem, do outreach, and collaborate with people on solutions, then do testing to see if it made a difference."
~Scott Eden

"This should give us a good perspective on what we have to work on."
~Brett Festerling

"If you need to take a step back from day-to-day operations and plot out the long-term direction of your user experience strategy, consultants can give you a perspective you can't get on your own."
~Jesse J. Garrett

"A little perspective, like a little humor,

strategies related to, current organizational capacity from a *management* perspective. That is, it's helpful to begin the process by taking a business-wide snapshot of the entity's existing capacity to carry out its operations and to steward its resources. To gain such management-oriented perspective, we guide leaders through an examination of four key areas:

Leadership Capacity - Pause before you immediately begin thinking about the *people* who are leaders within your organization. Instead, don't overlook the foundation on which the organization rests - its mission, vision, and values. Look at the existence and clarity of, and the reliance upon, these building blocks that really should underpin everything you do. If they exist at all, do they serve as the basis for setting goals and strategy, or are they just statements that are dusted off to put in marketing or recruiting materials? Are these principles known, understood, and championed by leaders so that they truly serve as bedrocks of the business and not just as slogans that cause chuckles and eye-rolling when mentioned?

Now, turn to the ability of organization-wide leaders to inspire, prioritize, make decisions, provide direction, and innovate. Start with your board. Does its composition, commitment, and governance provide the level of leadership, advice, contacts, expertise, etc. that the organization needs to advance its mission? Consider the most senior leaders. Do their backgrounds, grasp of the environment, and dedication to innovation position them as subject-matter experts among internal and external colleagues? Further, are they effective leaders within the organization - demonstrating positive interpersonal relationships, communicating effectively, developing staff, thinking strategically, producing reasonable results, possessing financial acumen, and living out organizational precepts?

Adaptive Capacity - In essence, how nimble is your organization? Are you able to monitor, assess, and respond to internal and external changes effectively? Think about your practices around research, learning, and strategic planning; concerning the continual refining of plans; regarding implementation efforts; and connected to the measurement of progress. Are programs, products, and services aligned with mission, vision, goals, and is there synergy across the organization, or are activities being carried out in a haphazard fashion? How attuned are you to customers or stakeholders, and are you able to respond to changing needs and/or wants fluidly without losing focus on underlying direction?

Management Capacity - Consider how the organization is managed - that is, how its human and other resources are stewarded on a daily basis. Do executives, managers, and/or supervisors have the skills to bring out the best in a diverse workforce? Has a staff been assembled that is equipped to perform the work associated with the current direction? Does each unit have a clear understanding of how it supports overarching organizational goals, and does that understanding carry over to each person in the organization? Does everything fall apart when the organization's key leader is absent or when unit leaders are away? Do shared rules, practices, etc. exist throughout the organization that produce not only a sense of unity but also that foster smooth functioning?

Operational Capacity - Simply put, how do you work? Are you staffed right, and do you have a pipeline for the future? Are you able to raise funds or develop business to advance the mission and keep people employed? Is communication fluid, timely, consistent, and directed to the appropriate audiences? Does the infrastructure (e.g., space, technology, etc.) fit the work to be done?

Want to know how *your* business is doing? A good first step is to scrutinize the operation from a management perspective. What you learn about the strengths, as well as the challenges, related to current organizational capacity can be invaluable to advancing your work, building a solid team, and leading well.

But, remember, the management lens offers only one perspective. Next month, we'll consider what can be grasped by communicating with staff members.

For additional resources about implementing a business-wide self-assessment to help you identify, get to the root of, and overcome business challenges, don't hesitate to contact us here at Executive Advantage.

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goes a long way."
~Allen Klein

"Over the next few days we will identify what caused the problem and what we should do to fix it."
~David Knox

"We're focused on managing our capacity for maximum effectiveness, in order to best serve our customers with a broad range of solutions[.]"
~John Legere

"There is a dollop of truth in virtually every perspective. I think we are all better served by hearing from as many voices as we can. It makes us better thinkers."
~Thomas Morgan

"Really, this offers a way to look at truth from a different perspective. If we always look at things from the same view, we can become [biased]. But a new perspective can always be invigorating."
~David Payne

"Employers are very focused on 'today,' on their bottom lines. They are not doing the kind of planning needed to identify their critical needs[.]"
~Deborah Russell

"You have to shut it down and identify the reasons[.] So many times teams are forced into a situation of treating the symptoms because they don't have the time. *** If you don't get the problem addressed, you still have the original problem[.] and now you have a second problem that was only a symptom before."
~Mackie Shilstone

"From my perspective, I'll take a great idea from wherever it comes."
~Andrea Wong

What Should We Cover?



Do you have questions or topics that you'd like to have us cover in an upcoming issue of EA Insights?

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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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