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Sense of urgency or stress?

Look around you. Chances are you'll see at least one person very agitated and doing several things at the same time. Being constantly on the move, talking on your cell phone, checking your blackberry and at the same time, frantically typing in several open tabs on your laptop browser does not equate to productivity or effectiveness. Perhaps it only reflects stress, anxiety, energy drain and lack of results.

As we currently live with the demand for immediate results (and increasingly shorter deadlines), combined with having only one person to execute the tasks previously executed by three, we have created a legion of people who end their days totally exhausted and at the same time frustrated because they were unable to translate all the invested effort into results, or because they were unable to significantly reduce their to-do list. In other words, they have a permanent sensation of missing something and not having done enough. Most of them are on the verge of a nervous breakdown.

They cannot find an answer to the question "Why am I not productive?" Worse, they see no alternatives to increase their effectiveness and reduce frustration. *"I am always on the go, alert to everything around me, I do whatever I can, I don't have time to have lunch, I have a sandwich while I continue to work, I only find time to go to the restroom between two meetings, I always arrive early and leave late, and I don't finish my tasks. What am I doing wrong?"*

In a case such as this, we're probably facing someone who needs to adjust the critical concept of his sense of urgency in order to improve his day to day effectiveness and reduce his anxiety.

Sense of urgency is not the same as an excess of adrenalin, running like mad, being stressed or shouting orders at everyone. It is about focusing on what is critically important, in initiatives that make a difference, and that are translated into daily progress. In other words, sense of urgency is the

energy invested in a focused action, with a positive attitude, which will bring meaning to what we are doing. It is not about desperately going after short term results, most times meaningless. Sense of urgency is reaching daily results, while being clear that opportunities have been identified, and we are taking advantage of them. It requires that we understand how each focused action contributes to the building of a complex mosaic. Finally, sense of urgency is about understanding what contributes to the organizational results and to our own personal development. It is about performing activities that definitely add value to all involved.

Let's see how leadership can create a true sense of urgency in your team without confusing it with running around or stress...

1. Share your vision and strategy

One of the reasons we see frustrated employees in offices all over the world is their difficulty to understand the true meaning of their work. This difficulty prevents them from identifying the purpose of their activities, from selecting critically important tasks, from focusing on what is important and in what really matters.

Therefore, in this context, one of the critical leadership attributes is to share the vision, its meaning and purpose, as well as the strategies that will allow us to reach it.

2. Remove obstacles or stop their proliferation

One of the most frequent time wasters is what we call an "agenda killer." Sometimes, because of our inability to say "no" or for political reasons, we feel compelled to accept tasks which add no value to our results, which offer no contribution to our vision, and simply represent a bureaucratic step without any significance to our results.

Before accepting an additional task (especially a task which will impact your team), question if it is aligned with the organizational vision and strategy.



3. Create a virtuous cycle of results

What is our motivation to engage in a task when the outcome seems intangible or unattainable? As we experience success we will feel energized to run after the next success.

How to do it? Break down long term goals in short term objectives (less than two or three months).

Establish key success indicators for each activity or task, and celebrate achieved results.

4. Celebrate accomplishments

To keep up with the rhythm of accomplishments is a major challenge. As people notice that their effort is translated into results, and that results are being recognized and celebrated, more energy will be invested in the next accomplishment.

The sense of urgency can be a powerful source of motivation. It only requires that you adjust the concept and some specific actions.

See you next month. Suggestions are welcome.

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