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Overcoming Obstacles

As I've yet to run across an executive without obstacles, learning how to effectively deal with them has to be a top priority. Often times, we are caught up in fire-fighting mode - every day, we plan to call that customer, read that report, train that employee, or put together long-term plans. And, every day, the day whizzes past with too few of our priorities addressed. Thus, the more adept and quick we become at addressing obstacles, the more successful we'll be.

So, how do we effectively deal with obstacles? 1) First, prepare to avoid them. 2) Remain calm. 3) Think about options.

1. **First, prepare to avoid them!** - Well, of course, it is easier to overcome an obstacle if there is no obstacle. I'm sure many of you are thinking, "Easier said than done". No doubt, as I've said that too; however, I have found that with a little thought, you can avoid several obstacles.

My best practice for accomplishing this goal is to stick with what's simple. First, don't worry about every obstacle. If it doesn't matter if you overcome an obstacle, don't waste your time. Focus only on those that will make a difference. Then, take 5 minutes to think. What is likely to go wrong? Can I live with that potential result? If not, is there something I could do to prevent it? Follow this process for your top 3 potential obstacles for all critical priorities. Soon, you'll have far fewer obstacles to overcome - and you'll likely become more effective by default since you can focus on fewer issues at a time!

2. **Remain calm** - Again, much easier said than done. Yet I've found this can be the most essential ingredient to success. Although it's a natural tendency to stress or feel bad about the situation, refrain as much as possible. We think more clearly when not stressed. Instead of thinking of all the ways we screwed up to make this occur or worrying about what the worst-case impacts might be, take a deep breath. Most likely, it is not a life or death obstacle. Although it might require damage control, it is likely that it will not end your career. So, why waste energy? Instead, let's put whatever energy we have to good use figuring out a solution.
3. **Think about options** - In my experience in working with all types and sizes of organizations across multiple industries and globally, the best way to overcome an obstacle is the same across the board - think about options. Don't waste time determining what caused the obstacle at this point (unless it will help in the resolution); instead, focus attention on options to overcome the obstacle. There are always numerous ways to overcome an obstacle. Don't worry about the merits of each of the options until you've brainstormed a list of options.

Brainstorming isn't a solo sport. Ask for ideas from even unlikely sources. I find that I'm constantly surprised at what I can learn from unlikely places. Once you have several potential ideas to overcome the obstacle, evaluate the top few. Don't fall into analysis paralysis. Keep it simple: Determine a ballpark amount of time and resources the option will require. Determine to what degree it will resolve the issue or improve the situation. Is there anything else that would have to happen to ensure success? Will it likely be approved? Then, when you're 80% ready, GO! In today's new normal business

environment, speed matters. Thus, a 2% improved solution is not worth sacrificing a week of time (or even a day in most cases).

I run into countless obstacles. Whether I'm successful or not has little to do with whether I run into an obstacle; instead, it has to do with how I address the obstacle. Become quicker and more effective, and you'll surpass your competition.

Lisa's Tips: Roadblocks to Success

Sticking with my theme of obstacles, I thought I'd discuss common roadblocks - many times, half the battle is identifying potential issues.

1. **An employee feels threatened** - one of the most common causes of project roadblocks is when an employee feels threatened. Who might worry about how a project will affect his/her job?
2. **A priority conflict occurs** - As everything seems important, how do we handle conflicts? Do you know which people or departments might have a conflict upfront? What can you do to prevent them?
3. **Lack of information** - Are your employees equipped with the information required to effectively address issues? Have you provided training? Access to help/ experts?
4. **Inputs vs. outputs** - Do you measure time and tasks yet expect results? Or do you focus on results and encourage flexibility and creativity in how to "get there"?
5. **Miss-matched measurements** - If there is anything that arises most frequently, it is that metrics and measurements do not encourage the behavior the leaders say they want. Do you say you want to encourage better customer service but measure dollars shipped vs. satisfied customers?

Recommended Reading

"[Social BOOM](#)" by Jeffrey Gitomer - this is an intriguing book on how to leverage social media to improve your business, build a brand, create a marketing buzz, sell products / services etc. It's a quick and fun read with lots of tips and ideas for leveraging social media for business success.

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