



The Discipline of Execution – Getting the right things done on time

Today's piece is a natural sequel to last week's discussion on the Habit of Action. Today's is a call to be an *Executioner* – the one that gets the right things done at the right time. Some years ago while working as HOD, Learning and Talent Development for Vmobile Nigeria (I wonder how many of us still remember that wholly Nigerian owned world-class Telco that later became foreign owned. Thanks to DFI), I was on a telecommunications training in Dallas, Texas when I read the book: Execution – the Discipline of getting things done (written in 2002) by Larry Bossidy and Ram Charan. It was un-droppable. I also recently read the summary of another book along this line – The 4 Disciplines of Execution – Achieving your wildly important goals by Chris McChesney, Sean Covey and Jim Huling. With these two beautiful books agreeing with all I hold so dear on the habit of action, I could not resist jotting down some of the things I gained and have found useful and practicable over the years.

Honing your execution skill is no rocket science, it is a discipline. It has to be deliberately cultivated, groomed and practised consistently. It is the mindset of 'if-it-is-to-be-it-is-up-to-me'. It is to be able to complete the sentence 'I'm the one person ultimately responsible for...'. It is making up your mind to add value and have no excuses. Getting the one being tough on It requires that you that is, time for ideas and solutions have this moment the bathroom, some why driving on the free way, some while having coffee, eating lunch or dinner; all these for different reasons. A friend once shared with me why the bathroom. It was quite revealing, pardon me if I'm not able to share his reasons with you on this page. When we meet in any of my classes, you may raise the issue. One key step, do not let your writing materials be far away from you, you may have to jot down your thoughts.



You would need to make choices if you desire to be so disciplined – a choice between concentrating your finest energy on a few goals at a time, and dissipating mediocre efforts on dozens of goals all at the same time. Execution starts with focus. I have heard people say focus and die. In fact, at a point in our in the last century, that was the swan song. For a manufacturing concern or products merchant, that would be okay but at the level of your personal goals, you need the power of focus and purpose to accomplish your goals.

Goals
Are
Dreams
with
Deadlines

It also helps your execution prowess when your goals have finish lines in the form of from X to Y and when. It was Harvey Mackay who said a goal is a dream with a deadline. Yes, those finish lines go a long way in facilitating execution. A lot of unserious people shy away from those finish lines for fear of failure. The fear of ‘what if...’ There is no shying away from them. The finish lines should be the motivation. Execution requires audacity to shoot for the moon in setting your goals, the big hairy audacious goals (BHAGs) as Jim Collins postulated in his classic book Built to Last.

In this regard, let me quote an action paragraph from the 4 Disciplines of Execution... “In 1961, President John F. Kennedy shook NASA to its foundations when he made the pronouncement ‘land a man on the moon and return him safely to the earth before this decade is out.’ When the team moves from having a dozen we-really-hope goals to one or two no-matter-what goals, the effect on morale is dramatic. If you can throw that switch, you have laid the foundation for extraordinary execution. When Kennedy said to the moon and back by the end of the decade, he threw that switch.”

Execution is not just getting things done but getting them done very well and effectively on time. Martin Luther King Jr. once said if a man is called to be a street sweeper, he should sweep streets even as Michelangelo painted, or Beethoven composed music, or Shakespeare wrote poetry. He should sweep streets so well that all the hosts of heaven and earth will pause to say, here lived a street sweeper who did his job well.

Larry Bossidy thinks execution is your most important job. I agree. Talking of his movement from GE to AlliedSignal as CEO in 1991, he said his (new) company had lots of hardworking, bright people, but they were not effective, and they didn’t place a premium on getting things done. Instead of hardworking, they should have been smart-working people. That is getting things done.

When leaders fail, check their execution scorecard, see the gap between the promises they made and the results they deliver. If culture eats strategy for supper, check strategy execution. Building blocks of execution would include knowing yourself, setting clear goals and priorities, follow through on them, continuous improvement, banish fear and be personally committed, delegate, be a team player, and be trustworthy. Trust is a currency you cannot afford to run short of if you want to accomplish something worthwhile.

Another essential ingredient of execution is responsibility and accountability. This is a different kind of accountability. It is personal accountability to the commitment you have made and is within your power to keep. When you are seen as fulfilling your commitments without excuse, then people see you as someone to be trusted. When this happens, relationships work better, performance improves, the team is energised, and there is a sense of fulfilment.

Something just happened. Two of our suppliers quoted for a particular service. We have just made a decision to buy from the one with the more expensive quote. Why this seemingly ‘uneconomic’ decision you may wonder? The difference between the two suppliers is that one has a track record of performance, no disappointment, bending over backwards to meet our demands even when we set ‘impossible’ timelines, and the other has a tradition of excuses and somewhat annoying apology text messages, though their quote was cheaper.



Do I need to say more? Good things happen to those who get the right things done.

In the meantime, do a self search. What are those things you have been pushing forward giving one excuse or the other? Make up your mind to be an executioner from today, start practising, get up and get going. Do something. Eradicate the virus called *excucitis*.

Go out there and excel. Till next week, enjoy.

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