

Affecting Change to Improve Business Health (Part II)

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This is Part II of a two-part series. For Part I, [click here](#) [1].



Fewer of our efforts to make changes in times of emergency are successful than our efforts to change when we are under less pressure. Sometimes it's simply too late and no change will be enough. Sometimes it just seems easier to fail than to change. Please don't go the latter path.

To plan your business change, either slow and steady or drastic and urgent, pretend you are changing your personal health. Knowing what to do to change our personal health and fitness is relatively straightforward. Make that plan, and then translate it to a business context. It's one of my favorite planning methods. Here is a quick example.

Pretend you are unhealthy and unfit. What must you do to become fit and healthy? Do you need to consult with a fitness expert or doctor? Do you need a trainer to help you pace your effort and encourage you to succeed? Would an advisor for your business be a necessary or worthwhile investment to help you commit to change and persevere? Just keep in mind, just as a personal trainer can't lose weight for you, neither can a consultant change your business for you, it can only advise. Your business must do the work.

Fitness and health are not achieved by exercise alone. Diet has the greater influence on both. If you continue to consume garbage, your exercise program will be crippled. To succeed you must commit to better eating habits. Stopping the purchase and stocking of foods that are unhealthy is the best plan to stop eating those unhealthy foods. Let's take that idea to business change.

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That which goes into our business most significantly affects what comes out of our business. There are three major inputs to our business performance that dictate how well we are set up for success.

1. Customer interface
2. Supply chain
3. Employee selection

Begin your change plans and process improvement efforts with your business inputs. Stop allowing customer interface problems to affect your orders and purchases. Stop engaging supply sources that cause you problems. The cheapest supply source is not necessarily the most cost-effective. Chaos and corrections with suppliers cost extraordinary amounts of money over time. Finally, employing the correct skills and personalities has more effect on performance than metrics and data can capture or communicate. Do not underestimate the importance of personnel investment.

Get the inputs to your business under control. Without those working effectively, all of the internal work you do to improve performance will be crippled.

Once we have planned a diet change and committed to executing that plan (by which I mean we have executed that plan and are striving to maintain it; I do not mean we have simply said we are committed) we can start building our exercise plan. We all know that if we are couch potatoes today we aren't going to win a marathon tomorrow. We must build our exercise and fitness within reason.

Likewise, just reading about exercise routines on blog sites and watching yoga videos isn't going to make us more fit. Training and education are helpful, but execution does the work. Our plan for exercise to improve fitness and health should be a small percent investigation and education, and a large percent work.

It makes sense that we should identify what we need most in terms of fitness and then research some methods to do that. Do we need weight training or cardiovascular exercise most? Is flexibility critical? Do we need some of everything? If so, how do we balance all of that and how much time must we commit?

Answer those questions in a business context. What is your biggest, most urgent challenge? Identify a method to address that first and train your team. Immediately, begin exercising that routine. Make it a priority part of business work. Just like no one successfully exercises or trains for sports competitions in their spare time, business improvement doesn't happen in personnel's spare time. Personnel don't have spare time when the business is unhealthy. Execution of process improvement must be as important or more important than other business.

Here is the easiest way to balance that priority in my perspective. Make it more important to fix a broken process than to execute a broken process. If you think about it, that is what the legendary business unit did in the tale above. It decided it

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was more important to fix the business than to do business and stopped everything in order to fix itself. We don't have to stop business necessarily, but we can stop doing one thing wrong long enough to fix it.

Build and pace your exercise plan, in business sense — your improvement plan, with your starting place in mind. Don't expect to suddenly be an athlete because you decided to change, but don't accept token efforts and lip service either. Make significant, meaningful and achievable steps. Ramp up aggressively toward high-performance expectations, but don't overtax your system.

The parallels between personal health and business health are remarkable. Use that to help plan your business change. Identify what needs to happen for an unhealthy person to become healthy and then translate that plan into a business context for your business. Consider what makes fitness successful and then use that vision to make business successful.

Remember this above all else. Whether you are going to start walking tomorrow or whether you need to make a drastic change today before losing a critical capability forever, you must commit to the change for it to happen. It must be an imperative, regardless of your pace or state of emergency. Don't allow your team to decide that doom is easier to accept than change.

Stay wise, friends.

If you like what you just read, find more of Alan's thoughts at www.bizwizwithin.com [2].

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[1] <http://www.foodmanufacturing.com/articles/2014/03/affecting-change-improve-business-health-part-i>

[2] <http://www.bizwizwithin.com>