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# The most important thing you can do on Monday morning

***Tony Manning***

**Like most smart executives, you probably have a “to do” list that you update regularly. So what’s on yours for Monday morning? What actions must you take to get you to your goals? And what must you do first, second, third?**

Knowing the answer will make all the difference between success and failure. It’s the only sure way to get the right stuff onto your radar screen and the wrong stuff off it. But be careful with your choices. Ruthlessly apply the “ten buck test” to everything that looks interesting, and don’t let anything slip onto your list because you haven’t thought about it.

The ten buck test is a simple reminder that all of us have too much to do and too few resources. Individuals don’t have enough time, money, energy, intellect or imagination to successfully tackle everything that comes their way; organizations are short of capital, skills, technologies, and much else. So we have to choose. We have to make trade-offs.

When we don’t, the interesting issues invariably get more attention than the ones that matter. Those stamped “urgent” go straight to the top of the action pile; anything that’s merely “important” lies around gathering dust.

The question to keep asking is, “Where should I spend my ten bucks?” Chances are that most of us would have to confess that we’re using an awful lot of gas to go a very short distance – and probably in the wrong direction.

So let’s use the ten buck test to check your Monday list right now. How should you use your precious resources.

In fact, let’s be even more specific. Can you think of just *one* thing that will make a massive difference to your results?

No doubt that’s a tough call. But my answer for most executives would be simple: make sure your people understand your strategy, and their roles in it.

Not necessary, you say? They already know that?

You might be surprised. I usually am when I work with management teams. I always start from the assumption that they know just what they’re about, who is responsible for what, how to do their jobs, and so on. After all, this is Management 101, isn’t it?

Don’t be so sure. What “everybody knows” often turns out to be what nobody actually knows. Top executives swear that they’ve shared their strategy in great detail, talked about it constantly, and made sure that all their people are guided by precise goals with agreed deadlines. The truth is often quite different.

In my experience over almost 20 years of consulting to top teams, I've learned that many CEOs cannot explain their firms' strategy either clearly or simply. Nor have they made the effort that it takes to drive the message home

In some cases, this is because the strategy is neither clear nor simple. Managers might have discussed it at one *bosberaad* after another, consultants might have been hired to craft it, and the "S-word" might be dropped into every conversation. But ask the boss, "What exactly is the point?" and the answer is vague. To add to the confusion, the focus and priorities keep changing: people are sent tearing one direction one day, and somewhere else the next. In one meeting, the firm's goal is to grow market share at home; the next thing you hear, Africa is the target or a merger might be in prospect.

If people are to be effective, they need to know five critical things: what to do (the task), why to do it (the context, the reason), how to do it (the method), how well to do it (standards), and how well they're doing (feedback). All these are important, but as Jeffrey Pfeffer, professor of organizational behaviour at Stanford University, points out, the reason people fail to perform is most often because they don't understand the "why".

So back to the question: what is the most important thing you should do on Monday morning? Answer: share your strategy with your team and let them know exactly what you expect of them. Encourage them to ask questions and challenge your thinking. Embrace their ideas. And show that you're willing to act on their ideas.

And then ... keep repeating yourself. Again and again and again. For the fact is, you can never do it enough.

Making strategy work is a long journey. It starts on Monday morning.

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