

PREPARE WITH ***PRECISION***

"I am mainly interested in promoting new developments. I should like to put something new into my cars every morning—an inclination that terrifies my staff. Were my wishes in this respect to be indulged, there would be no production of standard models at all, but only a succession of prototypes.'"

—Enzo Ferrari

Precision matters.

Enzo Ferrari had a greater impact on the world of professional auto racing than almost any other person in history. After racing cars and serving as a mechanic for Alfa on the highly successful Alfa Romeos in the 1920s and 1930s, he started his own business. In 1946, at the age of forty-eight, he concentrated all of his efforts on designing and building his own car, which bore his name.²

Over the next six plus decades, the name Ferrari has become synonymous with extraordinary speed—and with winning. His cars participated in the first Formula 1 Grand Prix World Championship in 1950, and over the next 60 years Enzo Ferrari and his successors won championships in 1952, 1953, 1956, 1958, 1961, 1964, 1975, 1977, 1979, 2000–2004, and 2007. I would call that sustained greatness.

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Enzo Ferrari's passion was precision. He wanted every part of his organization dedicated to increasing precision in the execution of every detail. He wrote, "All odds and ends of technical information are of interest to builders of racing cars, because a secondary detail can sometimes give a clever engineer a lead to something much more important. The heat of a spark plug, the type of fuel used, the kind of steel employed for the valves, the address of this or that supplier, together with an infinity of other details, are all useful."³

His famous emblem of a prancing horse on a yellow shield became a symbol of true greatness in winning through precision. Every year the Ferrari drivers attempt to tame the prancing horse by winning the Formula 1 Grand Prix World Championship. Every time Ferrari wins, people throughout Italy cheer one of their most famous sons. Enzo Ferrari created one of the world's greatest brands.⁴

Because Enzo Ferrari consistently prepared his team to win the race in front of them, he gained legendary status. He was named as an example of Italian genius in the book, *Sprezzatura: 50 Ways Italian Genius Shaped the World*, along with Julius Ceasar, Leonardo da Vinci, and Michelangelo.⁵

For you, as a business manager, precision also matters. The power of precision is available to every manager. Striving for precision is the most effective way for you to succeed as a manager over the long term.

THE NOBLE CALLING TO BE A PRECISIONIST

In *The Pocket Webster School & Office Dictionary*, the word "precision" means demanding exactness. Therefore, I'm defining a precisionist as a person who has mastered the art of demanding exactness. The precisionist operates among the very best performers in the world within a given area of focus and constantly works to improve his or her performance.

When customers and employers are hit hard in the wallet they become extraordinarily discerning about where they place their dollars. Customers become highly selective in terms of what they invest in. Employers develop a laser focus about only going after the type of

managers they absolutely need and seeking out only the best of the best within that target.

If you want to fall into that extremely small slice of managers who are always in demand, then I encourage you to be a precisionist. The business race for sustainable, profitable growth is too difficult to win for you to be anything less than a precisionist as a manager.

Demanding exactness from yourself and from other people doesn't mean you have to be a jerk or a dictator. It means you have to have a very clear idea of exactly what you expect in terms of performance from yourself and from other people. Then you have to demand nothing less than for everyone to work together toward that exact expectation.

Examples of Precisionists

While precisionists are extraordinary, examples of precisionists are abundant.

Truth be told, I'm not a golf fan. Watching men and women hit a little white ball into a hole for four days is not my idea of a good time, except when Tiger Woods plays. Then I pile up the pillows and watch the master at work. What I'm really watching is not golf, but rather a precisionist applying his craft.

All Tiger Woods does is improve. He searches for ways to become more precise in the application of his craft. People call him superhuman, but the truth is we can all get better at what we do. That's right. We *all* have the capacity to be the Tiger Woods within a given area of focus. The keys are . . . , well, I'll talk more about that in a little while.

Eric Clapton is the only three-time inductee into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame. In 1964, his first full year as a professional musician with the Yardbirds, he played in over 200 gigs. However, he felt that to become a precisionist, a musician needed to keep performing. In his book, *Clapton: The Autobiography*, he wrote, "To fully develop your craft you need to interact with other people."⁶

Practice is wonderful, but it won't force you to take your skills to the next level. Even though he had been on the road performing since the age of nineteen, he still felt throughout his career that it was

important to get back in front of a live audience in order to improve his performance.

If you want to be a better leader, jump in and lead, even if it means volunteering to be on an unpaid committee. If you want to achieve precision as a manager, then take on the responsibility to manage a key profit center. You can't practice your way to become a precisionist as a manager. You have to jump in and take on real challenges.

Recently I drove home from my sister's house. On the way I was stopped by a man holding a "Stop/Slow" sign. At first I thought, "How can a person do that job day after day? Isn't that terribly boring?" And then it dawned on me the extreme importance of his work and the work of the crew repaving the road. If he lacked precision, cars would run into each other, and if the crew lacked precision, they would end up creating a road that was uneven. Precisionists are needed in every industry and every walk of life. They are the ones who stand out in the crowd and establish a higher standard for what is possible.

Ron Dennis, the long-time head of the McLaren Formula 1 Racing Team, personified the art of demanding exactness. Prior to Dennis's joining McLaren in September 1980, they had won two Formula 1 Grand Prix World Championships, in 1974 and 1976. His first move was to hire John Barnard to be his Formula 1 car designer. As Alan Henry describes in his book, *McLaren Formula 1 Racing Team*, "Dennis's enthusiasm for engineering excellence was tempered by a degree of business savvy. He was interested in Formula 1, but not at any price. If he was going to do it, he would do it properly."⁷

Dennis built a culture that believed perfection was just good enough. From 1984–1999, the McLaren Formula 1 Racing Team won the Formula 1 Grand Prix World Championship nine times with four different drivers: Niki Lauda, Alain Prost, Ayrton Senna, and Mika Hakkinen.

Ron Dennis said, "I have a belief that everything is important in life and everything is important when you are trying to achieve high levels of success in any business—certainly in Formula 1. I believe that at all times you should have the best—or at least try to have the best. This is not simply about money, it is mainly about commitment. We

try to inspire it into the very fiber of everyone's approach to their work for the team."⁸

The challenge we all face is not in finding examples of precisionists, but rather in becoming a precisionist. And why does becoming a precisionist remain such a great challenge? Well, we get a little busy with our lives and before we know it today is over with and we're on to tomorrow, and we haven't exactly made very much progress in becoming more precise in what we're doing. In other words, the busyness of life takes over our best intentions until bedtime beckons us.

I encourage you to step off the train of constant activity, invest time in thinking through what you're doing as you go about managing, and make real progress toward becoming more of a true precisionist as a manager.

The Process for Becoming a Precisionist as a Manager

1. Select great management performance as your umbrella.
2. Maintain a high degree of focus for at least fourteen years.
3. Leverage technology.

Select Great Management Performance as Your Umbrella

Your umbrella is the area of focus you've decided to achieve precision within. This is the area you're committing to operating within over the long term.

Walt Disney's umbrella was family entertainment. Under any umbrella there is plenty of room to maneuver and create. Walt Disney made family films and television shows, he created theme parks, he licensed products, and he started amazingly popular clubs like The Mickey Mouse Club. Having a single area of focus isn't a limiting factor. It's actually a freeing factor. It allows you to operate with extraordinary freedom within a given umbrella and enhance the synergy between everything you do.

Operating under the umbrella of great management performance allows you the freedom to improve your impact in a variety of meaningful areas ranging from establishing a strategy to assembling a true team to executing a plan to building a great brand for your organization.

Maintain a High Degree of Focus for at Least Fourteen Years

Patience is a business driver.

If there's one lesson I've learned in studying successful performers and organizations over the past twenty years, it's that sustained patience leads to extraordinary results. Success takes time. Many of the greatest precisionists in history invested well over a decade in honing their craft.

Michael Schumacher said, "People keep asking me how it is I can come into Formula 1 and establish myself so quickly near the top level and for me there is a simple answer: experience. Although I am very young compared to some of the other drivers I have spent a long time in motorsport, nineteen years altogether, and I have had really good preparation for the job."⁹ He had started driving karts at the age of four years old in 1973 and he didn't become a Formula 1 driver until 1991. By the age of twenty-two he was a very, very experienced driver.

The actor/comedian Steve Martin invested fourteen years, from 1963–1977, before he became a national phenomenon as the most popular stand-up comic in history.

In his book, *Born Standing Up: A Comic's Life*, he referred to the beginning of his journey when he wrote, "I was enamored of the rhythmic poetry of e.e. cummings, and a tantalizing quote from one of his recorded lectures stayed in my head. When asked why he became a poet, he said, 'Like the burlesque comedian, I am abnormally fond of that precision which creates movement.' The line, with its intriguing reference to comedy, was enigmatic, and it took me ten years to work out its meaning."¹⁰ For fourteen years Steve Martin worked to hone the precision of his act to the point that people fell on the ground laughing even though he told no punch lines.

At age nineteen in 1973, Oprah Winfrey began to work for

WLAC-TV in Nashville. At twenty-two, she became a reporter and co-anchor at WJZ-TV in Baltimore, and at twenty-four she began hosting talk shows at WJZ-TV. In 1986, she was the host of the number-one ranked nationally syndicated television talk show, *The Oprah Winfrey Show*. Over the course of fourteen years, Oprah Winfrey developed her precision as an interviewer and has sustained her greatness for more than twenty years.¹¹

Tiger Woods began playing competitive golf at age seven and won his first major golf tournament in 1997 at age twenty-one by winning the Masters Golf Tournament. By the time he walked away with that first green jacket he had already invested fourteen years in honing his performance. He went on to win the 1999, 2000, 2006, and 2007 U.S. PGA title; 2000, 2002, and 2008 U.S. Open; the 2000, 2005, and 2006 British Open; and the Masters in 2001, 2002, and 2005. He is on target to break Jack Nicklaus's all-time record of winning eighteen major golf tournaments.

Walt Disney began making animated short films in 1921 at the age of nineteen and made the world's first full-length animated film, *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*, in 1937 just before he turned thirty-six.

Neal Gabler, author of *Walt Disney: The Triumph of the American Imagination*, described the precision of Disney's effort in the following way: "Walt was moving so incrementally, scene by scene, line by line, even word by word, that by the spring of 1935 he had yet to name all the dwarfs or characterize them, much less finalize the script. If there was any possibility to a scene, he seemed determined not to overlook it. *Snow White* would not be rushed, even if that meant disregarding the original schedule. It would percolate for as long as it took the film to brew."¹²

Harrison Ford started acting in 1963 at the age of twenty-one. He received his first starring role in *Star Wars* in 1977, although at the time a lot of people doubted whether *Star Wars* would attract any attention at all. He then got the lead role in *Raiders of the Lost Ark* as Indiana Jones at age thirty-eight. Ford said, "All I would tell people is to hold on to what is individual about themselves. Not to allow their ambition for success to cause them to try and imitate the success of others. You've got to find it on your own terms."¹³

While he was struggling to make a living as an actor, Harrison Ford was a full-time carpenter for six years. Biographer Robert Sellers wrote:

When Ford started out in Hollywood he recognized that the best way to pursue acting was not to imitate someone else's success, but develop what was particular about himself. Ford was to teach himself how to act precisely the same way he taught himself carpentry. To him they are crafts and his approach to both is almost entirely technical. Ford sees building a character as no different than turning a stack of timber into a bookshelf or a cupboard. It is a question of submitting oneself to the logic of the craft, and if one starts with a firm foundation, every subsequent step becomes part of that logical process.¹⁴

Joe Gibbs was an assistant college and professional coach for fifteen years, not counting his time as a graduate assistant, before he became a head NFL coach. Imagine waiting that long for your first big shot. However, Gibbs didn't just put in the time. He honed his craft during those fifteen years. Over the next eleven years he won the Super Bowl three times, in 1983, 1988, and 1992. He then repeated this pattern as the owner of Joe Gibbs Racing, which he founded in 1992. In his first eight seasons he never won a championship. He then won the NASCAR Winston Cup, later named the Nextel Cup, in 2000, 2002, and 2005. Precisionists constantly search to improve the exactness of what it takes to win, and that approach can be applied in multiple industries, as Joe Gibbs has proven.

If you want to be a precisionist as a manager, remain committed to constantly improving within the umbrella of great management performance for at least fourteen years. You might be wondering how pursuing precision can help you achieve a three-year goal like the Management 500 if it takes at least fourteen years to become a precisionist.

Here's how it works. The moment you commit yourself to a specific umbrella, a specific area of focus, you begin to attract people and opportunities to you that will help you hone your craft within that arena. In doing so, you become more attractive to other people. They

know what you are focused on and they admire you for pursuing excellence in that field. They may not say that to you, but that's what happens.

When you select the umbrella of great management performance, you probably won't be a world-class manager right away, and that's OK. You are on your way to becoming a precisionist in a field that you have passion for and that sense of adventure is worth a great deal. It's the same type of precision and adventure that the world's greatest racecar drivers pursue.

Leverage Technology

I used to think that technology meant computers, software, and electronics. I wasn't even close. In *The Pocket Webster School & Office Dictionary*, the definition of *technology* is "science used in a practical way." The definition of *science* is "systemized knowledge obtained by study, observation, and experiment." Consequently, technology means systemized knowledge obtained by study, observation, and experiment that is used in a practical way. I *love* that definition. That's exactly what precisionists do.

Tiger Woods is a student of golf: the history of golf, the great players from the past, and the different holes on the different courses. He experiments with different types of shots until he's able to use them in a practical way during a professional golf tournament.

Walt Disney constantly observed people and experimented with different ways to tell entertaining stories in practical ways. He was one of the first to use color in films, he embraced television when others ran away from it, and he created the first ever theme park.

Enzo Ferrari constantly searched for better ways to make his cars go faster and to sustain their performance at incredibly high levels over long periods of time.

You have the ability to leverage technology in order to increase the exactness with which you and your employees perform. The key is to constantly study, observe, and experiment within the umbrella of great management performance, and then use what you learn in practical ways that add value to your employees, customers, suppliers, and colleagues.

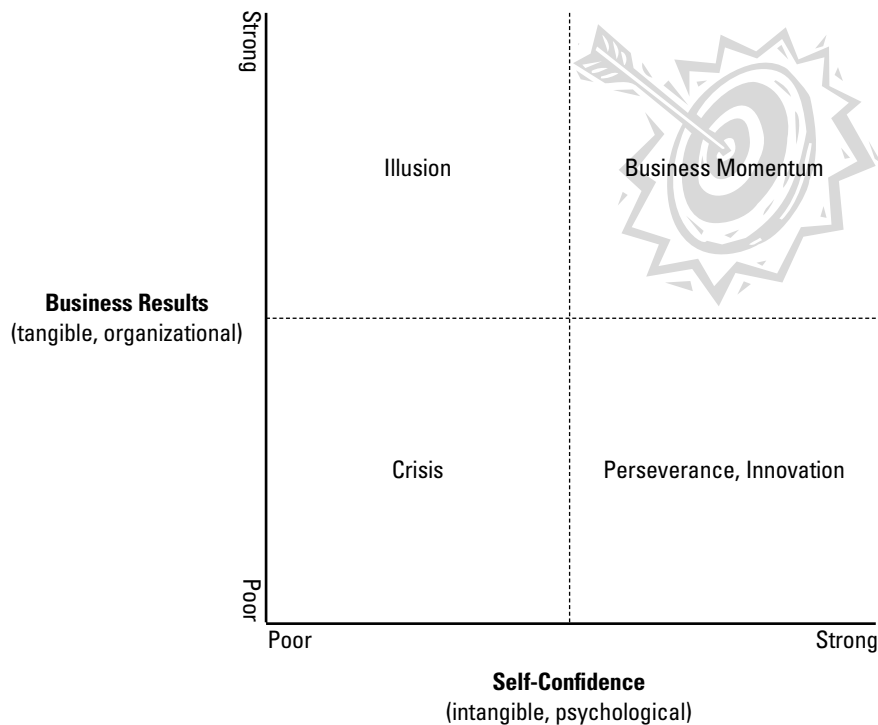
THE MEASURES OF A MANAGER'S SUCCESS

There are two measures of your success as a manager, as represented in Figure 1.1.

The first measure consists of your actual business results such as top-line sales, bottom-line profits, the attraction and retention of great customers, and the attraction and retention and development of great employees. Business results are tangible and organizational. They are real, they exist outside of you where everyone can see them, and they are about what your organization has achieved rather than what activities you have done.

The second measure of your success as a manager is your self-confidence. In a business sense, self-confidence is the degree to which you believe you're going to succeed in guiding your organization to

FIGURE 1.1 *Success as a Business Manager*



even greater success in the future. Self-confidence is intangible and psychological. You can't measure it and no one can see it. It exists within your mind.

As you can see in Figure 1.1, when a manager has poor self-confidence and poor business results, he faces a crisis. He's wondering if he's the right person for the job, and the people in his organization are wondering if he's the right person for the job.

When a manager has poor self-confidence and strong business results, she feels it's an illusion. I've had many managers say to me, "The reasons I'm getting great results are the market conditions are so good and I inherited a great long-term customer who has sustained our profits. However, I personally am not part of the reason why we're successful, and our success can all very well go away tomorrow." These managers didn't have the confidence necessary to make the decisions that would sustain profitable growth.

When a manager has strong self-confidence and poor business results, he perseveres and innovates to find ways to create more value for customers. Even though the short-term looks bleak, he believes the long-term is bright. However, it's not enough just to persevere. Eventually a manager has to actually produce strong business results.

The manager who has strong self-confidence and strong business results is the one who produces true business momentum. She has the confidence to push forward and the resources to invest in future growth.

The practical processes in this book are focused on improving both your tangible organizational results and the intangible, psychological belief you have in your ability to generate even better results in the future.

PREPARE WITH PRECISION TO WIN THE MANAGEMENT 500

For you, Day 1 of a three-year business race is fast approaching. Your goal: to get ready to manage the business or profit center in a way that accelerates positive cash flow in a sustainable manner. What lies in

front of you are three years' worth of laps where you will have to be at your very best.

You will have to make difficult decisions on strategy and people, deal with crises, maintain your concentration and the attention of your group members on executing a plan that may change over time, stay focused on your customers, and sustain your effort over the next twelve quarters. Not an easy task.

It's a thirty-six-month race. You can lose the race quickly, but you can't win quickly. You can get so far behind that you'll never make it to the end, but you can't get so far ahead that you can coast in. The first step toward winning the Management 500 is demanding exactness in your preparation for the race.

Larry McReynolds, a highly successful former NASCAR crew chief and author of *How to Become a Winning Crew Chief*, said, "The best way to make sure preparation is complete before you load that car and head to the track is to develop a comprehensive checklist system and adhere to it for everything you do."¹⁵ In Figure 1.2 is a checklist to help you prepare for the business race ahead of you.

FIGURE 1.2 *Pre-Race Checklist*



Confidence Prep

Joe was VP of Operations of a massive business unit, with several billion dollars in total revenue. He was talented in operations and had a good track record. His challenge was he doubted the real value that he brought to the table. He told me, “If I lose this job, I’m done. I’ll never be able to regain this status.” Consequently, he spent the vast majority of his time trying to either please his boss or figure out what he could do to please his boss.

When the corporation went through a reorganization, and Joe had to interview for the few remaining operational positions, he wasn’t able to articulate the value he brought to the organization. One of his subordinates got the position he wanted. It was a devastating blow to an already fragile self-confidence.

Many times a person gets promoted to a key management position because of great performance in an important functional area, such as sales, operations, marketing, or finance. However, if the person’s confidence is based on having a certain title, then he or she really has label confidence, not self-confidence. When the person makes a mistake as a manager, his or her self-confidence plummets because it’s not based on any internal characteristics.

While you can’t always determine your external, tangible business results, you can largely determine your self-confidence. Strengthening self-confidence is a two-step process.

The Process for Strengthening Your Self-Confidence

1. Review your past success stories.
2. Preview your future success stories.

Pounding yourself on the chest and saying, “I am great,” will only give you a sore chest. Having someone else tell you you’re great is nice, but doesn’t strengthen your self-confidence. Those words are

the opinion of someone else about you, but not necessarily your opinion about you. The key is to uncover why you succeeded in the past. Here's the first step.

The Process for Reviewing a Past Success Story

Invest five minutes in answering the questions below.

1. What was your goal?
2. What were the obstacles that stood in the way of achieving that goal?
3. How did you persevere?
4. What did it feel like when you achieved the goal?
5. What lessons did you learn from that experience that you can use in your current work situation?

A success is any time you achieved something really meaningful to you. Pause and think back over your lifetime. When was a time you set an important goal, persevered through obstacles, and sustained your performance all the way to success? What was the feeling like, and what lessons did you learn from that experience?

I encourage you to take out three sheets of paper. Take the first, recall one of your past successes, and write down your answers to the five questions above. Then go to the second sheet, think of a success story from a different period in your life, and write down your answers. Then do it one more time, from yet another period—or aspect—of your life. You can do this entire exercise in less than fifteen minutes.

These stories are very valuable because you now have something real that you can go back to in your mind to remind yourself that you have overcome challenges in the past and you can do it again in the future.

The second step to strengthening self-confidence is to preview a future success story.

The Process for Previewing a Future Success Story

Invest five minutes in answering these questions.

1. What do you want to achieve?
2. Why do you want to achieve it?
3. Why do you expect to achieve it?

Hope is not a strategy for success, and neither is hard work. A person can work incredibly hard and hope very sincerely for success, and yet never attain real success. Of the three questions above the most important one is the last one.

Take the three sheets of paper from before and turn them over. Decide on one business outcome you want to achieve and write it down on the first piece of paper. Be as clear as you can about what you specifically want to achieve.

Then write down all the reasons why you want to achieve that desired outcome. What would be the benefits of achieving it to you, your employees, your organization, your customers, and your suppliers?

Then write down why you expect to achieve it. What experience or knowledge or skills or relationships have you and your team developed that causes you to expect to achieve the desired outcome?

Take the next sheet and answer the three questions for another high-priority desired business outcome. Then repeat the process one more time.

Down the road you will need to map out how you will go about achieving each of the desired outcomes and then move into action, but be sure to first take the time to strengthen your self-confidence.

Enhance your belief that you will succeed in the upcoming situation. This is how you drive fast slowly.

Enthusiasm Prep

As a manager, know that other people watch your actions and your body language. If you're just going through the motions to get to the end of the day, everybody will know it even if you say all of the right things.

An intriguing quote I've heard over the years is, "To be enthusiastic, act enthusiastic." That is one I've learned to disagree with. I think if you act enthusiastic when you're not, other people will think you're a fake and they will doubt your sincerity. True enthusiasm comes from a sense of purpose.

The Process for Maintaining Daily Enthusiasm

1. Clarify your purpose for doing what you do.
2. Focus every day on fulfilling your purpose.

What is your purpose as a manager? Why do you do what you do? I call this "PBTP," purpose beyond the paycheck. This one might take several days to think about or even several weeks. If you want to achieve greatness as a manager and win the Management 500, you will have to maintain genuine enthusiasm on a regular basis over an extended period of time. That requires knowing your purpose for doing what you do and focusing on fulfilling that purpose every day.

I've been asked many times over the last twenty-five years how I maintain my enthusiasm so consistently. The answer is really very simple. I have had a very clear purpose and I've stuck to it ever since my college days. Over the years I've been a college coach, a high school teacher, an organizational consultant, an executive coach, a keynote speaker, a workshop facilitator, and an author. However, the common thread through all of these activities has been my purpose—

wanting to work with other people so they achieve great performances. This purpose is what has fueled me all these years.

In his autobiography, Enzo Ferrari said, “Fate is to a good extent in our own hands if we only know clearly what we want and are steadfast in our purpose. A single-mindedness of purpose in pursuing one’s ambition is a force that can overcome many obstacles.”¹⁶ From his purpose of making extraordinary racecars, Ferrari’s legacy flowed out, and it lives on to today. What is your purpose as a manager? Why do you do what you do?

Personal Effectiveness Prep

The greatest value you bring to your company is the combination of your values, strengths, and passions. Your company has high priority outcomes it wants to achieve, and your customers have high priority outcomes they want to achieve as a result of buying from your company.

Now here comes the hard part if you want to optimize your effectiveness as a manager. The truly effective manager intentionally intersects his or her strengths and passions with the desired outcomes on a daily basis, and does it while sticking to his or her values.

When you spend the vast majority of your time deploying your strengths and passions toward improving important outcomes while staying within your own values, you begin to clearly see the role you play in moving business results forward. As you do so, you gain a greater and greater belief in your ability to succeed in future situations.

You might be thinking, “Dan, don’t managers already do this every day? Don’t they use their strengths and passions to drive better results for their organizations and for their customers?”

If you asked me that, I would say, “Theoretically, yes, but in reality many times distractions occur. Meetings run over, employees have personal crises, customers are upset, and suddenly the day is over and the manager has not used his or her strengths and passions at all. The key is to *intentionally* intersect these three entities. It just won’t happen without a conscious effort on the part of the manager.”

After you write your answers out to the seven questions on page 20,

The Process for Intentionally Intersecting Your Values, Strengths, and Passions with the Desired Outcomes

Invest two minutes in answering each of the following seven questions. Then go back and invest another ten minutes looking over your answers and filling in any missing thoughts.

Internal Assets

1. What are your values? (Values are beliefs that drive behaviors.)
2. What are your strengths? (Strengths are what you do well.)
3. What are your passions? (Passions are what gets you excited.)

External Understanding

4. What are the two most important business outcomes your organization wants to improve this year?
5. What are the two most important outcomes that your customers want to improve this year as a result of working with your organization?

Intentional Intersecting

6. How can you use your strengths and passions in a practical way that will increase the chances of your organization achieving its goals while still operating within your own values?
7. How can you use your strengths and passions in a practical way that will increase the chances of your customers achieving their goals while still operating within your own values?

I encourage you to take out a three-by-five index card and write down a few themes that summarize your values, strengths, and passions.

At the beginning of each work day, take out the card and ask yourself, “How will I use my strengths and passions to drive better results for my organization and/or our customers today?” At the end of each work day, read over your card and ask yourself, “How did I use my strengths and passions today to drive better results for my organization and/or our customers?” In doing so, you will be intentionally intersecting your values, strengths, and passions with the desired outcomes. That’s how you remain effective every day.

Physical Prep

Back in the day, experts said that the Internet would replace paper and web conferencing would dramatically reduce travel. Nice try. The last eight planes I flew on were completely sold out. It didn’t matter the time of the day or the day or the week or the part of the country I was flying to. Every seat on every plane was filled. So much for no more traveling.

If you want to guide your team to sustainable, profitable growth, you need to bring your best energy to work every day. I’m not encouraging you to work 70 hours a week, but I am urging you to bring your best energy to every hour that you do work. You need to be in good physical shape to guide the myriad details you will encounter. It’s not about vanity. It’s about having the energy to make steady progress toward improving results.

A big part of Michael Schumacher’s success was the extraordinary conditioning he maintained throughout his driving career. Fellow driver Julian Bailey said, “We’d do the qualifying and then he’d go off and play tennis for four or five hours, keep on until late at night for his fitness. He was the fittest then, and in Formula 1 he’s the fittest now.”¹⁷

When you’re out of shape, you can fight your way through the challenges for maybe five months. You can survive on caffeine and candy to keep you going. And then, boom, you’ll hit a wall, and you’ll wonder if all this hard work is really worth it. The key is staying fresh

and having the energy necessary to take on challenges and opportunities in a way that energizes rather than drains you.

My brother-in-law, Richard Taylor, has a great diet book concept called “The Four-Word Physical Fitness Plan.” It will only have two chapters and four words in the whole book.

Chapter One: Eat right.

Chapter Two: Exercise regularly.

It doesn’t get much simpler than that. All of the wisdom on physical health can be reduced to those four words: eat right, exercise regularly. What is really crazy is that you and I already know that. The stumbling block is execution. Select your own plan. You know the basic drill: fruits and vegetables are better for you than fries and burgers, three martinis a day really will send you to the doctor, and water is better for you than soda. Jog, lift weights, play basketball or tennis or soccer or racquetball, and get out and move.

The most successful managers I’ve met stay in shape, pure and simple. They work out early or late or at noon time. They find ways to get it done. Many of them don’t like to exercise. They hate to run, but they know the benefits. They would rather have the onion rings, but they want their best energy for the biggest moments. If you want to drive the winning car over the long term, you need to be in great shape.

It’s time to get real. What two things are you going to do, or stop doing, to increase your energy and stamina? You don’t have to become a world-class athlete, but if you want to accelerate your current business results in a sustainable way, then you may very well need better energy and stamina than you have right now. Don’t make a list of twelve things. That’s unrealistic. Just select two. Is there some activity you’re going to start doing or stop doing? Is there something you’re going to start eating or drinking, or stop eating or drinking? Make your decisions and move into action.

Mental Prep

Can you imagine getting into the driver’s seat at the Indianapolis 500 never having studied the art and science of racecar driving? Or imagine one day someone taps you on the shoulder and says, “In an hour

you're driving in the Daytona 500. I know you've never been in a race before, but you're going to do great." It doesn't work that way.

The best racecar drivers study the details of driving fast in a crowded field. They discuss the experience with other drivers who have gone before them. Many of them have read about what the best drivers in history have accomplished and how they did it. To gain a sense of the degree to which world-class drivers study their sport, I encourage you to read about drivers like Richard Petty, Michael Schumacher, Dale Earnhardt Sr., Jeff Gordon, and Mario Andretti.

To ramp up your success for the next three years, become a student of the art and science of management. As you go through this book, I will recommend a variety of excellent management books. Ask people you respect for the books they've read. Read *BusinessWeek* and *Fortune* magazine regularly. Scan *The Wall Street Journal* every day. Join professional groups to exchange ideas and learn from other executives and managers. If you work as a CEO or key executive in a mid-size business, join useful organizations like Vistage International, which holds seminars for CEOs and key executives. Constantly strengthen your mental preparation.

Leaders are readers. I've always bought into that statement. Be a student of the game of management. Don't be a theorist, be a pragmatist. Jump in and apply the ideas you've learned. Over time you will hone your own philosophy and style of management.

Don't just read and read and read. Read, capture, and apply. Regularly step back from the activity of work and study the intangibles that make for great managers. After you read a chapter in a book or a magazine, ask yourself, "What did I learn that might be useful in moving results forward in my current project, and how will I use this idea?" Then consciously apply the idea as soon as possible. After you apply it, you can make adjustments and improve the application the next time. Constantly prepare yourself for greater success in the future.

What two things are you going to do to better your understanding of management? Is there a specific book you want to read, a course you want to take, a mentor within your company that you want to approach, or a project team that you want to be a part of? If you

continue to go forward with your current understanding of management, then you will continue to be the same manager you are today. That isn't going to improve results over the long term.

Industry Prep

If someone asked you to describe the state of the industry you're in, what would you say? What would you base your answers on? Do you have a firm grip on what is happening in your industry right now? What can you do to increase your understanding of your industry? Can you attend your industry's national conferences, join the board of the local or national association for your industry, read pertinent material about your industry, or something else? A variety of activities will help increase your understanding of the industry.

The Process for Understanding Your Industry

Answer these two questions.

1. What major changes are happening in your industry and how could they affect your business positively or negatively?
2. What changes outside of your industry will have the greatest positive or negative impact on the future of organizations in your industry?

You don't need to be the preeminent world expert on your industry, but you do need to be aware of the forces that could damage your business and the opportunities you can take advantage of to accelerate your desired business outcomes.

Customer Prep

Understanding industry trends pales in comparison to understanding your customers. Before starting the upcoming race, spend time really understanding your customers. Who are the people that buy the

products and services from your business or profit center? What are they like? What trends are affecting them?

The Process for Gaining a Greater Understanding of Your Customers

1. Watch your customers in action. Watch as they purchase and interact with the products and services your organization sells.
2. Talk to your customers in an informal way to find out their perspective on the value they receive from your organization.
3. Spend time as the customer. Purchase a product or a service and see what the experience is like. Try to do so incognito so you can see how you're treated. If you can't be anonymous, have a friend from outside the organization be a customer and discuss what his or her experience was like.

Organizational Talent Prep

What talent do you have in your organization right now to truly accelerate sustainable, profitable growth? By talent, I mean the capacity to add relevant value to customers that they will want and be willing to pay for. What values, strengths, and passions do your employees have that can be deployed to move results forward in a sustainable manner? Focus on understanding the talent in your organization, and don't make decisions about hiring or firing anyone yet.

Invest as much time as you can early on in getting to know the people in your organization. Search for their values, strengths, and passions. Ask your employees what they believe those to be, but also observe them. Soon you will have a clear idea of what different people bring to the table.

It's unlikely you're going to be able to replace everyone so rather

than looking at what people do poorly, find out what they have that you can build a winner on. Find out what they do well, what healthy beliefs they consistently demonstrate, and what they have passion for doing.

Talent is the capacity to add value to customers. What talent do you have in your organization that you can build on?

Strategic Understanding Prep

Don't start the race by changing your organization's strategy on Day 1. You simply don't know enough to make a sweeping strategic change. Even if you've been in charge of the organization for six years, don't start the next three years by introducing a new strategic direction that you came up with on your own. You still need to gather input and gain support for it to succeed. Otherwise you'll end up with "my strategy," not "our strategy," to win. Unless you plan on doing every single activity in your organization all by yourself, I encourage you to slow down and work toward the development of a new strategy with the other key members of your team.

The most important first step in developing a better strategy is to understand the current strategy. A strategy describes an organization and guides future decisions regarding the organization. Below are seven questions to help you describe the current strategy of your organization or profit center. Don't be intimidated by the number of questions. All you need are a few sentences to answer each question.

If the truth is that there is no clear answer to a question, then write that down. For example, if your organization has fifteen different purposes that employees think it is trying to fulfill, then just write down, "The answer is unclear."

Answer these seven questions in order to help clarify the current strategy for your organization. Twenty minutes may seem like very little time, but if your organization's strategy is clear, you will be able to write your answers down quickly. If it is not clear, then that will become very obvious as you struggle to answer these questions.

Until you really understand your organization's current strategy, you won't be able to effectively reinforce it or redesign it. If you find that the current strategy is unclear and constantly changing, that's

The Process for Understanding Your Current Strategy

Invest twenty minutes in answering these questions.

1. What are the most important business outcomes you want to achieve in terms of revenues, costs, and profits over the next three years?
2. What is the purpose of your organization?
3. What is primarily driving decisions in your organization?
Is it to offer the best product/service, to serve the needs of a specific market, to provide the best customized solution, to offer the lowest price, or to leverage a learned body of knowledge?
4. How would your customers describe the products and services they buy from your organization?
5. How would your customers describe their relationship with your organization?
6. What value do your customers think they currently receive when they buy from your organization and how does your organization deliver that value?
7. What are the behaviors your employees currently demonstrate on a consistent basis?

OK. Go ahead and write it down. You want to know what you're working from in order to improve it in the future.

Priorities Prep

You're not going to change or accomplish twenty things successfully in the next six months. Please trust me on that. Whether you're working with a group you've been in charge of for many years or a brand

new group, trying to accomplish too much too fast is a recipe for disaster. Many times I've seen managers be unrealistic and go after far too many objectives and activities simultaneously. In the end, they achieved very little in terms of improving important results.

Why not reverse the challenge? Instead of saying, "I have what it takes to go after twenty goals at once and achieve all of them," just say, "I have the courage to select the two most important outcomes to improve over the next six months, and we're going to focus on improving those two." You can make progress on two important objectives. That's realistic. That's how you generate *sustainable*, profitable growth. Accomplish two important objectives, and then consider moving on to something else if your progress on those two has been really significant.

The Process for Establishing Your Priorities

Invest ten minutes in answering these questions.

1. What two outcomes can you realistically improve in the next six months that would have the greatest positive impact on moving your business forward in a profitable and sustainable manner?
2. What outcomes are you not going to emphasize in the next six months?

Your answers might not please Wall Street analysts or even your boss, but the goal of this book is not to please those people. The goal is to help you win the race for sustainable, profitable growth. By defining the two most important outcomes to improve and the ones you are not going to focus on, you will help your employees enormously toward focusing their efforts. When a manager has twenty important objectives, the employees don't know where to spend their time.

When Mark Hurd took over from Carly Fiorina in 2005 as CEO of Hewlett-Packard, he put on a classic textbook example of how to prepare for a new management position. After studying the HP business, the industry, and his employees, he decided on a few important outcomes to improve and one important outcome not to focus on.¹⁸

Fiorina had introduced a series of new strategies each year for three years in a row. She reorganized her business units, she bought Compaq, and she continually spoke to the business media about how she was reinventing HP.

Hurd stepped in and largely avoided the media. Many people thought he would reinvent HP once again. He didn't go there. When he did speak to the media, he said there would be no changes to the strategy. He made it clear he was going to focus on simplifying the business and improving execution. He clarified what different departments were responsible for and what they weren't responsible for. He scheduled his time to be with his employees, not with the media. Within those first six months, the business performance improved significantly.

Scheduling Prep

All of this talk about preparation and priority outcomes means nothing until you place activities on your calendar. Where you spend your time speaks volumes about your business priorities.

If you say securing two new major customers is critical to your organization's success over the next six months and you schedule no time with prospects or your sales team in the first month, then you're fooling yourself. If you don't get into this race with a prepared schedule, you will quickly find your time being eaten up by other people's priorities.

Having all the industry and company knowledge in the world does nothing to improve results if you don't select and execute specific activities to improve those results. The key is to carefully select those six activities, put them on your calendar, and make them more important than anything else on your calendar. Don't let the urgency of the moment get in the way of doing the stuff that really matters.

The Process for Scheduling Your Priority Activities

1. Select your top desired outcome for the next six months.
2. Identify the three key activities you will do over the next thirty days that you think will have the greatest positive impact on improving that outcome.
3. Put those activities on your calendar.
4. Select the second most important desired outcome for the next six months.
5. Identify the three key activities you will do over the next thirty days that you think will have the greatest positive impact on improving that outcome.
6. Put those activities on your calendar.
7. Now fill in the rest of your calendar with what other people need from you.

Communication Prep

Before you walk into an important meeting with your employees or a private one-on-one conversation with one of them, clarify the key messages you want the other individual or individuals to focus on. If you begin business relationships by giving jumbled messages, even in your relationships with current employees, it's going to be very hard for you to clear things up later on. Decide on the two or three main points you want to keep everyone focused on, write them down, and practice saying them in a clear and concise manner.

One of my clients successfully focused her communications on the importance of improving basic operations throughout her business unit. She brought this point home in every single communication, and it worked. She was able to keep the attention of the entire profit center

that covered one-third of the United States on improving the fundamentals of operations. Customer satisfaction scores started rising—as did top-line sales and bottom-line profits.

The Process of Stating Your Key Messages Clearly

1. Take out a sheet of paper. Write down the key messages you want to get across to your new, or current, team as you prepare them for success over the next three years. Write down every important message you can think of.
2. Identify the one to three most important messages you want to focus on over the next six months.
3. Build those one, two, or three messages into every speech, voicemail, e-mail, and private conversation you give. Stick with these three messages for at least the next six months. Keep the attention of your group focused on the few things that matter the most. Don't introduce any other key messages during that six-month time period.

THE IMPORTANCE OF PREPARATION

The race usually favors the driver who is better prepared. That is particularly true for the longer and more challenging races. Three years to consistently generate sustainable, profitable growth is a long, challenging race. The better prepared you are at the beginning of the race the better your chances for success will be at the end. Keep in mind that preparation is an ongoing affair. You don't prepare to win once, and then not worry about it again. Instead focus every day on being prepared to make that day a successful part of the overall race.

To help with your preparation, I encourage you to read *The Effective Executive* by Peter Drucker very carefully.¹⁹ This is Drucker's shortest and finest book and will help prepare you for the business race that lies ahead. Particularly focus on Chapters 2 and 4, which have powerful insights on leveraging your strengths and knowing where your time is going.

