

# Smart Execution: Play to Strengths

Excerpted from Greg Bustin's new book, *Lead The Way*

As featured in the Sunday, May 4, edition of The Dallas Morning News

Order your copy today at [www.bustin.com](http://www.bustin.com) or go to [www.amazon.com](http://www.amazon.com)

One-third of 2008 is now history. And whether or not you believe we're in a recession, it's clear there's uncertainty.

How are you responding as time marches on and as economic adversity becomes more of a reality? Are your 2008 objectives still attainable?

For organizations operating on a calendar fiscal year, May is a good time to take a hard look at determining what's working and what isn't.

If you and your team are not operating from a written plan you're not alone. It's estimated that four out of five businesses don't have a written plan. Most of these are small companies. Even businesses that have a written plan have trouble executing it. Studies show that only one company in four actually integrates its plan into day-to-day operations.

Plans fail to deliver the results leaders expect for three primary reasons:

1. They're too complicated.
2. There's little genuine excitement for the plan.
3. Lack of follow-through to execute the plan.

Let's look more closely at problems with execution.

## 10 Reasons Execution Fails

In my work with leadership teams, I've found 10 reasons – excuses, really – execution continues to be a problem for most organizations.

Interestingly, nine of these 10 reasons are internal. Only one of these reasons is external, which I've categorized as "changing market conditions." It's true that "changing market conditions" covers a lot of territory, but the point remains that leaders have more control than they might otherwise believe to drive performance inside their organization.

I've already shared with you two other reasons execution breaks down.

The first is the plan itself. If your plan is too long, too complicated, overly ambitious or incredibly ambiguous about who will do what by when – you've wasted your time developing your plan. Any one of these factors threatens execution. My new book includes a template that shows you step-by-step how to develop a plan that's 10 to 20 Power-Point slides. There's another template for a one-page annual plan.

The second reason execution suffers is from lack of genuine buy-in. People who've had a hand in developing a plan will be much more likely to embrace it. Lack of real involvement from the team that must execute the plan means the plan is dead on arrival.

Here's a fourth reason execution is a problem for most organizations.

## Play to Strengths

When thinking about what must be done, keep in mind who should do it.

Jim Buchanan, CEO of Buchanan Associates, uses a model he calls a "triad" to assemble teams in departments and for projects in his 400-person IT company. This approach matches an individual's skill to the job to be done and is based on the belief that no single person is capable of excelling at the three facets that comprise a successful engagement in his organization.

In Jim's organization, the three facets of the triad (think of a triangle) are "People," "Process" and "Technology." (If you're not a technology company, substitute "Subject Matter Expertise" for "Technology" and you'll have your triad.)

Leaders should play to peoples' strengths and manage around their weaknesses. You're mostly wasting time trying to improve a person's weakness – it's better to acknowledge the weakness and compensate for it with a second or third person who's strong in that area, then allow the first person to do what they do best.

It's a model to keep in mind as you start to think more specifically about who will do what.

**Lesson:** *People excel at things they like to do. To improve performance, play to their strengths.*

## Take action

Ask and answer these four questions to improve your performance:

1. Are roles and responsibilities clearly defined?
2. Have we put people in positions to succeed?
3. At the end of the day, does everyone one know whether or not they had a successful day?
4. How effective is our performance review process?

You can achieve your 2008 objectives if you have the right people doing the right things the right way. ■