

Make Time Work For You

Excerpted from Greg Bustin's new book, **Lead The Way: Charting A Course To Win** to be published in early 2008

For busy leaders, time is the most precious commodity.

There simply isn't enough of it in the day.

What if you could focus your resources so that both you and your organization operate at higher levels of effectiveness? Wouldn't it follow that a more effective operation should lead to increased profitability?

Everyone's got the same 24 hours in a day. So how do the most successful CEOs do it?

After 25 years of working with and observing hundreds of senior business leaders, I've concluded that what separates those who are most effective from all the rest is their ability to do one thing exceptionally well.

The most successful leaders win consistently because they have a plan that they work.

They work their plan to deliver results effectively and profitably. They make time work for them by getting everyone in the business focused on the right things and performing at consistently high levels of execution.

In my first book, **Take Charge! How Leaders Profit From Change**, I outlined three guiding principles for leading in times of change. Great leaders:

1. **Know what they believe** – they operate from a set of core values that help them discern right from wrong.
2. **Define success on their own terms** – in times of change, they buck trends, question premises and try new approaches.
3. **Lead the way** – they articulate the challenge, explain the importance of what must be done, set the course and instill processes to get the right things done the right way.

It's this third principle that we'll examine at length in my new book.

Here's what distinguishes exceptional companies from average performers: leaders who understand the power of reducing the organization's priorities to a concisely written plan that can be embraced by the organization and tracked relentlessly to measure progress against specific priorities.

And there's the challenge. On one hand, a strategically sound plan that maps specific initiatives and improvements will deliver little new value to an organization if there's no follow-through or if things continue to be done the way they've always been done. On the other hand, consistent execution of a flawed strategy can actually accelerate an organization's demise.

To improve performance, organizations require a smart plan that's executed crisply and consistently.

Assuming the idea of a smoother-running, more profitable company is important to you, you'll first need to commit a chunk of time to prepare your company for its self-improvement initiative. I know – this is time that you don't really have. Too bad. As the leader, you cannot delegate this responsibility.

By now, many of you are likely smack in the middle of developing your plan for 2008.

Going Nowhere Fast

I've heard leaders boast that they can develop a plan in an hour. They probably can. My experience has been that half of planning is intellectual and the other half is emotional. Without across-the-board buy-in, your plan will go nowhere fast. You can accelerate emotional buy-in, but you can't expect to achieve the kind of ownership you'll need to implement your plan without bringing your decision-makers together and giving them a voice in the plan. That takes time. Becoming a consistent winner rarely happens overnight.

I've also seen companies – big and small – take months to develop a plan. You don't have that kind of time, and it's not necessary anyway.

This book will provide you with a step by step path to winning. This laser-like approach uses a series of exercises developed from years of watching and working with hundreds of senior leaders who are committed to improving their companies' results.

There are three primary reasons most plans fail. One reason is that they're too long. Most of the organizations I work with want quality – not quantity. A long plan does not equal an effective plan. A short, simple plan does not mean that the plan has no value. Today, I favor more of a dashboard approach that whittles down a plan to your most significant objectives or priorities – usually no fewer than three and no more than seven.

When finished, your plan will consist of between 10 – 18 pages with specific, actionable initiatives that will increase individual and organizational effectiveness.

With discipline, you can turn your ideas, dreams and plans into improved performance.

Are you willing to invest your most precious commodity to position you and your business to win as you've never won before? With the right approach, consider it time well spent.

If you're interested in ordering an advance copy of the new book, email Greg Bustin at greg.bustin@bustin.com. ■