



guest column BY MICHAEL DEVENNEY

Leading for growth

Focusing on pivot points separates the focused from the foggy

Leading for growth is about focus, plain and simple. The reason some businesses achieve rapid growth and others falter or fail lies in where and how energy and effort is positioned. Sadly, in our “new normal” of faster-paced need for results, greater complexity of problems, increased rate of change, and heightened competition, it’s easy to mistake busyness for strategic execution. However, the results soon separate the focused from the foggy.

Studies show that, on average, businesses achieve about 63% of potential performance; that’s a grade of C-. Add to that figure Atlantic Canada’s dire productivity lag, and the hope to achieve our strategic plan in this region is faint. We need a proactive solution to increase our competitiveness. Although the Conference Board of Canada’s annual CEO Challenge Survey identified the top priority for senior executives as achieving top-line revenue growth in 2011, leaders aren’t taking the necessary steps to capture growth opportunities.

multiply effort for enhanced outcomes. Allocating attention and resources to the pivot points of a growth strategy will result in the achievement or exceeding of planned results. It’s a simple matter of working smarter.

We recommend a strategy founded on a 3 x 3 Pivotal Growth Matrix. Leaders must first look to the future. In five years, what’s needed for the organization to successfully grow and be competitive? Where do you need to be as a company, where are you now, and where is the gap? Now leaders can focus on pivot points.

The first axis of pivotal growth determines the three pivotal strategic outcomes. What are the three results that if achieved would make the most lasting and competitive difference for the organization going forward? Envision the future of the organization and ruthlessly focus in on the three pivotal outcomes that are most important for business growth success.

When the pivotal strategic outcomes are clear, the second axis identifies the pivotal positions. The truth: not every role is equally important to driving your business results. Different jobs contribute differently to the top and bottom lines. Few organizations are comfortable with this concept. However, not all jobs are created equal. Pivotal positions can contribute 10 times or more than other organizational roles. Fair isn’t equal.

If excellence were achieved in only three roles, which positions would have the greatest impact on the achievement of the desired results? Which jobs will make or break the organization’s ability to achieve the projected growth? The three pivotal positions now become clear. For example, if the pivotal strategic outcomes were increased sales closures, higher engagement of front-

THE 3X3 PIVOTAL GROWTH MATRIX				
PIVOTAL POSITIONS				
		Position 1	Position 2	Position 3
Pivotal Strategic Outcomes	Outcome 1	Pivotal Performance Priority 1	Pivotal Performance Priority 1	Pivotal Performance Priority 1
	Outcome 2	Pivotal Performance Priority 2	Pivotal Performance Priority 2	Pivotal Performance Priority 2
	Outcome 3	Pivotal Performance Priority 3	Pivotal Performance Priority 3	Pivotal Performance Priority 3

We see leaders suffering from two potential afflictions. Some fall prey to tactical myopia, a concentration on the short-term chasing fires to the extent that energy is spent reactively rather than proactively, and the great dream remains just that. Others are constantly distracted by “shiny object syndrome.” Just when a plan is made, a new shiny object appears and attention is shifted to the next great thing. Under both scenarios, energy and resources will be diluted, diverted, and drained with lower than planned results.

To achieve growth, leaders must focus on the pivot points. Pivot points are results transformers, those focal hinges that can leverage and

Achieving top performance levels in these pivotal performance priorities could add as much as a 10 times multiplier to results

line employees, and innovations to the product line, the pivotal positions may be the managers, sales team, and R&D team. If these positions all achieved top performance, the results would be realized, and more.

People are the greatest lever for increased performance, and individual performance can vary dramatically across the organization and in specific roles. The third component of the matrix rests with focusing on the pivotal performance priorities—the actions or competencies that, if done well, will have the greatest impact on the performance of the people in the pivotal positions. This is where we want top performers. Define the three performance priorities where excellence will have the greatest impact. Training and development, as well as

performance management, should be focused to the greatest extent on these pivotal performance priorities.

For managers to have the greatest impact on creating success, the areas of coaching for performance, customer impact, and results orientation may be identified as the pivotal performance priorities. Getting as many managers to achieve top performance levels in these three pivotal performance priorities could add as much as a 10 times multiplier to results. Training and development should be focused on core competencies in these roles. Spreading training and development equally across the organization will dilute its ability to achieve the desired results.

Winning is about being different and better than your competition. With de-

acades of process, technology, and capital efficiency improvements, there is increasingly less that can be done to differentiate one organization from another. So what's left to improve? Organizations need to innovate in their management practices by focusing on pivot points to achieve performance excellence. Such a strategy will be unique to the business and difficult to copy by competitors, creating a more lasting advantage to generate significant increases in top-line growth and productivity. Find the pivot points, focus, and grow. 🌟

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