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## ACTION WITH TRACTION

### Banging Pots

The time: Almost 25 years ago. It was my second day at a new summer job, working in the kitchen of a local diner. The dish tank was hot and humid. Behind me sat a row of plastic trays filled with greasy dishes. In front, a busboy was sliding another tray onto the table, slopping dirty dishwater onto my new tennis shoes and the soggy rubber mats below. After three-and-a-half hours of scrubbing plates and glasses, my hands were sore, my shirt soaked with dishwater, and my hair matted to my forehead. I leaned against the stainless steel table for a minute to catch my breath.

With a bang of the swinging door, Rusty, our cowboy cook, came flying around the corner, a cast iron burner in each hand. “What’s up, boy? I didn’t hear any noise, so I thought you weren’t working. Take these things and degrease ‘em. And lemme give you a word of advice. You wanna take a break, you better bang some pots. You better sound busy. No noise from the dish tank means work ain’t getting done... you got it?”

I had just learned one of my first lessons in business: *Look busy. Act busy. Sound busy. And if you’re not accomplishing anything, at least bang some pots.*

Flash forward. I’m selling TV ad time in a cubicle at a large firm on mid-Wilshire in Los Angeles. I am one more person in a sea of blue blazers

(standard apparel for assistants with aspiration). We knew it was a competition: One of us would be getting the promotion. Which one? The one who paid the dues and looked the part. The one who *looked busy*.

Of course, this conflicts with the things we're taught in training programs on time management and productivity, and with the slogans tossed around in the latest books on leadership:

“Don't work hard, work smart!”

“Collapse time!”

“Achieve balance!”

“Focus like a laser on what's essential!”

All of these ideas sound good... but how do we do it?

How do we “collapse time” when, after answering our last six voicemail messages we find that nine more have piled up in the mailbox? How do we “achieve balance” when our company is behind the eight ball and struggling to launch that quarter-saving new product ahead of schedule? What happens when there's a changing of the guard? What happens when sales are off? What do those in the executive suite want and expect?

We all know the real answer. They want to see activity. They want production reports, sales reports, and marketing reports. They want to hear phones ringing, keyboards clicking, printers buzzing. They take comfort in knowing we're doing all we can. They want to hear the sound of banging pots.

The pressure to join the potbangers is intense. It's one of the big reasons that sensible concepts like job-sharing and telecommuting have taken so long to catch on in most corporations: “I can't work at home. If the boss doesn't see me in the office, he'll think I'm not working.” Being productive is less important than being *seen* to be productive. But we all know, deep inside, that the noise from our banging is ultimately meaningless. We long to trade the treadmill of endless, ineffectual *action* for the lasting value of traction.

*Traction* is when our efforts in the workplace make a genuine, measurable, and lasting difference... when the things we try to do *get* done and *stay* done.

Most managers achieve traction, but usually in the form of sporadic breakthroughs that lurch them forward, then leave them to sit, exhausted, until they can build energy, purpose, and focus once again. It's better than nothing. Our goal is to gain *real* traction, traction that cuts deeper with every move, which carves a path and carries momentum into the future.

In order to achieve this level of traction, we must create and nurture an environment for ourselves and our team members where traction is second nature. It starts with our bosses, their goals, their needs, and our alignment with them. With alignment attained, we can employ a host of tools to keep us on the path to the traction we desire.

In the pages that follow, you'll consider the concept of Management Value Added, a powerful tool for setting your course. You'll explore the difference between traction and slippage, and how to build a portfolio of projects that stick rather than slip. Building upon these concepts, you'll look at achieving group traction and offer some new ideas for ensuring follow-through.

## The Problem with Time Management

If you've been living in the corporate world for some time, you've probably attended a training session where one of the exercises was to conduct a "time spent" analysis in order to increase your efficiency. You cracked open your calendar, reviewed how you spent your time for the past week, and identified black holes that were wasting your energy. Maybe you even went so far as to break your activities into categories, separating the "urgent" things from the "important" things and both of these from the "insignificant" things.

Time management studies like these can be interesting, but the findings are almost always the same. Virtually every manager who works through the exercises discovers that he or she is spending too much time on "putting out fires"—dealing with the daily dramas and emergencies around the office—and not enough time thinking and planning for long-term projects that really matter. E-mails, instant messages, phone calls, and that guy from Purchasing who drops in "just for a second" and chews the

fat for 45 minutes undo our best-laid plans—not to mention the endless, interminable, usually pointless meetings.

We know all this. Why doesn't it ever change?

The problem lies in our approach. Time management programs usually focus on your personal productivity, analyzing how you choose to spend your time. This is all fine and dandy, but it misses one essential truth: In an organization that's devoted to banging pots, *you better bang pots or have a damn good reason for not banging them.*

That's why, after the PowerPoint presentation had ended and the trainer went home, you fell back into your old, unproductive rhythms—not because you didn't agree with the time management expert's analysis, but because you returned to normal life in the world of The Middle... which means doing what you think your boss wants you to do. Bang! Bang! Bang!

## Managing Your Managers

In order to take back your time, your life, and your career, you need to make a new *kind* of change in your approach to self-management. You must step into the realm of *managing your managers* and thereby altering their expectations related to your time. The goal is to achieve complete alignment between *what your bosses want (and perhaps need) you to do* and *what you believe you really should do.*

In the same way that you coordinate the schedule in your PDA and your laptop with the one in your desktop computer, you need to continually coordinate with your bosses to ensure that you are clear, on track, and working from the same plan.

All of this starts with having a happy and supportive boss. And that means a successful boss. Your boss *has* to be successful. For if he is not, his failure may cast a negative light on everyone on his team. Many potentially great careers have been stalled, not because of the effort of the individual, but because of a boss who failed to make an impact, who failed to demonstrate his own value and the value of those on his team.

The first step in managing your manager is to move beyond your own needs to examine your bosses' needs. Sounds reasonable—but understanding those needs and figuring out what to do to meet them isn't usually straightforward. In fact, it's a challenge in itself, requiring a whole new set of skills most people have never thought about.

## Needs Explicit and Needs Implicit

Let's start by dispelling a common misunderstanding. Lots of people in business assume that “meeting the boss's needs” means doing exactly what the boss wants them to do—accepting the boss's vision and direction wholesale. Wrong! This assumption is simple-minded and inaccurate. It leads to managers in *The Middle* focusing on aligning their lips with their boss's backsides rather than meeting anyone's *actual* needs.

Real “managing upward” demands a more serious and subtle analysis of human needs, which starts with the realization that needs come in two forms—*explicit* needs and *implicit* needs.

Explicit needs are easier to understand. They may be stated in the strategic plan promulgated by the company or the division, or they may be announced by your boss whenever the team gets together for the usual pep talk/torture session. They may sound something like this:

- “We need to expand our business internationally.”
- “We need to create a shipping policy that will save us some money and keep the administrative assistants from running around the office like decapitated chickens every afternoon at 4 p.m. when the FedEx guy makes his last pickup.”
- “We need to commerce-enable our Web site before Amazon.com decides to start selling the same kinds of widgets we sell and drives us out of business.”
- “We need to hire two more designers, fast, so we'll have a prayer of getting the fall product line into the stores sometime this year.”

Explicit needs are the kinds of things that make it into the lists of goals you write every year at objective-setting time. They're the things you tell people you're working on when they ask. They tend to be the things

you are proud of accomplishing (if and when you happen to accomplish one of them).

Implicit needs are more subtle. People don't talk about them. Sometimes they're not even aware of them. Most of the time they are things that people would deny if confronted with them. They sound like this:

- “Make me look good in front of my boss so that when he gets kicked upstairs he'll recommend me for his job.”
- “Help me demonstrate my creativity by coming up with some ideas for next year's marketing campaign that I can tweak a little and show off at the next divisional conference as if they were mine.”
- “Help me feel more like a leader and less like the kid who was always picked last in the schoolyard basketball games.”
- “Figure out some way to keep the department running when I'm not around so I can go on vacation for ten days in a row without having to call the office every two hours to make sure the damned place isn't on fire.”

While explicit needs tend to run a linear path, implicit needs tend to be random, triggered by emotion and circumstance. But don't think of them as flighty and certainly not as insignificant. They are ever-present, tenacious, and can overrule the explicit needs with a swiftness and power that can be awe-inspiring.

It's a fun exercise to sit down with a sheet of paper and try listing your boss's implicit needs. It's also deadly serious. From the first day you meet your new boss through the last day you work together, you need to devote a portion of your time and energy to scoping out his or her implicit needs and defining them with as much precision as possible. Then measure whatever you do against those needs. (Your boss certainly will.)

One implicit need that virtually every boss has (and therefore belongs on the to-do list of every ignited manager) is the need for *confidence*. Your boss must have confidence that you are working in his best interest and that you are capable of delivering what he needs (both explicitly and implicitly). Fail to maintain this confidence and your boss will most likely drive you crazy—and will often drive you out.

We've all been there. The boss who last week simply set a goal and gave us the freedom to carry it out suddenly wants to micromanage every phone call we make this week. Sometimes it's because they've lost confidence in us; other times it's because their bosses have lost confidence in them, producing a sort of trickle-down anxiety that may end up with you being hypercritical of the dinosaur diorama your nine-year-old makes for science class. Giving your boss a sense of confidence in you is perhaps the most fundamental of all the implicit needs and the one without which no managerial relationship can succeed.

Understanding the implicit and explicit needs of your boss and his bosses sets a course by which you can align your own efforts. When that alignment is clear and accurate, you're on track to creating an environment in which traction is possible.

## Management Value Added

The concept of *Management Value Added (MVA)* is based on a simple question that you should ask whenever you're making a decision about how to invest your time and energy: "What value does management add?" And how can your actions "add value" to any situation in business? That's right—by helping to meet your bosses' needs.

One way to start using the concept of MVA is by sitting down with your boss to discuss his or her explicit needs (the ones written down as part of the company's strategy or the division's official mandate). It shouldn't take long for the two of you to agree on what they are and to prioritize them appropriately. Then ask your boss, "How do you feel I can add the most value?" If your boss responds, "Huh?" you can flesh out the question with additional questions like these:

- "What are the activities I am engaged in when I am contributing the most?"
- "What are the activities that you and the company most need me to do?"
- "What do you consider to be the best and most productive use of my time?"

- “What do you think is the special contribution that I am best positioned to offer to you and the company?”
- “Of all the things that I’m engaged in on behalf of this company, what are the three areas where you believe that I can contribute the most?”

Listen carefully to your boss’s answers. Using them as a guide, you can begin to understand exactly how your boss views your contributions. It’s quite likely that the way he or she measures your MVA is different from the way you might measure it.

Here’s what one of my bosses had to say when I asked him to define my most important areas for MVA:

1. “Hiring, nurturing, and guiding talent; putting the right people in the right jobs with the right goals.”
2. “Building capability; teaching my team members and creating an environment conducive to challenging thought and growth.”
3. “Staying close to the customers—understanding what’s important to them, what their challenges are, and how our company can provide them with solutions.”

Of course, this exercise will relate only to your boss’s *explicit* needs. (Don’t try to engage him in a discussion of his *implicit* needs. There’s a good reason why they’re implicit.) Having these priorities clearly defined is an enormous step forward and an advantage that surprisingly few managers enjoy. It provides you with a framework you can share with others on your team and allows you to use the test of MVA in your quest to get past pot banging.

You can use MVA to help you determine how to spend your time, which projects to support, and which meetings to attend. In my case, before committing energy to any new activity, I ask myself: “Will this activity help me achieve my priorities? Will it help me put the right people in the right jobs? Will it help me build capability? Will it help me know and connect with our customers?” If the answer is no, I avoid the activity—even if it sounds otherwise interesting, appealing, or fun.

MVA helps you maintain a focus on the things that matter while earning the support of those you serve. When your boss or someone else in the organization asks you to commit time or energy to an area that falls outside of the MVA priorities you've established, you can talk about how new commitment may affect your main goals and reach a joint decision as to whether a shift in priorities is warranted.

## Bridging an Unbridgeable Gap

For some of us the priorities are already clear. The priorities are alive in performance evaluations, and they are written into our planners or are posted on our office walls. All we have to do is keep the dialogue open and use MVA as a criterion for planning our time.

However, for other priorities, just coming to agreement about what's important can be quite difficult.

Consider two managers—Sarah and Rob.

Sarah spent eight years leading a team in the Midwest for a company that she really loved. Recently she'd begun reporting to a new boss on the East Coast—Rob. Early on it became clear that Sarah and Rob were not clicking. Trust was low, and they struggled to communicate. Sarah felt that Rob didn't understand her and didn't appreciate what she had accomplished with her team. Rob felt that Sarah was quick to judge and not open to a new approach.

There they were—unhappy and stuck.

Sarah could have reacted in one of the dysfunctional ways many managers do: by blowing up in frustration and anger, snipping at Rob behind his back until a bitter confrontation was provoked, or quitting precipitously to take a less-than-ideal job. Instead, she took a thoughtful approach, which started by taking a step back to consider her own role in the impasse. Reflecting on the situation, Sarah came to realize that, while Rob wasn't a perfect manager (who is?), she probably had some work of her own to do. She'd worked for a long time without a mentor, a champion, or even a trusted confidante, and she needed someone she could talk to about her job and its challenges, especially during this difficult time.

Sarah decided to hire a personal career coach named Keith Rosen. Keith is a Master Certified Coach and the founder of ProfitBuilders.com, a very successful executive coaching firm based in New York.

Keith helped Sarah work on her communication skills, an area in which Sarah realized she could use improvement. However, as she and Keith walked through a variety of real-life scenarios together, it soon became clear that Sarah *also* needed help with listening skills. She'd been unable to comprehend Rob's explicit needs, and she certainly wasn't accurately interpreting his implicit needs (which as we've noted are always harder to plumb). Keith and Sarah pondered and probed the situation together and came up with a plan.

The following Monday, Sarah went to Rob and said, "I've hired a career coach to help me become a better manager. In working with him, I've realized that one of my main goals is to get in better sync with you. I really want to understand what you need from me and how I can help you be more successful."

The following day, Keith called Rob and introduced himself as Sarah's coach. There was a long silence, and then Rob emitted a long, heartfelt sigh of relief. He began to talk, admitting that, like Sarah, he'd been quite frustrated with their failure to communicate. He felt that Sarah was out of touch with the corporate goals (not to mention his own personal goals). Each time they spoke, he sensed she was reacting to his needs rather than simply listening to them and comprehending them. As a result, she seemed to view every change or new idea as a threat rather than an opportunity.

As they talked, Keith gained a new insight into the dynamic between Rob and Sarah. In Rob's eyes, whenever Sarah challenged or questioned his explicit goals, she was also challenging his implicit goals. Conversely, whenever Rob challenged Sarah's explicit goals, he was also challenging her implicit goals.

The conflict between them really had less to do with corporate strategies or work duties than they'd imagined. It was mainly about a new boss trying to look good and a long-time employee trying to maintain her dignity in the face of disruptive, disconcerting change.

Thankfully, there was no basis for any fundamental conflict between Rob and Sarah. Rob had no need (explicit or implicit) to send a talented veteran manager packing during his first month on the job, and Sarah had no need to end her successful and happy career at the firm. Both really wanted to try to make their new partnership work. So Keith jumped in and spent time with each of them in private, reviewing their explicit needs and helping them interpret their implicit needs. Acting as a bridge, he connected them to one another with a plan that they could each commit to, build on, and maintain.

Sometimes the fit between two managers is so skewed or so damaged by failed attempts at communication that the obstacles to contact seem insurmountable. In such cases, a third party may be able to help you gain needed perspective and work your negative emotions out of the way. He or she can serve as a bridge on the road to greater traction.

If you find yourself in such a dilemma, consider looking for a third-party bridge. Sometimes an independent coach can play this role, as in the case of Rob and Sarah. In other cases, the bridge can be a manager from another department that both parties like and trust, a conflict management counselor or consultant hired by the firm, or a smart and sensitive member of the company's Human Resources department. The key is an open-minded attitude and a willingness to listen on the part of both individuals.

Most communication gaps are bridgeable. Sometimes all it takes is a fresh perspective and a new voice in the room to change the atmosphere from confrontation to cooperation.

## Knowing versus Doing—Traction versus Slippage

All too often, when we're most in need of traction at work—at times of high competitive pressure or internal pressure or economic insecurity—we find ourselves experiencing slippage instead. Wheels are spinning, lots of energy is being expended, noise is emitted and sparks fly—but there's no traction and, therefore, no forward momentum.

Sometimes the difference between traction and slippage is obvious. But other times, it can be rather subtle. How can you make the distinction for sure?

If you find yourself removing the same barriers today that you removed last year, last month, or yesterday—you've got slippage. It may not *feel* like slippage to you, because removing that recurring barrier allowed you (at least temporarily) to get something done on behalf of your company. But in a longer perspective, it's slippage—a place where people needlessly spin their wheels time and time again.

Every company is filled with mudholes where slippage is the norm. For example, think about the many varied approval processes you probably face related to budgets, routine spending requests, project go-aheads, hiring or firing decisions, and so on. How many of these processes are empty formalities—hurdles that you (and other managers) must repeatedly jump for no good reason?

Or consider the people problems you've had to "solve" over and over again. There's the gal in marketing who finds fault with every new product launch and never buys into the program until she gets a personal plea to cooperate from someone at the executive level. Or the guy in IT who lets requests for computer upgrades pile up on his desk for months until his boss lays down the law and forces him to act. Or the department that's run like a private fiefdom by a manager who hoards information and devises his own strategic plans that never quite mesh with anyone else's, until a vice president personally intervenes. All of these are classic examples of wasted time, energy, and resources—slippage.

In some cases, we're blind to these corporate mudholes. In other cases, we've accepted them as the way things are. And in still other cases, we're aware of the problems but just can't find the time or motivation to address them.

These kinds of problems aren't confined to the business arena, but crop up constantly in the personal realm as well. How many people do you know who have quit smoking or lost the same ten pounds repeatedly? (Maybe you are one of them.) My own experience with online banking provides another good example. For years I was sitting down twice a month to pay my bills by hand, all the while knowing that online bill paying could save

me time, energy, and money (no more stamps to buy). I just didn't commit myself to setting it up. When I finally did, the rewards were immediate, substantial, and permanent. What took me so long?

Behavior like mine reflects what's known as the Knowing *versus* Doing gap—a common problem in business (and life) that the highly respected professors Jeffrey Pfeffer and Robert Sutton have written and lectured about extensively. A handful of companies are aware of these gaps and have created a culture that attacks them. They look for the gaps, create new systems to close the gaps, and periodically evaluate their effectiveness so that necessary follow-up changes can be instituted.

Sadly, such companies are rare. Most of us work in companies where the existence of the Knowing *versus* Doing gap isn't recognized. Consequently, some of our most persistent and debilitating problems are never addressed proactively. Instead, we act only when the pain becomes too great.

What's important is that we open our eyes to see these gaps, then begin to work on the ones where the potential reward for a solution is greatest.

## The Good Business Reason—Designing Your Project Portfolio

When we pursue traction, we're looking for ways to drive our companies forward. Sometimes we're stymied by the slippage that we've just discussed. In other cases, the problem is the sheer volume of demands on our time, energy, and resources. If you're a manager with even a modicum of intelligence and ability, you are probably inundated with requests for your help on this or that project, team, or task force. Narrowing these demands to the essential few that ought to become a part of your personal project portfolio is an ongoing challenge.

Regardless of how these projects make it our way, there's a lot of power in a very simple question: *What's the good business reason for doing this?*

Actually I can't take credit for the question. I owe it to my friend Jason Jennings.

An author, consultant, and motivational speaker, Jason has studied thousands of successful firms and in three best-selling books has examined 30 of the best—companies that have grown by more than 20 percent per year for more than 20 consecutive quarters. When profiling Herb and Marion Sandler, the founders and operating owners of World Savings (one of the nation’s 15 largest banks and thrifts), he learned that they attributed their success to a corporate culture that never makes a move without first asking that same very simple question: *What’s the good business reason for doing this?*

For World Savings, it meant a lot of things that other banks considered essential *didn’t* get done. World Savings didn’t launch a network of ATMs until years after the competition. The team at World Savings felt they couldn’t justify the capital expense because their savings and time-deposit customers (at the time the heart of their customer base) didn’t have much of a need for ATMs. It wasn’t until World Savings decided to pursue high-balance checking account customers that it made economic sense to install the machines.

Based on that one simple question, the Sandlers created a culture where the justification for every decision needed to be demonstrated and, if possible, quantified. The results have been incredible. World Savings beats their competitors in profitability year after year.

Now I use the same question to help me focus on the projects and activities that make the most sense for me and my company. If something is *really* worth doing, there will be a clear and compelling answer to that powerful question, *What’s the good business reason for doing this?*

Here is some additional advice about developing your personal project portfolio—the set of activities and initiatives on which you will choose to focus and with which to become identified.

Perhaps the most important suggestion is to think of your “to-do” list as just that—a *portfolio* of projects. The echo from investment management is no accident. Every project you commit to should be viewed as a personal investment—not of money, but of time and energy, both of which are limited and precious resources. Just as you should think about your financial portfolio in terms of overall risk and reward, so should you plan your portfolio of projects.

Your personality will play a role in the project decisions you make. If you are a high-risk player, you'll take on more high-risk projects, recognizing that the likelihood of failure is significant but that the rewards for success can be enormous. If you are risk-averse, you may take a safer route by sticking to projects you *know* you can bring to successful fruition. Either strategy can lead to success over time. It's just a matter of how you feel comfortable getting there.

Ian Beavis, vice president of marketing for Kia Motors (the Korean-based company that is the world's fastest-growing automaker), told us that he built his career by taking on the projects that nobody wanted—the tough challenges that once solved really defined him as a winner. Quannah Bonrud from Enthusian, the Web-based talent acquisition and management provider, feels the same way, advising, “Do what others are not willing to do, and then do it well.”

At the same time, we found that while these managers made their names on their home runs, they also hit a lot of singles and doubles—in fact, they were experts at getting on base consistently and often. Clearly they balance the most difficult assignments with more manageable ones, which enable them to rack up wins quarter after quarter, adding value all the while.

## Making Teams Work—Controlling the Cave People

With all of the time we spend working together in teams, we spend very little time learning how to make them work. Sure, we discuss leadership, we talk about buy-in, and we do our best to drive towards clear and meaningful goals. Yet, at the same time, at least half of corporate initiatives never make it from meetings to implementation, and more than 83 percent of corporate failures are driven not by external circumstance, but by simple failure to follow through. Obviously our knowledge of what it takes to make teams effective is lacking.

Without follow-through, we don't have traction. We're back to spinning our wheels. In order to get follow-through when working with a team in a corporate environment, several things are necessary:

- First, we need to create momentum early on by establishing goals that are meaningful and processes that make sense.
- Next, we need to understand the cast of characters we are working with. What motivates them? How do we activate them to invest time in our cause? And how do we prevent the naysayers and the energy-sappers from killing the project?
- Finally, we need to create an environment in which each individual is accountable not to the leader, but to the team—so that the project and everyone involved in it becomes self-driving rather than requiring constant Sisyphean labor (pushing the boulder up the hill through sheer brute force).

Okay, so that's the plan. Now how do we make it happen?

Laurence Haughton has written and lectured extensively about teams, performance, and follow-through. In his book, *It's Not What You Say... It's What You Do—How Following Through at Every Level Can Make or Break Your Company*, he warns us about the dangers posed by the cave people. That is, CAVE people: Citizens Against Virtually Everything. According to Haughton, the cave people are the ones in every organization who go out of their way to kill buy-in, spread negativity, and create failure:

Just like our bodies have an immune system that assaults everything new and unfamiliar, organizations have their own autoimmune response (a.k.a. the CAVE People) that attacks every new idea and change in direction. So, like doctors preparing a patient for a transplant, leaders must take steps to outmaneuver these antibodies in human form.

According to Haughton, that plan starts by keeping any cave people off your project until *after* you have generated some early critical successes. Having them around is not worth the risk, because killing projects by destroying other people's enthusiasm is what they do.

Oddly enough, in his work as a business consultant, Haughton finds that many companies allow cave people to kill projects even though they recognize the danger they pose. "I get invited into companies after things have gone horribly wrong," he explains, "and management's got a dead initiative on its hands—or one that's mortally wounded. I can't

tell you how many times, as I'm re-creating what went wrong, I hear, 'I knew so-and-so would kill our buy-in.' 'Well, if you knew that,' I think in my head, 'why on earth did you let them on the team?'"

At first, it may seem uncomfortable or awkward to work around the cave people, but if you're really going to create change, gain traction, and move forward, it's essential.

## The Rest of the Cast of Characters: The Committed and the Compliant

What about the other people who participate in your team? What does it take to understand and motivate them to generate the energy and momentum needed for success?

One way to get started is to sort your team members into two broad categories—the *committed* and the *compliant*.

Suppose you have two team members, each of whom has been asked to deliver your team's business plan to a senior executive. The executive will review the plan and decide whether or not to approve it.

The committed team member walks the plan over to the exec's office and asks the assistant if the executive is available. Learning that he or she is in a meeting that'll end in five minutes, the committed team member decides to wait until the executive is free. When the exec strolls out of the meeting, the committed team member puts the plan into the exec's hands and says, "Thanks for reading this. It means a lot to us and we're really looking forward to your good thinking on this challenge."

By contrast, the compliant team member decides not to wait around. Instead, she simply passes the envelope to the exec's assistant and walks away. She provides no context, no enthusiasm, not even a pitch to the assistant for help.

Committed people are driven by the project at hand. They've caught the passion. They are curious. They want responsibility.

Compliant people are just going through the motions. They may be present physically, but they haven't bought in with their hearts and

minds. They'll do the least amount of work necessary to get credit for participating, but they don't contribute new ideas or support the old ones with enthusiasm.

When you know where everyone sits, compliant or committed, you can begin to work on motivating them. Think of it in steps:

1. First, chain up the cave people—don't let them near your project.
2. Next, determine who's committed and who's compliant. Then build early successes with those who are committed and demonstrate this success back to those who aren't. Many people in most organizations will be swayed away from their compliant status toward commitment by evidence of success. You'll find that the momentum created by their shift towards commitment is just tremendous.

With each success, take time to celebrate and demonstrate how everyone can play a role creating even *more* success.

## Using Technology to Assure Accountability and Create Traction

As a manager, you're often asked to join a cross-divisional team where your influence is supported not by your power base, title, or role, but rather by the strength of your ideas and your ability to engage people in a common cause. Often these are ad hoc teams created to support projects initiated by senior managers to pursue goals they care about—goals like cost reduction, product and process innovation, or research.

Creating accountability in this kind of situation, where the cast of characters is unfamiliar and it's hard to know what motivates them, is often challenging. Blogs and Wikis, now easier to implement, are beginning to play a powerful role.

As you may know, blogs, which reside online, allow their hosts to share their words, images, and sounds while soliciting a dialogue with their readers. With blogs, the readers are welcome to post responses. With Wikis, anyone can edit the page and improve upon the content.

Originated by software developers putting their minds together to evolve code and later popularized by Wikipedia.com, Wikis facilitate the wisdom of crowds and consistently generate better work. Both blogs and Wikis are being used as business tools by some of today's savviest organizations. 10e20, a Web design shop in New York, decided to launch a blog for each project, requiring employees to post updates on their progress twice a day. Within the first six weeks of the new system, ten projects were completed *early*. (How often does that happen in *your* office?) The blogs played a key role. Being able to read about the other participants' challenges and successes was inspiring for those involved.

Blogs help team members sense the momentum, stay connected to the community between meetings, and really think about, see, and enhance one another's contributions. Blogs also provide visibility into projects for those who have sponsored them, but may not be directly involved. The senior executive who cannot attend every meeting can go online 24/7 for a status report and join the ongoing conversation with personal thoughts and encouragement.

These increasingly simple technologies are facilitating age-old practices in a way that is uniquely convenient for the participants.

## Maintaining Traction

There's no doubt that creating traction takes effort, but the rewards are great. We and our companies are at our best when we escape pot banging to do the things that really matter.

When you are exposing your company's Knowing versus Doing gap, reframing your job using MVA, finding ways to build communications bridges between managers, or planning a team effort so that the committed can win over the compliant, you are drilling a layer deeper than those around you. The traction you develop and maintain will enable you to go further and faster than you ever dreamed possible.

