



The Effective Organization

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Don't Just Do Something... Stand There!

I recently had the CEO of a certain business very proudly tell me that she was so busy looking for clients and helping her staff deal with the economic crisis that she didn't even have time to sleep. Was she serious? Yes, she was. Were things actually working out for the business? That was less clear, however it didn't matter. They were Taking Action, and that's what really counted.

When we're feeling stressed, the instinctive response is to take action. Taking action feels good; it provides an outlet for our energy and a feeling of accomplishment. It just may not actually be useful. Sometimes it really is better to follow the advice of the old joke, "don't just do something, stand there!" After all, if you take the wrong action too frequently, you may well find yourself without the time, money, or energy to take the right actions.

Now, it's certainly true that sometimes the toughest problem is just to get started. It's sometimes the case that taking some action is better than taking no action at all. However, it does help if the actions being taken are those that have at least some chance of moving the business forward. It helps even more if the CEO can clearly evaluate the success or failure of each action

and adjust course as necessary. That's hard to do when you aren't sleeping.

A lack of sleep leads to more than just a desire for an extra cup, or ten, of coffee. There is a reason why athletes want a good night's sleep before a big game and why legendary investor Jesse Livermore stated that one his secrets of success on the stock market was being well rested. Lack of sleep interferes with motivation, judgment, and planning. It makes one more reactive, less able to stop and look before leaping. Worst of all, lack of sleep very quickly degrades a CEO's ability to recognize a losing strategy and replace it with one that might work.

As anyone who has taken a first aid class recently will recall, the first thing you need to do in an emergency is evaluate the situation. That's difficult to do when sleepy. Part of that evaluation involves determining how quickly you need to act. Even if there's a wall of flame rushing toward you, a few seconds of thought can still make the difference between life and death: caught in a massive forest fire, firefighter Wagner Dodge stopped and thought. He survived the fire while those around him were engulfed. Wagner Dodge

Publications

[Seven Habits of Pointy-Haired Bosses](#) was published by the CEO Refresher.

Steve was quoted in "[Modeling Employee Behavior](#)," published by Human Resources Executive.

Steve will be speaking on [using games for learning](#) in Montreal.

[Building confidence by focusing on success on Youth Sport Radio](#)

[How to Foster an Innovative Workforce](#) live interview

[Leadership and Team Formation](#) live interview



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had only seconds to come up with an innovative solution to his problem. The good news: he did. The bad news: he had never developed strong bonds of trust and loyalty with his team. Under pressure, they ignored him and perished in the flames.

Today, many businesses are still facing the financial equivalent of that wall of flames. Instead of stopping and thinking, they are leaping into action. In many cases, those actions are not working out so well. The CEO who isn't sleeping isn't helping her

company or herself. She is, however, giving herself the opportunity to undermine her own credibility with her staff. The longer that goes on, the more likely they'll give up on her at just the wrong moment.

So what should a CEO do?

- Build up a reservoir of trust and reinforce it daily. Help employees understand your decisions. Invite employee feedback, ideas, and suggestions.
- Build and maintain loyalty: this is the worst time to cut employee benefits or have an opaque layoff policy. As demonstrated by IBM's Tom Watson or HP's Hewlett and Packard, building employee loyalty makes a tremendous difference in tough times. Without it, they won't follow you when you most need them.

- Don't just react to the crisis. Stop and think. Brainstorm solutions with others. Find someone who will give you unbiased feedback. Take full advantage of the eyes, ears, and brains around you.
- Take care of yourself. Exercise and sleep are critical to maintaining perspective and functioning effectively under pressure. Despite the failing equipment around them, even the Apollo 13 astronauts took the time to sleep before attempting their return to Earth.
- Anticipate success. Never pass uncertainty down to your team members.

Many companies will survive the current economic downturn. Fewer will prosper as the economy turns around. It will be those who know when to stand there before they act who will be in the second group.

About 7 Steps Ahead



Stephen R. Balzac is a consultant, professional speaker and president of 7 Steps Ahead, specializing in helping businesses increase revenue and grow their client base.

Steve has over twenty years of experience in the high tech industry and is the former Director of Operations for Silicon Genetics, in Redwood City, CA.

He serves on the boards of the New England Society of Applied Psychology (NESAP) and the Society of Professional Consultants (SPC). Steve is a member of the Operations Committee of the American Judo & Jujitsu Federation. No stranger to the challenges of achieving peak performance under competitive and stressful conditions, he holds a fourth degree black belt in jujitsu and is a former nationally ranked competitive fencer. Steve is an adjunct professor of Industrial/Organizational Psychology and has been a guest lecturer at MIT and WPI.

Building effective development organizations, improving team morale, focus, and enthusiasm, developing effective communications between team members, reducing employee turnover, helping businesses identify and attain strategic targets, and applying sport psychology techniques to business have been some of his most successful projects.

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