

The Keys to Success in Troubled Times - Persuasion and Exceeding Expectations (Apr 09)

By Tony Jeary

What OK. . .times are tough. Our elected leaders have convinced us that the economy is dismal and nobody may ever buy another product from anybody, anytime, anywhere! Thank goodness that is not reality. The truth is that American business can and will revive itself and the American spirit will once again overcome economic difficulty. I really believe that!

In the meantime, it may be tougher to generate revenue and your competition will be stiffer. In the economy of today you are going to have to think differently, to overcome your competition. Different thinking begins by realizing that opportunity is always there, waiting for someone to discover and take advantage of it! Many of today's most recognizable products were introduced during the Great Depression -- 3M's Scotch tape, Revlon's long-lasting nail polish, Campbell's Chicken Noodle soup, and GE's fluorescent light bulb. Some of America's powerhouse companies - Motorola, Unisys, Converse, Hewlett-Packard, La-Z-Boy and even the Pittsburgh Steelers - were also founded during these tumultuous times, proving that good ideas and strong execution during an economic downturn can produce success.

I teach and practice a methodology called Strategic Acceleration and it is an approach that lends itself perfectly to creating success in difficult times. Strategic Acceleration can be compared to a tripod with individual legs for clarity, focus, and execution.

All three legs work together to achieve a common goal, which is to produce superior results faster. Clarity is about knowing what you really want and understanding the purpose and value of your vision. Focus is about avoiding distractions and learning to identify the high-leverage activities that significantly move the results needle. Execution is about the doing of things that produce superior results.

Clarity, focus, and execution are equal parts of the Strategic Acceleration process. None is more important than another, but if you remove one or more of them, you will not be as successful as you want to be. By that, I mean the results you achieve will be less than you need or expect—just as a tripod will fall over if you remove one of the legs. Clarity, focus, and execution are also linked together in a progression or process. Clarity provides the foundation for focus. Clarity and focus together form the basis for execution.

While all three are important, this article focuses on execution, and specifically, one aspect of execution: Persuasion! Execution is significant because execution is about doing. Clarity and focus provide a roadmap and form the basis for doing what you need to do, but execution is about actually doing it, and this is where you will spend the bulk of your time. There are core issues about execution that are strategic and are therefore the most important. One of them is the ability to persuade others.

The best way to understand the significance of persuasion and the role it plays in execution is to recognize how much of your time is invested in persuading others. What percentage of your total effort do you spend persuading others? 20%? 50%? More than that? The answer to that question certainly depends on what you do for a living, but if you are a business leader, if you are an entrepreneur, if you are involved in sales, or if you are in any way involved with other people, I can tell you that most of your time is involved in some form of persuasion. Also, if you are married or have children, you are constantly involved in persuasion. If you do any volunteer work, you are always trying to persuade others to support your charity or your project. If you are involved in politics, the entire political process involves persuasion. If you are a pastor, a doctor, or an attorney, you are invested in persuading others to do what is best for

themselves.

Chances are you are heavily involved in persuasion, which is why persuasion is one of the strategic elements of execution. You need the assistance and cooperation of others to be successful, and your ability to persuade has a lot to do with the willingness of others to not only assist you, but to do so by exceeding expectations. When you can persuade others to exceed expectations, you take execution to a higher level and really move the results needle.

Persuasion and Exceeding Expectations

When it comes to the role of persuasion in execution (the action we take daily), persuading others to exceed expectations is critical to success. Why? It's because all human beings have expectations about everything in their lives! It is a universal characteristic of people. People have expectations about their relationships, their jobs, their families, the cars they drive, the food they eat; the list could go on forever. The point is that every experience we have in life has an expectation attached to it. In the same way, whatever action we take engages either the expectations we have for ourselves, or it engages the expectations of others. Therefore, strategically considering how our goals will impact expectations becomes the critical mindset for creating superior results. When you are able to surpass your own expectations and the expectations of others, Strategic Acceleration begins to flow over to every part of your life and becomes the basis for your ability to get superior results faster.

The first thing to understand about exceeding expectations is this: The expectations you exceed today become the seed for new opportunities in the future. This may seem to be an obvious fact, but many people fail to connect today's actions with future opportunities. By that I mean they approach exceeding expectations as a one-off special event rather than a way of life.

Exceeding expectations is a foundational attitude and something that you have to pursue daily. Exceeding expectations is a proactive effort that is always looking for a way to express itself. Exceeding expectations is a completely voluntary activity and when it becomes foundational to the way you think it has the power to elevate value and become the seed for new opportunity.

It is rare for anyone to exceed expectations unless they do it on purpose. To exceed expectations on purpose means that you have an understanding of expected performance, and you realize that expected performance is in no way extraordinary. It becomes tougher when you realize that exceeding expectations requires more effort to surpass what might be described as "acceptable performance." Acceptable performance is in fact mediocrity and mediocrity is usually the norm. The problem is that it's hard to sell mediocrity!

Understanding how expectations are created is the first step in being able to exceed them in a positive way. Expectations come from our experience. As our experience changes, our expectations change, too. To illustrate how this happens, let me share an example. It involves a tool that has changed the way we all work and communicate: voice mail. Prior to voice mail, when you dialed a phone number, your expectation was to hear a live person answer the phone. When voice mail first appeared, however, that expectation was suddenly shaken by an invitation to leave a personal recorded message. The first time I encountered voice mail, I hung up! It was such a departure from my expectations, I didn't know how to respond to it.

The original intent and strategy of voice mail was to create a positive tool that would exceed expectations by significantly improving the speed and results of telephone communication. Prior to voice mail's the

expectation of callers was to get caught up in a process that can best be described as message-slip phone tag. The message slips were created by switchboard operators and receptionists who handed the message slips off to the people being called. Typically, the message slips merely reflected the name and number of the caller and the reason for their call was fairly short and cryptic.

Message-slip phone tag was the standard of telephone use until the advent of voice mail.

As with most good ideas, voice mail as it was originally intended accomplished a great positive result. It enabled people to leave personal recorded messages for specific people, who could return their calls more efficiently. Voice mail helped synchronize telephone communication to the real-world work environment. The ability to leave content-rich messages allowed people to engage the purpose of their call much faster and reduce the time it took to resolve problems. Prior to voice mail, only one in four calls made through a switchboard connected in real time to the person being called. Getting a message of content through via message slips was a hit-or-miss possibility. Voice mail allowed callers to leave a message directly with the person they needed 100% of the time. Clearly, voice mail exceeded expectations of business callers in a positive way and led the way to superior results, faster.

The voice mail story reveals two things about exceeding expectations. First, voice mail in its real-time use exceeded the expectations of the businesses that purchased voice mail and the customers of those businesses who were able to use voice mail to communicate with the business. The fact that voice mail exceeded expectations of the business and the callers to those businesses created enhanced value for both parties. It was the enhanced value that changed the status quo of using the telephone. Those facts give us a formula for exceeding expectations. If you can do something for your customer that not only exceeds their expectations, but also empowers them to exceed the expectations of their customers you have enhanced your value tremendously. It is also significant that Voice Mail was created during a time of economic difficulty in America!

Successful people influence others by knowing what they want to say and how they want to say it, and are able to say it in a way that impacts others and spurs them to take action. I have met many very intelligent people who don't have an appreciation of the powerful relationship between the skill to persuade and success. Frequently, I've seen attitudes that these skills are important and are only subject to improvement after more important things were taken care of. Dale Carnegie wrote that 85% of a person's financial success is related to his or her ability to lead people. I concur with this assessment because leading people is about persuading people to act in specific ways. A vital principle I've learned is this: When everything else is equal, the ability to effectively present and communicate your ideas is the greatest single factor in success.

So, if you are concerned about the economy take heart! There are still plenty of prospects out there who will buy your product or service if you deliver enhanced value. The way to do that is to exceed their expectations! Do something positive in their behalf they do not expect.

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