

A Bias for Urgency and Action

BY RANDY G. PENNINGTON



"It is time for us all to stand and cheer for the doer, the achiever - the one who recognizes the challenge and does something about it."

– Vince Lombardi

We all have them - the handful of things that we could do immediately to make our teams, organizations and ourselves more effective. Perhaps it's a key problem or challenge that needs a resolution. Maybe it's an action we need to take or even something we should stop doing.

In uncertain times like these, there is a natural tendency to be more cautious. This is an understandable response because you don't want to make a mistake. People sell their investments out of fear when they should be buying new ones. Companies overanalyze a new product's potential profitability to the point where a competitor beats them to market.

I am not suggesting that you throw caution to the wind. Rather, I am suggesting that a sense of urgency in decision-making and action can be a catalyst for improvement and provide a greater sense of control over your final outcome.

So go ahead. Complete this statement: One thing that I should do right now to make my team, my organization or myself more effective is _____.

Congratulations! You have taken the first step to creating a bias for urgency and action. You have set yourself on a course to be known as a leader who accomplishes results rather than analyzes options to the point of paralysis.

Here are five ways you can continue to expand your bias for urgency and action:

Establish a clear vision for what you want to accomplish and a target date for doing so. Clarity of vision creates focus. Paint a specific picture of what you want to achieve, why it is important and what it will look and feel like when you have achieved it. Creating an aggressive but achievable date to accomplish your goal generates urgency. Together they pull you toward accomplishment.

Remember, people support what they help create. Engage others to provide input so that they too can be motivated to action.

Create an action agenda. Plans, at least the way most of them are used, are completed prior to implementation. An action agenda, on the other hand, is a living document that outlines the steps to

achieve your vision. Identify the actions that must be taken as far as you can see them. Don't worry if your agenda isn't complete before you begin. You will update it and add details at every milestone. Remember to include barriers that must be overcome and people that you must enlist to support your efforts.

Use meetings for discussing and deciding - not reporting. Nothing sucks the energy out of a team more quickly than meetings spent listening to reports that could have been read in advance. Provide progress updates prior to the meeting so that participants can prepare. Use the meeting to discuss the status and decide next steps. This will improve accountability and help you maintain the sense of urgency.

Adjust the process and agenda. Modify the target date as a last resort. Most people automatically push the target date to accommodate any delay. But as you know, moving targets are much more difficult to hit. There may be times when you must modify your target date. This should be a last resort. First try to adjust the work process or add steps to your agenda, because a target that is repeatedly moved will ultimately breed complacency.

Recognize and reinforce effort. Reward results. Everyone wants to be appreciated for their hard work. Sincere recognition maintains momentum toward the goal. Just remember to hold the ultimate reward for the delivery of results.

Nolan Bushnell, founder of Atari and Chuck E. Cheese's Pizza Time, said, "Everyone who's ever taken a shower has an idea. It's the person who gets out of the shower, dries off and does something about it who makes a difference."

A sense of urgency and bias for action are the difference between desire and accomplishment. Isn't it time you got started?

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