

LEADERSHIP Excellence

Warren Bennis



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**Humble
Inquiry**

Why Leaders Fail

**Collective
Leadership**

Unite Diverse Groups

**Henrik Ekelund
CEO BTS**



“Leadership Excellence is an exceptional way to learn and then apply the best and latest ideas in the field of leadership.”

—WARREN BENNIS, AUTHOR AND USC PROFESSOR OF MANAGEMENT

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Practice Makes Perfect

Getting the company on course.



by Henrik Ekelund

UNVEILING A NEW strategy? Everyone knows the drill—cue the town hall meeting. Create a big splash at the annual conference. Send out emails, webcasts, brochures, even logoed shirts with the strategy boiled down to a pithy statement.

There's a better, faster way to achieve genuine employee alignment and effective execution of that strategy. Savvy leaders are now focusing on strategy execution as well as strategy development, knowing that practice is the key.

While having the right strategy in place is mission-critical, poor execution can sink a company and a CEO's career. In the end, execution is everything, and CEOs have less time than ever to get it right.

Senior leaders have identified strategic alignment and speed of execution as the most pressing challenges. CEOs are rarely fired because they lack a strategy, but because they fail to effectively engage people in its execution. This starts with

building agreement among the leadership team members—getting everyone on the same page. As Jack Welch said, "Getting every employee's mind into the game is a huge part of what the CEO's job is all about."

Those top managers often internalize the strategy in different ways, which influences the implementation. The differences can lead to inconsistent execution, lackadaisical implementation, conflict, and turf wars. Without alignment at the top, a strategy can splinter into a million pieces.

How can leaders motivate people for success when strategic change is often synonymous with fear, uncertainty, and doubt? "Why should I adopt the new strategy?" is a question that every CEO must answer crisply and convincingly. Senior executives and frontline managers need to understand six points: why the new strategy is necessary; the impacts of the new strategy and how they apply to daily work; changes required for the organization and the leader's department or division; how they may have to shift

as leaders; what strong execution looks like; and how to build skills and motivate others moving forward.

Case In Point: Sodexo

A \$20 billion on-site services and employee motivation solutions company with more than 380,000 employees, Sodexo serves 50 million people daily. When Michel Landel took over as CEO in 2005, Sodexo was primarily known for food services, despite being the third largest outsourcing company with expertise in such disparate areas as medical equipment maintenance, defense, senior care, and education. Landel introduced a strategy to better reflect current demand from Sodexo customers and capture market opportunities. He engaged top Sodexo leaders in the strategy, pushing them beyond their food-services comfort zone to envision themselves as part of a valued service provider for all non-core client services.

In March 2009, the Sodexo Management Institute was tasked with engaging 940 managers and VPs in the new strategy. They launched the CLIMB (*Change, Leadership, Implementation, Behaviors*) program. CLIMB incorporates online learning, face-to-face sessions, and a customized, competitive simulation developed with BTS. The goal: *Get 940 managers living and experiencing the new strategy.*



After being organized into groups of 100, CLIMB participants complete a four-month online/virtual preparation process and then participate in *VirtuoSo*, the heart of the program, featuring a virtual as well as a three-day onsite simulation. Teams are formed to serve as the Senior Leadership Team, then guide the three-year simulated lifecycle of an enterprise based on Sodexo.

Managers are convinced of its effectiveness, and employees are hooked. Simulations provide rapid alignment, build confidence in the strategy's success, and help CEOs drive better results faster.

"The *VirtuoSo* simulation, provides a safe environment for risk taking, enables participants to see real-time impacts of their decisions, and offers a competitive environment that gets our people involved and committed," said Elisabeth Carpentier, VP of HR. A new wave of participants is already scheduled to attend the CLIMB program. LE

Henrik Ekelund is CEO of BTS. Visit www.bts.com.

ACTION: Improve execution through simulation.