



# Coaches Corner:

## Getting Employee Buy-In

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A business leader I know lamented to me that his last efforts to implement strategic planning failed. “We just didn’t get any buy-in; neither from our employees nor from some of our leaders. It never went anywhere.” He was frustrated because he’d presumed everyone would be excited about their plan.

Similar comments have been made to me frequently by other leaders. Of course, these companies aren’t alone; the statistics are that fewer than 20 percent of companies successfully execute their strategy.

There can be many reasons for failing to get the buy-in to execute strategy; however I’d like to focus on one I’ve found is fundamental but often overlooked or disputed by senior leaders. That reason is that your people are too busy with the day-to-day and they already feel overwhelmed. They feel there’s no time for strategic stuff. From my perspective as a coach, certainly people are very busy and I’ve heard the “we’ve been too busy” excuse. However, I’ve found the problem often is a combination of them underestimating the time it’ll take and committing to too many priorities.

I believe you need to acknowledge and deal with the “very busy” reality before you can obtain their genuine buy-in so here are three steps to doing that.

### STEP 1: ACCEPT REALITY

Get everyone (you included) to face reality. Executing strategy is doing the important tasks whilst also managing the tidal wave of urgent tasks and deadlines people face every day. This competition between urgent and important is what your people are struggling with and they may be reluctant to admit it, so they need your help. Make this OK by telling them you know they’re busy and your intent is to help them find and do the most important thing – their No. 1 priority. Get everyone thinking in terms of creating the time and capacity to work on the important in the face of the urgent. What is consuming time that can be streamlined? (Poor meetings are a common source of bloat in companies). What’s being done that nobody needs?

### STEP 2: GET THEIR INPUT

Encourage them (or force them if necessary) to participate in creating their prioritized action list. Don’t just assign them their No. 1 task and expect them to be off and running. To get buy-in, you first

must get people to weigh-in. As they know their work and workload better than you do, have them create their master workload list including their “tasks to be done” that support the strategy. Then debate and discuss those tasks and put them in order of importance. Find the No. 1 thing that supports the strategy.

### STEP 3: GAMIFY PROGRESS

Once people have their No. 1 thing, create a game of measuring the team’s progress, complete with simple and fun visual scoreboard to track progress. Games make things visible, measurable and fun and contribute to the feeling of making progress. They also give opportunities for celebration and recognition which are important to getting and maintaining buy-in.

### A FINAL SUGGESTION.

Often people take on too many priorities. This is a mistake because too many priorities mean no priorities. Instead everyone should work on their No. 1 priority exclusively until it’s done. Then it’s time for No. 2. If you don’t get to No. 2 in the timeframe don’t worry, you’ve still done the most important. ♦