

Special Report

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49 Tips On Using Action To Achieve Results

As a leader, you do nothing more important than get results. You can't get results simply by yourself. That's not leadership; that's stand up comedy. Instead, you must motivate other people to get the results your organization needs. However, people who are merely motivated are useless to an organization. People are useful only when they take action to get results. When skilled, motivated people are taking heartfelt action, organization results are limitless. People who don't believe that don't understand leadership and the power of action.

(1) **Understand what action really is.** Action is not what people think, it's not what people feel. It's what they physically do. This may seem obvious, but leaders often miss this point. They get so caught up with what people think and feel, they miss the important actions those people are taking or failing to take. This can lead to a failure of focus, a main cause of missed results.

(2) **Action gets results.** People must take action to get results. When you see results through the lens of the physical action taken by the people you lead, you get a vivid view of how best to increase those results.

(3) **Draw action flow charts.** Draw an action flow chart of the results that you achieved (or failed to achieve.) Do it this way: On the right side of the chart write the results. On the left side write the sequence of actions that led to the results. Could you change the sequences to get better results? Could you change the actions to get better results? Drawing such charts helps you see both action and results in new and useful ways.

(4) **Change actions into processes.** Avoid the one-in-a-row syndrome with action and results. Transform the sequences of actions you have drawn on the flow charts into action processes that can be used in a variety of settings.

(5) **Link motivation to actions.** Action and motivation are closely related. Like action, motivation isn't what people think or feel but what they physically do. They are not motivated until they are actually taking action that leads to results. Efforts to motivate people should go beyond having them simply feel good. It should focus on having them take physical action aimed at achieving results.

(6) **Start every meeting with an action report.** Whatever the reason for the meeting, whatever its agenda, first on the agenda should be one of the participants giving a brief report on how h/she motivated somebody to take action for results. What results were targeted, what action was taken, what results were achieved? Select the person to give the report at the start of the meeting. This means that everyone must show up ready to deliver, though only one person will do so. The report should be no longer than five minutes. If the person you select has no report to give, let five minutes of silence go by before going on to the regular agenda.

(7) **End meetings with action.** Many meetings end with a whisper not a bang. From now on, make sure that your meetings end with people taking action that targets results.

(8) **Avoid ordering people to take action.** Unless you are dealing with particularly recalcitrant people, request, not order, that they take action. Your request gives them a relative choice. Best of all, have it be fully their choice. Have them decide what action they will take. (See Tip 13.) Note: You, as the leader, have veto power over whatever action they decide. They cannot decide to take frivolous action. You must agree with them on the action they select. Still, they will be more committed to the action if they themselves select it rather than you ordering it. You often speak best as a leader when your mouth is shut. Of course, there are people you lead who want to be given orders, who will resist your letting them make choices. In this case, it's best to give them what they need for awhile, while at the same time trying to wean them from the craving, which is ultimately destructive to them and your organization.

(9) **Develop time lines, and monitoring and evaluating mechanisms.** Just having people take action for results is not enough. You should come to an agreement with them as to when the actions will happen, how those actions will be monitored, and how they will be evaluated. In this way, you add a qualitative dimension to the actions.

(10) **Be simple.** Avoid complicated actions. Keep it simple. Make sure they understand the action before they take it.

(11) **Be purposeful.** In many cases, people misunderstand the purpose of the action they intend to take. So,

before they take the action, ask them what their action is intended to accomplish. Do not have them take action unless they first explain its purpose.

(12) **Invest the action with meaning.** There is a difference between purpose and meaning in action. They might understand the purpose of the action, but that does not necessarily mean that it has meaning for them. People taking action that means little to them will not get the results you want. Just as they should describe its purpose to you, so they should describe its meaning. It is meaningful to them only when it solves a problem of their need, not your need.

(13) **Encourage their participation.** Generally speaking, they take the best action for results when it is action they thought of themselves. Freedom of choice, freedom of decision is the name of the game. It's not enough that you inspire them to have confidence in you. Inspire them to take action that will give them confidence in themselves. Know why that action gives them confidence.

(12) **Know their values.** The people you lead will only be committed to take wholehearted action when that action is consistent with their values.

(13) **Shape structure from action.** Action is structure. The action you challenge people to take determines the structure of your organization, no matter what structure is ostensibly in place.

(14) **Hold them accountable.** Accountability is not just what we do, it's who we are. They must be accountable for actions that they decide to take and the results they achieve or fail to achieve. Without accountability, there is no freedom of choice.

(15) **Hold yourself accountable.** If you don't hold yourself accountable for the actions that you and they take, they will not take the committed action that you need.

(16) **Support their actions.** You lead most effectively not when you are simply telling people what to do but when you are supporting them in what they freely choose to do. Support them by removing obstacles to the actions they are taking and by giving them the resources to help them more effectively take those actions.

(17) **Take action from the unique.** When things are going well, something is always going wrong. When things are going wrong, something is always going well. Define and take action from what is going wrong when things are well and what is going well when things are wrong.

(18) **Build trust through action.** Trust is established mainly through action. Act so that you can speak to people face-to-face; act to keep your commitments; act to show them that you trust them; and act to challenge them to trust you.

(19) **Action gives meaning to emotion.** People take action only when they are emotionally impelled to do so. Clearly, the people you lead have many emotions that work both for and against you. Their emotions become meaningful for the organization when they drive action for results.

(20) **Your most effective call-to-action.** It's not from you to them — but from them to themselves. You cannot motivate them to take action, only they can motivate themselves. Your call-to-action is the trigger for them to be motivated to take action for results. Your asking, "What actions will you take to get results?" is a powerful call-to-action.

(21) **Focus on what and how.** Action makes issues visible. Have your call-to-action be a simple, clear thing that they can do. Watch them do it. Pay attention not only to what they do but the way they do it. Are they doing it on time? Are they eager to report to you on the results of the actions? Are they getting results from the actions? These are indications of how strongly or weakly they are motivated. Their body language may reveal a great deal more than their words. If they choose not to do it or they do it late or they do it reluctantly, you may not have cause leaders, even though they have verbally signed up.

(22) **Actions ratchet up achievements.** They won't know how good they truly are unless they can take actions to make themselves better. Keep asking them to choose actions that will have them keep improving.

(23) **Test willingness to change through actions.** If people are not willing to change, you will see that they would rather take the old wrong actions in what they perceive are the right ways instead of the new right actions in the temporarily wrong ways. If you don't support them in the latter, you will be mired in the status quo. And the status quo is always wrong.

(24) **Be confident.** You may face many uncertainties in your quest for results. But challenge them to take action only when you are radiating optimism and hope. After all, the message is not just the message; the message is also the messenger. Throughout history, when people needed to accomplish great tasks, one thing had to happen first: a leader had to gather them together and speak confidently from the heart. People won't be motivated to take action by leaders who don't think the job can get done. If you're one of those, you are a critic, not a leader.

(25) **Define the context for action.** Never provide information alone. Define and communicate the reality that the information influences. All great enterprises begin with a change of mind. For example, they need to

meet a goal of obtaining 100 units. The quantity of units is important only in the quality of reality that the units represent. And that quality is always tied to their emotional needs. Have they never met that goal before? What does their meeting it have to do with what is changing, their fears, their major problem, what makes them angry? Will they be perceived as losers if they don't meet it? Will they be heroes and heroines if they do meet it? How will their meeting it shape your vision and their dreams?

(26) **Give importance to place.** Place can influence action. Have them commit to action when they are in the environment that best lends itself to such action. A leader in a plant, for instance, can have a receptive ear from individuals when talking informally with them on the factory floor; but if those individuals are called to a conference room or his office, where layoffs and bad news have repeatedly been communicated, those very same people may get angry and defensive.

(27) **Be aware of easy and difficult emotions that prompt action.** Easy emotions are linked to people saying that those other people have to change. Difficult emotions are linked to people saying that they themselves have to change. Challenge people to take action from their difficult emotions.

(28) **Understand when action should take place.** It's not just what people say to you that's important, it's what they do after they have had their say, and they leave your sight. Don't expect people to change in the meeting where you call for change. Look for the change as evidenced by new actions that took place before the *next* meeting.

(29) **Promote coordinated action.** See action as a *team* dynamic. Challenge people to identify the actions they can take together then support them in taking it.

(30) **Be challenged.** Challenge them to critique you on the actions you have taken. Then critique their critique.

(31) **Meet fear with action.** Fear informs most situations in which people are being challenged to get big increases in results. Challenge them to face their fears by having them describe precisely what they fear. Let's say it is fear of failure. Have them describe what actions would lead to failure. Then have them describe what actions will lead to success. Challenge them to take leadership of the latter. We cannot defeat fear, but when we employ right action, fear need not be defeating.

(32) **Deliver effectively.** The effectiveness of a call-to-action hinges not only on what it is but how it is structured and delivered. Deliver the call by framing it with their most urgent need. The action should be simple and easy. Break it into parts. For instance, you want them to sign up for the journey by signing their name on a sheet of paper. Don't simply say, "Sign your name!" Instead, say, "We know the most important issue in this room is job security. Going to the mountain will help insure that we have job security. It won't be easy, but we will get there together. We will do it for each other! Let's start our journey right now. I need you to sign up. So please take the blue sheet out of your meeting folder. And take out your pen. Please sign your name on the blank at the top of the sheet." Watch them every step of the way. If people are not taking out the blue sheet, if they are not taking out their pens, they are not motivated. Don't go on! Redo the Process. Don't deliver a call-to-action that won't be carried out. If people see others hesitating to carry out your call, you have created *negative* action. Create *positive* action by having them do simple, easy things *together* in full view of each other. After they have accomplished the call, complete your frame by telling them what they did, and why they did it. For instance, "You have taken an important first step for job security. Now here is the next step in going to the mountain. Bring those sheets to me right now."

(33) **Build action into your meeting's agenda.** An agenda item for many meetings: "How do we step up results by having people take new action, and what action will that be?"

(34) **Understand that people are always motivated to act.** The question is: Will they act to champion your cause — or subvert it? Like good performers on the job, poor performers also take action that is persistent, committed to excellence, and adaptable. The trouble is, it's action that cements their poor performance. Seeing poor performers in this light may provide you with fresh insights to deal with them.

(35) **Transform experiences into action.** When challenging people to take action, remember those occasions where your actions and the actions of others successfully tackled tough challenges. Transform those actions into processes that can help people take action now. (See #45)

(36) **You don't have to give motivational speeches and pep talks to get and keep people motivated to take action.** True motivation isn't about cheering and noise making and flags waving. Motivation happens in the profound quiet of human relationships. You best motivate people to take action for results by strengthening and deepening those relationships.

(37) **10 ways to have people take new action.**

1. Change their measurements.
2. Change their compensation.
3. Order them.
4. Let them take control.

5. Change their job/role responsibilities.
6. Have them work on tasks reviewed by upper level executives
7. Institutionalize change-producing processes.
8. Have them teach new actions.
9. Challenge them to lead.
10. Change their leaders.

(38.) **How to get a group to take new action.** Identify the potential cause leaders in the group. Meet with them individually and challenge them to come up with new actions. If they agree that they will be the cause leaders for the new actions, then meet with the group. Have you and your cause leaders talk to the group about taking the actions. Have your cause leaders get more cause leaders. Keep the process going.

(39) **Have people lead not simply do.** Know the difference between leading and simply doing. Challenge people to take action to be leaders, not simply people who are doing a job. Understand when they are leading and when they are doing. Accept only their leadership.

(40) **Use questions.** Your effectiveness in motivating people to take the right action can be enhanced simply by using question marks in your discourse with them rather than periods.

(42) **Avoid two traps:** When giving the call to action, avoid the “I need . . . “ Trap and the “You do . . . “ Trap. We fall into the “I need . . . “ Trap when we play on our field, not the audience’s. We say, “I need . . . the company needs, etc.” To get Cause Leaders, we must be the visiting team on *their* field. We do that by defining their major problem and having them lead a solution to that problem. The “You do . . . “ Trap is when we challenge people to do, not lead. Once you are in a trap, it is easy and simple to get out. Introduce a question mark: Instead of saying, “The company needs . . . “, ask, “Do you think you need?...” Or substitute the word “lead” for the word “do.”

(43) **Know the five levels of motivation.** There are five levels of motivating people to take action for results. In ascending order of importance: 1. Have them listen. 2. Have them see. 3. Have them do. 4. Have them teach. 5. Have them lead.

(44) **Three ways to continually improve actions.** Constantly determine which actions you will stop, which actions you will start, which actions you will continue.

(45) **Revisit leadership activities.** When challenging somebody to take action for results, it is often helpful to talk first about how that person took leadership in other areas, including areas outside the organization. Leaders are not simply born nor are they made, they are. All people have taken leadership at one time or another in their lives. People who feel that they might not lead well in your organization could have been a strong leader in their church activities or in Boy Scouts or Little League or a bowling league. Encouraging them to talk about that leadership, and the specific ways they may have been successful, might help you convince them to be your cause leader.

(47) **Know the rallying cries of the status quo that prevent people from taking new action.** — *It won't work.*

— *We tried that before.*

— *I need more time to do it.*

— *I don't have the resources*

— *That's not our area.*

— *This is the first that I've heard of it.*

— *Are you sure that I'm the person that you want to talk to?*

— *You'll need to get with my boss because my plate is already full.*

— *Has anybody determined its cost-effectiveness?*

— *It all pays the same.*

What are status quo rallying cries that you have heard?.

(48) **Know the shadows of results.** Ordering people to go from point A to point B leads to actions that achieve the shadows of results, no matter how substantive they appear. Having people want to go from A to B leads to actions that achieve the substance of results.

(49) **Action to promote speed.** Speed is a results multiplier. When you are not only getting results but getting results faster, you can tap into a new results mother lode. See speed as fundamentally a leadership dynamic. If you are not getting the speed you want, look first at the leadership cause. Draw a cause-leader map for speed. Put the goal in the center with spokes radiating to the people you need as your cause leaders to achieve more speed. Then, with their help, draw an action flow chart. Get them to commit to specific leadership actions that they will take, and lead others to take, to make speed happen.