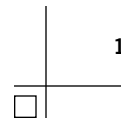


The Call for Results

Several years ago, we conducted an executive education program with a group of senior managers in a growing service organization. In a serious discussion of what factors they considered to be most important to their career success, a heated debate broke out. Opinions were strong and varied about how to keep your job and get ahead. All the executives seemed to have their favorite three or four success factors that they championed during this discussion. Here are some of the typical opinions that emerged from this energized exchange:

“Be sure to take care of the bottom line.”

“It all comes back to who you know and your connections.”





- “You’ve got to be willing to pay the price.”
- “Get as much cross-functional experience as you can.”
- “Find a mentor to help show you the way.”
- “Surround yourself with the best people possible.”
- “You’ve got to keep improving yourself.”
- “Get your systems and processes working in concert.”
- “Get involved in high-profile projects.”
- “Be willing and able to make the difficult decisions.”

The passion, interest, and energy generated by this discussion encouraged us to explore this critically important career issue in greater depth since these views were only opinions at this point. To do this, we conducted a formal survey of more than 5,000 managers all across the United States. Top, middle, and front-line managers were surveyed from nearly every major U.S. industry, including high tech, chemical, health care, automotive, banking, financial services, steel, retail, telecommunications, and transportation. In this study, managers were asked to identify and rank order the factors they considered to be most important to their personal career survival and success. *Stop right now and on a sheet of paper list the top five most important factors that you feel are essential for your career survival and success in your current situation.*

If you are like the managers in our study, getting better results is most likely on your list in some way, shape, or form.¹ Although some variance exists across organizations, industries, and management levels, people completing this survey made it very clear that getting results is almost always the most critical career survival and success factor and the name of the career game.

The CEO of a *Fortune* 500 manufacturing organization that we were recently working with made a telling comment in a management development strategy meeting: “What we need are more managers who know how to get the right results in the right way if we are going to be able to hit these aggressive num-

bers and take care of our customers and people.” Although his organization was very successful financially, it was experiencing increasing competition, eroding profit margins, shortened life cycles on technologies, and rapid turnover of its product line. It became clear to all in this organization that managers had to become more results oriented if their organization was to endure.

■ How to Get Results: What Managers Think

If this tenet is indeed true, it begets the most important question, one that every manager must think about and explore: *How do I go about getting better results in the ultra-competitive workplace of the twenty-first century?* To explore this issue in greater depth, we surveyed over 1,600 high-performance managers on what they believe are the keys to getting results and learned a host of important lessons. Our sample of managers averaged forty-six years of age with seventeen years of management experience; 64 percent were men and 36 percent women. Participants in this study were all labeled high-performers” by their organization and collectively possessed over twenty-seven thousand years of management experience. Follow-up interviews were conducted with an additional four hundred high-performance managers to solicit further input, examples, cases, and personal anecdotes and quotes that we share throughout this book.

We analyzed the data generated from both the survey and interviews and ranked the results factors in their order of importance to the managers in this study. Table 1.1 contains the top twenty management fundamentals that these managers deemed most important in their quest for results.

The information in Table 1.1 lets us dispel several myths. First, when managers are described as being results oriented, they are frequently viewed as being too task oriented, with little or no regard for people or the human side of organizations. On



Table 1.1. Key Research Findings for Getting Results

1. Use effective and dynamic communication practices.
2. Lead by example to demonstrate character and competence.
3. Establish and maintain a clear and meaningful vision and mission.
4. Provide motivation to create ownership and accountability for results.
5. Clarify performance expectations with all employees.
6. Foster teamwork and cooperation.
7. Develop clear and balanced performance goals and metrics.
8. Develop key working relationships.
9. Provide ongoing employee training and education.
10. Conduct appropriate and systematic planning activities.
11. Remove performance barriers quickly.
12. Keep yourself current and practice personal development.
13. Provide ongoing performance feedback and coaching.
14. Demonstrate extreme care in staffing your operation.
15. Clarify your value-added role as manager.
16. Provide ongoing performance monitoring and measurement.
17. Equip people with resources they need to perform.
18. Proactively improve your processes.
19. Practice constructive employee appraisal and development.
20. Maintain balance in both your professional and personal life.

Note: $n = 2,000+$ managers.

the contrary, these findings make it clear that getting results requires a balance between effective people-oriented practices and effective task-oriented practices, with the balance favoring the people side of the equation. High-performance managers make this point loud and clear: unless you engage people power, you cannot create great long-term performance.²

Second, although the words of the legendary football coach Woody Hayes—"You win with people!"—ring true, concern for people alone does not bring a manager desired results. An executive friend of ours is often heard saying, "Even the best people can only get so far without effective systems, processes, support, and resources." This is a view shared by managers in this study: managers must be task oriented in very specific ways to create

an overall process and workplace system that is set up to get desired results. Yet we know from previous research that many managers tend to gravitate toward task-oriented practices at the expense of people-oriented issues and that people-oriented issues are frequently lost or tossed aside in the heat of battle.³ Thus, although most managers truly want better performance and the results that follow, they frequently lack the focus, skills, passion, knowledge, and balance necessary to create an effective personal management system that addresses both the people issues and the systems issues in concert.

■ The Rules of the Game: Five Absolutes for Getting Results

The ability of managers to get results and improve their performance is driven to a great extent by their ability to address what we have come to call the Five Absolutes for Getting Results. “There are no absolutes anymore” is a well-worn axiom of modern business—but it’s simply not true. The intent of this oft-repeated saying is probably to remind us that the rules of business and the marketplace are constantly in a state of change (so don’t look for pat answers or standardized solutions to fix complex problems or deficiencies). Yet this line of thinking can lead managers to look for a quick fix or ignore tried-and-true practices that can help make the complex issue of improving performance much easier to understand and address.

Based on our findings, it is our position that when it comes to getting results, there are a few critical results-oriented practices. We have carefully selected the word *absolute* as a moniker for each set of results-oriented practices that emerged from this research. An *absolute* is defined as something that possesses the characteristic of being complete in nature. We found that the twenty results-oriented practices identified by the managers in this study can be categorized into Five Absolutes for high performance.



Further, for a manager to create and sustain a level of complete performance that will produce desired results in these pressure-packed times, all of the following Five Absolutes must be present:

- *Absolute 1. Get everyone on the same page: Focus on the purpose of your organization.* Create and maintain a clear and unambiguous focus on desired results for yourself, your people, and your operation as a whole—and create a means to measure performance.
- *Absolute 2. Prepare for battle: Equip your operation with tools, talent, and technology.* Progressively staff your operation with high-quality people, develop effective planning practices, provide ongoing training and education for your people, and ensure people have the tools they need to get the job done.
- *Absolute 3. Stoke the fire of performance: Create a climate for results.* Create an operational climate that measures performance, provides ongoing performance measurement and feedback, motivates people, and removes barriers to performance in an ongoing and systematic fashion.
- *Absolute 4. Build bridges on the road to results: Nurture relationships with people.* Identify, foster, nurture, and sustain relationships, practice effective communication, and foster cooperation through the practice of trustworthy leadership with the people you need to get results.
- *Absolute 5. Keep the piano in tune: Practice continuous renewal.* Continuously improve and renew yourself, your processes, and your people, and maintain balance in all facets of your life for long-term success.

Together, these Five Absolutes represent the pieces of a puzzle, all of which managers must put together to create a complete high-performance system that is capable of getting and sustaining results. If one of the pieces of the puzzle is missing (or any piece is only partially in place), the performance puzzle

is incomplete and performance will suffer. All the pieces must be brought together in unison, and dynamic and trustworthy leadership that creates real change and desired results must be provided by the manager. Figure 1.1 illustrates this concept, showing how each of the Five Absolutes represents a critical component that is needed to improve performance and get better results.

If a manager lacks skill in (or ignores) a particular area, results will not be optimal. In this context, it is easy to see why getting better results can be a daunting challenge—because it requires focus, skill, discipline, and passion in a host of different or even competing arenas. But herein is also the reason for hope, enthusiasm, and encouragement. Almost all managers have specific areas of performance that already work well, and others that can be identified, targeted, and improved upon to increase overall effectiveness.

■ Mastering the Five Managerial Absolutes

To identify areas of your performance that are currently effective and areas that need work to make you a more complete and effective manager, stop right now and complete the Getting Results Assessment in Worksheet 1.1. We return to this assessment in the last chapter to help you develop an improvement plan using what you learned from reading this book.

So what is it that you need to be working on to complete your performance puzzle? Do you have a clear sense of purpose for your operation? Do you have a meaningful set of goals and metrics that you and your people are pursuing? Are all of your people clearly focused on performing the duties that are most critical to the success of your operation? Do people in your operation cooperate with each other in serving your internal and external customers? Is effective staffing and training of personnel

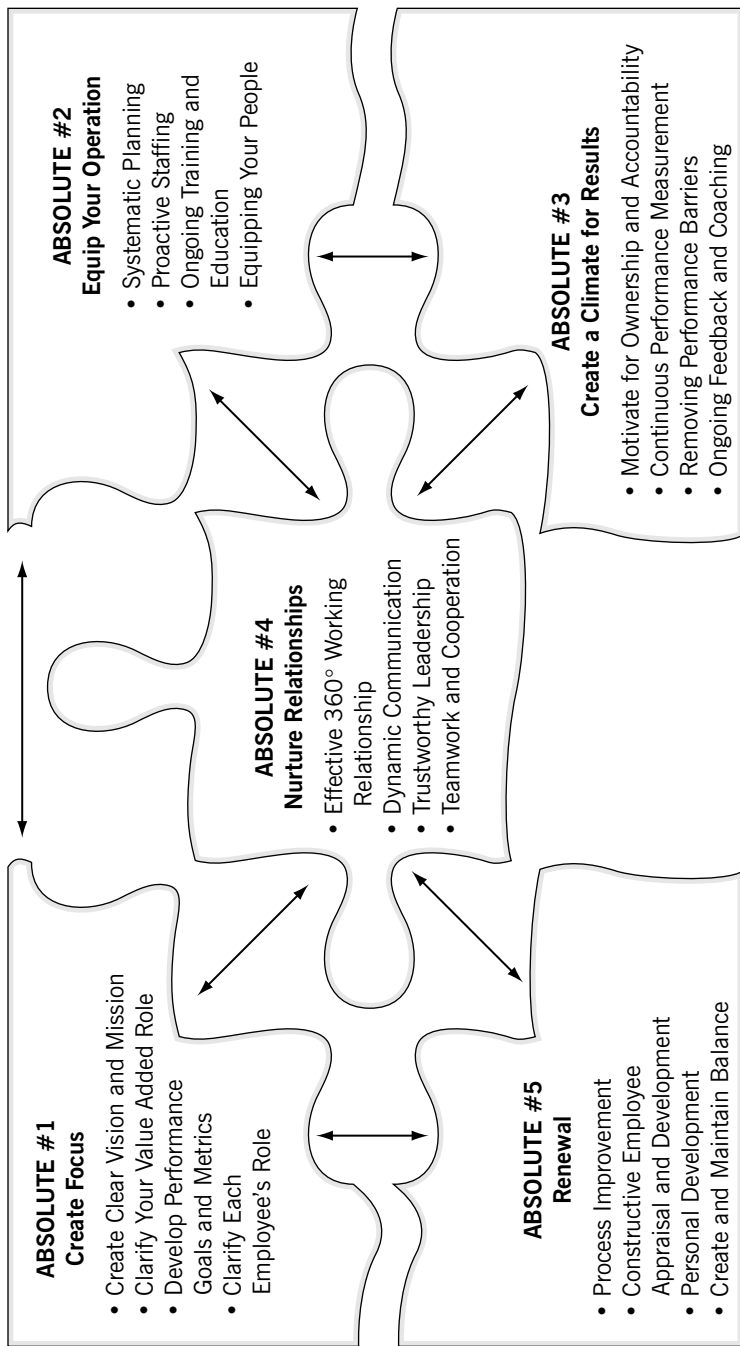


Figure 1.1. The Five Absolutes for Getting Results



■ Worksheet 1.1. ■
Getting Results Assessment

Instructions: Answer each of the following questions in an honest and open fashion to assess the extent to which you are effectively engaged in the practices that lead to improving performance and results. Use the following rating scale:

1=Never 2=Rarely fometimes 4=To a Great Extent 5=Always

To What Extent Do I . . .

1. Practice effective communications to understand others and to be understood? _____
2. Lead by example and demonstrate competency and character in the workplace? _____
3. Have a clear vision and mission for where I am leading my people? _____
4. Hold people accountable and motivate them to increase their performance? _____
5. Clarify performance expectations with all my employees? _____
6. Foster cooperation and teamwork with the people who need each other to get results? _____
7. Use clearly defined and balanced performance metrics to measure performance? _____
8. Work at continually developing and nurturing key working relationships? _____
9. Ensure that my people are properly trained and educated to get results? _____
10. Employ appropriate and systematic planning practices? _____
11. Work to rapidly remove performance barriers that get in the way of getting results? _____



■ **Worksheet 1.1.** ■

Getting Results Assessment, Cont'd

- 12. Keep myself up-to-date with the skills necessary to be effective in my job? _____
- 13. Provide ongoing performance feedback and coaching to my people? _____
- 14. Take extreme care in staffing the operation? _____
- 15. Proactively clarify my value-added organizational role? _____
- 16. Regularly monitor and measure the operation's performance? _____
- 17. Work to make sure that people are properly equipped to perform their jobs? _____
- 18. Have mechanisms in place to improve processes on an ongoing basis? _____
- 19. Constructively appraise my employees' performance and establish plans for their development? _____
- 20. Work to maintain balance in all facets of my life? _____

Interpretation: Any practice that receives less than a score of 4 is a potential target behavior for improving your personal performance and propensity for getting better results.

a priority? Do you move to remove performance barriers in a timely fashion? Do you have a plan to improve your personal performance? Is developing your people an activity that you take seriously?

These are just a few of the critical questions that we will address in the rest of this book as we lay the foundation for developing a system for improving your ability to get results and your long-term career survival and success. In the end, your ability to improve your performance and corresponding results will be dictated to the greatest extent by your ability to develop and master the Five Absolutes that we are about to explore.

In these dynamic and competitive times, it is easy for managers to feel overwhelmed and perhaps even to begin to despair, because the organizational demands for improvement are never ending. Modern managers are being paid to get results for their organizations and their approach to leading people and creating effective business processes is critical in any effort to improve performance. But it is our purpose here to provide all our readers with a sense of hope and optimism about their future. Our core belief is a simple one: as things get more complex, complicated, dynamic, and fast-paced, managers at all levels must get back to mastering the managerial absolutes that drive improvement, because it is here that the seeds of success or failure are found.

CHAPTER SUMMARY

As organizations move into the ultra-competitive twenty-first century, they are becoming more performance oriented and performance sensitive. Research on organizational downsizing practices points to the fact that what managers do and how well they do it is critical to their career survival. Our research on career success points to the fact that conceptual, interpersonal, and technical skills are all very important. And being able to



make good decisions, handle stress, build a broad base of work experience, and acquire a mentor are key as well. But the single most important factor for keeping your job and getting ahead is to build an excellent performance record based on your ability to get results. The research shared in this book will show you how to go about improving your performance by focusing your energies and developing effective management practices that we have come to call the “Five Absolutes” for achieving high performance. Perfecting these management fundamentals will play a critical role in your future, which you can greatly influence by your actions and what you do with the information in this book. Without this foundation of fundamentals it is very difficult to build a track record and career of high performance.