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An Blog by Donald Cooper, MBA, CSP, HoF.

## As business leaders or managers, our 1<sup>st</sup> job is clarity:

(Time to read this Blog article is about 2.5 minutes)

Managing any business today is tough...and getting tougher. We're all faced with more demanding customers, more and stronger competition, increased complexity and shrinking margins. On top of that, great staff are hard to find and keep...and that problem won't go away any time soon.

Every industry is over-served and under-differentiated. To thrive we must create, deliver and communicate extraordinary customer value and experiences that clearly differentiate us from our competitors, make us 'famous' and grow our bottom line. Mediocrity is no longer an option.

### Our 1st job is 'clarity':

In spite of what anyone tells you, whether your business is large, small, or just getting started, your first and most important job is creating clarity...and nobody talks about that. If we, as a business, don't know clearly 'who' we are, where we're going and what we stand for, how will our target customers know who we are, how can we be focused and intentional in running the business...and how will we know what talent we need to attract, develop and retain to make it all happen?

Clarity always starts at the top so, as owners, leaders or managers, our 1<sup>st</sup> job is to be clear about these 8 things:

1. Who our **target customers** are and what life's really like for them.
2. The **compelling customer value and experience** that we *commit* to deliver. Value and experiences that will 'grab' our target customers, clearly differentiate us from our competitors, make us 'famous'...and grow our bottom line.
3. How we will **communicate** our compelling value story in a crowded and cynical market. There's no point being the best if we're also the best kept secret.
4. **What we commit to become** to be a profitable and responsible market leader in 3 to 5 years (our Vision). How will our business be different from what and who we are today?
5. The specific **decisions and actions that we must take** to get us to that 3 to 5 year Vision (our Mission). The talent that we need to help us get there and how we must grow as leaders to make this happen.
6. The extraordinary **bottom line** that we *commit* to generate. Without a healthy bottom line, there is no business.
7. The **talent, team and organizational structure** we need to make this happen...and,
8. How we *commit to behave* along the way (our values, ethics, culture and standards). One of the most important roles of our leaders is to guard the integrity of the business.

Most businesses lack this kind of clarity...and it's hurting them badly. Realistically, as a business owner, leader or manager, on a scale of 1 to 10 with 10 being 'very clear', how would you rate your personal clarity on each of these 8 key success factors listed above...and how clear are your management team and your front-line people?

So, how do you get started on improving clarity in your business? Clarity, commitment, urgency and accountability start with you and filter all the way down the team through communication, daily example, rewards for performance and consequences for non-performance. But it all starts with the leaders of the business determining what clear commitments look like for each of the 8 key factors above.

Then, as part of this important exercise, sit down with some of the best minds and hearts in your business, give them the list of 'the 8 clarities' and have an open and honest conversation about what they're clear about...and not clear about. Finally, get agreement on what needs doing or fixing and specifically what will be done, by whom, by when, measured how, to improve clarity, commitment, urgency and accountability throughout your business.

**Forget 'goals, targets, aims and objectives'. Let's talk about 'commitments':**

You'll notice that in the 8 key clarities listed above, I use the word '*commitments*.' I talked about what we *commit* to deliver, what we *commit* to become, the bottom line we *commit* to generate and how we *commit* to behave along the way.

Every business in the world talks about 'goals, targets, aims and objectives'. They have efficiency *goals*, sales *targets*, profit *objectives* and they *aim* to satisfy customers. One of my recent Business Coaching clients proudly states on their website, "*We strive to be ethical.*" What the heck is that?

All of these words, 'goals, targets, aims and objectives' leave way too much wiggle room to not perform. We need to replace all of them with one word, '**commitments**'. There's a big difference between a goal and a commitment. A target is something we hit sometimes and miss other times ...and it's 'OK', it's just a target. Goals are something we score sometimes and miss other times...and that's 'OK". And, in business, nobody cares what we aim to do...they want to know what we commit to do. When we change our language, we change our culture. We become what we speak. Talking about 'commitments' helps create the culture of urgency and accountability that every business needs to thrive or even survive.

So, for 2017 and beyond, what will you, starting right now, to improve clarity in your business? From that clarity will come commitment, urgency and accountability.

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