

Think Simple, Not Easy

By Susan Schilke; October 1, 2018

The most important things in your life are simple, but not easy.

The words are similar, but not interchangeable. If something is simple, it is easily understood and offers clarity. If something is easy, it requires little effort. While you want to aim for simple, the path is not often easy. And though we all would welcome positive outcomes with minimal effort, achieving our best in business and in life requires a great deal of work.

Think about some of the core strategies of effective organizations. Leading companies have a set of overarching guideposts – Mission, Vision, Values – in clear, memorable language to provide guidance, motivation and inspiration to the team. I've worked with leadership teams to craft these statements. The results have been amazing – strong, simple statements the entire team can connect to. The process to get there was not easy, but the effort so worth it.

An effective performance incentive plan motivates team members, rewards their results, improves the customer experience, and increases the value of the company. The best plans are simple. And crafting them is hard. We shared a summary last month with 12 requirements of a well-designed performance incentive – the first was simplicity. And with 11 additional requirements, you can bet getting this right requires real effort.

Internal communication is simple – employees just want to be kept informed and have a clear understanding of goals, performance measures, why what they do is important, and how to behave to succeed. Consistently providing this information through meetings, presentations, reporting, 1-1s, feedback, email, conversations, text, intranet, project tracking, KPIs – that's not easy.

Let's look at the adult conversation – the one you need to have to address someone else's behavior because it is having negative impact on you or the company. On the surface it is simple – you just need to tell them. But it's not easy to do. And in fact even when you carefully choose your words and your timing and deliver the message in the best possible way, you will likely initially be met with some resistance and defensiveness.

What about creating long-term plans, an org chart of the future, effective recruiting strategies, specific strategies to gain market share? All of these are most effective if they can be simple and straightforward. And all will take effort to get right.

In today's world with so many demands and distractions, there is a huge risk that we will take the easy path on the wrong things. The most important things in business – and in life – require an investment of effort. Often what you most need to do for your company, your health, your relationships is simple – and takes time and effort.

Keep your priorities simple and clear – and put in the work. What's most important to you? You probably have a simple, short answer to this question. Make sure you're spending the most effort on those things.