

# THE 30 DAY MANAGER

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Recently featured in TechLinks Magazine

## SUMMARY

**T**he attention given to corporate quarterly earnings forces many Companies to focus on a quarterly horizon. Internal departments must react even faster, so this article offers guidance on getting your management team recharged and refocused in 30 days.

## INTRODUCTION

**M**any of us have grown up with the belief that the path to management success involves the ability to take a long term view of business, to make a measured response to changes in the business environment, rather than just reacting. In other words, successful managers must be visionaries, not foot soldiers.

It's a great theory, but, nowadays, that's about all it is. The reality of today's business climate is that whether we like it or not, for now and for the foreseeable future, US business will be run strictly on a short-term basis. The reason for this? Historically low interest rates.

With bank deposit interest rates that make even the most conservatively-priced stock look attractive by comparison, Wall Street remains the place where Americans and American companies put most of their money. Naturally, in these turbulent times, investors like to keep a close eye on their investments, and the focal point of most investors' attention today is the Quarterly Earnings Report. Heaven help the Company that trounced last year's numbers, or saw a significant jump over the Quarter before, but still fails to meet the analysts' expectations for its latest Quarter. Its stock will be hammered, shareholders will lose confidence, possibly so will the Board, and where will the finger point? To line management.

With this kind of fire drill occurring every few months it is no wonder that the classic long term business view has become sublimated into a quarterly perspective in so many Companies. But if the Company is working towards the next Quarter, the individual departments are faced with an even shorter horizon as managers attempt to adjust their departments' activities to match ever-changing Company objectives. The most common horizon below a Quarter is a month, or 30 days as a more consistent metric. As a result more and more department managers are today finding that their performance, and that of their departments are being regularly reviewed over a 30 day cycle.

The bottom line, then, is that if you want to remain a successful Company, you had better be able to turn your management team's performance around within a period of 30 days. Welcome to the era of the 30 Day Manager.

## **But what can really be done to improve management performance in just 30 days?**

**A** lot more than you think. In 30 days, with the right focus and attention, any management team can be mobilized to drive a Company towards improved performance. The following steps lay out a chronological path towards the kind of activities that, if initiated within 30

days, will enable you to meet your Company's goals, satisfy your Customers' requirements, and significantly improve the performance of your management team

### **Week One: Finding the Path. Company objectives and Customer needs.**

**W**here you have to be in 30 days will be driven by two forces – Company objectives and Customer needs. It's a rare day when these two totally coincide, so you have to list them all, objectives and needs, and throw out what isn't covered by both.

Company objectives should come from your Mission, or your Business Plan. Customer needs come from where else? - the Customer. If you have the results of a recent (less than 3 months old) Customer Survey – great. If not, you don't have time to do a complete Survey now, but in one or two days a few dedicated employees can find out from your top 50 Customers exactly what are their issues, and what are they looking for from you. In addition, a quick survey of your front-line employees can tell you a lot about your Customers' requirements, and how well your Company is meeting them.

### **Week Two: What should you be doing in 30 days? Setting the goals.**

**I**f Week One was successful, you know what your Company wants, and you have a good idea what your Customers' needs and issues are. Now your management has to translate all this data into goals that each department, every manager and all their staff can understand

You should have two types of goals. One set will be those that can actually be achieved in 30 days – example – an error rate of X errors per 1000 orders. The other set of goals may not be achievable in 30 days but you can put actions into place within 30 days that will result in these goals being met before the end of the Quarter. One example of this is when Customer comments and productivity demands tell you that you need at least 90% first-call resolution by Customer Service. The training you initiate to ensure this happens will not give you the result in 30 days, but if the required training is in place and active within 30 days, you should be able to meet your 90% goal within that magic quarterly horizon.

Now there will be systems constraints, budget issues and other factors outside your immediate control that will prevent you from making them 30-day goals. Address these separately. What we are dealing with here are factors you have control of and can influence.

### **Week Three: You know what has to be done, but can you do it? Closing the Skills Gap.**

**N**ow you have your goals laid out you have to decide whether your organization has the capability to achieve these goals. Week Three should be taken up in deciding what skills are needed to achieve each goal and whether those skills exist in your organization.

It is inevitable that you will not have some of the required skills – it's called the Skills Gap, and this is where you call in your training resources to put into place the training, coaching or whatever is required to close the Gap. However, keep in mind that the training etc. must start within the 30 days and be completed within the Quarter, so your training resources only have two weeks to put everything into place.

#### **Week Four: Putting it all together. Mobilization.**

**S**o, you now have the goals, you know what can be immediately addressed, what will require training support, and what will require new systems, or other things beyond your immediate control. Week Four is when you put it all together, when staff and management have to go into action and make the process changes that ensure you make your goals. So, the Week should start with a complete and open briefing of everyone in the Company affected by these activities.

To ensure you get buy-in by everyone affected by these activities, a quick education in change management is required. You have to explain in language that everyone understands, what are the problems being caused by current company performance and how the changes being proposed will bring benefits to everyone. This step is critical. At the pace you are moving, you must get everyone's support right from the start.

#### **Day 29 and 30: Celebrate? Sure, but think, you can't go through this every Quarter. The answer is Continuous Performance Improvement.**

**Y**ou made it – your goals are either being met or you have implemented the activities that will result in all the other goals being achieved this Quarter – well done! But wait a minute. If you really did make all your goals in 30 days, you have probably disrupted most of your operating processes, shaken up a bunch of employees, and are personally suffering from acute exhaustion. How can you go through this every Quarter? The good news is that you don't have to, if you take these two days to ensure that the new or improved processes that have been initiated form the basis for continuous performance improvement.

There are a number of ways of achieving continuous performance improvement, but one proven method is to have each employee and manager write and commit to their own Personal Service Plan. In this Plan they say in their own words how they will continue to make their goals and meet their internal or Customers' needs. Your goal here is to use the momentum created by this 30 day operation to create a continuous activity of process development and performance improvement.

#### **But hold on – this was supposed to be about improving management team performance in 30 days. There hasn't been a single word here about improving manager performance!**

**O**f course there hasn't. What do you think would have been the reaction of your management team if you had got them together at the start of this process, told them that any deficiency in Company performance was down to them, but you were going to turn it all around in 30 days? The one or two managers who would even be close to believing you could achieve this, would surely have resented your insinuation that Company performance failure was down to them.

However, by taking your managers through this 30 day cycle, you are providing information and honing skills in a process that guarantees they will be better managers than they were a month before, without once having to criticize their performance or put them on the defensive. Once again, actions have spoken louder, and so much more effectively than words. Robin Cramp is a partner at HarrisonGray, a global management consulting firm focused on providing strategic business, operations, technology, outsourcing and venture capital solutions. He can be reached at [robin.cramp@harrisongray.com](mailto:robin.cramp@harrisongray.com).

