



## Executive Duties...

Document 2014

Donna Hover, CEO Advisor

[www.leaderslaboratory.com](http://www.leaderslaboratory.com)

### Overview of the Executive Duties

We will begin our work by looking at an overview of executive duties. Executives lose sleep over many things, some of which they should not lose sleep over. These are the elements that we feel executives should be concerned about, fret over and, if you are going to lose sleep, make sure it is because you are focused on these executive duties. Patrick Lencioni highlights in his book, *The Four Obsessions of an Extraordinary Executive*, that there are two fundamental requirements for organizational success: an organization has to be both **smart** and **healthy**.

“Smart” is being good at those things like strategy, marketing, finance, technology, etc. Businesses have to be smart. They need a good strategic plan a successful financial model, etc. By and large, businesses are smart. Executive teams are made up of intellectual, well-educated individuals much like yourself who understand strategy, balance sheets, technical standards, etc. Interestingly this is where most of the focus is put within organizations because it is easier to write or teach about these elements because it is more discreet, measurable and relatively easy to understand.

However, there is a whole other side of the equation that gets largely ignored or certainly receives not enough attention. You need to also be a healthy organization. “Healthy” relates to things like having less politics and less confusion and maximum levels of productivity and morale, etc. within the organization. Not in a soft way. We are talking about aligning people around what you are trying to do and having a strong culture. The reason why the healthy side is misunderstood is because it is challenging to get your arms around what it means and how to do it. Executives that we work with look at the list and say, “...wow, that would be great if we could do that. But that’s hard **and** I don’t know how to do it **and** its difficult to measure so I’m going to focus on the things I am better at doing.”

It is like the Lucille Ball episode where Ricky Ricardo walks in the front door and finds Lucy crawling around the floor on her hands and knees. Ricky asks her what she is doing to which she responds, "I'm looking for my earrings." Ricky then replies, "you lost your earrings in the living room?" Lucy states "...no I lost them in the bedroom but the light is so much better out here."

Most executives feel more comfortable in the "living room" of business talking about strategy and finance and marketing and operations and those things which are critical. And then it comes to those things like "do you think all of our people are on board, do you think we know what makes a good fit here and what doesn't, do you think we have eliminated politics and confusion and silos and inter-conflict within the organization?" and they say "Oh, I don't know how to do that. I would like to but let's just keep working on what we know."

An organization needs to focus on both sides of the equation in order to be successful, not just the smart side. In fact, if you had to sacrifice one side or the other you could make the clear argument that it would be better to be healthy vs. smart. There are numerous examples of organizations of stars that have all the smarts and ability. However, they never realize their full potential because the organizations are full of inter-conflict with each person wanting to be the star. We have also seen examples where teams or organizations with less smarts or talent who achieve greatness because they are able to generate maximum productivity and morale within the organization.

So how do you work on the healthy side of the organization? It starts with the executive teams of the organizations focusing on these four disciplines.

The first discipline is to build and maintain a cohesive leadership team. The leadership team needs to recognize that if the people at the top are not on the same page, do not know how to have a good argument, and do not stand shoulder-to-shoulder leading the organization without gaps between themselves, they will be not cohesive and they will not be able to maximize their productivity and success. In fact, they will most-likely struggle. Almost every tactical problem we find within organizations can be linked back to the executives at the top not being cohesive and on the same page.

Discipline number two needs to be happening simultaneous to discipline number one. The executive team has to create organizational clarity. It is not enough just to be cohesive. You have to be cohesive around something. The executives need to be on the same page around some fundamental questions and answers. This encompasses everything from core ideology – core values, purpose and mission – to long-term strategy to shorter-term priorities around that strategy. Many companies are locked in around the details of the processes within their organization but have not taken the time to get clarity around some of these higher-level issues.

After you do those two things then the third discipline is over-communicating that organizational clarity. As Patrick would say, you have to communicate like crazy. Until you have said something over and over and over and over and over and over and over –

seven times – you haven't communicated it. And it needs to be done in multiple mediums – emails, memos, company announcements, employee meetings, press releases, etc. You know you are getting there when you begin saying something and one of the employees finishes your sentence. Even if they are doing so mockingly you at least know they are hearing the message.

Many executives are rational types who value knowledge and competence. One of the things about rational types is that they abhor redundancy. They do not like to repeat things or have things repeated to them. It insults them and they surely do not want to insult others by repeating things. They like to say things once and not say it again. It is common for executives to publish or announce things once – like the corporate strategy or core values and then say “I said it once, they're smart, they got it. I don't want to insult them by repeating it.” Great organizations repeat things at this level constantly so there is never any doubt.

Now the fourth discipline is reinforcing that organizational clarity through all the human systems in the organization. Embedding all these things into the humans systems such as hiring, training, managing, performance reviews, reward and compensation, etc. Not in a bureaucratic way. You need to find a way to institutionalize these things without turning it into bureaucracy.

These are the four disciplines required for creating a healthy organization. We consider these to be the basic executive duties within an organization.

###