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Article published - Feb 12, 2007

CHUCK TALK: Ready, set: Learn, exercise discipline and execute

Talk is talk; the best have a personal mission and focus

BY CHUCK MACHE

When I was 18, I decided to take karate lessons, probably because I'd just seen a Bruce Lee movie. "I'm taking karate," I told others. "I'm going to become a black belt."

I paid my money – I think a \$25 introductory fee for the first three months – and while this was approximately 30 years ago, the experience remains burned in my brain.

All the students were sitting with their backs to the wall inside the dojo, with the exception of two people. They were in the center of the mat going at it with full contact – or so it seemed to me at the time. I remember feeling the fear and thinking to myself, "Ouch! That looks brutal."

I went through one lesson with an instructor and never returned. The thought of actual physical contact and the reality of the discipline required to get my black belt just wasn't realistic for me at that time of my life. Hey, I didn't want to actually fight, I just wanted to be a black belt – like Bruce Lee. Remember, I was only 18 at the time.

I must have been asked by everyone I knew over the next couple of weeks how the lessons were going. You know what, there's a reason for the phrase "Talk is cheap." It really is. I wasn't ready to make the commitment, pay the price, take the journey and learn the art. I didn't have the discipline to learn, execute and improve until I reached my goal.

This is my observation about those that are the very best at what they do:

- **The best have a clear personal mission.** They are clear on their purpose. They conduct their business by the principles that are important to them. They've discovered what really "moves" them. They are passionate about living their mission, and it ties directly to their work. They do not waver from their mission. They press past the painful experiences and continue to break through to new levels. For the strugglers of the world, they just talk about their mission. It's usually half-baked. Doing it is too painful a proposition.

- **The best are disciplined.** They are focused on results. They stay on the course, making necessary alterations to their core strategies that will only improve their results. They make difficult decisions that are

often times painful in the short term but will usually result in an increase in productivity. They aren't looking for a "magical" strategy or an "all new" approach. They have the discipline to get better at what they do best. And then they get better again. The strugglers just talk about it. Having the discipline to stay the course can by times be a painful proposition.

● **The best are focused on execution.** It is the core element of their mission. Without it, a personal mission is just words. The best focus on advancing their goals and issues every day. Execution is their job, no matter what level they are on. One huge reason they are the best is because they focus on the discipline of execution. Strugglers don't execute, they talk about it.

Recently I was listening to a sales rep describe his marketing approach to getting business. "This is how I do things," he said proudly. He went on a long dissertation of how he cold calls – which, by the way is a dinosaur of a strategy – identifies a suspect, who becomes a prospect, sets a meeting, etc. He was firm in his approach and set in his ways.

At the appropriate moment, I reminded him that he was producing at half of his quota. "Talk is cheap," I said. He paused and looked at me for what seemed like an eternity. He was stuck in his own thinking, failing miserably, yet continuing to execute in the same fashion. Our discussion led to what will hopefully be a breakthrough moment for the young sales rep.

Think about those that are the very best at what they do. Regardless of their positions in sales, operations, management or at the executive level, are they not crystal clear on their personal mission? Are they not some of the most disciplined people you know? Are they not executing machines? Find them, meet with them, talk with them, learn from them and mirror them. After all, talk is cheap, and doing is difficult.

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