



## WORKING ON vs. IN THE BUSINESS

### *Why is it so hard to find a balance?*

One of the most common self-criticisms senior executives share with me is about their inability to get their “On the Business” agenda done. They realize that, even though they’re making progress in other “In the Business” areas, they’re often disappointed when they take stock at the end of the year. A common message is, **“We didn’t get enough of the big stuff done.”**

The “big stuff” is often outside of the operational realm and not deemed as urgent when other things are afire. The “big stuff” can be more complicated and challenging. It can also lap over into the following year. It is often the stuff that helps the company catch up to its growth, right-size itself and increase in value.

**“Culture eats strategy for breakfast”** is a quote attributed to Peter Drucker. In addition to Culture, things like Operational Issues, Business Performance, and Short Term Results also occupy one’s mindset and quickly eradicate any notion you may have around working “ON the Business.” You want to do it, but you never seem to have the time because your agenda is consumed with the more urgent issues. Most executives don’t have much choice in **“letting the urgent drive out the important,”** so it does.

Today’s work environment moves faster than ever. Managing in business is a 24/7 sport. A ubiquitous set of tools “help” you stay on top of anything and everything that is going on. It’s easier to stay in touch than to go off the grid—even after hours and over weekends. It is hard to unplug. When I am facilitating strategic meetings, participants find it hard to be together and not devolve into a discussion about operational issues. It’s just the nature of the beast in today’s fast-paced world.

So how can we achieve a better balance and get more of our “ON the Business” agenda done? Joseph Juran said it best, **“We have to separate the vital few from the trivial many.”** There are several layers to how we can think about this. First, is my ON the Business agenda hidden among my IN the Business priorities? Second, do I even know what my ON the Business agenda is...is it clear and well-articulated? Three, have I shared my ON the Business agenda with our key players and have we come to consensus on what we want to get done and why it is important to us? Four, do we ever talk about our ON the Business agenda and discuss plans and goals for how we want to go about making it a reality?

Because your work environment wants to have your ON the Business agenda for a snack, you need to be more deliberate with building your intention. You need to spend time separating your vital few and articulating exactly what they look like. Then discuss them with your key players and come together on where they fit into the big picture and what you all want to do about making them happen. When you do this, you are building your *collective intent* as a team.

Once you have separated your vital few, gained clarity on the details of what they require, and built a collective intent about where they fit...you will find that they can withstand the onslaught of your work environment and guide you to where you want and need to go.



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