FOREWORD BY William A. Cohen, PhD
Author of *The Practical Drucker*

DOING THE RIGHT THINGS RIGHT

How the Effective Executive Spends Time

LAURA STACK
Author of *Execution IS the Strategy*

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—Nido R. Qubein, President, High Point University

"If you're tired of all the business fables and want real-world coaching on getting more done, then this is the book for you."

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"I hired Laura Stack personally six years ago. My staff and I were frazzled and felt overworked and out of control. Stack came to town and came to work and life has been better since. Rarely does a day go by that I don't think of one or two of the productive tips she teaches. Now, *Doing the Right Things Right* comes along and updates, refreshes, and adds a new perspective to the science of productivity and all that I thought I knew. Read this book so you too can 'manufacture' that time in your life that you need so you can go home early!"

—Montague Boyd, CFP, forty-year financial advisor, Atlanta, Georgia

"Laura Stack doesn't beat around the bush when it comes to productive advice—because that would waste time. Not a word's wasted here. Her examples are to the point, her advice concise, and the book itself surprisingly brief. If she were anyone else, I'd say she tried to cram too many topics into one book, but that's part of this book's utility—this book saves time and shelf space."

—Jeremy Eaves, Director, People Services, DaVita Inc.

"To be successful in business, you must make money, and time is money. The more time you can save, the more of it you can repurpose to higher-value activities. In *Doing the Right Things Right*, Laura Stack offers leaders a practical guide on doing their jobs efficiently and effectively."

—Alex Doverspike, Director of Financial Services, Chick-fil-A, Inc.

"Once again the 'right' thing to do is to read Laura's latest book, *Doing the Right Things Right*. Her time-saving productivity systems are vital to strong leadership of self or team. Her practical approach, coupled with a quarter century of teaching leaders, will help you succeed without the pain of mistakes."

—Jeff Bettinger, Global Head of Talent Acquisition, Alcon

"I love Laura's refreshingly practical perspective. No one really cares how many items you've crossed off your to-do list or how many hours you spend at the office. What matters is that you get the right things done—and that's what this no-nonsense little book will teach you to do."

—Laura Vanderkam, author of *I Know How She Does It*

"Laura Stack has taken the best ideas of Peter Drucker to a new level for the 21st century. This book shows you how to dramatically increase your efficiency, effectiveness, and results—faster than you ever thought possible."

—Brian Tracy, author of *Time Power* and *Eat That Frog!*

"I have never met a professional who provides so many immediately impactful solutions to navigating through this busy world and tough business environment. If you follow the concepts that Laura sculpts, you can gather insight into *where* you might improve your results, understand *why* you might be falling short in some areas, and find practical *ways* to improve both your work and your life."

—Cathy Krause, Learning and Development Manager, MillerCoors

"Execute today, plan for tomorrow, and invite the very best from your team. Sound compelling? Then add Laura Stack's latest book, *Doing the Right Things Right*, to the top of your reading list. There's no time to waste, so use her 3T Leadership Assessment and jump straight to the content that will help you most!"

—Catherine Stewart, talent, culture, and organizational development consultant, H&R Block

"More than a book, *Doing the Right Things Right* is a complete program in leadership efficiency and effectiveness. Offering a tool for analysis, online support, and resources for additional information, Laura Stack provides an exceptional straightforward model for organizational and personal productivity."

—Karla R. Peters-Van Havel, PhD, COO, Institute for Management Studies

"I'm a big fan of concise writing and straight talk, so I found Stack's *Doing the Right Things Right: How the Effective Executive Spends Time* right on the mark. Stack makes it easy for executives at all levels to be effective and efficient in twelve practical chapters."

—Jennifer Colosimo, coauthor of *Great Work, Great Career* (with Stephen R. Covey) and former Vice President of Wisdom, DaVita Healthcare Partners

DOING THE RIGHT THINGS RIGHT

Other Books by Laura Stack

Execution IS the Strategy: How Leaders Achieve Maximum Results in Minimum Time

What to Do When There's Too Much to Do: Reduce Tasks, Increase Results, and Save 90 Minutes a Day

SuperCompetent: The Six Keys to Perform at Your Productive Best

The Exhaustion Cure: Up Your Energy from Low to Go in 21 Days

Find More Time: How to Get Things Done at Home, Organize Your Life, and Feel Great About It

Leave the Office Earlier: How to Do More in Less Time and Feel Great About It

DOING THE RIGHT THINGS RIGHT

How the Effective Executive Spends Time

LAURA STACK

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Doing the Right Things Right

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To Kathy Cooperman,
my first mentor,
who took me under her wing
25 years ago

You taught the first
time management seminar
I ever attended.

I still use the principles you taught me.

Thank you.

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FOREWORD

My intention in writing this foreword is to introduce you to the book *Doing the Right Things Right: How the Effective Executive Spends Time* by Laura Stack, aka The Productivity Pro®. But above and beyond a simple introduction, I'm going to tell you why reading this book is one of the "rightest" things you can do for yourself.

For you to understand why I can make such a claim and why it matters, you have to understand where I'm coming from.

Recently, I received an email from Neal Maillet, one of my early editors, announcing that he was editing a new book. There's nothing unusual about that; it's what editors do. But this one had him excited. He insisted that I consider writing the foreword.

I have a soft spot for former editors, but I didn't want to commit without seeing the manuscript first. I told him I would read the book and then make my decision. He sent me the entire manuscript right away. I was immediately hooked.

As Laura explains in her preface, her book was inspired by Peter Drucker's *The Effective Executive*. Drucker is nothing less than the Father of Modern Management, and this was one

of his classics, written in the mid-1960s. Laura describes it as her favorite book, and I have no difficulty understanding why that's so.

You see, Peter Drucker was a true genius. There are Drucker Societies today in more than nineteen countries, still studying and analyzing his thirty-nine books and hundreds of articles and speeches ten years after his death. I was the first to receive my PhD at Drucker's hands, and I later founded the California Institute of Advanced Management (CIAM), to offer an affordable MBA in Executive Management and Entrepreneurship based on the principles and values of Peter Drucker. In addition, I write a syndicated column on Drucker, and my last four books are all about Drucker and his ideas.

I devoured Laura's book—and what a feast it was! Understand, Drucker was the first scholar to differentiate management and leadership, and this difference goes a long way toward explaining both Peter's and Laura's book titles. "Management," Peter said, "is about doing things right—leadership is about doing the right things." He went on to write that the latter was critical, and that while doing things right meant efficiency, doing the right things was about being effective.

Thus, *The Effective Executive*. Of course, we'd like managers to be both efficient *and* effective, because, as Laura points out and Drucker proclaimed, nothing is worse than spending time, effort, and money in doing the wrong things with 100 percent efficiency. So Laura set herself the task of showing us how *To Do the Right Things Right*. She succeeds wonderfully.

Laura does far more, actually. Without a doubt, Drucker's genius was in showing us *what* to do. Rarely, however, did he tell us *how* or suggest ways to carry out his recommendations and insights. Laura does. In just over 50,000 words, she goes nonstop with hundreds of ways, steps, and checklists to

implement Drucker's ideas. If you don't get at least a couple of million-dollar ideas on every page, you aren't paying attention. The breadth of coverage is more than impressive—it is amazing.

Laura categorizes the three areas where leaders spend their time into what she calls "The Three Ts": Thinking Strategically, Team Focus, and Tactical Work. Then, with four principles in each, she covers everything about each from Action to Vision, and everything in between and back again. Moreover, she illustrates everything with specific examples so you know exactly what she is talking about and exactly how to apply her ideas.

You'll enjoy and profit from her book. I know I did.

—*Bill Cohen, PhD*
Major General, USAF, Ret.;
President, California Institute
of Advanced Management

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PREFACE

This book pays homage to a man I consider one of my chief mentors and kindred spirits, though I never actually had the pleasure of studying or working with him.

When I was a business student in the late 1980s, I fell in love with Peter F. Drucker's book *The Effective Executive: The Definitive Guide to Getting the Right Things Done*. It delivers a huge amount of useful, real-world information in fewer than two hundred pages. It's still my favorite business book of all time, and I learn something new every time I read it.

Drucker published the first edition of *The Effective Executive* in 1967. While the book has weathered the years well, some of the concepts are a bit dated, particularly with today's technology and social customs. Drucker doesn't cover the electronics revolution that swept the business world in the 1980s, even in later editions; and in this book, executives are men and women are secretaries. I don't believe he intended to be sexist, however, because the secretarial pool was the main foothold women had in business then.

Regardless, I believe the time is right to update Drucker's concepts for the twenty-first century. *Doing the Right Things Right: How the Effective Executive Spends Time* focuses on time

management strategies that today's executives can use to quickly obtain profitable, productive results by managing the intersection of two critical dimensions: effectiveness and efficiency. The impact of technology plays an important part in the discussions outlined here, and that I have included gender equality goes without saying.

I don't mean to replace Drucker's work in any sense, nor could I. Let me emphasize that this is NOT an attempt to rewrite Drucker's classic. However, I do hope that *Doing the Right Things Right* will stand as a companion to Drucker's work, an addition that directly addresses how the role of the effective executive has changed in the almost half-century since Drucker penned the first edition of his groundbreaking book *The Effective Executive*.

I'm humbled by the opportunity to attempt it.

DOING THE RIGHT THINGS RIGHT

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INTRODUCTION

There is nothing so useless
as doing efficiently that which
should not be done at all.

—PETER F. DRUCKER

It's not surprising that *The Effective Executive* is one of the most widely read business books in the world. A brief, straightforward book on how an executive can best serve his or her organization, it has, after all, been available continuously for just shy of fifty years. I know I'm not alone in considering it my favorite and most instructive business book.

In *The Effective Executive*, Peter Drucker provides what he promises in the subtitle: a definitive guide to getting the right things done, complete with all the things an effective executive must do to help keep his or her organization afloat. He explains the "why" and the "what to do" in a superlative manner—as always. If the book has a flaw, however, it's in not examining the "how."

How does the modern executive—a somewhat different animal from the executive Drucker defined in 1967—do the

job both effectively *and* efficiently? How does the executive at any level mine that intersection of effectiveness and efficiency to get the right things done *right*?

Let's start with the key definitions. Drucker's book distinguishes between being effective and efficient. Here's how I differentiate the two terms:

> ***Effectiveness*** refers to successfully producing the expected or desired result; it's the degree to which you achieve your objectives, solve problems, and realize profits. In business, effectiveness is summed up by "doing the right things."
>
> ***Efficiency*** is the accomplishment of a job with the minimum expenditure of time, effort, and cost—the shortest distance between a goal and a checkmark. In business, efficiency is summed up by "doing things right."

Alone, effectiveness isn't enough to distinguish a good executive, since anyone with the right training or a good manual can do the right things. So can a robot. When effectiveness lacks efficiency, it's often unproductive. A task that should take four months to complete can end up taking fourteen. Additionally, efficiency without effectiveness can go devastatingly wrong. It doesn't matter how well your team climbs Mount Everest if your intention was to climb the Matterhorn.

I'm sure you'd agree that executives should work to be not only effective but also efficient. *Doing the Right Things Right* combines Effectiveness (doing the right things) with Efficiency

(doing things right) to yield the most profitable AND quickest route a leader can take to execute goals. Leaders manage time most productively at the intersection of effectiveness and efficiency. Therefore, once you know you're spending time on the *right* things, you then focus on doing them *right*.

WHO IS AN EXECUTIVE?

In today's business vernacular, we usually assume an executive is someone in a senior leadership position. However, the dictionary defines an executive as "a person or group appointed and given the responsibility to manage the affairs of an organization, and the authority to make decisions within specified boundaries."

In reality, an executive is *someone who executes*—almost anyone with the authority to make significant decisions and whose time is spent producing value and/or managing people for the benefit of the organization. An executive might be an emerging leader, a front-line supervisor, a middle manager, a senior leader, or even an individual contributor who hasn't received a title.

In *The Effective Executive*, Drucker outlines five effectiveness practices, or what he refers to as "habits of the mind," for executives to follow, which I summarize as:

- Understand and control where time goes.
- Focus on results.
- Build on strengths.
- Prioritize tasks.
- Make effective decisions.

THE EFFECTIVE AND EFFICIENT EXECUTIVE

To be both effective and efficient, today's leaders should follow twelve practices (see facing chart). Some of these practices were not as germane in Drucker's time as they are now, or they were considered too obvious to state explicitly. However, priorities have changed over the decades, and sometimes even the obvious must be spelled out.

These twelve practices, which supplement Drucker's work and correspond to the twelve chapters of this book, describe how to do the right things the right way. They are up to speed for our modern times, where flexibility, agility, and on-the-spot, in-the-moment execution rule. Today, an executive not only must do the right things but also must carefully ensure he or she does the right things *right*, wasting as little time as possible in the process.

THE 3T LEADERSHIP MODEL

What leaders actually "do" during the day and where they spend their time can be grouped into three leadership activities that I call the "3T Leadership" roles. These three activities (Strategic Thinking, Team Focus, and Tactical Work) also describe the three parts of this book. As shorthand, I'll refer to these 3Ts as THINK, TEAM, and TACTICS. The 3Ts are the chief time management roles for leaders:

STRATEGIC ***THINKING***

Acting as the organizational strategist who focuses on business goals.

The executive monitors the big picture and makes sure the team efforts reinforce the company's goals.

DOING THE RIGHT THINGS RIGHT

1 GOALS
Align strategy and objectives

2 CHANGE
Embrace innovation and adaptability

3 COMMUNICATION
Share mission, vision, and expectations

4 DECISION-MAKING
Resolve and execute decisions promptly

5 ENVIRONMENT
Build an open team culture

6 PERFORMANCE
Forge a results-oriented team

7 MOTIVATION
Harness creativity and loyalty

8 GROWTH
Emphasize continuous improvement

9 VALUE
Focus on high-impact activities

10 TECHNOLOGY
Master data handling and workflow

11 AGILITY
Maximize speed and flexibility

12 BALANCE
Sustain personal health and mental acuity

TEAM FOCUS

Serving as the conscientious leader who focuses on employee productivity.

The executive builds and maintains an effective, productive team as the first step toward high performance.

TACTICAL WORK

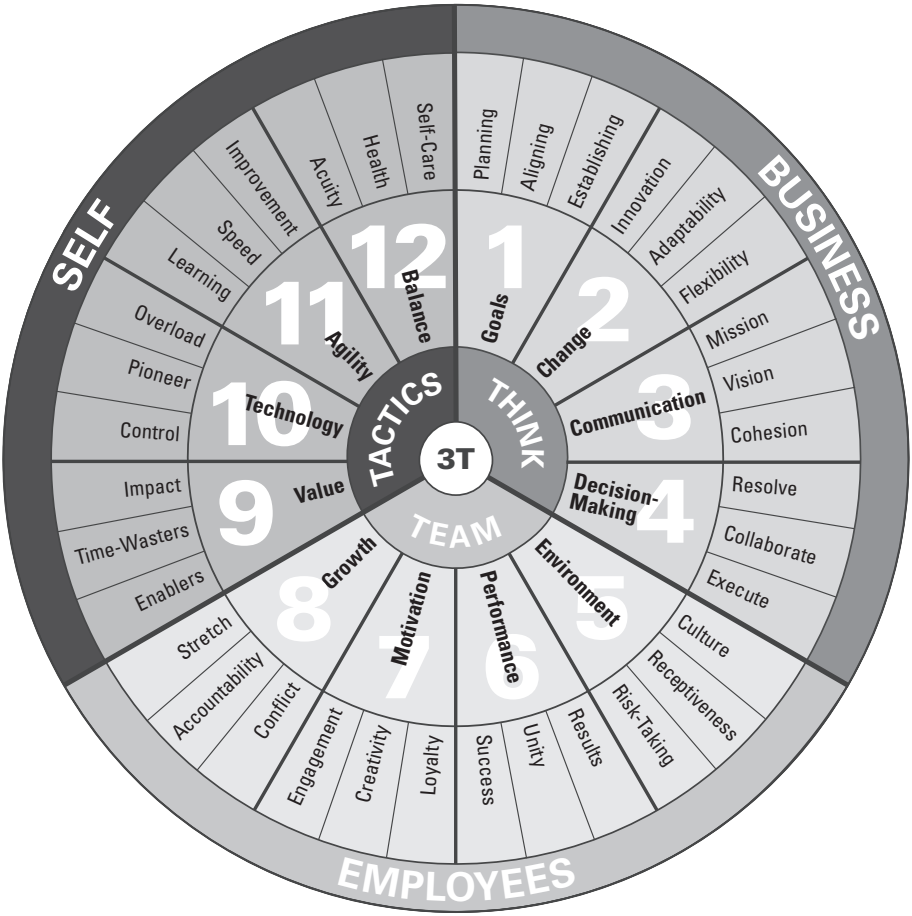
Being the productive performer who focuses on task completion.

The executive completes his or her individual duties and carries out any day-to-day, operational activities.

The "3T Leadership Model" on the facing page not only aptly summarizes the 3T Leadership Roles with their individual components and associated concepts, but it also summarizes the content of this book. THINK, TEAM, and TACTICS are found at the center of the chart. The twelve chapter titles (the twelve practices for doing the right things) radiate out from the center. Attached to each title are three themes discussed in that chapter.

In general, as an executive moves up the leadership ladder, the percentage of time spent in each category tends to shift, becoming less tactical and more strategic. This focus may also vary according to the executive's position or immediate project needs. You may not be content with the current mix of your time in these three areas. Perhaps you feel you spend too much time "in the weeds," dealing with day-to-day operational issues, and not enough time with your team. Or perhaps you spend too much time managing your team's work and

The 3T Leadership Model



The 3T Leadership Roles with their individual practices and associated concepts.

not enough time focused on strategic activities. With the area requiring the largest investment of time listed first, here's a typical breakdown of the 3Ts for various leadership levels:

Senior Leadership (VP/C-Suite)
1. Think 2. Team 3. Tactics

Leadership Team (Director)
1. Team 2. Think 3. Tactics

Manager
1. Team 2. Tactics 3. Think

Individual Contributor
1. Tactics 2. Team 3. Think

Are you starting to see that where you spend your time *now* isn't necessarily where you *should* be spending your time? You can get started by taking the 3T Leadership Assessment. It will provide insight into your current level of efficient effectiveness as you prepare to read this book.

START DOING THE RIGHT THINGS RIGHT

Keep the momentum going and continue to develop your time management skills after reading this book! Visit **www.3TLeadership.com** for free related resources, including a personal journal to take notes as you read, a discussion guide to share with your leadership team, and video lessons to review key learning points.

THE 3T LEADERSHIP ASSESSMENT

Strategy execution is becoming more common at all levels within the white-collar business hierarchy, making more of us *de facto* executives. Good execution requires you to do the right things right: that is, you have to be both efficient and effective in completing your tasks or meeting your objectives. The assessment is divided into sections that follow the book's parts and chapters. Each question has a focus highlighted in bold and repeated in the scoring section.

Before you start, I recommend photocopying the assessment, rather than marking your answers in the book itself. That way, you can come back and retake the assessment as your working conditions change and your career advances. Or you can go to www.3TLeadership.com to take the assessment online. After you take the assessment, use the Score Sheet at the end to analyze your scores further.

TAKING THE ASSESSMENT

For each question, begin by asking yourself "To what extent do I…", and then answer it using the following scale:

1 = to no extent
2 = to a small extent
3 = to some extent
4 = to a considerable extent
5 = to a great extent

PART 1: STRATEGIC THINKING

1. Goals

Align Strategy and Objectives

1. Understand our overall strategic **planning** process from beginning to end?

   1 2 3 4 5

2. Work toward actively **aligning** our team and individual goals with organizational goals?

   1 2 3 4 5

3. Focus on **establishing** team goals and encouraging my team to take ownership of them?

   1 2 3 4 5

GOALS SUBTOTAL: _____

2. Change

Embrace Innovation and Adaptability

4. Foster **innovation** and continually nurture and implement new ideas?

   1 2 3 4 5

5. Encourage faster **adaptability** to the agile business environment?

   1 2 3 4 5

6. Increase **flexibility** and embrace chaos during times of change?

   1 2 3 4 5

CHANGE SUBTOTAL: _____

3. Communication

Share Mission, Vision, and Ideas

7. Communicate our **mission** in straightforward terms and ensure my team's understanding?

1 2 3 4 5

8. Promote my **vision** to my peers and upper management clearly?

1 2 3 4 5

9. Create **cohesion** and present a united front when I sell new initiatives to senior leaders?

1 2 3 4 5

COMMUNICATION SUBTOTAL: _____

4. Decision-Making

Resolve and Execute Decisions Promptly

10. **Resolve** indecision quickly?

1 2 3 4 5

11. **Collaborate** and emphasize the value of teamwork?

1 2 3 4 5

12. Avoid procrastination, encouraging the team to **execute** and implement strategy immediately?

1 2 3 4 5

DECISION-MAKING SUBTOTAL: _____

PART II: TEAM FOCUS

5. Environment

Build an Open Team Culture

13. Create a **culture** of team efficiency by simplifying workflow and improving processes?

1 2 3 4 5

14. Encourage team **receptiveness** toward urgency, nimbleness, and swift execution?

1 2 3 4 5

15. Reward **risk-taking** and challenge my team to think creatively?

1 2 3 4 5

ENVIRONMENT SUBTOTAL: _____

6. Performance

Forge a Results-Oriented Team

16. Teach my team that **results** matter first, emphasizing substance over style?

1 2 3 4 5

17. Encourage team **unity** and mediate clashes?

1 2 3 4 5

18. Build on strengths and reduce weaknesses to create greater team **success**?

1 2 3 4 5

PERFORMANCE SUBTOTAL: _____

7. Motivation

Harness Creativity and Loyalty

19. Understand and implement employee **engagement** techniques?

1 2 3 4 5

20. Encourage **creativity** and resourcefulness on my team?

1 2 3 4 5

21. Maximize **loyalty**, treating my team members with respect, trust, and gratitude?

1 2 3 4 5

MOTIVATION SUBTOTAL: _____

8. Growth

Emphasize Continuous Improvement

22. **Stretch** my team's abilities by encouraging them to grow?

1 2 3 4 5

23. Emphasize **accountability** and expect team members to take responsibility for their needs, shortcomings, and errors?

1 2 3 4 5

24. Encourage healthy **conflict** on my team?

1 2 3 4 5

GROWTH SUBTOTAL: _____

PART III: TACTICAL WORK

9. Value

Focus on High-Impact Activities

25. Place a high value on my time and maximize my personal **impact**?

1 2 3 4 5

26. Clear **time-wasters** for my team, making it easier for everyone to be productive?

1 2 3 4 5

27. Add productivity **enablers** to my team, such as by saying no and reducing wasted time in meetings?

1 2 3 4 5

VALUE SUBTOTAL: _____

10. Technology

Master Data Handling and Workflow

28. Deal effectively with information **overload** and efficiently handle workflow?

1 2 3 4 5

29. **Pioneer** new technology?

1 2 3 4 5

30. Establish tight **control** over my technology without letting it control me?

1 2 3 4 5

TECHNOLOGY SUBTOTAL: _____

11. Agility

Maximize Speed and Flexibility

31. Stress **improvement** by focusing on genuine, quantifiable results?

1 2 3 4 5

22. Emphasize **speed** when responding to unexpected situations?

1 2 3 4 5

33. Use consistent training and **learning** opportunities to stay ahead of the changes in my field?

1 2 3 4 5

AGILITY SUBTOTAL: _____

12. Balance

Sustain Your Physical and Mental Health

34. Practice personal **self-care** and relaxation on a regular basis?

1 2 3 4 5

35. Maintain my personal **health**?

1 2 3 4 5

36. Work to sharpen my mental **acuity** and intelligence?

1 2 3 4 5

BALANCE SUBTOTAL: _____

THE 3T LEADERSHIP SCORE SHEET

Copy your subtotals from the previous sections and add them up to find your grand total. See the key below to interpret your score.

PART I. STRATEGIC THINKING

1. Goals SUBTOTAL _____
2. Change SUBTOTAL _____
3. Communication SUBTOTAL _____
4. Decision-Making SUBTOTAL _____

PART I TOTAL _____

PART II. TEAM FOCUS

5. Environment SUBTOTAL _____
6. Performance SUBTOTAL _____
7. Motivation SUBTOTAL _____
8. Growth SUBTOTAL _____

PART II TOTAL _____

PART III. TACTICAL WORK

9. Value SUBTOTAL _____
10. Technology SUBTOTAL _____
11. Agility SUBTOTAL _____
12. Balance SUBTOTAL _____

PART III TOTAL _____

GRAND TOTAL (ADD PARTS I, II, III TOTALS): _____

SCORING

151–180: **Congratulations**! You have a deep understanding of what it takes to be an efficient, effective modern executive and how to help your team members maximize their productivity. At most, all you need to do is fine-tune a bit. Keep up the good work!

121–150: **You need a few tweaks here and there**. You're on the right track! Strive to improve any question where you gave yourself less than a "5." Give yourself credit for what you do well. Acknowledge where you can improve to become an even better executive.

91–120: **Average**. You're in the middle of the bell curve. You're not the worst, and you're not the best. Work on kicking your efforts toward achieving effective, efficient execution up a notch, so you can perform at a higher level and produce greater results. For twelve weeks, focus on one of the twelve chapters each week and work to improve your weak areas and build on your strengths.

61–90: **Major overhaul required**. Get serious about changing the way you handle your team and projects. Are you efficient but ineffective, or effective but inefficient? Without neglecting your area of strength, start focusing on improving your area of weakness. Stop working so hard on the wrong things or doing the right things wrong—whichever happens to be the case. Break your weaknesses down into subcategories, based on the ones in the assessment above. Work on one item on this list over the course of several months until you systematically improve your competence level.

36–60: **Danger**! You're both ineffective and inefficient. Your leadership productivity skills need a jumpstart *fast*! Both your job and your organization's future may depend on it, so start working hard on doing the right things the right way right now.

HOW TO USE YOUR SCORES

Comparing scores on each part of this assessment will help you determine which of the 3Ts is the weakest link in your executive process. I've divided the assessment as I have so that within each part, you can delve deeper by comparing the chapter subtotals, thereby better understanding in which topics you've expressed a weakness. Even more useful is looking at the individual quiz items with the lowest scores; in fact, those represent your best places to start working. Regard this as a bottom-up method of continuous improvement.

As you study each chapter (especially those in which you've scored poorly), think about how you can improve your process. If your weakest of the 3Ts is Team, where do you face your greatest challenges: in Environment, Performance, Motivation, or Growth? If you've marked a full slate of 5s except in the Performance chapter (chapter 6) where you drop to 4 on Results, 2 on Unity, and 1 on Success, then your scores mark a clear line of action. Start with working on improving your team's success, followed by encouraging team unity.

Make a sincere effort to weld your team together as an effective, productive unit, providing the training and education needed to improve their return on investment as both individuals and a team. Aim to increase their performance all around. Do the same for yourself.

Once you're happy with your new results, move on to another unsatisfactory function and work on bringing it up to

par. While I would normally tell you to focus on improving what you're already good at—i.e., pushing your scores from good to great rather than wasting time on things you don't do well—the functions I discuss in this book represent exceptions to that rule. They're so fundamental that they require the highest level of competence you can bring to bear. That way, you and your team can strategically execute on the spot so automatically that you ensure your survival in an increasingly difficult business world.

As you successfully put new concepts into play, retake the assessment to determine how much you've improved. You may not even recognize that original *you* a year from now!

Don't forget to visit www.3TLeadership.com for additional tools and information to supplement this book.

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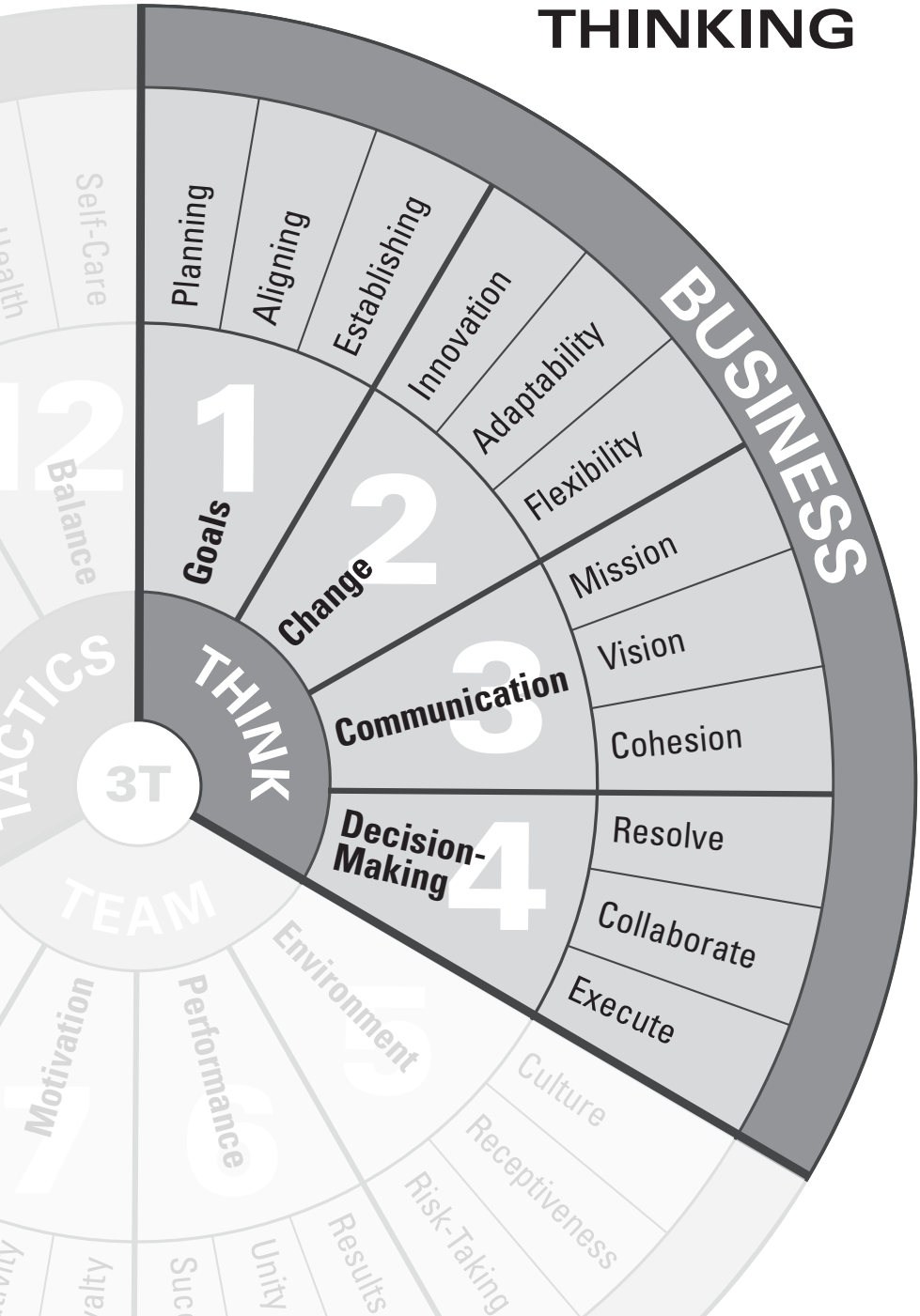
PART I

STRATEGIC **THINKING**



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STRATEGIC **THINKING**

Strategic thinking boils down to one simple question: ***What is the desired outcome?***

The answer to that question helps an executive drive organizational strategy through various ways to:

- Maximize results in minimal time.
- Maintain a bird's-eye view of the big picture.
- Ensure the team aligns its goals with those of the organization.

As a leader, you have to regularly set aside time for strategic thinking, so you can take your team from start to finish with the least interference along the way. My clients tell me, "We want our employees to be strategic enablers of business." I tell them, "Well, then you have to give them time to be strategic." As an executive, you must *create* the time to think strategically—it won't magically materialize.

This makes sense and it's easy to say, but it begs this question: what exactly *is* strategic thinking in the first place?

THE COMPONENTS OF STRATEGIC THINKING

Although strategic thinking varies from one team or organization to another, it generally includes these characteristics:

- It focuses on group needs.
- It leverages existing organizational structure and seeks to improve upon it.
- It's cross-functional, presuming and requiring cooperation between groups.
- It has long-term, far-reaching effects.
- It considers what tactics can best be used to accomplish the desired outcome.

APPLYING STRATEGIC THINKING

Strategic thinking can be difficult to apply when circumstances—and sometimes people—seem determined to crush it. In addition to dealing with market forces and good old-fashioned competition, you may have to adroitly cope with crises over which you have no control.

Your goals tie together all the disparate members of a team, as well as the strategies that apply both individually and collectively. Goals set a course—a benchmark for the team to shoot for. In a sense, goals are promises to our teams and ourselves, dreams with deadlines that tweak our performance upward. The great thing about goals is that it's as easy to think big as it is to think small. Thinking big not only tests our reach and abilities; it also stretches our mental boundaries.

By its very nature, strategic thinking requires you to learn to make the best decisions you can as quickly as possible, boosting innovation and flexibility, helping your team adapt to circumstances as they change.

Just as importantly, you have to be able to communicate those adaptations to all involved: to communicate the new mission, to promote your vision, and to sell teamwork in a way that gets people to take notice.

Like the captain of a ship, you should always consult with your officers before making a decision, taking their viewpoints and suggestions into account. But the decisions are ultimately yours, and you must make them. If you don't, circumstances will make your decisions for you.

Once you've made a decision, you and your team have to execute immediately—on the spot if necessary.

REMEMBER

Executives *execute*. No one cares how many hours you spend at work and how many items you check off your to-do list. Execution and results are all that really matter in any business. And don't assume you don't qualify as an executive. An executive can be a front-line manager, an up-and-coming star, a programmer who institutes a productive change in a system or process . . . *anyone* who is responsible for results.

Thank You For Reading

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