

Why Can't I "Just Do It"?

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Those Nike commercials show an athlete performing a feat that my body just won't let me do. You know the ads—they end with a stylized check mark and words in bold letters: "**Just Do It!**"

Unfortunately, leaders rarely find it that easy. They have good ideas, but implementing them—ah, that's something altogether different! Putting ideas into practice is a challenge for many of us.

The Nike commercials make "execution" sound like it's a one-time effort. The truth is there are at least six individual stages of execution, and success is elusive at every one!

Make a decision. First, you choose from among the many other alternatives what action to pursue. Realistically, of course, you could do nothing. That's the easiest approach. It requires no effort and no resources. Further, taking initiative carries with it risk of criticism if the action fails, so it's safer to just do nothing.

Then there are all those other alternatives. When you select a specific action, you forego the remaining lost opportunities. What if one of those options might have yielded a better outcome? You subject yourself to criticism when you decide to pursue only one specific action!

Make a plan. Rarely does "winging it" result in a successful outcome. "Anything worth doing is worth doing well," right? If the action is to involve more than one person, then there needs to be some coordination of effort. The steps required to move from where we are to where we want to go need to be orchestrated. Here's where everybody has to agree who will do what by when.

Start. All we've done to this point is think and talk. To make progress, you actually have to DO something, right? Once you start, all the things you overlooked in your plan become evident. So, you take a step backward, thinking anew about all those things you had forgotten!

Continue. Anything that's going to be of lasting value will take some time. The Nike commercials show an athlete participating in a sport that maybe consumes a couple of hours. With the leaders I support, we're talking about major enhancements that can't be accomplished in just one day.

Sometimes it's easy to think "Hey, this isn't going to work anyway!" Just giving up is the easy way out. But you're committed, right? Stick with it! You're going to see this thing through, even when the going gets tough!

Finish. Oh, how easy it is to start projects. Can you finish them? After all, interruptions keep diverting our attention to other matters! It's so hard to get back to a project that we used to consider important. The priority of the moment holds our attention. "We'll work on that tomorrow" becomes our fallback position day after day, until the project is covered in cobwebs.

Complete the effort. We're not done until we've put all the tools away, completed all the paperwork, and notified everybody who needs to know about the changes. This step involves linking everything we've done into the ongoing systems of the larger organization.

Is there any surprise that "execution" of good ideas is a problem for leaders? Figure out where the hang-up typically occurs for you, so that you can transform your good ideas into productive improvements!

Dennis Hooper is a local leadership development coach. With his skills, we don't need to go to Atlanta to hire an expensive consulting firm to improve our organizations. Contact him at (478)-988-0237 or dhooper2@juno.com.