

STAFFING LETTER

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The Not-So-Secret Secrets To Making It Big Five Surprisingly Doable Steps That Will Propel You To The Top

Have you ever said to yourself, "How in the world did [insert name of powerful business executive] get to where he is? He's not any smarter than I am!" Well, chances are you're right. That executive who made it big probably doesn't have more powerful brain cells than you . . . but what he (or she!) probably does have are three non-glamorous but crucial qualities: **focus, discipline and follow-up.**

"These three qualities might not sound extraordinary, but they can truly set you apart," says Michael Feuer, co-founder and former CEO of OfficeMax and author of the new book *The Benevolent Dictator: Empower Your Employees, Build Your Business and Outwit the Competition* (Wiley, 2011, ISBN: 978-1-118-00391-6, \$24.95, www.benevolentdictator.biz). "The truth is, there isn't a simple magic bullet that will propel you straight to the top. Success in any endeavor, especially business, really comes down to specific character traits and habits. If you have those qualities, you'll excel. And if you

don't, you probably won't."
"Before you ever craft a sales stra-

tegy or walk into a client meeting, whether or not you have a chance of success has already been decided by how you think about your work, what you have to do and how you do it," Feuer asserts. "Outcomes are shaped by your focus, discipline and commitment to follow-up . . . or lack thereof. It's important to remember that achievements are often less dependent on your technical know-how and more dependent on how you organize and think."

three qualities look like in practice and how you can make them work for you.



Take good notes.

Taking notes in business is just as important as it was in your advanced economics class in college. Your brain isn't always as powerful as you think it is, and having a written record of your boss's project analysis or your colleague's sales strategy can save you from having "oh darn" moments and can set you apart from the pack and put you on a straighter path

to success.

Do what you say you will, period.

In today's dog-eat-dog environment, a person's word isn't always his or her bond. And that's a shame. When you fail to follow through on promises and commitments, you imply that you lack discipline and – perhaps – shouldn't be trusted with more important tasks and objec-

Read on to learn what these

Continued

tives. However, if you cultivate a reputation for being completely reliable, you'll enjoy more responsibility and success as well as better business relationships.

Give homework assignments.

A leader's job is to make people think and discover alternatives. It's a great way to determine who on your team you can rely on and who is capable of taking a project to the next level. You can afford to invest in developing someone who is interested in developing.

Scrap your iron-clad five-year plan.

Being able to work with focus and discipline is generally a good thing . . . unless you're focusing on things that won't help you or propel you forward! To help prevent this, Feuer recommends developing a short-term plan with a six- to nine-month outlook. This plan will help you get through the year. He also recommends creating a longer-term plan with a seventeen- to eighteen-month strategy. It will encompass the goals and benchmarks you need to achieve during this time period. Why have two plans instead of one? Well, the world is simply evolving too fast to rely on a one-size-fits-all five-year plan.

Use a rifle, not a shotgun.

When you fire a shotgun, your shot hits a wider area, but it lacks focused precision. In business, a shotgun approach gets the job done . . . but usually doesn't yield outstanding results. Sure, you'll hit something with a shotgun, but the price in doing so seldom provides the big payback. Yes, a rifle or laser-sharp approach will take more planning and forethought, but in the

end you'll probably save time and resources. It pays to identify exactly what needs to be done and then focus relentlessly on accomplishing those objectives. ■

Michael Feuer cofounded OfficeMax in 1988 starting with one store and \$20,000 of his own money, a partner and a small group of investors. As CEO, he grew it to more than 1,000 stores worldwide with annual sales topping \$5 billion. **Dustin S. Klein**, contributor and editor of *The Benevolent Dictator*, is the publisher and executive editor of Smart Business Network, publishers of *Smart Business*, the nation's second-largest chain of regional business publications.

"Don't tell people how good you are, show them."

— Kelley Robertson

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