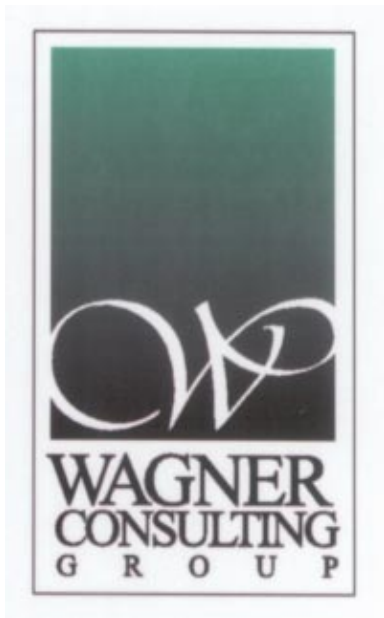


[Home](#)[Mission](#)[Services](#)[Testimonials](#)[Clients](#)[About](#)

You Are Here: November 2006

logo/links



Page Links

[Case Studies](#)
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November 2006

Walk the Talk

As a management consultant, I'm often called upon by clients to help solve problems or improve performance in a specific area. Over the years I have found many situations where inconsistent goals were the root cause of the problem. That is, a business would proclaim one value while rewarding performance inconsistent with the stated goal. You can avoid this trap by being mindful of the following three behaviors.

Reward the desired results

Measurement systems that are not congruent with strategic goals often cause unintended consequences. For example, rewarding behavior that maximizes profit may sabotage company initiatives to gain market share. Think carefully about the cascade of consequences your reward metrics may unleash. Reinforcing behavior that helps achieve big picture goals often requires meticulous planning to achieve the right cost-benefit balance.

Deal only with reality

Don't accept unsubstantiated "facts" or rely on assumptions. Insist on hard data and measurable performance by taking up homework and independently assessing outcomes. Ask probing, relentless questions to identify areas that need attention. One of the best ways to get first hand knowledge is to spend time on the front lines interacting directly with customers and employees.

Act consistently

Erratic behavior by a leader causes confusion among those being led, and confused people deliver inconsistent results. Imagine working for a business owner whose mood was unpredictable and whose priorities changed with the temperature, and then ask yourself, "would I want to do business with this company?" Slapdash planning and ready, fire, aim decisions can destroy a business. A steady hand on the tiller inspires confidence and helps a company build and maintain momentum.

There's no shortage of companies who proclaim lofty ideals and standards. The tough part is to deliver what is promised - to walk the talk.

Tom Wagner



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