

Faster, Smarter Execution

by Gary Tomlinson

“Learning from the school of hard knocks can be very informing, but often the tuition is too high! We should learn from other people’s experiences.” The purpose of this column is to share great business wisdom from the experiences of authors like Jim Collins, Michael Gerber, Frank McNair, Michael LeBoeuf, Ron Willingham, Randy Pennington and others. Because when you combine great business education with your own business experiences the outcome you’ll receive is far greater than the sum of its parts.

The wisdom of Davis’, Frechette’s and Boswell’s new book; *Strategic Speed – Mobilize People, Accelerate Execution* has been chosen to share with you this week. “Virtually all executives would agree that speed is necessary to a successful business. *Strategic speed* is where urgency meets execution; it’s about implementing plans and strategies not only quickly, but well. It’s something leaders pursue every day and something they are paid to achieve.”

“This book is for any business leader who has felt frustrated that the work wasn’t moving fast enough, that critical initiatives weren’t gaining traction, or that a new strategy had stalled after the initial buzz subsided. It’s for any leader who, despite all the time, money and energy invested in a major new project, is disappointed that the outcomes have fallen short of expectations. It’s for leaders who want to stop telling their people to move faster and instead start giving them the tools to do so.”

Carolina Business Connection recently had the opportunity to interview one of the authors, Ms. Jocelyn R. Davis.

CBC Reviewer: Was there a tipping point for the three of you to write this book?

Jocelyn Davis: Yes, there was definitely one. There’s been a lot of discussion around execution lately. It’s not brilliant strategies as much as brilliant executions that are the key. There was this one statistic we kept reading about. This statistic said that somewhere between 50% and 70% of strategic initiatives fail. This was horrible news and we wanted to know if it was indeed true. So before we ever began writing this book we did our own research. We studied 20 years worth of research on the execution of strategic initiatives. These studies included data on hundreds of companies. And we found that those alarming statistics were accurate and very well supported. We decided to take a closer look at the barriers causing these failures and what could be done about it. This book is about what we discovered.

CBC Reviewer: What barriers did you discover that caused the failures?

Jocelyn Davis: The two main reasons we found for failure was leaders fell into two specific traps. One was *over-attention to pace* and the other was *over-attention to*

process. Over-attention to pace is when leaders tell everyone to do everything faster; to stoke the boiler by throwing more resources, like money, people or technology at tasks and problems; or to cut corners by eliminating steps in a process, pieces of a project or people in the loop. *Over-attention to process* is when leaders focus the majority of their time on the processes and very little time on what motivates people. I'm not saying that seeking to optimize processes is bad. But if you're dealing with people versus process, people will trump process every time.

CBC Reviewer: What factors did you find that affect *strategic speed*?

Jocelyn Davis: Speed in organizations depends on pace, process and people. It's the people factors however, that turn out to be the most powerful accelerator – or brake. As a leader, you can have all the processes and technologies in place, all the charts and graphs drawn up, all the money in hand and all the angels on your side, but if the people won't move...the work won't move. Our research indicates that there are three conditions that effective leaders in fast organizations seek to increase, and that in turn increases strategic speed:

1. **Clarity** – shared, clear understanding of your situation and direction.
2. **Unity** – wholehearted agreement on the merits of that direction and the need to work together to move ahead.
3. **Agility** – willingness to turn and adapt quickly while keeping strategic goals in mind.

CBC Reviewer: What key message would you like the readers to take away from your book?

Jocelyn Davis: You can accelerate execution in your organization. By affirming strategies, driving initiatives, managing climates and cultivating experiences leaders can increase *strategic speed* and accelerate execution.

To learn more about *Strategic Speed – Mobilize People, Accelerate Execution* or to purchase a copy go to www.forum.com/strategicspeed. This is an informative book filled with assessments and tools that provide a road map for leaders who want to accelerate execution in their business.

Gary Tomlinson is a strexecutionist specializing in strategy execution management. He works with senior leaders to help them clarify, deploy and achieve their organizational initiatives by establishing execution management as an organizational competency. Gary uses a unique and dynamic methodology that is part process, part software and part roadmap that enables his clients to close the gap between planning and implementation. You can engage Gary at gary@gary-tomlinson.com or visit his website at www.gary-tomlinson.com