



I Fell Out Of Rhythm

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I hate to admit it but I fell out of RHYTHM.

For those who try to maintain some sense of rhythm, you know what I am talking about. For those who don't, you will know what I mean by the time you finish reading this *Mantra™*.

Most of you have gotten used to receiving the *Mantra™* every month. Well the last time you got one was several months ago. Many of you have written to me and some have even called to inquire why you have not received the *Mantra™* for months. Well you haven't received one because I haven't written one. And I haven't written one because I fell out of rhythm.

In this *Mantra™* I will help you understand the value of rhythm using my failure to maintain it as an example.

What is a rhythm?

Rhythm is defined as an occurrence and recurrence of an activity at regular intervals. Everything in the world relies upon rhythm. It is the basis of life. Starting from the rotation of the earth that gives us days and nights and the climatic changes to the beating of the human heart that gives us life – everything depends upon rhythm. Maintaining a healthy body requires regular exercising; building and sustaining an organization requires strategic planning and execution; good music must have rhythm, and on and on. These are only a few examples where rhythm is absolutely essential.

Why do you need rhythm?

Rhythm creates order, discipline and consistency. Rhythm gives a basic structure for coordination, cohesion and comprehension. Skipping rhythmic beats creates chaos and adverse consequences.

Successful planning and execution of strategies in a business is a rhythmic process. When executives come together for yearly, quarterly, monthly, daily meetings and stay focused on important things, great results are generated. In the meetings the discussion revolves around important things that help executives set their priorities. In addition, a rhythmic behavior at the highest level of the organization creates a culture of learning and development through creation of good habits.

I am a weekend golfer. Every time I play, I want to have a great score but I don't have the practice or the routine to hit the ball consistently. No matter how hard I try or how much I wish, my scores don't

improve significantly. Why? Because playing occasionally does not allow me to create a rhythm professional golfers have.

How can you create and maintain rhythm?

Our brains are quite adaptable. For every behavior we repeat, our brain builds circuits for managing that behavior. The more some behavior is repeated, the more the brain builds onto that circuit for managing that behavior. Our brain uses signals from our bodies to know that we are repeating a behavior and to perform this circuit growth. When the repeated behaviors are rhythmic, the brain builds rhythmic circuits. These rhythmic circuits control our behavior (including focus and attention) and are integral to our development.

There is nothing magical about creating rhythm. The first thing is one's desire to be disciplined. I know people who live in chaos and pandemonium and others who are extremely disciplined. It is the choice one makes. However, in business world, there is no choice. In my experience creating good rhythm requires time and effort. It requires even a greater effort to maintain it.

Both, creating rhythm and maintaining it, is a matter of priorities. It all boils down to doing the important things all the time. When we are disciplined to always doing the important things, we must have a process for identifying the important things and then doing them in the right timeframe. This closes the loop. Once we have a system, sticking to it and repeating it builds rhythm.

My job as a business advisor and a coach is to help executive teams create a rhythm of meetings. It is my job to be alert for signs that suggest the organization is "out of rhythm". Getting out of rhythm should be neither unexpected nor alarming; however, we must strive to catch this weakness early.

When a client gets out of rhythm, a gentle reminder is often all that is needed to get them back on track. Gentle nudges can get them back on track. Asking the executive team, if they are holding to their meeting rhythm, acts as a good tool to maintain the rhythm. This honest question will usually generates honest answers.

What are the symptoms for going "out of rhythm"?

People fall out of rhythm all the time. Organizations sometimes get out of their internal meeting rhythm and don't even realize that they are going out of rhythm. The following are some of the symptoms that may indicate an organization is going "out of rhythm".

The first and an obvious symptom is the irregularity of meetings and erratic schedules. This indicates weakness in the organization's internal meeting rhythm.

The second is related to the nature of the conversation surrounding the prior quarter's highest priorities (Rocks). If the conversation repeatedly bogs down with debate over the issues rather than a quick review of the outcome, the team is probably out of rhythm. They are not spending enough time during the quarter to debate the issues and accomplish the Rock. If this happens, the quarterly meeting becomes the natural outlet for conversation that should have already occurred.

The third symptom is similar to the first but is more subtly recognized. A team member will occasionally mention that weekly or monthly meetings are running too long. This likely means that administrative and non-priority issues are clogging the meetings, indicating that the client is out of rhythm at the daily or weekly level.

The fourth is when the team members start getting bored in meetings and look for reasons not to participate. This may be a sign for greater trouble in the organization.

I fell out of rhythm

I try to stay healthy by maintaining a rhythm of regular workout routine either at home or at the gym. I try to stay current with my business by maintaining a rhythm of activities that include client and prospect meetings and writing articles. Over the past few months I got distracted. No workouts and no writing articles. This did not happen by choice and happened gradually. First to go was the workout. I missed a day, missed another day and missed the week. Missed two weeks and before I knew it I had missed months. People will tell you that I am a disciplined person. However, I fell out of rhythm and getting back on track got harder and harder with every missed day.

With respect the writing, I started to fall out of rhythm in June '08. I started to write but could not get into the topic. Had some false starts and before I knew it June had come and gone. I thought I'd skip June and write for July. Missing a month is not good but it's no big deal I rationalized. July too came and went and before I knew it, the year was gone. When I look back over the past few months and try to put blame, there is no one to blame except me. I allowed it happen. Distractions are always there but if we let ourselves get distracted, days become weeks and weeks become months and you stay distracted. And there was no one giving me gentle nudges, or whacking me on my back to get back on it. I let it happen.

But I am back with a resolve. I working out again and, now I'm writing again.

From the Coach's TOOLBOX - Things you can do to create your rhythm

Create a habit of identifying your most important things and getting them done.

- ✚ Know your single most important thing to accomplish in the year
- ✚ Know your most important action in the quarter you are in that will help you accomplish your single most important thing for the year
- ✚ Know your most important thing for the month that will help you accomplish the most important thing for the quarter
- ✚ Know your most important thing for the week that will help you accomplish the most important thing for the month
- ✚ Know your most important action for the year that will help you accomplish your most important thing for the week
- ✚ Move to #2 most important thing for a particular time bucket only after you finish the #1 for that time bucket

- ✚ DO this every day, week, quarter, year. This is your rhythm. It won't be long before you see results.

Some inspirational quotes

These great people learned that translating strategy into results requires a rhythm of execution.

- ✚ "To make more than noise in your business, you've got to have rhythm. And the faster you want to grow, the faster you have to pulse. At the heart of executive performance is a rhythm of tightly run meetings...." Verne Harnish (Mastering the Rockefeller Habits)
- ✚ "Strategy" overrated, simply "doin' stuff" underrated. We have a 'strategic plan,' it's called doing things." - Herb Kelleher (Southwest Airlines)
- ✚ "Execution is a systematic process of rigorously discussing hows and whats, tenaciously following through, and ensuring accountability." - Larry Bossidy & Ram Charan/ *Execution: The Discipline of Getting Things Done*
- ✚ "The result...is an organization that has developed the most vital core competence of them all - the ability to execute its strategy." Gary Harpst, CEO and Founder, Six Disciplines Corporation
- ✚ "Music creates order out of chaos: for rhythm imposes unanimity upon the divergent, melody imposes continuity upon the disjointed, and harmony imposes compatibility upon the incongruous" Yehudi Menuhin