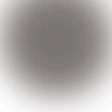


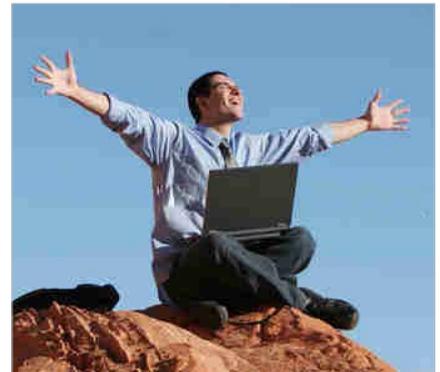
MANDAT  GR  WTH LETTER®

Growth Focus: Realization

# CEO-Tip *of the Month*

by Guido Quelle

## Do You Have a Lack of Ideas or is it an Implementation Problem? Pay Attention to the Nuances



In our consulting projects, we see the same situations again and again: All too often, good growth ideas – whether innovations, new market strategies, acquisitions, or what have you – do nothing but gather dust. They are endlessly discussed, refined and enhanced. Boards are convened, political games are played, charts are prepared and PowerPoint duels are fought (who can cram more text into one slide?), but ultimately no decisions are made.

Even if a decision is finally made, those involved tend to then kick back and relax, the idea being: “We did it; now it should run just fine all by itself.” Guess again. Nothing runs on its own. In our experience, many companies have too many employees who “actively wait,” who are content just to have made or to have accepted a decision, yet can rarely be moved to take care of its implementation.

Why is that? Because implementing ideas demands attention, and not just once or sporadically, but constantly. Most often growth can only be achieved with the help of well thought-out projects, which in turn means that some group of employees will receive additional work as a result. Since growth is a key topic for the Senior Management, it also calls for attention at the highest levels. But attention costs time. And we’re not necessarily talking about time that happens to be “left over,” but instead time we have to take away from other duties. But what should we leave out? Everything seems to be important in some way or another. And new topics seem to pop up practically every day. What makes this worse: It’s twice as hard to keep up your attention over a longer period of time. When the growth project then has to be supervised

because the person heading it up can only halfheartedly identify with it at best, the chances of success will become increasingly slim.

Most of our clients have no shortage of ideas. At most of the companies we encounter, top-quality employees are focused on carrying out their day-to-day work professionally while also leading the various projects that are running at the same time. Sometimes these companies suffer from implementation problems, and we very often hear statements like the following: “Mr. Quelle, we have a great team and super ideas, but we need someone who can methodically work through the topics with us and help make them a reality; what we need is a power booster.”

Work on the assumption that you have enough good ideas at your company to push its growth forward. Work on the assumption that your employees aren’t the main bottleneck. Instead, there are too many projects, all of which are equally important; priorities are either unclear or constantly change. Very often, growth projects don’t get off to a good start, which in turn necessitates costly and above all time-intensive cleanup work to remedy. Inroads already made are often forgotten and never followed up on, because the lead crew’s attention focuses elsewhere.

If you have an implementation problem, invest time and your best employees into solving it: with priorities; with a focused effort to reduce the number of projects; with methodical and effective efforts to move projects forward; with a realistic timetable; and by using the know-how already at your disposal. Combine these methods and you’ll rapidly boost your effectiveness.

# Strategy & Leadership

by Guido Quelle

Are You Still Deliberating or  
Have You Started Acting?  
Implementation is What  
Matters Most



Success consists in making good ideas into realities; no one would argue with that. But at most companies there are more good ideas than there are projects that successfully implement them. It would seem reasonable to ask the question “why.”

Though we might initially tend to assume the problem was a lack of suitable methods, and though that’s surely sometimes true, there are other issues that need to be addressed first. Here are nine problems that pop up again and again when companies themselves complain that they’re heroes when it comes to ideas but zeroes when it comes to their implementation:

## 1. Failing to think things through

Some good ideas simply aren’t thought all the way through. Brainstorming sessions, strategy meetings and retreats to discuss growth can produce reams of good ideas. Nonetheless these ideas must then be discussed in depth and their details need to be fleshed out. This is true both in terms of an idea’s fundamental appeal and of its feasibility in light of the company’s resources.

## 2. Lack of compatibility with the project landscape

Even if an idea looks great and it could contribute significantly to your company’s growth, its implementation can only succeed if you simultaneously take into consideration the other projects currently being pursued. Unfortunately, most companies don’t have a clear over-

view of all active projects because creating and maintaining a project landscape entails a daunting amount of work and is accordingly rarely done. In those cases where we actually do find a company with a project landscape, the landscape usually involves so many details and such complicated tools that only a select few can work with it. But this defeats the purpose of having a company-wide project landscape. Good ideas should always fit in the current project portfolio; if not, they’re off to a bad start.

## 3. Lack of priorities

“Important,” “Very important,” “To be done immediately”: These terms sum up the kinds of priorities many companies use. Though that may seem a bit overstated, when we ask employees at our client companies about the priority of the projects they’re working on, the response very often amounts to one big question mark. Either employees don’t know what the company’s priorities are, or everything seems to be equally important. But when everything is important, then in reality nothing is.

## 4. Shifting priorities

What’s worse than a lack of clear priorities? When the priorities keep shifting. With the former, at least your employees can assume there will continue to be no clear priorities, which after all means a bit of stability. With the latter, they are often confronted by a system that

promotes a false sense of security. Priorities are carved in stone – until they aren't anymore. What basis is then used to make investment decisions involving financial resources and the company's time? A certain project is priority number one ... until the next one shows up. And, if we're honest: Haven't we all seen the phrase "top priority" used overly much?

### 5. Unbridled euphoria

Even though we should certainly appreciate the fact that some employees always raise their hands when we need volunteers to get a new project rolling, at the same time we should take a critical look at their eagerness. After all, it's fair to assume that they have a high enough workload from their day-to-day business and that their euphoric "I can do it!" will mean they have to take on additional work and responsibilities. Therefore, though it shouldn't be a wet blanket for enthusiastic employees, it's essential that the Senior Management check whether said employees are actually in a position to take on the additional load.

### 6. Uncomfortable silence

This is just the opposite of euphoria. Though everyone or nearly everyone supports the new idea, they can imagine it will be accompanied by an avalanche of new work; as a result, the call for volunteers is greeted with silence. The problem here is that then usually someone has to be coerced into taking on the project. We've all seen what often happens next: nothing.

### 7. Always the same faces

This correlates with the unbridled euphoria, because when we take a look around in many companies, we notice that it's always the same people who take on new projects, introduce something new, or push forward innovations. The risk: These people, too, only have limited amounts of time at their disposal, which means if they keep taking on new work, at some point the quality is likely to suffer.

### 8. Politics

Political games are something we encounter fairly frequently. They tend to crop up wherever employees are convinced they had a better idea but no one asked them, or if they think a new idea might jeopardize their posi-

on in the company. If these games are played out in the open, it's still possible to get them under control. Unfortunately, they primarily take place behind the scenes, making it extremely difficult to keep them in check. The best tactic is not to drop to their level, but to directly confront those involved.

### 9. Double-work

Especially at mid-sized and larger companies, employees in different departments or offices often end up working on the same topic. If this isn't prevented, or at least discovered in time, there's bound to be trouble if both teams are already (nearly) done, because ultimately the company only needs one set of results. When the work of one team is chosen over that of the other, the "losing" team might try to boycott what their rivals came up with, exhibiting the so-called "not my baby" attitude. We've seen this happen more than once.

These are just nine obstacles; I'm sure you could add a few of your own to the list. What they all have in common is that they keep you from turning your strategically good ideas into realities. If you get the feeling that there's too much discussion and not enough implementation going on at your company, don't just concentrate on your implementation methods, but take a step back and first look for hurdles that could stand in your way. Chances are, you'll find some.



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