

## **CEO Tip of the Month: Discipline? Of Course, But How?**

by Guido Quelle

Needless to say, no one would deny that discipline is a key success factor when it comes to pushing forward growth initiatives that have already been started, and above all when it comes to successfully completing them. At the same time, it's due to a lack of discipline that, apparently "out of the blue," many initiatives that initially look promising get bogged down or yield no concrete results.

The question that arises is what leaders can do to boost discipline in their companies, to maintain that high level, and potentially to even top it. Here are five tips:

### **1.: No discussions without the next steps.**

All too often, discussions over the phone or in person come to an end without agreeing on any concrete next steps that the parties could enter in their calendars. As a result, they go their separate ways without any clear idea of when they'll talk again, what they'll talk about, or with which goal in mind, making misunderstandings a foregone conclusion. Do yourself a favor: Agree on the next steps.

### **2.: Results, not responsibilities.**

Especially when it comes to projects, it's important to not only think in terms of responsibilities, but to also agree on which results each activity is meant to produce. Therefore, you should always ask yourself: "What is the intended result of this activity?"

### **3.: Short-term, not long-term projects.**

The risk involved in long-term projects is that some things aren't dealt with until quite late in the game because, after, all, there's "still so much time" before the end of the project. Then the surprise comes when the parties involved realize that it would have been a good idea to start a certain activity much earlier. Therefore, it can be a good idea to pursue projects that can be completed within a fairly short amount of time; as a rule, we recommend a maximum of 15 months. If you have extremely long-term goals, they can be achieved using a number of sequential projects.

### **4.: Maintain an effective follow-up list.**

Granted, this involves a certain amount of supervision and administrative work, but it's outweighed by the benefits a good follow-up list offers. Employees are often shocked when they only realize that they failed to deliver a certain result yesterday (though that's what they had agreed to do) when their boss calls and inquires into the whereabouts of precisely the result in question. Of course, the prerequisite for the follow-up list to work best is that you embrace the "no discussions without the next steps" principle.

**5.: Be a role model.**

It's simply impossible to demand discipline from your employees if you yourself are hardly a good role model in terms of discipline: Expecting everyone to be on time for meetings has a hollow ring to it if you constantly arrive too late. Similarly, asking them to deliver results on time is hard to enforce if you yourself are often unable to keep your project deadlines. As a leader, it's a better strategy to attempt a bit less and to deliver quality content on time than to make promises you ultimately won't be able to keep.

Prof. Dr. Guido Quelle  
Managing Partner  
Mandat Consulting Group (Mandat GmbH)  
Emil-Figge-Strasse 80  
44227 Dortmund  
Germany