



Management Concepts Series – 2010

* *Common-Sense Guidelines for Successful Organizations* *

Management Concept #7	
<i>Don't Get Bitten</i>	
<i>The Perils of Soundbite Management</i>	
<p style="text-align: center;">Active Management Pillar Applicability</p> <div style="text-align: center; border: 2px solid yellow; padding: 5px;"> </div>	<p>Here are some classics:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ <i>Money doesn't motivate people</i> ❖ <i>Don't create strategic plans – think strategically</i> ❖ <i>Titles don't matter</i> ❖ <i>The budget evolved from a management tool into an obstacle to management (Carlucci)</i> ❖ <i>Don't automate, obliterate (Hammer)</i> ❖ <i>Don't pave the cow path</i> ❖ <i>People resist change</i> ❖ <i>Leadership is irrespective of position</i> <p>We've all heard them. They come from a vast store of management lore and tribal knowledge. They put in appearances at planning sessions and conferences. They're often heard when something needs to be justified or refuted. They can be whipped out quicker than a jackrabbit on a date (Jean Shepherd).</p> <p>They have the additional advantage of implying there is more wisdom beneath them; possibly the result of experience or research. Because of this implication, the soundbite often wins the day. Disagreement implies a lack of enlightenment and, in any event, requires a subtlety of discussion that is frequently not suited to the venue. In other words by combining baloney and chutzpah: Score!</p> <p>In fact, each of them does contain some element of truth. Sadly, however, management in a hurry tends to grab the simplistic concept, combine it with what they would like to hear, and create their plans and actions as if they had the whole book. By doing this, they are managing after reading only the table of contents.</p> <p>Your job is to ferret out the true depth that lives under the soundbites. These are titles, not distilled wisdom. Use them as guide posts that point you in the right direction, not as maps.</p> <p>To paraphrase Albert Einstein:</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>Everything should be made as simple as possible but no simpler.</i></p>

The Perils of Soundbite Management

Proverbs and Soundbites

We all do it. We latch onto shorthand versions of wisdom that helps us remember things. These come in many shapes and sizes and go by many names: Proverbs, sayings, truisms, etc. We learn them from the time we are old enough to speak and we use them for the rest of our lives. There are thousands of them. Here are a few:

- ❖ Blood is thicker than water
- ❖ A stitch in time saves nine
- ❖ Still waters run deep
- ❖ Silence is golden
- ❖ The best things in life are free
- ❖ Don't cut off your nose to spite your face
- ❖ Quitters never win, winners never quit
- ❖ Those who never win and never quit are idiots (just kidding – from the Demotivator series by Despair, Inc.)

Note: For an interesting listing of proverbs, look at C&L Kelly's page:
<http://www.manythings.org/c/r.cgi/proverbs.u>

In many cases, these proverbs are a concise and useful distillation of wisdom that can help us understand peoples' motivation or can provide useful counsel in our actions.

Management by Soundbite

The concept of the management soundbite is a natural extension of the ancient human tendency to shorten concepts to a memorable phrase. The problem is these soundbites are often more akin to the title of an idea, rather than a distilled version of it. Through a desire for convenience, lack of understanding, or simply laziness, we use them as if they were capsule versions of deeper concepts. In doing so, we frequently lose critical pieces of the core concept – to the point we are justifying actions that are misguided and not consistent with the very idea we are citing.

There is often an element of truth in these soundbites. Here are some examples:

Money doesn't motivate people

Really? It certainly can de-motivate them. I'd also guess that the money had something to do with the motivation behind the recent mortgage crisis. The potential for raises, bonuses, keeping the kids fed can provide a modicum of motivation. Is money the sole motivator? No. But don't discount its importance in motivating your people to action. And stop dwelling on 365 ways to motivate your staff without spending money. Reality: It's all part of the picture.

Don't create strategic plans – think strategically

This one is a doozy. I'm reminded of Robert Preston in *The Music Man* touting the *Thinkology Method* for learning to play a musical instrument. Yes, you need to think strategically. But you need to make that thinking real through a disciplined planning, execution, and governance processes. I believe the concept here was to avoid making static plans and to continually keep moving strategically. The unfortunate internalization of the concept, however, has been thoughts of grandeur and minimal action.

Titles don't matter

Actually, they do. They matter to people who are growing their career. They matter to those outside the organization people must deal with. They matter to resumes. They matter to the government (who must be on all bank floors during working hours?) This statement is almost exclusively made by those already seated in executive offices. The nugget of value here is the attempt to avoid the counterproductive effects of an overly hierarchical organization (“I’m a manager so I get 100 square feet of floor space and an arm chair. Yes!”)

The budget evolved from a management tool to an obstacle to management (Carlucci)

Get over it. The budget is a planning tool like any other. If you let it control the enterprise then the plow just started running the farm. A budget simply helps you find the best and most efficient financial structure to achieve your objectives and success. It isn't the blob from outer space; it's just a set of spreadsheets and processes.

Don't pave the cow path; don't automate, obliterate (Hammer)

Sometimes the very best thing to do is to pave the cow path. More organizational transformations and system installations have failed because they tried to fix everything at once and pushed the organization beyond its ability to absorb change than because the ideas or the technology was bad. You need to approach transformation and change strategically and tactically, not explosively. Granted, we don't want to just do the same things we do today faster, if we can do it better. But think: Sometimes paving the cow path can be the first step toward a super highway.

People resist change

Okay, this one is true to a certain degree. People are subject to inertia just like everything else in the universe. But... People really resist dumb change or change on a whim. People are can enlist and are pretty tolerant of change if it meets four conditions:

1. They understand it
2. They perceive it is change to take them to a better place
3. They perceive they are being told the truth (not lies or parsed words)
4. They think there is a likelihood of success

Leadership is irrespective of position

There are aspects of leadership that derive from personal characteristics and from organizational authority or position. The truth is that the most effective leadership is seen when these two things are joined. There are “floor leaders.” These are people who lead by example and who are inspirational. In order to have effective leadership and to have an organizational impact, an individual must have both organizational authority of position and internal personal leadership strength. One without the other can be either admirable or tragic but it will not be terribly effective.

As a leader and a manager, you must work to avoid the pitfalls of soundbites. Use the concepts beneath them but understand them before you let yourself be convinced by them.

About Agovia Consulting

Agovia is your partner in crafting common-sense plans, execution governance, and management practices that are laser-focused and, by design, create your results and your success. We help you solve your problems today and help assure your success tomorrow through management practices built on outcomes, results, and achievement.

Managing to Success

Success requires the alignment and coordination of many factors. Enterprises must be competent at, not only the elements of their core mission, they must also have the ability to create and maintain the infrastructure that surrounds and supports that mission.

What We Do

Agovia is a management consulting firm. It's what we do. Picture us a management fitness coach. We help you develop and strengthen the skills you need to succeed. We have provided consultation and solutions to multiple industries including: Information Technology, Insurance, Universities, and Homeless Services. We bring you the support, advice, and driving facilitation that allow you to stop "planning" and start getting results.

Services

- ❖ **Positioning for the Win**
- ❖ **Identity Development (Mission & Vision)**
- ❖ **Team Effectiveness Coaching**
- ❖ **Strategic and Tactical Planning**
- ❖ **Planning and Governance Training**
- ❖ **Organization Turn-Around**
- ❖ **Retreat Facilitation**
- ❖ **Runaway Project Services**
- ❖ **Problem Solving – A Cultural Effective Approach**
- ❖ **Conflict Mediation**
- ❖ **Team/Function Start-Up**

Trust yourself

Experience tells us that most of the time you do know what you are doing. You are the expert in your core domain area. The challenges businesses often encounter are nuts & bolts issues: organization, clear vision, discipline, management infrastructure, and communication. Sometimes you just need a catalyst.

We can help.

We listen.

We pay attention.

We work with you

