

YES! AND... CREATIVE GORILLA # 133

How do you effect change or innovate and maintain the operation?

Sprint Actions

“Great acts are made up of small deeds” - Lao Tzu, Chinese Philosopher



Sprint Actions

Are your people struggling to effect change and run the operation?

Some of you may be the type of person to pull out a toolkit at first sight of a drawer knob dropping off or other domestic issue. To my discredit, I can always find something more interesting to do and many jobs build up before begrudgingly, I do them.

However, when our bathroom door hinge recently developed a very high-pitched squeal that grated on the teeth, I lubricated it quickly with WD40. It was easy and the WD40 was handily under the kitchen sink (that had a knob on the door).

I wish I could write an article about a tool that cures management issues as easily as WD40 cures many household issues, however, the squeaky door hinge provides a good analogy.

When a management team has a “to do” list of more pressing things to do, it takes a very squeaky issue to replace an action on the list.

However, I am sure most of you have sat in meetings and created a large list of additional actions to add to the already full “to do” list. Many people are enthusiastic and accept the actions; others are pressured to take them. It is no surprise though that people often fail to take actions because the issue is not squeaky enough.

This is especially the case when new actions are about creating change and the existing actions are dealing with operational issues that affect the business today.

Some of you might argue that the solution is to prioritise. To me, the solution is to hire more people to take the new actions. You can stop laughing now. I was joking.

Whatever your view, the fact is many organisations are now so lean, their solution for additional actions is longer hours. So how do you effect change or innovate when everybody is running at full tilt to make the operation work? Let me suggest an alternative solution.

I was working with a team of software developers this year who use the concept of “agile software development” (click [here](#) for a definition). This methodology creates software in a flexible and pragmatic way. Within it, people typically use the concept of a “scrum”; they split development in to thirty-day cycles called “sprints”, at the end of which the programmer delivers a functioning piece of code. (Click [here](#) for more detail.)

For my solution I built on the above and extended the Solutions Focus concept of “Small Steps”, setting small tasks that people are likely to do, to devise the concept of “Sprint Actions”.

SO

How does it work?

- The premise of Sprint Actions is that people must be absolutely sure they can take the action in the time frame. If they can’t (for example if they are on holiday) they do not accept an action or they

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break an action down in to small enough chunks to achieve it

- The time frame is typically two weeks
- Every two weeks the team holds a brief meeting (or includes a short slot in a regular meeting) to confirm they have taken the action and to create another set of sprint actions for the next two weeks

This cycle continues until the team achieves what they want to .The benefits of Sprint Actions are that:

- People are more willing to take on the action if they know it is small enough to achieve
- People walk away from a meeting in a more positive frame of mind
- When people achieve the action they tend to feel better and may well take another action without it being tasked
- When actions are achieved and shared they help motivate the team to take on more actions

Sceptics will say that:

- It will take too long to achieve anything of use (“You must take big decisive actions to achieve anything!”)
- People will not have the discipline to meet every two weeks and the process will fall apart

That’s a fair comment. To the first I would say that many big decisive actions don’t happen unless extra resources are brought in or other actions are shelved. To the second I would say that this approach can be fitted in to the daily routine very easily. For example, the senior manager might use a PA to monitor actions and schedule sprint meetings. Or the team can assign a sprint action for someone to monitor actions and schedule the next meeting.

ACTION

I have used the concept with five other teams this year and all found it a pragmatic approach.

Raise the concept in your next meeting. Choose a small change you want to happen and work on it using the Sprint Actions Approach. Please let me know how you get on.

TO CLOSE

You can also use this approach on your own. As an example, I have wanted to clear out my office for months. Last week I set myself the one day “Sprint Action” of clearing out the books I no longer use in my work. I took one plastic box of books at a time and managed to get rid of two boxes of books. I also threw out my collection of cassette tapes (that hurt).

Inspired by this, a day later I cleared all the old folders and freed up another three boxes. As I filled a box, (I can’t believe I did this) I itemised the folders in the box on a Post It note and affixed it to the transparent front. Yesterday I sorted the remaining books in to boxes by category and tidied up further.

Today my wife took the books to the charity store and I went to the tip and dumped the waste. It felt great. Now if I could just replace that light bulb in the kitchen...

Have a sprint of a week.

*John Brooker | Facilitate, Innovate,
Transform.*

Speak: +44208899990

Read: www.yesand.eu

Write: hi@yesand.eu