

## The Bus Riders

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Jim Collins published a book in 2001 that has many truisms that are as relevant today, if not moreso during the havoc of a pandemic, as they were then. The book was called "Good to Great". I recently pulled it out again when one of my LinkedIn connections mentioned a quote I used from Jim's book when I gave a presentation at a convention in 2016 titled "The Bus Riders". The quote is: "**Get the right people on the bus, get them in the right seats and then drive the bus.**" The research that accompanied that quote came up with another great quote from Jim: "**It's who you pay, not what you pay them that makes the difference.**"

The bottom line message of The Bus Riders is that to be an effective CEO / President of an organization, you must have the concentration of a bus driver to keep your eyes on the road ahead of the bus (aka managing the long-term plans). You can't have the need, physically or psychologically, to be constantly checking on what the other people in the bus are doing. Getting to the point of not having the need creates three important questions:

- How do you know who the right people are?
- How do you know where to seat them?
- How do you drive the bus while people are working without your direct supervision?

I'm not going to get into details (I've published other articles to assist with those), but here are some highlights to begin the thinking processes.

### The Riders Required

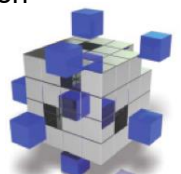
Who you need now will be different from who you need in the future. Some roles (e.g. payables clerk) will have little change while other roles (e.g. CIO, COO, CFO, VP-Sales / Marketing, VP-Human Resources, etc.) will require skills that will need to be able to be adaptive to change. Therefore you'll need both a tactical and strategic human resources plan that includes items such as continuous skill set improvement and allowance for structural reorganization.

To make sure your organization doesn't degrade in human abilities, you will want to implement HRDRP (Human Resource Disaster Recovery Plans) for the critical structural components of your riders plan.

### Seating the Riders

The first step to successfully seating the bus riders in the right place is to have a proper description of the roles required for both the current (tactical) and long-term (strategic) organizational structure. Where organizations fail in this task is in thinking that a person will only be a "payables clerk" when the person in that role may also be involved in cost accounting, supplier evaluation and ERP selection teams. This indicates that there is a need to have an in-depth description of the knowledge capital required and evaluation of social impact elements of each role in the organization. Where there is more than one person in a role (e.g. several payables clerks), the need to first evaluate what you have currently and the potential of the current cohort occurs before determining who the next bus rider will be.

The seating plan also provides the organization with the means by which to evaluate and successfully move a rider to a better position on the bus...or out the back door when required.



## ***Managing By Exception***

Many leaders have been taught to Manage By Walking Around (MBWA) which, if done properly, is not a bad method of taking the pulse of the organization. However, balancing MBWA's good points versus the perception of employees that 'the boss is looking over my shoulder' or 'the boss doesn't trust me' and the amount of time and cost required to properly MBWA and questions arise in terms of value versus potential downside. Then there's the organization that has multiple locations, countries, cultures, risk factors, etc.

Managing By Exception (MBE) is a far more effective method of ensuring that the CEO can be the bus driver that does not steer the bus into a bus shelter, fire hydrant or other obstacle such as pedestrian. What MBE requires is having the *right people* in the *right seats* and *access to fast, reliable information that alerts the CEO* to issues that require immediate attention or corrective action. Immediate action items are those where there's some form of risk to the organization that has not been dealt with effectively by others in the organization. Corrective action items would include issues such as a significant: downturn in an Employee Value Index; change to the performance of a sector of the business; or, resignation of a direct report to the CEO.

You may want to read my article "The Spider and the CEO" which was posted on LinkedIn on September 27, 2017.

## ***Components of Effective Bus Management***

A CEO that is going to be effective in maintaining focus on the road ahead of the bus has a few key needs:

- An exceptional direct report team that includes the VP, Human Resources (not going through someone else).
- A clearly defined tactical plan with tactical action triggers identified.
- A clearly defined strategic plan with an honest SWOT assessment and strategic action triggers defined.
- A plan for getting the organization from the tactical "as is" status to the strategic "to be" that is expected. This would include an organizational change management strategy as roles, technology and structure change.
- A clear understanding of the process conditions and data exceptions that create business risk or have the potential to require a change to the strategic plan.
- Information technology that monitors business and operational processes and corporate data. The information technology must have the ability to recognize data exceptions and when processes are not being executed in a timely manner. Then that technology must be able to escalate that information to the appropriate levels of management until such time as action is taken.

## ***Parting Thoughts***

- Einstein once said that one cannot solve the current problems, which were created by the current pattern of thought, by using the current pattern of thought.
- "Knowledge of the self is the mother of all knowledge. So it is incumbent on me to know myself, to know it completely, to know it's very atoms" - Khalil Gibran

