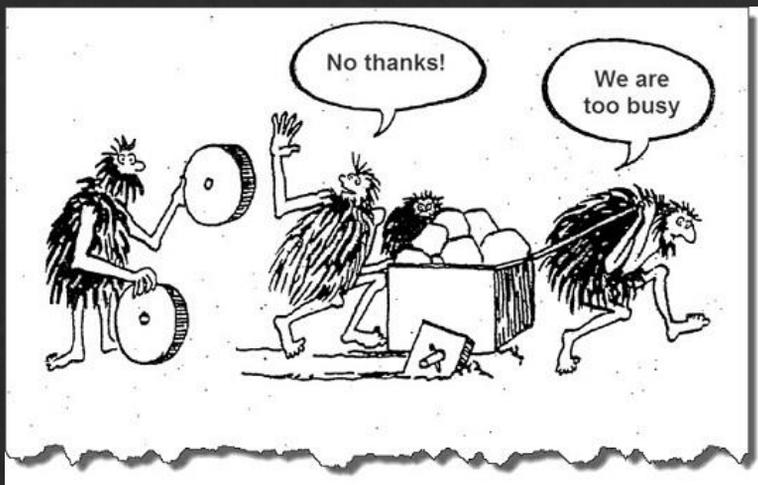


## Missing in Action – How *doing* can be less than productive

By Steve Bernard

Having spoken to a host of our clients over the summer I'm noticing a worrying trend – people are seemingly so busy *doing* that they are *missing* some really important gaps and opportunities.

We know our fair share of pretty active people; ambitious by nature, pragmatic and experienced, the kind of people you'd want in your camp to make things happen. Most if not all of the organisations they work for, are clearly out of the trough of their business cycle.



There is a seemingly frenetic activity bubble in the air right now. At least 50% are dealing the very real consequences of restructuring or rationalising their workforce. In most cases there are simply fewer managers and change agents to make things happen. While we've all had to deal with having less resource than is ideal, we think it is also a symptom of something less productive – a lack of prioritisation.

So what's happening? The catalyst in many cases is that the Board Room dictate, screaming "*Just make it happen!*" So what's the problem with that?

Many of these businesses are large and well established entities with sophisticated systems and infrastructure in place. In the worst cases, little or no conversation is afforded to the consequences of extreme timescales or cutting across existing lines. This can indicate an underlying cultural norm that is delivery at any cost - "Well if they complain or can't cut it, clearly they weren't up to it in the first place." Is this a simple 'win – win' for the demanding Executive? Maybe, but at what cost?

I personally know some pretty amazing leaders; experienced Senior Managers who are in danger of being turned into low level implementation managers punching way below their intellectual and creative weight. When they lose their ability to freely prioritise for themselves, they lose some of their value, they are less likely to collaborate and communicate effectively. A CEO demanding more women managers or COO wanting to double revenue with 10% less people are not uncommon today. The danger is that unless properly discussed, snap decisions or demands become the sole focus.

A risky unintended consequence is that when talented managers are used in this way, "*just implement – don't think!*", it changes the very fabric of the company culture. If they are too busy doing, they may withdraw their creativity or be less likely to challenge when they see real risks or a better way. Good organisations know when it's acceptable to cut across reporting lines and just make things happen fast. It's the great ones who know when not to do this; they understand what can be undermined and what's really at stake longer term.