



Effort Is Great-But Results Are What REALLY Matter.

Description

My writings are based on experiences, either my own or those I hear about from others. Today I'd like to write about that ability one achieves to be able to not confuse effort with results. Yes, I admire effort. Yes, effort often leads to results. Effort can be a very good thing. However, it is possible to put forth a lot of effort and still fall short on the desired outcome. This does not mean to beat oneself up when the outcome falls short of the goal. It does mean working on the ability to identify the goal, to know the needed steps to achieve the goal, and to be self-aware if one falls short on that responsibility.

For some people, this way of thinking comes naturally. For me, it has been a process. My wake-up call came when my supervisor called me in for an update on a project I was leading. I knew we were falling short of the goal, but I was working so hard. I was prepared with a list of all the actions being taken. I wove in the number of hours I was working. Then I waited for the compliment on how hard I was working. Here is the supervisor's response (it may not have been said this directly; however, this is what I heard): "Effort and results are two different things."

Being overly sensitive, I thought, *How can he say that? We are a faith-based, not-for-profit organization. Where is his empathy, love, compassion?* Yet the reality is that while effort is needed, whether or not one succeeds *does* often come down to goals and results.

I can spend months writing a book. Is the goal to write a book? Is it to get a book published? No, for me the goal is to have people read the book. I write books to be helpful to the readers. I want them to feel better as they read the book and take some ideas to implement that will help them achieve their goals. So, the result I am seeking is books that are read.

I own or co-own some businesses and am founder of a not-for-profit. Also, I'm grateful to be able to interact with many people in leadership positions in business and in the community. When working with leaders, I attempt to help them learn what I learned about not confusing effort with outcomes.

Here is an example: I received an email from a customer who was upset that he had not heard from someone on an issue. When the person mentioned by the customer was asked about the situation, they replied that person was wrong; they did follow up. They had called and left messages and thus felt they had done their job. This person was confusing effort with results.

The way to handle a situation like this is to look for other channels of communication until the customer is reached. Today, people may not pull their voicemail messages; some landlines will not even accept them. It could be the customer gets many messages and this one was missed. Or, if we send an email and don't get a response, it is possible that the email went into the spam folder and was never opened. We just need to remind ourselves that the goal is to connect with the customer, not to leave a message or send an email.

Another example is social media. I hear people sharing how many items they posted. The question is this: Is the goal to post, or to achieve some results based on the posting? My wife owns some shops that sell coffee, tea, books, candy, olive oil, etc. Social media is used in the marketing. What is the goal? It is to gain shoppers. I participate in professional baseball. We have games on TV and radio, and we use social media extensively. The ultimate goals are to have people purchase merchandise, come to a game, and support the advertisers.

Maybe you have a digital marketing person who creates amazing videos. However, if those videos don't convert to views, which in turn convert to business transactions, the person may be confusing activity with progress. It's important to make sure they know what the real end game is. It's not about the effort put into the videos; it's about whether those videos are getting results.

Here are some recommendations on helping people more clearly understand desired outcomes:

1. Before you put in the effort, truly know the outcome you are looking for. If this is a large goal, identify the sub-goals needed to achieve the ultimate outcome. Step one is providing clarity. Be sure the person fully understands that they will be evaluated not on the effort expended but on achieving the set goal. (It can take time for some people to adjust to this reality.)
2. Educate the leaders that leaving a message, sending an email, or posting on social media are steps to achieve the goal. They are not the outcome.
3. When a project is delegated, make it clear that people must own the handover. It is not sufficient to say, "I handed the project over to so-and-so." Rather, one needs to follow the handover until the outcome is achieved.
4. Help people see how this system reduces work in the long run. The method of clarifying outcomes and asking the question, *How will this action help achieve the outcome?* will lead to separating "nice-to-have" actions from "must-have" actions. This does not mean those "nice-to-have" actions are not done; it means one must then accept that they added to their workload. (Of course, there are some items that are still done, for while they cannot be specifically connected to the outcome, our feeling is that they make a difference. All action does not need to lead to measurable results to be worthwhile and to advance the organization's overall mission.)

Coming to understand the above is part of the maturation process of a person and an organization. While I did not like hearing that effort is no excuse for lack of results, it was a defining moment in my own development.

When people internalize this truth, they often experience a leap in their personal and professional growth. It feels good to realize you do have the skills, the creativity, and the work ethic to keep going until goals are met and outcomes are where they need to be. And helping others get to this place is one of the most rewarding parts of being a leader.

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