



## Urgent: Is Your Team Where it Needs to Be?

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**E**arlier this year, McDonald's announced one of the worst years in it's recent history.

During the results conference call the CEO, as reported by the *Economist*, said the company faced "meaningful headwinds" and was "acting with a sense of urgency."

In the last quarter of 2014 operating profit had fallen 20% compared with the same quarter in the previous year. And despite the market increasing by 50% since 2012, McDonald's shares were actually worth less than they were in early 2012.

Five days later the CEO resigned and they have been in a transformation mode ever since.

# CHANGE MANAGEMENT:

As I consult and support organizational change efforts for my clients, leaders often ask:

- What does urgency look like?
- What is the right amount of urgency?
- How do we achieve the appropriate level of urgency to enable our strategic goals and not get caught off guard?

## WHY URGENCY?

It's important to remember:

*Urgency is an earnest and persistent mindset that seeks focused and timely action.*

Organizations that do not have the right level of urgency risk missing opportunities for growth and can become vulnerable to detrimental disruptions from external threats.

Like McDonald's, your team might be rebuilding a deep sense of urgency. Or perhaps you are comfortable with the current level of urgency and want to prevent it from slipping.

Regardless of your circumstances, it is critical to clearly define the right level of urgency in your organization, so that everyone on your team can consistently move with the appropriate amount of speed and intensity.

### **Is Your Team Where it Needs to Be?**

# **3 LEVELS OF URGENCY**

The following are three levels of urgency. Each has a place and a purpose.

The goal is to match the level of urgency to the scope and impact of the organization's goals and need for change.

Think of which level your team is currently performing at and where it needs to be. Use these levels to communicate the desired urgency to your team.

### **Level One: Working Like a Charm**

# **URGENCY LEVEL ONE:**

This level is ideal for successful companies whose current urgency level delivers what the customers need.

This level is characterized when the information flow and group discussions are appropriate for the needed speed of decision-making and rate of implementation.

Leaders are clear about their goals and have experience in following through on them.

Hand offs between groups are established and working reasonably well.

When there are obstacles and challenges, timely solutions are identified to meet the work demands.

The caution with this level is that people can become *too* comfortable and may slowly ease up on the gas decreasing organizational growth and momentum.

It is the natural disposition for most people to find the least path of resistance, and success can exaggerate this feeling.

People may start resisting new ideas because the current ones are working well enough.

However, *Urgency Level One* always expects and relishes a certain amount of improvement—it expects it.

Without consistent improvement as the norm and a frequent reflection on how process is achieving desired results, leaders can fall off the urgency spectrum completely.

This lack of urgency is what can lead to level two.

### **Level Two: Measure Once, Cut Once**



## **URGENCY LEVEL TWO:**

This level is where most organizations aspire to be as they tackle large organizational changes.

This level focuses on being proactive and having a bias for action over unproductive debate and meetings. There is a willingness and a high tolerance to take educated risks.

The old adage of measure twice and cut once is changed to measure once and then act! It is still important to plan and to discuss, but moving quickly is prized.

Level two is characterized by openness to accept failure as learning and risk as opportunity. It is enabled by clear planning and unified goals and succeeds through competent, engaged people who care greatly about making a difference.

In *Urgency Level Two*, leaders lead by using the phrase -

***“I would rather you ask for forgiveness if something isn’t going well than always ask for permission before taking action or making decisions.”***

Some may look at this level of urgency and call it frantic or out of control. Often, those people have become too comfortable in level one and are struggling to understand and adapt to this new level. To help these folks, align the leadership conversations with goals.

In other words, match the walk with the talk through the correct incentives, development, and follow up.

For example, if innovation is truly the strategic direction, then leaders should not first ask about cost and resist the discussion of bold ideas.

Without a healthy respect for creativity, newness, and clear accountability, too often level two can fall into level three.

## Level Three: The Ship is on Fire!

# URGENCY LEVEL THREE:

This level is ideal for addressing true crises.

When the plane is going down, when your largest account files suit, when a new competing technology wipes out your business plan, this is the level that requires rapid and immediate action.

The actions are typically short-term oriented such as downsizing jobs, reworking an entire product line overnight, or demanding quality improvements by the end of the week.

Normal course of business is put aside to ensure the survival of the organization. This approach should be used sparingly.

While this can help improve the chances of survival, there is usually deep collateral damage that can introduce new challenges in the long-term.

The caution is also to not be too quick to call something a crisis and claim this level of urgency, when it is not the case.

Sometimes a leader may describe a level two situation with level three words, in hopes that it will inspire people to be at least at the second level. However, such attempts can produce greater confusion later on.

Don't cry wolf and use this level of urgency as the last resort.

# The Urgency Chart

## The 3 Levels of Urgency: Is Your Team Ready?

	URGENCY LEVEL 1	URGENCY LEVEL 2	URGENCY LEVEL 3
	<i>"Works Like A Charm"</i>	<i>"Measure Once, Cut Once"</i>	<i>"The Ship is on Fire."</i>
Situation	Speed matches results	New intensity/focus needed	Addressing a true crisis
Purpose	Executing a clear plan	Achieving a greater vision	Creating rapid action
Focus	Long-term	Short-term to create a new long-term	Survival mode
Description	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- When information flows and meetings match the needed speed of decision making</li> <li>- Experienced leaders are clear about goals - Obstacles can be worked through quickly</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- When action is prized over debate</li> <li>- When there's a willingness to take risks</li> <li>- When there's openness to new ideas</li> <li>- Clear vision for the future - A willingness to define goals along the way</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Everything must be placed on hold until the bleeding is stopped</li> <li>- All hands on deck</li> <li>- Relationships and engagement are not a priority</li> </ul>
Caution	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- When you find you're becoming too comfortable</li> <li>- When you start resisting new ideas</li> <li>- When your organization is no longer self correct and renew</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- When you feel like the speed of change is out of control</li> <li>- Avoid frantic and sporadic decision making</li> <li>- Ground your decision making in a clear vision of the future</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Use this level sparingly</li> <li>- There can be collateral damage if this level is used too frequently or used for too long</li> <li>- Be careful how you use this, don't deem things urgent or a crisis unless they really are.</li> </ul>