

FLAWLESS EXECUTION

**Use the Techniques and Systems of America's
Fighter Pilots to Perform at Your Peak and
Win the Battles of the Business World**

JAMES MURPHY

JAMES MURPHY is founder and CEO of Afterburner, Inc., a seminar and business consulting firm. Mr. Murphy, a graduate of the University of Kentucky, has served as chief of training for the Georgia Air National Guard and as a combat flight leader with the US Air Force. He has logged more than 4,400 hours of flight time in F-15s and other high performance aircraft. Mr. Murphy also has a successful career in imaging equipment sales. Afterburner has been engaged by more than 100 of the Fortune 500 corporations and to date has trained in excess of 1,500,000 businessmen and women. Mr. Murphy is also the author of *Business is Combat*.

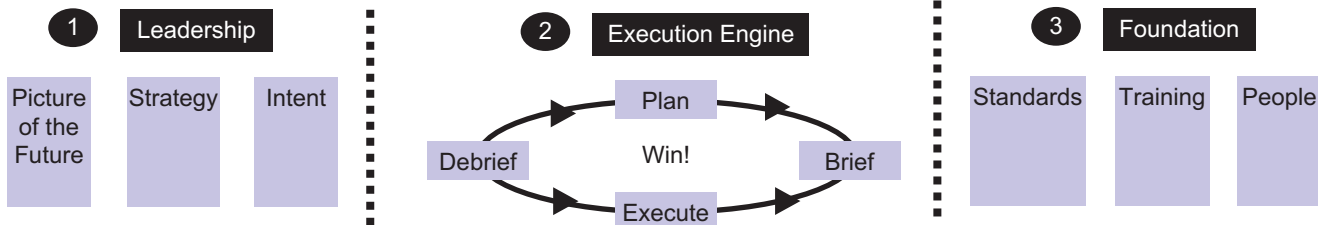
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MAIN IDEA

Irrespective of whether or not you believe military strategies apply in business, there is one thing military organizations do well which general business practice has not yet picked up on. Military organizations carry out extensive briefings before attempting to act and then have systematic debriefs afterwards to figure out what went well and what did not for next time. In this way, the people at the frontlines pass on practical information which can be used to enable subsequent teams attempting the same task to do them better, and ultimately flawlessly. Briefing and debriefing are areas many businesses are weak at and this is often the reason know-how is lost when people leave the organization.

Flawless execution is all about generating predictable results time and again. It requires three elements to be in place:



“Flawless execution was developed in one of the most unforgiving laboratories in the world – the military jet fighter. In the aftermath of accidents, mistakes, and miscalculations that, since the 1940s, have cost uncountable aircrews their lives, Flawless Execution has become the theme in our book of lessons learned. Born of necessity; due to the international conflicts that put our men (and now our women) into harm’s way, the United States military long ago came to grips with the need to train people how to execute flawlessly. Nowhere was it accomplished with more fervor, with more thought or study, or with a more fanatical dedication to institutionalizing the results than in the training of America’s fighter pilots. Flawless Execution is a trainable, learnable repeatable process – bred in military aviation – that improves execution.”

– James Murphy

Element #1 – Leadership Pages 2 - 3

To execute flawlessly at an individual level is very worthwhile but to do so consistently at an organizational level requires sound ongoing leadership. You need to have leaders in place who will consistently specify three key parameters:

1. Picture of the Future – The goals your organization should achieve.
2. Strategy – The precise strategy that can best be used to achieve those goals.
3. Intent – The reasoning and rationale behind your preferred strategy.

Overall, the more open and inclusive the planning process is, the better the people at the frontlines will be able to execute in their area and the better they will be able to adapt the plan when unexpected contingencies arise in the marketplace.

Element #2 – Execution Engine Pages 4 - 6

More than anything else, the execution engine is designed to accelerate the learning and hands-on experience of your team so they can execute flawlessly in the future. The execution engine has four steps:

1. Plan – Take the strategy and develop the tactics which will accomplish the desired effect.
2. Brief – Bring everyone involved up to speed so they know what is expected of them.
3. Execute – Get out and use the tools provided.
4. Debrief – Look at what went right and what went wrong so others can benefit the next time around.

Notably, the execution engine centers around winning. The engine cycles again and again. As soon as one cycle is completed, the entire team then moves smoothly onto the next cycle. You start planning how to win again using the benefit of all the experience garnered thus far. These same lessons are also transferred to others in your organization so they can avoid the mistakes you made along the way. The execution engine keeps cycling as you layer one achievement over another. This is the heart of flawless execution. In the aggregate, you then start outperforming your competition.

Element #3 – Foundation Pages 7 - 8

No execution plan is ever perfect when it is first conceived. When an execution plan breaks down or has to be adapted to changing market conditions on the fly, you have to rely on the three basic elements which form the foundation of flawless execution:

1. Standards – Your implicit and explicit organizational expectations of what is acceptable and what’s not.
2. Training – Which is ongoing and consistent so as to meet the demands of a fast-changing world.
3. People – Getting the right people involved in the organization in the first place.

In effect, your foundation is your ultimate contingency plan. If your execution engine fails completely, you can count on your foundation elements to keep your organization working until the problems are fixed.

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