

How to Engage Your Entire Organization in Driving Business Results

By Kevin Lawrence and David J. Greer

Many companies launch internal campaigns to boost morale or drive change within an organization. The reality of these is that they're often just corporate fluff and puff and really don't create an impact. Here's an example of a leadership team who has created notable change, not only in the performance of the company, but in the level of service delivered to clients. An incredible theme aligned the entire company creating marked and measurable performance over a period of 90 days.

Victorian Epicure Inc.



Vancouver Island, on Canada's West Coast, is home to Victorian Epicure Inc. which was founded in Victoria, BC in 1991, by Sylvie Rochette. Sylvie first sold her small selection of home spice blends from the back of her station wagon at community fairs and other events. Her vision was to make it easy for busy mothers to create healthful and delicious meals for their families.

From those humble roots, Victorian Epicure has expanded to an office and manufacturing facility situated on 80 acres of agricultural reserve land, which includes 7 acres of vineyard on the Saanich Peninsula, just north of Victoria. Sylvie's original vision of helping busy mothers continues today, but the company now manufactures and markets over 300 high quality spice blends and gourmet food products, accompanied by a line of professional quality cookware and a Home and Body Care line.

In 1996, Epicure Selections® (www.epicureselections.com) was created as a catalogue division of the company in response to the high demand for the products. More than 6000 Independent Sales Consultants represent Epicure Selections® in communities across Canada, providing personalized service to sell Epicure's products. Amelia Warren is the Vice President of Epicure Selections®.

Identifying the Challenge

In the fall of 2007, the senior executive team at Epicure met to plan their strategy for the fourth quarter, which included Christmas, the busiest time of year for Epicure. In the meeting, it became clear that the biggest challenge (and opportunity to improve) they faced was the time it took to process each order during the Christmas rush period. This "in-and-out" time needed to be dramatically shortened: in previous years, it was taking up to ten days from the time an order was received at the Home Office facility until it was out the door for delivery. Depending on where the order was going in Canada, the shipping time could be an additional three to seven days. In the worst case, a customer would have to wait up to seventeen business days for their order.

Near Christmas, customers wanted to ensure their orders arrived before December 24th. Because customers were uncertain about processing and shipping times, they would stop ordering at the beginning of December to ensure timely delivery. For Epicure, this meant the potential loss of two weeks of sales at the busiest and most lucrative time of the year.

During the planning session for the fourth quarter of 2007 there was much discussion around order processing times. In the end, the leadership team decided that they needed to get orders out the door in under three days. While the focus was on speed of delivery, the leadership team knew that customers also had the expectation of accurate orders. As a countermeasure to speed, they decided that the absolute minimum quality threshold would be 97% accuracy of orders (proper items selected, sealed and labeled properly, and packaged so that there would be no breakage during shipping).

Choosing a Theme

The leadership team brainstormed on how to communicate the order processing goal of three days to the company. They wanted to engage each and every employee in making sure that the entire company would deliver the commitment to Epicure customers.

In order to ensure success in achieving the goal, they used a process they have used a number of times before, which is called a quarterly theme. As explained in the book *Mastering the Rockefeller Habits* by Verne Harnish, quarterly themes are designed to engage all employees of a company in achieving the number one goal for the company in that quarter. In the end, the theme they chose was so simple that everyone, customers and employees, could grasp it at once:

"In & Out in 72"

Executing "In & Out in 72"

Much thought was given to aligning the entire company around the new goal.. Tangible ways were found to measure whether they were meeting the order processing in 72 hour goal. A bonus scheme was created to incent employees to achieve the quarterly theme. Epicure built a system that provided daily feedback to all employees on how they were doing. With the help of the art department, the leadership team created posters that set expectations for employees and showed the bonus levels while communicating the absolute minimum goal of 93% of orders processed in 72 hours with a minimum of 97% accuracy.

At Epicure, the employees are called the "Home Team." At the same time that the Epicure leadership team was selling "In & Out in 72" to the Home Team, they made a bold move. They ran a six week marketing campaign to all their external customers promising them "In & Out in 72." Employees were featured in advertisements promising "We will deliver in 72 hours, period." Amelia Warren, Vice President, said "(The ad campaign) was effective in that once we made our commitment public to our customers it also was engaging and reinforcing the importance to our Home Team, the importance of their jobs to the businesses and livelihoods of our customers."

Running Hard to Christmas

The campaign was launched with tremendous enthusiasm and excitement. Employees responded positively to the bonus scheme. Everyone was held accountable. Teams met in daily huddles and reviewed the numbers. The numbers were published daily, both yesterday's orders and accuracy, but also the cumulative totals on whiteboards around the Home Office facility. There was no hiding from the results. Everyone knew where they were at. People did stumble, but there was one goal, one focus, and everyone had to work together better than they had ever done before.

Amelia says "I think it challenged everyone to look at, where are the gaps here? Where are we stuck? What's the relationship between what I'm doing over here to what you're doing there, and how does that all contribute to meeting or not meeting that In & Out in 72 hours?"

There were other changes that helped them drive to their goal:

- Management made it crystal clear that it was 72 hours from order receipt until shipment out the door. If the order arrived Friday at 11:59 pm the shipment was out by Monday at 11:59 pm.
- They moved to a seven day schedule.
- The pick list was tweaked to correct some confusing items. For example, they changed "Greek Oregano" to say "Oregano-Greek" as sometimes the "Greek Seasoning" was being picked by mistake.



David J. Greer

Exceeding Expectations

The "In & Out in 72" campaign was a phenomenal success. There were 28,543 orders shipped during the campaign with an amazing 99.67% In & Out in 72 Hours. The average time to process an order and have it ready for shipment was less than 27.5 hours (just over a day) -- which is two and a half times faster than their In & Out in 72 goal. They did all of this while maintaining an outstanding 97% accuracy for all orders.

"In & Out in 72" is the new expectation by the leadership team, the Home Team and for Epicure's customers. There is a complete expectation inside and outside Epicure that orders will be processed and shipped within 72 hours. The accuracy rate has improved, rising from 97% to almost 99%. Not only did they improve the performance of the company, all of the employees pulled together and got to share in the satisfaction of being a winning team.



Lessons Learned

We discussed the lessons learned from this campaign with Amelia. She told us the following:

1. There has to be one person driving the whole process.
2. Clear measurable goals make the focus clear to the leadership team and give them a sense of what is happening with the rest of the Home Team.
3. Employees like having numbers to aim for. Providing daily feedback means that they know immediately where they are succeeding or failing. If you don't know what you're aiming for, you don't know whether you are succeeding or not.
4. Communicate, communicate, and then communicate some more. If you're not going to meet your goals, if there's issues about meeting the goals, or if things change, communicate that before the end of the quarter clearly and authentically.
5. Having measurable goals helps everyone pull together and lets individuals know the role they are playing in the lives of Epicure's consultants. When Management talks about meeting "In & Out in 72", they can link it to feedback from a consultant in Nova Scotia who writes and says "Thank you so much. I was so excited to get my order."
6. Keep it simple. You want the minimum possible administrative burden. The "In & Out in 72" campaign had two simple goals:
 - a. At least 93% of orders out in 72 hours.
 - b. At least 97% accuracy of orders.

7. The incentives don't have to be huge. It's more about the energy and excitement that the theme generates and less about what the actual reward is.

Wrapping Up

Quarterly themes can be a powerful way to drive business results. A theme is an engaging way to get all employees in an organization to pull together to deliver on a tangible goal that makes a real difference to the business. Themes work best when they are backed up by simple daily measurable results that every employee can understand. As with this example with Epicure, a quarterly theme is a powerful way to improve the performance in an organization while at the same time engaging the entire team in accomplishing something they can take pride in. Epicure performed two and a half times better than their unbelievable goal of 72 hours, while delivering 97% accuracy on all orders. To learn more about using themes and other strategic tools in improving your company's performance, contact either Kevin Lawrence or David Greer.

About David J. Greer

With a professional background in software engineering, David Greer has many business successes to his credit. He built up and ran a highly profitable multi-million dollar software company with a global industry presence and Fortune 500 customers. He has also been active in the Vancouver, Canada angel investment community, and instrumental in launching and growing several emerging companies.

David provides tailored, senior-level support to companies needing to accelerate areas of their operation that have plateaued, or to capitalize on high-potential, but as yet untapped, product or market opportunities. His key areas of focus are Sales and Revenue Generation, New Business Development, Product Performance, and Industry Relationship Management.

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About Kevin Lawrence

Kevin Lawrence is a business coach, speaker and agent of change, who is driven by a relentless passion for helping entrepreneurs and business leaders get what they really want, in business and life. He deeply believes that entrepreneurs can have tremendous professional success along with an enriching, adventurous and fulfilling lifestyle, taking a 'have your cake and eat it too' mentality to an entirely new level.

With more than a decade of hands on experience as a business coach to hundreds of entrepreneurs and business leaders across Canada and the United States and the Middle East, Kevin is an expert at helping clients overcome major obstacles, deal with tough decisions and capitalize on new opportunities to achieve breakthrough results. His strategies, style and savvy approach have helped his clients increase revenue, profitability and productivity; build higher caliber teams; attract ideal (and eliminate headache) clients; and, reduce stress levels and hours worked so that they are freed up to live their personal version of outrageous quality of life.

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