



Turning Ideas Into Success

Apply these maxims to all of your programs

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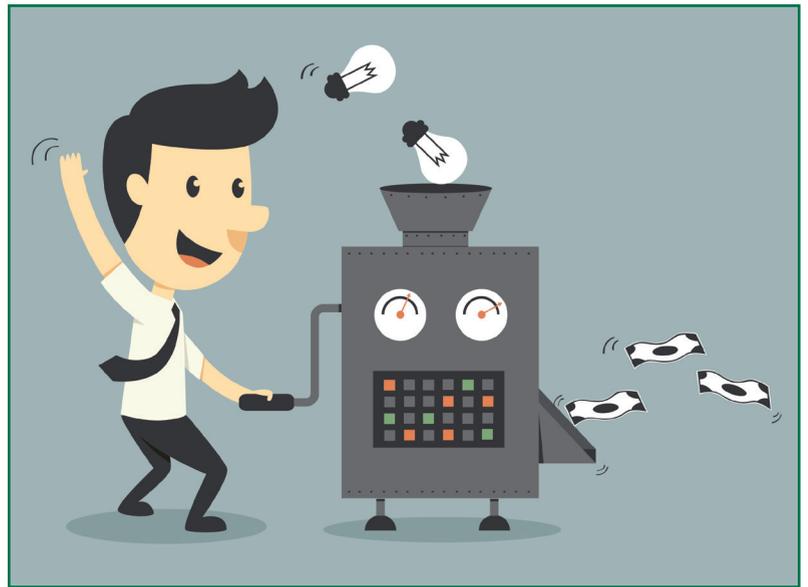
As we enter a new year, many people will take time to reflect on their performance over the last year. Some will look back with the comfort of knowing they achieved many of their goals. Others will be left asking: “What happened? We had some great ideas and plans that, for one reason or another, did not come to fruition. Why not?”

The answer often lies in the execution (or lack thereof) of the plans we felt so strongly about. One of the key tools provided in the Hubbard Management System is referred to as “programs.” By definition, a “program” is a series of steps in sequence that carry out a plan. Ideally, a program is thought through and written out. It should identify the steps that need to be carried out, along with exactly who is responsible for each step and when each is to be completed. When a plan is broken down into detail like this, it has a much better chance of being executed.

However, creating a written program does not, in and of itself, ensure success. There have been many good ideas that were turned into programs (whether formally written out or not) that failed to bring about the expected results. The reason for some of these is addressed in a policy letter in the Hubbard Management System titled “Programming.” This policy outlines key maxims (defined as generally observable truths) that apply to all programs. For the balance of the article, I will outline some of these maxims and give details as to why not following them can lead to trouble.

■ **Maxim One: An idea, no matter if it is badly executed or not, is better than no idea at all.** This is pretty straightforward, but very important. An example of this is seen in many dealerships where the sales team is struggling. Upon inspection, I often find no real plan for sales. Reps are simply hired, given a little training and turned loose to bring in business. There are no formal activity expectations, few (if any) one-on-one sales meetings and little daily sales management; yet, the owner wonders why sales just do not pick up. If you want success, you need a well-thought-out plan.

■ **Maxim Two: To be effective, a program must be executed.** It does not seem that this should even need to be mentioned, but you would be surprised how many people have great ideas and never act on them. Thinking or talking about a plan is not execution. Challenge yourself and your team to use the concept of programs to ensure plans are executed.



■ **Maxim Three: A program put into action requires guidance.** I have seen many dealerships make this mistake. You have a great idea: “We are going to launch a new marketing program or offer a new service like managed IT.” In order for any program to get traction and success, it must have guidance. Simply telling your sales manager to get a marketing program in place will not make it happen. As the owner or senior executive of the business, you need to provide some guidance to make sure that those assigned to carry out the program are capable of doing so and are making progress.

■ **Maxim Four: A program running without guidance will fail and is better left undone.** This may seem a little harsh, but it is absolutely true. If you or someone else on your team does not have time to guide a program, do not expect it to work. It will fail. This is not a maybe, it is a definite. Simply telling someone to go get the program done is not the same as guiding it. This one maxim alone could save you a tremendous amount of wasted time and heartache. Be honest with yourself and decide if you have the time and desire to guide this program. If the answer is “no,” put it on the back burner until the answer can be “yes.”

■ **Maxim Five: Any program requires some finance.** When launching a new plan, it is common to forget to work out the finance end of it, or to underestimate what will be needed. There is typically a lot of excitement about the potential income

you will be bringing in. If you will be launching a new service like managed IT, there will be expenses for things needed — like additional people (sales and service), training, marketing/marketing materials, software, hardware and more. It is critical to work out what will be needed and make sure you have the ability to quickly bring in the money required to cover these costs. As you will see in a later maxim, you cannot afford to allow other parts of the company to support a new program.

■ **Maxim Six: A program requires attention from someone.** This sounds a lot like Maxim Three, but it is different. This maxim refers to the need to have someone actually working on the plan and moving it forward. I have seen this in action a number of times when dealerships are trying to launch a new website. They sign on with a Web developer and find that, six months later, the project is not complete. This usually boils down to the fact that it did not get the attention needed to put the data together. The dealership owner went into the website update under the false impression that the developer would be able to handle everything when, in fact, a lot of attention is required to feed the developer the information he (or she) needed to complete the site.

■ **Maxim Seven: The best program is the one that will reach the greatest number of dynamics and will do the greatest good on the greatest number of dynamics.** In a nutshell, this means that the best program will be in the best interest of as many people as possible — the dealership, the sales team, the service team, the customer, your vendors, the community, etc. It is important to keep this in mind as you will, from time to time, be approached by employees, vendors or customers and asked to put a plan in place that favors one of these groups and possibly hinders others. For example, a vendor may want you to take on a new product that is not the strongest. This may benefit the sales team and the vendor with sales, but will not benefit customers or the service department that has to support them. If this is out of balance, it will inevitably do harm to the business as a whole.

■ **Maxim Eight: Programs must support themselves financially.** This goes hand-in-hand with understanding that every program requires finance. A program must be able to support itself. I have seen too many situations where a dealership is supporting a losing program with the success it is having elsewhere. Managed print services (MPS) has been a great example of this. There are dealerships out there that are losing their shirts in MPS due to poor pricing models, lack of sales skills and a host of other reasons. Yet, they are surviving because their traditional business models are supporting their MPS losses. Proper application of this maxim would prevent

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this. The MPS program would need to be profitable in and of itself.

■ **Maxim Nine: Programs must accumulate interest and bring in other assistance by virtue of the program interest alone or they will never grow.** If your employees and/or customers do not get excited about a program, do not expect it to succeed. If you have to drag people along, it becomes too much work and eventually trails off. I have seen this with sales activity

programs. The dealership launches a program to drive sales activity with the idea that it will lead to additional sales. Out of the gate it will take some work, but when members of the sales team start to see positive results, they will get behind it. If they do not see results, the program turns into a grind and everyone dreads it. Not only does it not lead to additional sales, but worse — it brings down morale.

■ **Maxim 10: A program is a bad program if it detracts from programs that are already proving successful or distracts staff from other successful programs.** Many dealerships have burned themselves by chasing an exciting new idea at the expense of their bread and butter. As mentioned earlier, too many dealerships have struggled with MPS and at the same time, have seen their standard sales drop off. This maxim points to the reason why sales and service specialists have been successful. If you are going to launch a new service or product offering, sales specialists can allow you to fully engage in the new offering without losing momentum on current sales. Adding the new offering to your current team's portfolio will dilute its efforts. In these cases, one plus one does not equal two; it more closely equals one and a half.

I am sure that while reading the maxims listed, they likely brought to mind times where you have violated them and did not get the desired results. Thinking of the lost opportunities is easy. I would challenge you to also look at the plans and programs that have been successful. I am willing to bet that they covered most, if not all, of the maxims above. To go back to the initial statement: Turning your ideas into success almost always depends on following these maxims. So the next time you want to launch a new plan, read through them again and set yourself up for success. ■

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