



Compass Bearing and the Absolute

by Cub Marion

Compass Bearing – defined as the angle between our forward direction, and a line towards the object in question. What is important in this definition are the words “direction” and “object”. If you are hiking in the Alaskan frontier land navigating with a compass, the bearing (direction) is very effective in finding your destination (object), and avoiding an unfortunate situation of wandering off course and getting lost. In a business environment, Compass Bearing also has significance, as it represents where the business is going, also providing awareness if the organization is on or off course.

Defining an organization’s Compass Bearing needs to be very thoughtful as there are different ways to approach this. One approach is to have it holistically represent a company’s vision and mission. A company’s vision represents the future, typically providing insight into values and purpose, and serves as an inspiration; particularly to employees. The vision is focused on “where”, and the mission focuses on “how”. The mission statement is clear and concise, defining the strategy to support the vision. It answers what the organization does, how it does it, and for whom.

Another approach to the Compass Bearing is a subset to the vision and mission. The company has a well-defined and recognized vision and mission, and a subset of the organization would like to provide even further definition to direction. In this case, the Compass Bearing looks to the future, so it is a visionary statement. This more focused visionary definition must fully support the company’s overall vision. This can be particularly effective to generate organizational alignment, thus minimizing wasted motion, and maximizing a focus of effort. The next step of this technique is the subset mission statement. This too must be in complete alignment with the company mission, and is termed the Absolute. The Absolute is the commitment that must be met each day, without compromise. It truly represents the cornerstone of what the organization does.

The Absolute must always be maintained; not meeting it will put the organization off course from the Compass Bearing. Maintaining the Absolute is an “All In” effort every day, and is translatable to any employee, regardless of their specific job responsibilities.

A critical element to satisfying the Compass Bearing is to further define specific actions that will be taken to ensure the organization remains on course to achieve the future state. These actions, or Strategic Priorities, represent the critical few strategic actions the organization will take, and completely commit itself to.

By executing the Strategic Priorities with laser focus, wasted motion will be eliminated, and course will be maintained. Just writing this however, does not ensure it will be executed well. For this reason, a methodical and disciplined approach is required to ensure progress is measured and monitored, and response to challenges or unforeseen obstacles is decisive. Additionally, clear lines of responsibility and

accountability are required. The Operational Execution Tool provides this methodical and disciplined approach to execute the strategic actions, and track progress.

The Compass Bearing journey is not one of supersonic speed, it is deliberate forward motion that at times may appear slow. A mistake an organization can make is that it starts to wander, and before you know it, the course is no longer recognizable, motivation wanes, and suddenly the default future consumes the effort. In short, the status quo has prevailed. The medicine to fix this is leadership; always taking the time to check and make sure the organization is on course. Quantitatively, this is done through daily controls, reviewing metrics, following up on action items, etc. Qualitatively, this is done through leadership development, performance dialog, inspiration, and accountability, to name a handful.

During this journey, as the Strategic Priorities are deployed, geared to secure the organizations aspirations for the future, the basic actions in the life blood of the organization must be met...always and without compromise. These items are defined as the Absolute.

The result of this effort is a transformed operation and leadership team.