



## **Intent**

by Cub Marion

Before you can expect people to perform, they must know what is expected of them. It is direction. Clarity of expectations fosters alignment of action to what the defined goal is. Without alignment, wasted motion is most certainly the by-product.

Effective leaders know this, and act on it consistently. A good term for clear communication of direction is intent. Intent represents the leader's final result desired. When thoroughly understood throughout the organization, both vertically and laterally, energy and action is devoted to that mutually shared objective. This is powerful. It fosters innovation, initiative, and independent decision making. Intent is not a detailed, step by step, A to Z, procedural manual.

When a person or team knows what the finish line looks like, with an understanding of boundaries, they are free to do their job. Depending on team experience, capability, and situational risk, the leader can tailor his/her role to best support the individual or team. This generates tremendous empowerment and ownership.

Intent comes in different sizes and forms. At a high level, one could say the leader's or organization's intent is captured in the vision and mission statements. This is strategic intent. Strategic intent also has utility, and can be leveraged effectively to drive strategic objectives that fully support the company's vision. For example, a corporation is very focused on growth, and has opted to acquire a smaller company, with the strategic intent to complete the acquisition within 12 months, and upon consolidation reduce operating costs by \$10M. Clear objective that will definitely generate an aligned effort.

To augment intent at the strategic level, is an equally effective utilization at the tactical level. On a day to day basis, commitments must be met. For example, first line supervisors can clearly outline his/her intent for the day, providing direction on what the final result desired is on a given assignment. This type of leadership behavior has profound impact on elimination of rework, missteps, or scrap. The objective is understood. Incidentally, when communicating intent clearly and concisely, take the time to entertain questions, and ask some as well. Validating that the goal or mission is understood is absolutely essential.

Effective leaders are effective communicators.