

Chapter 4

NINE SECONDS

Production is not the application of tools to materials. It is the application of logic to work. The more clearly, the more consistently, the more rationally the right logic is applied, the less of a limitation and the more of an opportunity production becomes.

Peter F. Drucker

In Chapter 3, “Perfect Pearls,” I discussed the concept of creating “Organizational Symmetry” and the important role Transmitters play in the twenty-first century company. In this chapter I will focus on the third functional group, Drivers, and their critical role in creating and delivering the very goods and services organizations define themselves by.

Drivers are the reason we go to the ballpark, recover from cancer, have a great glass of wine, or fly safely across the Atlantic. Drivers are the reason forest fires do not reach the village, students graduate with the knowledge to innovate new technologies, or someone can walk safely to dinner and a movie late at night. Drivers protect our freedom a half a world away, ensure power is restored to our neighborhood after the storm, or allow us to transport our spouse and children safely without incident by car or train.

Behind the façade of every organization, brand, logo, or marketing effort are the Drivers who make the products, services, or entertainment a reality. We don’t go to the ballpark to see the General Manager of Baseball Operations; we go to the ballpark because we want to see our favorite player hit a home run or make a great catch. We don’t walk home late at night because our national or state governments say it is safe, we do so because we know state and local police officers are physically there, on patrol, ensuring law and order is maintained. Historically, Drivers are the reasons why we can and will likely be safe and enjoy ourselves. They are also, from my experience, likely to receive the least recognition and compensation for it.

Of the three functional groups, Drivers by nature are the most diverse and complex group. Drivers are diverse because of the wide range of skills and knowledge they require for the various professions and industries they serve in. The common thread for Drivers, however, is that they are the people who interact with us, who make the products we use, who deliver the services we enjoy and count on. For the consumer, Drivers are the tangible face of the company. When I say tangible, I must first clarify what I mean. Some of you think of tangible as the person or the tag line you associate with the brand; for example, the late Steve Jobs with Apple or “Just do it” with NIKE. My contention is that our real tangible

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connection lies within the products or those services we the consumer see, touch, use, and experience in our everyday lives. A great spokesperson, great marketing campaign, or great tag line will only get you to try a product or request a service once. Whether or not you continue to trust the company, enjoy the products, or appreciate and use the service after that will likely be decided by Drivers.

Why? Here is an example: Let's say you receive a promotional ad in the mail from ATT offering new lower rates when you buy a new cell phone. If you buy a new cell phone and it malfunctions on the first day, you'll want to return it. If you go to a restaurant and you have a terrible waiter or your meal was undercooked or lukewarm when you receive it, you will likely never go to that restaurant again. If you order a bouquet from 1-800-Flowers and the delivery person goes to the wrong address or delivers it too late, you will likely not try them again. This is the reality of today's competitive business environment.

Having said all of this, it has been the most surprising to me through all of my years working in business how few leaders within organizations or society acknowledge the importance of Drivers. I am not saying that leaders do not think Drivers are important, just that leaders do not acknowledge that Drivers are, in many respects, the *most* important. I must say that if there is anything that you take away from this book, I hope it is this: One of the core principles in leading from behind is the ability to show respect to all people, at all levels, for all of the talents, contributions, and impact they provide. There must be a firm understanding that by the very nature of organizations, structure, and the natural process of production and service delivery systems that Drivers inherently have the greatest opportunity to impact consumers positively or negatively. The recognition of this by Navigators and Transmitters in the organization and their desire to make Drivers an integral part of steering the company forward through bottom-up communication and feedback is critical. We will cover more on this later in the chapter.

In Chapter 1, I briefly touched on the concepts of Action and Reaction points in business. As you may recall the Action points are those positions where data in your business are created: the point of sale and the point of service or production. An example of an Action point might be the assembly person on the production line who will be the last to see and inspect the final product before your customer does, or it could be the sales representative who works face to face with your client to help him select the right insurance for his company or family. This is where many of the Drivers in your organizations live. The remaining Drivers perform functions I call Reaction points, which although these Drivers may not meet or connect directly with the consumer they indirectly can influence the customer experience. An example of a Reaction point might be the sales support person who prepares the customer quotations or collateral for the sales representative who will

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actually visit the client, or the purchasing coordinator who is working to set up a quality supply line of materials or components for the assembly department.

These Action points represent the “moment of truth” or the level of success with meeting the expectations of the consumer. It became very clear to me early on in my career that successful organizations have energized, well-informed, well-trained Drivers who have the authority and are equipped to win or sustain business at the Action points—“moments of truth.” Accomplishing this requires the skill and sustained efforts of both Transmitters and Drivers. I must also state that as consequential as it is for Navigators and Transmitters to understand the importance of Drivers, Drivers should also understand that delivering on the promises of an organization and earning respect does not come easily.

Having spent many years working in various industries as a Driver, I have learned several important lessons that must be understood if you are to be successful in this role. With that said let’s start by discussing what it is that Drivers themselves must do to contribute at a high level in today’s high-performing organizations. Drivers must:

1. see themselves as professionals and hold a high standard for excellence no matter what role or function they play in your organization;
2. thoroughly understand the promise your organization is making to your customers and the level of commitment and talents needed to deliver them;
3. understand that leadership relies on their timely and tactful communication to identify limitations that will prevent Drivers from meeting the needs of the customer;
4. realize that authority and respect are not given, but earned by fulfilling the needs of the organization, the needs of the customer, and the needs of fellow stakeholders; and
5. be ready and willing to learn and teach others what they’ve learned.

Facilitating the Professional Standard

I want to continue driving home one of the main building blocks required in moving organizations forward. It is that everyone in an organization must be respected, treated equally, and acknowledged for their contribution. Drivers will only feel this way if the culture of the organization from the very top and across the organization demonstrates this. Drivers, more so than any of the functional groups, need to see themselves as professionals and hold a high standard for excellence no matter what role or function they play in the organization. Leaders that can foster this example among Drivers in even the smallest of pockets in the organization will see it grow and influence others to adapt and strive to emulate the behavior.

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In my late teens and early twenties I worked for a small NAPA auto parts store in New England. I worked there afternoons in high school in their small automotive machine shop performing a wide range of light machining and assembly on brake rotors, flywheels, brake calipers, and other automotive components. I was very interested in automobiles at that time in my life and fascinated with mechanical devices and the internal combustion engine. However, I struggled with the decision to make this my vocation following high school. I knew that going straight to college at that point for me was likely not going to happen, so with my graduation from high school and with limited options I reluctantly started working at the machine shop full time.

Looking back I think that this type of job was not at the level of professionalism I wanted for myself. I did not see “automotive engine builder” as the vehicle that would provide me the level of respect I was craving. Shortly after I started full time, the owner hired a new engine builder named Chris. Chris was a tall, thin man and, at the time, in his early thirties. His slender face, deep-set eyes, and ridged jaw line presented a very serious and ominous figure. From the beginning I noticed something unique about Chris. He was not like the others in the shop. His blue shop uniform was pressed, clean, and included several certification patches that he wore as if they were badges of honor. His black shoes were shined, and in his upper right-hand pocket was a small notepad with carefully crafted notes in perfect penmanship. Chris’s toolbox was clean and organized, and all of his tools were clean and well labeled. To Chris automotive engine building did not have the same meaning as it did for me. To Chris, automotive engine building was artistry. It was precision, where every component, every surface, and every machining operation was critical to an engine’s optimal performance.

I would learn shortly thereafter that Chris was not just some machinist. He had completed his studies at the only accredited automotive engineering school in the country, Chaffee State College in California. With this training and education, and his own professional drive, Chris had pushed his skills and expectations to a level that separated him from others in his profession. After graduation Chris spent some time working in the sport of drag racing in Orange County and with this exposure began building his own drag cars. Over the next year I worked with Chris full time. As the shop was quite small, the daily and hourly interaction was unavoidable. I began to watch closely over the first couple of months how Chris worked and how he approached each project, but in particular how low his tolerance was for poor workmanship from himself and anyone else working with him. At such an early stage in my work career this was in fact my first real work experience. At first Chris was tolerant of my work style and approach but quickly his expectations grew. For me the environment and my relationship with Chris became stressful. On one hand I admired and in many cases tried to emulate his pursuit of perfection and the work habits that carried him there. I began to

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present myself better, work cleaner, and be more organized and thorough in everything I did. On the other hand, no matter how much I tried in the first six months my level best was not good enough, and I grew frustrated—frustrated in my inability to elevate my skills enough to earn his respect or at least garner the appropriate level of encouragement.

It was at that moment that Chris found the thing that would bind us together, his 1972 Chevy Vega. For those of you who remember the Vegas of the 1970s and are grimacing, this was no ordinary Vega. It was Chris's personal drag strip car that was anything but stock. It boasted a 700+ hp 289 small block Chevy engine and covered the quarter-mile distance in just under nine seconds. For Chris, this car, along with the technology and workmanship within it, embodied everything good about him and his pursuit of excellence as an engine builder, master machinist, and professional. One day as our shift was ending Chris asked if I wanted to stay after work and help him work on his Vega engine and, of course, I said yes. At first the tasks were small but over several months as he witnessed my progress as an engine builder and machinist, the importance and skilled requirements of the tasks increased. The weeks passed, and with each evening I became more interested in being better, learning more, and mastering the trade at the highest of levels. My confidence soared, and the experience began quickly to help me not only at work but in most areas of my life. From then on our relationship grew, and a mutual respect was formed. With Chris's coaching and connections he set me up eventually to attend classes at the same automotive engineering school in San Bernardino, California, that he attended.

This experience with Chris taught me some life-long lessons and shaped my beliefs on many things. I realized that Chris as a peer was able to find the link that allowed us to bond and communicate, the link that allowed me to grow professionally and personally. Shortly after moving on in my career I realized that what Chris had taught me most was this: You do not have to wear a tie, have a degree, or work in a large office to be a professional. Being a professional, the best in your field, or an expert of your craft no matter the profession is a choice. It is not what you do but how you choose to do it and at what level that will define you as a professional or not. Chris loved automotive engine building, and achieving excellence in his passion was his choice. Quite frankly, with his intellect and drive he could have chosen any vocation and succeeded. That is true of many Drivers I've worked with during my career.

Because of this experience and many others, I see Drivers as well as Transmitters or Navigators as professionals, making the choice to be the best or not regardless of position or social status. Unfortunately most people, even if they do not say it, do not see the Navigators, Transmitters, and Drivers as equally talented and professional resources in business. This troubling and deliberate societal branding of Drivers leaves many organizations performing on only two of three cylinders. Sorry for the automotive pun

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here. Our goal as leaders is to foster the kind of equality, interdependence, and mutual respect in organizations that will energize Drivers to join the other two functional groups in driving forward the mission of the company. It is also important not to prejudge Drivers because often individuals that seem to have the least ability to impact a situation positively are overlooked or even worse they are not provided the opportunity to play a role at all.

I hear over and over that it is difficult to create this type of success with all Drivers especially in the back offices and factory floor of traditional non-professional trade or unskilled labor groups. To this point I firmly disagree. It all starts with your belief as a leader and as a person. When I see a man or woman, no matter their position, age, education, social status, race, or physical straightness, I see opportunity. I see experiences that I do not have, skills that I do not possess, knowledge that I want to learn.

About 15 years ago I was managing operations of an OEM manufacturer for Medtronic, one of the global leaders in medical technology. Our company was making a particular assembly component for them. The component by its design was difficult to automate and test, so that much of the assembly or testing operations were completed by hand and very labor intensive. To be more specific the components were quite small and involved the threading of a small plastic tube into housing that was then sealed and cured under UV light. Prior to my arrival, the previous managers tried many different techniques and staff to improve the assembly operation and reduce the labor cost to retain the business. A large group of managers and engineering staff with the division Vice President spent significant time instructing the eight-member team of assemblers on what to do, but to no avail.

When I arrived it became my first challenge as the “expert” brought in to create teams and teach LEAN manufacturing techniques to assembly staff. Due to the frustration of the team after weeks of changes and instruction from management, two team members left the company. So I began trying to fill the vacant positions and asked human resources for applications of potential new hires. After reading through several I noticed all of the candidates began looking similar: similar skills, similar experience, similar ages. I went down to HR and asked to see the pile of applicants they did not send me and began to sift through the pile. There buried in the pile was my person, seventy-two year old Margret. “Seventy-two,” said the HR manager, “you can’t hire someone that old. We need someone that can produce.”

The thing I noticed about the team was that they were all very young, on average I would say maybe early 20s. What I needed was someone older, someone who was so different that the group would find her unique. Also, Margret was a schoolteacher for 38 years, I knew if I could teach Margret the LEAN techniques her skills as a teacher combined with her age and experience would help her to connect and advise the group in a mature and sensitive way. Also, Margret’s favorite hobby was crocheting, and I knew her dexterity from years of

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crocheting would help her with the actual work. After a few days of LEAN orientation with Margret, I introduced her to the team. I gave the team some basic training on the concepts of LEAN and asked if they would consider looking at ways to reduce cost on the Medtronic product. My part would be to keep everyone, management, away from them so they could focus. In less than three weeks the team decreased the labor cost of the product by 50%. Over the coming months productivity would increase by almost 300% and Margret was the star of the team, becoming the eventual team leader of the area.

I have witnessed and, I guess in my own way, perpetuated many scenarios like this success with Margret. These happen every day, some planned, some not. However, it is always the case that these victories for companies happen because the platform for Drivers to do what they do best is created. Navigators and Transmitters must understand that Drivers want to perform, they want to achieve what others say can't be done; but they often are not afforded the opportunity or the creative space to be heroes. Obviously there are many more components to successful integration of Drivers into the quest of progress. Fostering the engagement of Drivers requires a wide range of skills, given that Drivers as we've said in this chapter are quite diverse. And there is nothing more important than fostering this engagement because organizations will not make needed progress with only two of the three functional groups working in unison. Unifying Navigators and Transmitters in planning and execution of initiatives will fail if Drivers are not fully engaged. The larger question I pose to leaders today is this: Will you be able to leverage Drivers' experiences, skills, and knowledge as an opportunity to help your organization move forward? Will you be able to help Drivers to understand that without them forward motion is not possible? Will you be able to break down the traditional barriers that have divided Navigators, Transmitters, and Drivers?

Understand the “Promise” and the Talents You Need to Deliver Them

Thoroughly understanding the promise the organization is making to your customers and the level of commitment and talents you will need to deliver them is a critical step for Drivers. Before I leave this point I want to restate that yes I said your customers. I don't know how many times working on the factory floor I have heard a machine operator say to a sales representative, “Just tell me what to do and I will do it; you deal with the customers and the headaches, that's why you make the big bucks.” But a machine operator on the factory floor needs to know just as much about the customer as the sales representative. In this case both the machine operator and the sales representative are Drivers and so they both must share common intimate knowledge of the customers' expectations. Every company, no matter if they are selling a product or service, is establishing a set of expectations with customers at the point of sale, whether that point of sale is through distribution, retail locations, or directly to the consumer. Expectations are established

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based on the customer's understanding, and the customer will gauge the company's success on its ability to meet or exceed them. Drivers must understand two critical sets of expectations:

1. the value proposition or promise of the product or service the company intends to offer; and
2. the customer's interpretation of the promise.

Drivers need to understand if there are differences between the promise of the company and the expectations of the customer. Drivers' ability to help Navigators and Transmitters monitor, communicate, and align the promise of the company to the customer's expectations is critical to the organization's success.

The further Drivers are away from the end user of the product the more difficult this process becomes. Companies selling their products or services through distribution, for example, increase the risk of variation between promise and expectation. This increased variation happens for several reasons. For example, a distributor's business model may have a different value proposition or strategy than the company who is making the product or creating the service opportunity. If you are a company who is selling your product or service through various distributors, each one of their target customers may have different needs or expectations depending on how they go to market or present their value. As you can see, this type of complexity increases the risk that the product or service will not equal or exceed expectations without significant communication. Without creating the parallel between offering and expectations the business cannot sustain itself.

Effectively Communicate Barriers to Meeting Customer Expectations

Drivers must understand that both Navigators and Transmitters need their timely and tactful communication to identify limitations preventing the organization from meeting expectations of the customer. Drivers are typically the people who will witness the effects of the company's business model, procedures, and strategy on its customers. Utilizing an effective communication channel that generates a steady and accurate account of actual customer responses to products and service is critical. Asking for feedback from Drivers in your organization can be accomplished in many ways.

One of the main questions I hear from Drivers is their reluctance to delivering "the bad news," or sounding like a complainer. It is important to understand that bringing into view issues that may be driving your customers to your competitors is news worth communicating. One reason for this reluctance is that Drivers often communicate issues without structure so it comes across to leadership as their opinion instead of fact. That can

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tend to discredit or minimize the power of this critical information. Drivers need to consider that both Navigators and Transmitters are used to receiving and presenting information in a structured manner. In order for Drivers' information to have the same impact or demand the same level of consideration it needs to be presented in a format and with content that lends credibility and a cause for consideration.

For Drivers, the first keys to successfully delivering limiting issues up through the communication chain and opening an active dialogue toward resolution with leadership are to ensure that:

1. the information is accurate;
2. the limitation you are presenting is quantifiable; and
3. the limitation is well presented.

The issues preventing Drivers from achieving customer expectations need to be quantified with some sort of data collection that will provide merit to your observations. This data collection does not have to be complicated but should be done for some period of time that is long enough to rule out normal variation or one-off business conditions. Once the issue is quantified Drivers need to present their findings in a language and a format that Transmitters and Navigators can relate to. Drivers need to remember that due to their role in the organization and the intimate details they know about their office, machine, patients, etc., they possess institutional knowledge of their area and/or customers that leadership may not have. The limitations Drivers present must describe in detail for leadership:

1. the limitation preventing them from meeting customer expectations;
2. the frequency at which it is occurring with customers;
3. the impact it is having on the customers; and
4. most important, a potential solution you feel could curb or eliminate it from happening.

I am sure this all sounds good and many of you reading this book might say, "Well this is already happening. We are getting feedback from our back office staff, manufacturing and operations staff, doctors and nurses, paralegals and administrative assistants, sales representatives and marketing coordinators." You may be, but you are certainly not receiving enough information if any at all.

The Great Divide

Why is the communication of critical limitations not passed onto leadership? Why does it seem to be getting worse when technology has given us so many useful tools to

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communicate? As I've stated several times throughout this book there is a large and growing divide between Drivers and both Navigators and Transmitters within large and small organizations. First, I would attribute this lack of communication up and down the organization as significant lack of understanding: Understanding by Drivers of the critical role Navigators and Transmitters play in positioning and directing successful organizations, understanding by Navigators and Transmitters of the critical role Drivers play in delivering and reacting to customer expectations, understanding by both that without complete trust and understanding of each other's critical roles success is nearly impossible.

Elizabeth Richards, former IT Manager for Bank of America, verbalizes what I hear all across the country:

At least in my experience, I've seen people very committed to their jobs—even staying up for four days during an outage. Even with that sort of passion there is still a divide between management and employees. It's interesting to observe. Employees feel unappreciated and are convinced that management is foolish. While management views employees as necessary evils that are likely to run amok unless controlled. There's certainly occasions where both views are true, but both sides often operate at the lowest common denominator all the time.

Elizabeth's comments underscore many of the real feelings and beliefs the workplace has created over the past 50 years. As the compensation divide between executives and non-executives increases, so too does the divide between people and their willingness to communicate. Without a constant open dialogue, assumption replaces true understanding and eventually becomes fact.

The second thing I attribute this lack of communication to is leadership's significant lack of response to and respect of Drivers' observations. Over the past 100 years leaders have somehow equated position level in the company to intelligence level of the people who occupy them. I think it is critical for today's leaders to understand that the real gift of leading others is as much about knowing when to lead and when to let others lead. When an organization is properly structured and the tools to collect information are in place, leaders need to know when to receive direction and when to give it. Yes, good leaders, Navigators and Transmitters, should be willing to accept direction from Drivers and respect their opinion toward potential resolution.

I was consulting with a company recently in the Great Lakes Region where line workers were showing area leaders the significant downtime they were experiencing on a line. As part of a LEAN Six Sigma initiative we installed some basic data collection devices and downtime logs at each position so line staff could track station downtime. The goal was to have each of the

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team members responsible for elevating productivity and quality of the line participate in a weekly team meeting. Each team member was to bring his information from his particular station and present it to the larger team. Once all of the individual issues were brought forth the team could then identify where the largest source of limitations were coming from and reach consensus on what should be fixed and in what order. Every week the team members brought their station downtime logs showing management the loss in production due to equipment issues isolated by the team. The maintenance staff being understaffed due to company downsizing was unable to react and fix the equipment issues. After several weeks of presenting their issues and seeing no progress, the line workers stopped bringing forth ideas.

Drivers would say that this lack of response and follow through happens all too often in organizations today—that this lack of response or acknowledgement is slowly eroding the path of communications companies use to bring valuable information from the Action points in the business to the decision makers. Although I agree with this to some extent, it is imperative that Drivers be persistent and find multiple ways of presenting the limitations they face. Clearly though, Navigators and Transmitters in organizations must realize that programs and the willingness of Drivers to gather and present their information and solutions has a very short shelf life.

Like Navigators and Transmitters, Drivers Must Earn Trust and Respect

Trust and respect are not given, they are earned. Both are extended to Drivers by Navigators and Transmitters because they earn it by demonstrating that they can fulfill the needs of the organization, the customer, and the team. It is easy for Drivers to say they know more than those that lead them, and in some particular situations or conditions this may be true. However, Drivers must be taught the role they have in the organization, the freedom they have to conduct work, and the limitations as well. As critical as it is for Drivers to see and conduct themselves as professionals they also must understand that the way they communicate, present ideas, gather and receive information is vital to gaining respect among their peers and leadership.

Drivers, like Navigators and Transmitters, have a certain scope of influence—basically, what they know better than anyone else in the organization due to their technical skills, intimate knowledge, or vantage point or circumstances surrounding their profession. The more clearly Drivers understand where their scope begins and ends, the more they will be able to provide focused and relevant feedback to peers and Transmitters in the organization. If Drivers can speak to issues in a professional manner and from a perspective that is based on their scope of influence and body of knowledge, it creates added value to the decision-making process. This is a key step in bridging the gap between the front office and the rest of the organization. If each of the Drivers, Transmitters, and

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Navigators can openly discuss and offer meaningful content that is based on knowledge from their scope of influence, a bridge to effective decision making that will work for the entire business is more likely to exist.

Be Obsessed with Learning, Teaching, and Overcoming Limitations

Drivers must be ready and willing to learn and teach others what they've learned, and to be obsessed with overcoming limitations that prevent them or other Drivers from achieving more for the company. This is critical of companies in the new millennium. The days of learning how to run one dedicated machine, one department, one software program are long over.

Among the old habits that continue to block progress of organizations today is the conflict between the constraints of "the job we have for you" versus the freedom of "the work that needs to be done." It is simply the old paradigms that must be dealt with: job postings, job descriptions, job interviews, on-the-job training. First, the job, or maybe I should say the concept of a job, in its very structure is restrictive. The job is basically a very specific list of tasks that a person is responsible for. From this list HR professionals comb through hundreds of resumes, choose a few from key words and characteristics based on the current requirements, interview, and select a candidate based on the very job description they are trying to fill. The reality is however that business and, for that matter, most positions are being restructured or changed almost every year in today's global economy. With new technology, product development, business expansion, corporate downsizing, or acquisitions are demanding ultimate flexibility of all functional groups.

This is driving the need to employ staff throughout organizations that are extremely flexible and make learning, teaching, and overcoming limitations essential. Given that, I am suggesting all areas of organizations consider the traits of individuals they are looking to retain versus their current skills or knowledge. Yes, skills and knowledge are transferable, but if the individuals are not "quick studies" or do not have high reasoning skills that allow them to pick up or learn new information quickly and teach it they will simply try to survive off of what they know.

It is true that in many ways jobs can help to define the role of a person in the organization's structure and prevent too many people from focusing on the same things. However, I am suggesting that "the job" by its very design is also limiting. I am not suggesting that we eliminate the organizational benefits that jobs provide or the focus that people need to understand their purpose. I am suggesting that we put less emphasis on fitting Drivers into the jobs we create and instead find what Drivers do best and put them to work helping the company to move forward. There is much more to discuss relative to "the job," organizational structure, and the limitations they can provide. We will cover these

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issues and more in the next chapter along with the other missing links to effectiveness and efficiency in organizations.