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Determination Drives Top Results; Climb Higher In '15

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Action turns dreams into reality. How to stay on an action track this year:

Aspire. "Project, prepare, persevere." That's how Susan Ershler reaches lofty goals.

While working for Fortune 500 companies, she's led teams to achieve sales targets as high as \$600 million.

Also a hiker, Ershler and her mountain guide husband, Phil, climbed the seven summits — the highest mountain on each continent — together.

Define it. In "Conquering the Seven Summits of Sales," Ershler and co-author John Waechter emphasize the importance of projecting, or setting meaningful goals.

"Make sure it's an ambitious and clearly articulated vision," Ershler told IBD.

If it's a sales target, "every morning, look at that number," she said.

Plot. Ershler writes out detailed plans for every objective.

"Keep pulling out that plan," she said. "If we have that written out, we'll work on the important activities."

Regroup. Treacherous conditions forced Ershler and her husband to turn back 1,400 feet short of the peak of Mount Everest, at the border of China and Nepal, in 2001. "Personally, I felt like a failure because I had this dream of standing on the summit of Everest," she said.

Back home, Ershler resolved to try again.

It's the same with doomed sales calls. "The people who were top performers in my organization would keep going back," she said. " 'No' means 'not yet.'"

Shine. Ershler found fresh inspiration at the Rum Doodle. The restaurant in Kathmandu, Nepal, lets those who've summited Everest sign wooden boards behind the bar. "I thought: I have got to come back and have my name on that board," she said.

That's exactly what she did after summiting in 2002.

"Everyone wants recognition. They need it," Ershler said.

Get a grip. To climb in your career, concentrate on important assignments. Too often, we're spinning wheels on busywork. That's according to a six-year study by performance improvement firm FranklinCovey (NYSE:FC).

Respondents estimated that 40% of the workday is spent on tasks that aren't important to them or their companies.

Prioritize. Harried executives often think every task is urgent, when only some are. So say FranklinCovey time management experts Kory Kogon, Adam Merrill and Leena Rinne. They wrote "The 5 Choices: The Path to Extraordinary Productivity." They urge executives to take three steps when presented with seemingly essential chores:

Pause before reacting.

Clarify the task's worth.

Decide to do it or discard it.

Mastering that process delivers ROM — return on every moment.

Sharpen. Edward Hallowell wrote "Driven to Distraction at Work" to address what he calls an epidemic of attention deficit trait (ADT), a phrase he coined in 1994.

"I've witnessed the vaporization of attention, as if it were boiling away, while people tried valiantly to keep track of more data than even the most adept human brain could possibly accommodate," he said.

Detect it. Symptoms of ADT: a persistent feeling of being rushed, inability to give full attention to thoughts, a tendency toward impatience or boredom, and a habit of hopping from task to task.

Conquer. Creating to-do lists and getting organized aren't enough to tame a frenetic environment. "Instead, you have to retrain your attention," Hallowell said.

His advice: Resist the urge to multitask, and stop fixing other people's problems.