OK, so it’s not original, but “ready, fire, aim” captures the essence of busyness that is so endemic in today’s business world. When everyone is so busy they don’t have time to think, there is often no one left to say, “Wait a minute! Why are we doing this?” True leaders should never be in that position. True leaders need to be ever mindful of “why” and they should be forever engaging the organization in dialogue about it. An organization will be ready when its purpose is understood, its vision of a desired future is shared, its values and priorities are clear, and its strategy with short-term and long-term objectives owned by all. Members of the organization will be aiming correctly when each one has line-of-sight for his/her individual contribution. And when it’s time to fire, or perform, all can see how they’re doing relative to targets.

Ready

When preparing to aim, it is tremendously helpful to have identified the target. In the corporate world this would fall under the heading of clarity:

- Who are we as an organization?
- Why do we exist?
- Where are we going?
- What is important around here?
- When does XYZ need to be completed?

The five Ws are the fundamental elements of information gathering, but one or two or several of the Ws is often missing in action at the typical organization. In the absence of target clarity, it should come as no surprise that people struggle with aligning (or aiming).

Aim

With clarity of purpose and strategy it becomes much more feasible to create organizational alignment. However, all too often the clarity exists only at a functional or departmental level and the alignment is achieved silo-style. When Operations and HR and Finance and IT and Sales and Marketing are all at cross purposes, there is an excellent chance for a circular firing squad. Certainly, functional leaders have their pressing functional requirements, but their job is to use their knowledge and expertise to align those functional requirements with the overall business requirements of the organization, thereby streamlining and simplifying the business rather than complicating and hindering it. A well-tuned organization will have each member understanding how his/her job is contributing and moving the organization toward its targets.

Fire

In pursuit of high performance, clarity cannot end with helping people understand what they are supposed to be doing; they must also be receiving feedback on how they are in fact doing, relative to targets. If you were a marksman or an archer shooting at a target, would you ever be able to improve without knowing where your shot landed? Yet we hesitate to monitor performance or give/receive performance feedback. Why can an archer take the results of his/her first shot and make adjustments to improve the results of the second, but a worker, especially a knowledge worker, perceives performance feedback as critical and punitive, rather than helpful?

Many organizations aspire to high performance. Most never get there. Oh, they might survive, and they might be
profitable, but they fall far short of their potential. It is the job of leadership to help each individual and the entire organization perform to their potential. Busyness, or being crazy busy doing a lot of things of no value, is the antithesis of high performance. Leaders who tolerate or reward busyness are the reason it exists. They will use it as an excuse themselves, e.g. they are too busy to take the time to make the organization ready, create alignment, and monitor/manage performance.

Is your organization hitting its targets?