Results Intelligence: Identifying People Who Get Things Done
Most people would count themselves fortunate to launch a single successful business. Then there’s Elon Musk. The Silicon Valley businessman has helped scale four brand-name, category-defining businesses in less than 20 years – PayPal, Tesla Inc., SolarCity, and Space Exploration Technologies Corp. (SpaceX) – and he isn’t slowing down.

What makes Musk different? It’s not necessarily the originality of his ideas, but rather his remarkable ability to turn them from dream to reality.

Consider Tesla. Though many companies have attempted to popularize electric cars over the past 100 years, none have done it as quickly and effectively as the 14-year-old Fremont, California-based automaker. While it has faced the inevitable setbacks, including serious production delays to its Model 3, Tesla still surpassed 250,000 total cars delivered at the end of 2017. It also boasts a market cap larger than two of the three largest US-based automakers.

Or look at SpaceX, which Musk founded in 2002. With the goal of making space travel as routine as airplane travel, SpaceX has launched a steady and growing number of missions for customers ranging from NASA to telecommunication companies. As of November, the company had launched a record 16 missions in 2017, double its 2016 tally.

And Musk – who also founded PayPal precursor X.com, one of the first online banks, in 1999 – has no shortage of future ambition. He’s currently investigating new ways to get around the world faster through a network of tunnels and the possibility of colonizing Mars.

While this ability to get things done shows up in spades in Musk, it’s something that many people possess in varying degrees. In this paper, we’ll look at the various elements of what we call Results Intelligence, how it relates to the better known Emotional Intelligence (EI), and how to effectively hire for it.

### People who make things happen

Throughout history, people like Musk have always stood out. Consider Thomas Edison, who commercialized music with the phonograph, and electricity with the long-lasting lightbulb – or Steve Jobs, who revolutionized mobile phones with the introduction of the iPhone ecosystem of devices and apps. Like Musk, Edison and Jobs were not the first or only inventors to dream up their products, but they were the first to make them commercially viable for mass consumption. Their initial efforts may not have been perfect and their futures likely looked bleak at certain points – but despite headwinds, each was able to fundamentally change the human experience in ways that others believed impossible.

Every era has its superstars who make things happen, and the need for their talents has only increased in the past 10 years. That’s because complexity is rising and the pace of change is accelerating, forcing companies to innovate smarter and faster to stay ahead of the competition. While it’s a hard concept to measure precisely, consider how much our dependence on instant communication via the Internet has grown in just 10 years. Per capita Internet traffic was less than 1 gigabyte per month in 2007; it was 13 gigabytes per month in 2016 and projected to grow to 30 by 2021, according to the Cisco Visual Networking Index. Meanwhile, first-class US mail volume dropped by more than one-third over the same time period.

One clear sign that companies feel the pressure to keep up: Big established companies like GE, Microsoft and Intel are increasingly turning to start-ups to innovate faster. Through their corporate venture funds, large companies invested in 1118 early-stage deals, on average, in each of the five years between 2012 and 2016, nearly double the average 609 from the previous five years.

### A reliable model for picking winners

Most executives will have impressive accomplishments listed on their resumes. Through our years of helping companies pick leaders, however, we’ve noticed that there are some – like Edison, Jobs, and Musk – who are exceptionally gifted with the ability to get things done regardless of the context or phase of their career. We call this ability Results Intelligence (RI).
RI is different from classic intelligence, or how much someone knows. Instead, it’s the ability to beat the right path to the finish line, regardless of obstacles that may emerge. People with high levels of RI can envision ways to accomplish large, complex goals that are not obvious to others, and they stick with them past the point when others would quit. By building a leadership team with high RI, companies can innovate more efficiently and effectively. They can focus on what matters, discard what doesn’t, and easily pivot to take on new priorities.

Those who have RI are calculated risk takers. They combine big bets with preparation and practical considerations. In the Leadership Span model we have developed with Hogan Associates, they would score high on many of what we call the “loud” traits – being disruptive, risk taking, and galvanizing – but also some of the quiet ones, such as pragmatism.

RI can be considered a complement to Emotional Intelligence (EI), which is the ability to consider and manage emotions in relating to other people. In the most effective executives, RI and EI balance each other out. If someone is too focused on results, without paying attention to how they make people feel, morale will suffer. Conversely, if someone is too focused on emotions, without thinking about results, productivity will suffer. Together, RI and EI can help leaders make progress without alienating those around them.

When we reviewed our interviews with the executives who distinguish themselves for RI, we found some common themes in how they describe the way they work. Based on this analysis, we have identified five consistent facets of RI that can help companies screen for this ability in their hiring processes.

People who have high levels of RI tend to do the following five things extremely well:

1. **Begin with the end**
   - Results-getters have a clear and precise end objective seared into their minds. They then reverse engineer; deconstructing final results into components and processes that need to take place. They tend to be excellent planners who start with highly specific goals and approaches. They hold frequent reviews to ensure accountability.

2. **Aggressively seek out the right resources**
   - Results-getters are single-minded about getting what they need to succeed. Whether it’s more people, more money, or some other type of resource, they are often seen as the squeaky wheel (but who ultimately get the grease).

3. **Know the rules – and when to bend them**
   - Results-getters learn existing rules and processes, but then determine where they can skip steps to create efficiencies. For example, they might look to shortcut a project approval or capital allocation process when an initiative is particularly time-sensitive. The question that’s always in their mind: Which rules are firm and which are flexible?

4. **Ditch decorum**
   - Results-getters are willing to face criticism for leaving out key people if doing so helps them advance their project more effectively. They seek buy-in and involvement with only the most crucial parties, living by the mantra that it’s better to ask forgiveness than permission.

5. **Accept no excuses, even from themselves**
   - Results-getters are objective and clear-eyed in their evaluations about results, and failure is not an option. When one route is closed, they will find another. They tend to have exceptionally high standards, they set a clear tone for their teams that nothing but the best will do.
**Asking the right questions**

This model provides a useful shorthand for finding leaders with RI – and perhaps some inspiration for those who could improve their effort-to-result ratios. At the same time, it sets up a logical line of questioning in hiring processes.

**Where do you begin when developing an action plan to achieve a specific goal?**

*Good answer:* Seeks to understand the big picture and desired end state, works backward from the end state to organize problems into logical buckets, is clear about which resources are needed, ensures the plans relate directly to the goal.

*Poor answer:* Overly general regarding magnitude of work, overly flexible and open ended, uncertain what good will look like, has trouble prioritizing tasks.

**How do you keep track of initiatives in your area of responsibility?**

*Good answer:* Has a strong project management mindset, clear organized plans, includes phases, timeframes and accountability. Checks on progress frequently.

*Poor answer:* Comfortable with a hodgepodge of actions and roles, allows plans to drift without regular review.

**Is it acceptable to you to break rules or defy common industry practices? Why or why not?**

*Good answer:* Respects rules, but considers other ways to solve problems; believes rules can be a hindrance in some circumstances, uses gray areas to his or her advantage.

*Poor answer:* Always follows rules, too black and white in thinking, wants a clear rule book and consistently thinks about how things have been done in the past.

**How do you decide which people to involve in a project or initiative?**

*Good answer:* Has a strong orientation toward efficiency, is openly against bureaucracy and believes that consensus can lead to mediocrity. Believes in short focused meetings, avoids and removes those viewed as roadblocks.

*Poor answer:* Overly inclusive, likes to think out loud with others, does not emphasize scope, overly concerned about offending others.

**Tell me about a time when you were unsuccessful in reaching a goal.**

*Good answer:* Will not let himself or herself fail, believes there is always a solution, has visible discomfort with not achieving objective.

*Poor answer:* Rationalizes, works too hard to justify a failure, blames others.

So the next time you need someone to shake things up, don’t just look for someone who seems charismatic enough to pull it off, or has great ideas for how to do it. Put them to the test. Do they think like someone who has high RI? Do they act like someone who has high RI? And most importantly, do they impress you with the speed and effectiveness with which they’ve gotten results in the past? If not, it may be time to move on.
Elon Musk: Results Intelligence in Action

A deeper look at how Musk gets things done

BEGIN WITH THE END:
Musk helped found two ground-breaking Internet companies (Zip2, directory software maker that was acquired by Compaq, and X.com, acquired by PayPal) before most people had mastered e-mail, runs Tesla according to a Master Plan that aims to make electric vehicles broadly affordable, plans for SolarCity to ultimately provide the energy needed to run those cars, sees SpaceX’s commercial launches as a prelude to civilian space travel and life on Mars. “He almost hypnotizes you,” said Dolly Singh, the former head of talent acquisition at SpaceX. “He gives you the crazy eye, and it’s like, yes, we can get to Mars.”

AGGRESSIVELY SEEK OUT RIGHT RESOURCES:
Musk became Tesla’s CEO in 2008. Soon after, the company laid off a quarter of its staff, lost a key lawsuit, and announced production delays. At the same time, General Motors and Chrysler were both approaching bankruptcy. In the middle of this, Musk secured an additional $40 million in commitments from his original investors on top of the $146 million they had already promised. “I am personally standing behind delivering the cars and the deposits for the company,” Musk told Reuters.

Musk is also well-known for aggressively pursuing top talent. He counted complaint letters from Silicon Graphics Inc. about poaching its best engineers as a sign of victory. An early hire at SpaceX, Bryan Gardner, recalled Musk offering to buy him out of the academic work that Northrop Grumman Corp. was sponsoring for him. Gardner then sent his resume to Musk at 2:30 a.m.; Musk "replied back in thirty minutes addressing everything I put in there point by point."

KNOW THE RULES – AND WHEN TO BEND THEM:
SpaceX quickly expanded into multiple buildings, which meant its engineers needed high-speed data connections to collaborate. When corporate neighbors blocked their initiatives to install fiber optic lines, one of Musk’s long-time employees came up with “a quicker, more devious plan,” as Musk biographer Ashlee Vance describes. In the middle of the night, SpaceX employees tinkered with existing telephone poles to add fiber networking cables that ran directly into their buildings. “I know they did a lot of hanky stuff at night,” SpaceX’s landlord recalled. “They were smart, needed to get things done, and didn’t always have time to wait for things like city permits.”

Reflecting on early days at Tesla, employee No. 12 David Lyons recalled a results-at-all-costs culture. “Don’t worry about the methods or if they’re unsound. Just get the job done. It comes from Elon.”

DITCH DECORUM:
When Tesla co-founder Martin Eberhard struggled to manage the company's rapid growth, Musk – then chairman and a key investor – quickly inserted himself in the troubled production process and put a succession plan in place. He replaced Eberhard quickly with a new CEO, and ultimately installed himself in the role. “There was no discussion,” Eberhard told Business Insider. “I didn’t get to defend myself.”

ACCEPT NO EXCUSES, INCLUDING FROM THEMSELVES:
Even as a college student, Elon had a burning desire to achieve big goals, recalls Jeff Heilman, one of Zip2’s earliest employees. “Elon had this drive that this thing – whatever it was – had to get done and that if he didn’t do it, he’d miss his shot,” Heilman said. “I think that’s what the VCs saw – that he was willing to stake his existence on building out this platform.”

“We are so confident in the superior durability of our Solar Roof tiles that we offer the best warranty in the roofing industry—the lifetime of your house, or infinity, whichever comes first.” – Tesla Q2 2017 Shareholder Letter
DEAN STAMOULIS leads the Center for Leadership Insight at Russell Reynolds Associates. He is based in Atlanta.

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\(^7\) Sources for this section: Vance, *Elon Musk: Tesla, SpaceX, and the Quest for a Fantastic Future*, 131, 179.


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