

**Excellence. NO EXCUSES!**

**Excerpt:**

**THE 50  
“HAVE  
YOUs”**

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## The 50 “Have Yous”

*While waiting in the Albany airport to board a Southwest Airlines flight to Reagan one morning, I happened across the latest Harvard Business Review, on the cover of which was a bright yellow “lead article” sticker. On it were the words “Mapping your competitive position.” It referred to a feature article by my friend and admired colleague Rich D’Aveni.*

*Rich’s work is uniformly good—and I have said as much publicly on many many occasions dating back 15 years. Moreover, I’m sure this article is first-rate, too—though I admit I didn’t read it.*

*In fact, it triggered a furious negative “Tom reaction,” as my wife calls it. Of course I believe you should worry about your “competitive position.” But instead of obsessing on competitive position and other abstractions, as the B.Schools and consultants would invariably have us do, I instead wondered about some “practical stuff,” which I believe is far, far more important to the short- and long-term “strategic” health of the enterprise, tiny or enormous.*

*Hence, rather than an emphasis on competitive maps or looking for a “blue ocean” (empty space, per the popular book Blue Ocean Strategy), I urge you to pay attention to my 50 “Have Yous,” as I call them. The list could easily be three times as long—but this ought to keep you occupied for a while. Of course, the underlying hypothesis is that if you proactively do the “small stuff” below, your “competitive position” will improve so much that mapping will become a secondary issue!*

*Herewith:*

## TODAY?

1. Have you called a customer ...
2. Have you in the last 10 days ... visited a customer?
3. Have you in the last 60-90 days ... had a seminar in which several folks from a key customer’s operation (different levels, different functions, different divisions) interacted, via facilitator, with various of your folks? (Goal: Fully integrates us with our key customers—and makes it clear we want to get to know them on all levels.)
4. Have you thanked a front-line employee for a small act of helpfulness ... in the last three days?

5. Have you thanked a front-line employee for a small act of helpfulness in the last ...

# THREE HOURS?

6. Have you thanked a front-line employee for carrying around a great attitude ... *TODAY*?

7. Have you in the last week recognized—publicly—one of your folks for a small act of *cross-functional cooperation*? (“Small,” social acts enhancing cross-functional bonding may be my Obsession #1.)

8. Have you in the last week recognized—publicly—one of “their” folks (another function) for a small act of cross-functional cooperation with your gang?

9. Have you invited in the last month a leader of *another function* to your weekly team priorities meeting?

10. Have you personally in the last week-month called-visited an internal or external customer to *sort out, inquire, or apologize* for some little or big thing that went awry? (No reason for doing so? If true—in your mind—then you’re more out of touch than I dared imagine. Pity.)

11. Have you in the last two days had a chat with someone (a couple of levels “down”) about specific deadlines concerning a project’s next steps?

12. Have you in the last two days had a chat with someone (a couple of levels “down”?) about specific deadlines concerning a project’s next steps ... and what

specifically *you can do to remove a hurdle*? (**Boss as**

## CHRO, Chief Hurdle

## Removal Officer.

Peter Drucker: “Ninety percent of what we call ‘management’ is doing things that make it more difficult to get things done.”)

13. Have you celebrated in the last week a “small” (or large!) *milestone* reached? (I.e., are you a milestone fanatic? Are you a celebration fanatic?)

14. Have you in the last week or month revised some estimate in the “wrong” direction (i.e., acknowledged that things were more problematic than previously estimated) and apologized for making a lousy estimate? (*Somehow or other you must publicly reward the telling of difficult truths—and the reporting of bad news.*)

15. Have you installed in your tenure a very comprehensive customer satisfaction scheme for all your *internal* customers? (With major consequences for hitting or missing the mark.)

16. Have you in the last six months made a week-long, visible, very intensive *visit-tour* of external customers’ operations?

**17. Have you in the last 60 days called an abrupt halt to a meeting and “ordered” everyone to get out of the office and “into the field” *immediately* with the *order* to fix (f-i-x, finito!) *some/any* nagging “small” problem through immediate practical action?**

18. Have you in the last week had a rather thorough discussion of a “trivial” “cool design thing” someone has come across—*away* from your industry or your function—at a website or in a product or its packaging? And do you urge/insist that everyone (*every one*) be on the lookout for, bring in, and present “incredibly cool stuff I’ve found” from “everyday life”?

19. Have you in the last two weeks had an informal meeting—at least an hour long—with a front-line employee to discuss “things we do right,” “things we do wrong,” and “What would it take to turn this job into something approaching their “dream job”?”

20. Have you in the last 60 days had a general meeting to discuss “things we do wrong” ... that we can fix in the next 14 days? (With follow-up *exactly* 14 days later.)

21. Have you had, in the last year, a one-day, intense offsite with each of your principal internal customers—followed by a substantial celebration of “things gone right” on both parties’ parts?

**22. Have you in the last week privately pushed someone to do some family thing that you fear might be overwhelmed by internal deadline pressure?**

23. *Have you learned the names of the children of everyone who reports to you? (If not, you have 30 days to fix it.)*

24. Have you taken, in the last month (two weeks?), an interesting-*weird* outsider to lunch? And, do you keep careful track of “weirdo lunches”?

**25. Have you in the last month invited an interesting-*weird outsider* to sit in on an important meeting?**

26. Have you in the last three days discussed in a meeting something interesting, beyond your industry, that you ran across while reading, etc.? (This means more than an email from you with a cyberlink or two.)

27. Have you in the last 24 hours injected into a meeting “I ran across this interesting idea in (strange place)”?

28. Have you in the last two weeks asked someone to report on something, anything that constitutes an act of brilliant service rendered in a “trivial” situation—restaurant, car wash, etc.? (And then discussed the relevance to your work—and then implemented *on-the-spot* some little thing from what they learned?)

29. *Have you in the last 30 days examined in detail (hour by hour) your calendar to evaluate the degree to which “time actually spent” mirrors your “espoused priorities”?*

(And repeated this exercise with everyone on the team.)

30. Have you in the last two months had a presentation to your group by a “weird” outsider?

31. Have you in the last two months had a presentation to the group by a customer, internal customer, vendor featuring “working folks” 3 or 4 levels down in the vendor/customer/internal customer organization (and in your organization)?

32. Have you in the last two months had a presentation to the group of a cool, beyond-our-industry idea by two of your folks?

33. Have you at every meeting today (and forevermore) redirected the conversation to the practicalities of implementation concerning some issue before the group?

34. Have you at every meeting today (and forevermore) had an end-of-meeting

discussion on “action items to be dealt with in the next **4, 24,**

**48** hours”? (And then made this list public—and followed up in 4 or 24 or 48

hours.) (And made sure everyone has at least one such item.)

35. Have you had a discussion in the last six months about what it would take to get recognition in a local-national poll of ... *“best places to work”*?

36. Have you in the last month approved a *cool-different-very different training course* for one of your folks?

37. Have you in the last month taught a front-line training course?

38. **Have you in the *last week* discussed the idea of *Excellence per se*?** (What it means, how to get there, concerning a current project.)

39. Have you in the last week discussed the idea of ...

**“Wow”?** (What it means, how to inject it

into an ongoing “routine” project.)

40. Have you in the last 45 days assessed some major internal process in terms of the details of the “experience,” as well as results it provides to external or internal customers?

41. Have you in the last month had one of your folks attend a meeting you were supposed to go to, which therefore gives them unusual exposure to senior folks?

42. Have you in the last 60 (30?) (15?) (7?) days sat with a trusted friend or “coach” to discuss your “management style”—and its long- and short-term impact on the group?

43. Have you in the *last three days* considered a professional relationship that was a little rocky and made a call to the person involved to discuss issues and smooth the waters? (Taking the “blame,” fully deserved or *not*, for letting the thing-issue fester.)

44. Have you in the last ... *two hours* ... stopped by someone’s (two-

levels “down”) office-workspace for 5 minutes to ask **“What do**

***you think?”*** about an issue that arose at a more or less just completed meeting? (And then stuck around for 10 or so minutes to listen—and *visibly* taken notes.)

45. *Have you ... in the last week ... looked around you (“eyeballed”) to assess whether the diversity of the group pretty accurately mirrors the diversity of the market being served?*

(And began to act on the disparity, if it exists?)

46. Have you in the last day at some meeting gone out of your way to make sure that a normally reticent person has been engaged in a conversation—and then thanked him or her, perhaps privately, for their contribution?

47. Have you in the last four months had a half-day, full-team session specifically aimed at checking on the “corporate culture” and the degree we are true to it—with presentations by relatively junior folks, including front-line folks? **(And with a determined effort to keep the conversation restricted to “real world” “small” cases—not theory.)**

48. Have you in the last six months talked about the *Internal Brand Promise*—i.e., what you and the organization promise to employees in terms of respect and growth opportunities?

49. Have you in the last year had a full-day off-site to talk about individual (and group) aspirations?

**50.** Have you called a customer ... **TODAY?**

(51. Have you “mapped your competitive position” since you finished this checklist? Now it’s okay to do so.)

**Do You ... *Hear Me?***

**Have You ... *Started?***

Obviously I hope you'll use this list. Perhaps as follows:

- (1) Circulate to your team.
- (2) Agree on no more than a half-dozen items to act as a Starter Action List.

(3) **Pick ONE** item.

(4) **Do it TODAY.**

- (5) Repeat once a week.