

# **‘Shiny Object’ Syndrome Can Kill Your Company**

Each day, Oklahoma business leaders wake up and go to work with vigor and anticipation. We are challenged with new opportunities to invest in exciting projects, hire new people, expand our organizations, acquire new assets, and create new products and services. It’s exciting to consider the possibilities that seem to present themselves on a daily basis. However, as leaders, we also understand that we can’t pursue them all. But how clear are we when it comes to decisions about what to pursue and what to let go? Which opportunities will leverage our best and create greater velocity for our organization and which are simply “Shiny Objects”?

As a CEO, I know something about “Shiny Objects”; it is thrilling to try new things. During board meetings, management briefings and water cooler chats, our attention often turns to the latest “Shiny Objects”. On the one hand, we all understand that if we do not innovate, our organizations will stagnate and eventually become irrelevant. On the other hand, innovation for its own sake can drain valuable resources away from the key priorities. It’s a balancing act, and we believe that part of this art is managing the “Shiny Object Syndrome” as we consciously and intentionally ask ourselves which opportunities to pursue and which to ignore.

An illustration may help clarify what I mean. A local manufacturing company had been considering various acquisition targets. For nearly a year, they had looked at three alternatives. The first was a \$70 million opportunity, the second was \$10 million and the third was \$7 million. Their analysis showed that the \$70 million acquisition was expected to produce a 14% ROI. The other two had more modest return profiles. In this case, the \$70 million acquisition target turned out to be a “Shiny Object”.

As they clarified their strategy, they began to see clearly that on the surface the \$70 million opportunity “made sense”, but it didn’t really fit how they were staffed or where the company was headed; furthermore, once they understood why it didn’t fit, they saw that there were many hidden costs that would only surface as they got deeper into the execution of the transaction. Once they understood this with clarity, they were able to take that opportunity off the table, stop spending time researching it and thinking and talking about it, and focus on finding another \$70 million opportunity that was more in their sweet spot.

How much did the lure of that “Shiny Object” cost them? Fortunately not \$70 million, however, there was an opportunity cost. They spent considerable time and energy going round and round discussing it over the course of a year. What if that energy had been focused on another high impact activity instead?

The three big issues with “Shiny Objects” are that they distract, dissipate and divert. They distract by drawing attention away from more relevant items and gobble up valuable time as we try to “figure out” how to make them work. They dissipate when they prevent us

from seeing beyond what lies directly in front of us; when we clear away the fog they create, we can seek out larger opportunities that are in better alignment with our organization's personnel, goals and direction. Finally, "Shiny Objects" divert resources when staff and management keep coming back to the same issues but cannot quite come to a decision.

While it is easy to fall prey to "Shiny Object Syndrome", there is a way out. First, understand with great clarity what business you're in. That may sound overly simplistic, even silly, but you'd be surprised how many business leaders can't answer this question with clarity. If the leader isn't clear, how can management and staff be clear? Second, understand what areas you need to focus on leveraging and improving. This will guide you toward investments and activities that will increase your organizations velocity rather than slowing you down. Finally, make sure that everyone on your team understands these things with the same clarity that you have. If they do, not only will you avoid the dreaded "Shiny Object Syndrome", but you will find that small decisions that you used to have to make, no longer filter up to you. That means less stress for you as the leader. Maybe you can even go home early once in a while. Now that's something to ponder! Written by Matthew Myers.

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