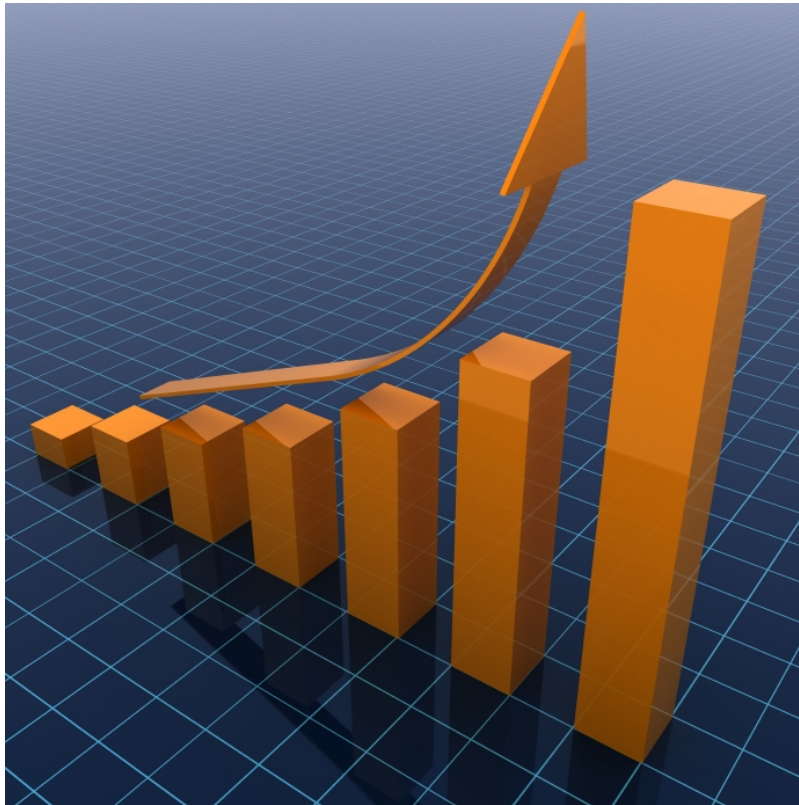


CREATING A STRATEGIC PERFORMANCE ADVANTAGE



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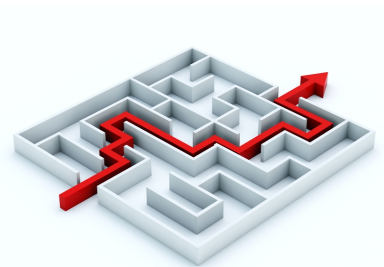
3 Keys To Performance Improvement

Clarity

Everything you and I can see or touch was, at one time, nothing more than an idea in someone's mind. Creation begins with vision. And the clearer the vision the better. Study after study shows the absolute necessity of being crystal clear on what we want to achieve or accomplish. A fuzzy vision leads to lackluster results. A clear, specific vision lays the foundation for planning and execution, which are also critical for improved performance and productivity.

Focus

Once we're clear and specific on what we want to achieve, the next step is to focus our attention on specific initiatives that will move us in the direction we want to go. Every endeavor or project needs to be broken down into strategic steps for achievement. The clearer the focus on what needs to be done and when, the greater the probability we'll accomplish what we say we want to accomplish. Conversely, an unclear focus is like trying to hit a target blindfolded. It just isn't going to happen.



Focused Activity

The only measure of what we believe is seen in what we do. Taking the right actions at the right time is where progress toward success and achievement is really made. Execution on those tasks that lead to goal achievement is the final and most important key to creating a Strategic Performance Advantage. Ashley Montagu said: "The only measure of what we believe is what we do." Achievement is about doing, not about dreaming. Executing on carefully chosen tasks is what really moves us forward.

The Power of Process

Creating a Strategic Performance Advantage for yourself or your organization is easier than you might think. The fact is most individuals and, unfortunately, most organizations have no plan or process for improving performance and productivity.

In 2009, FranklinCovey's **Center for Advanced Research** completed a five-year study involving thousands of employees in nine critical sectors of the economy. Among their findings was that 44% of companies, governments and other organizations had no specific plans for success and achievement. The study went on to show well over 50% of employees in various organizations in the sectors studied could not name a single performance objective for the organization they served.

W. Edwards Deming, one of the great management thinkers of the last century said: "If you can't describe what you're doing as a process, you don't know what you're doing." It's no wonder that 96% of businesses fail within the first ten years and 80% of those businesses fail within the first two years.

The Power of Planning

Wishing or hoping or wanting something to be different will not result in change. Wishing, hoping or wanting, without planning and action, produce nothing but disappointment.

Dwight D. Eisenhower said: "Plans are meaningless but planning is essential." Plans seldom work out exactly the way we want them to, but studies and experience show that the simple act of thinking through an issue or a project is essential to successful completion. Planning allows us to establish the targets we intend to reach. While we realize we might not hit specific targets, at least we have something to shoot for. Most people and most organizations don't.

"When an archer misses the mark he looks for the fault within himself. Failure to hit the bull's eye is never the fault of the target. If we want to improve our aim we have to improve ourselves."

(Gilbert Orland)

The Value of Vision = CLARITY

Vision is simply seeing what is yet to be or seeing clearly what we intend to achieve. Clarity begins with vision and not just any vision, mind you, but with a S.M.A.R.T. vision. In order for a vision to have power it must be *specific*. A broad, vague vision has no power to energize or inspire.

S.M.A.R.T. visions are:

- Specific
- Measurable
- Achievable
- Realistic
- Time-bound

Here's an example of a *not so smart vision statement* that is in effect nothing more than a wish or a hope:

“Someday I want to be a business consultant.”

On the other hand, here's a S.M.A.R.T. vision statement:

“By December 31, 20XX, I will have grown Markham & Associates into a \$350,000 a year, Phoenix-based business consulting practice specializing in performance improvement and leadership development.”

I think you see the difference between a wish and a vision. The value in having a S.M.A.R.T. vision statement, one that lays the foundation for strategy, goals and activities, is the starting point for developing the clarity needed to create a Strategic Performance Advantage.

S.M.A.R.T. vision statements provide the clarity we need to motivate, inspire and move us forward in our efforts toward success and achievement.

Focus

Once our vision is defined, we can now concentrate on specific areas of activity. While our vision helps us see where we're going and what we want to accomplish, creating focus allows us to pay particular attention to specific areas of interest.

Strategic Initiatives

I refer to these specific areas of focus as strategic initiatives. By definition, an initiative is “an act or strategy intended to resolve a difficulty or improve a situation.” Identifying specific “acts” that will, in and of themselves, improve performance and productivity is essential for creating a Strategic Performance Advantage.

Here are a few examples of strategic initiatives for both an individual and for an organization.

INDIVIDUAL	ORGANIZATIONAL
Health/Nutrition	Sales
Training/Education	Product Development
Relationship Building	Process Improvement

Strategic initiatives start the planning process. In fact, a strategy is nothing more than a plan for changing the status quo. You know the old saying; *“If you keep doing what you’re, doing you’ll keep getting what you’re getting.”* Developing strategic initiatives is the second step in initiating change.

Strategic Initiatives differ from objectives in that strategies don’t have to be measurable. A strategic initiative can be as simple as: “improve my education,” or “increase sales by 20% over last year.” A strategy identifies specific areas of focus so we can set meaningful goals and take appropriate actions.

There’s Gold in Those Goals

Brian Tracy, performance improvement guru, says: “Goals are the fuel of the furnace of achievement.” Goal setting has long been known as the secret ingredient for high performing individuals and organizations.

As simple as goal setting is, it’s truly amazing that more people, and more organizations don’t take advantage of this simple but powerful technique for performance improvement. The FranklinCovey study previously mentioned shows the negative impact on individuals and organizations that don’t set goals.

Meaningful goals, rightly written and prioritized, turbocharge performance and productivity. As a result, they also increase the bottom line. Top sales professionals, athletes and high performing individuals in any field are goal setters. More importantly, they’re *goal achievers*.

S..M.A.R.T. Goals

Writing a S.M.A.R.T. goal is as simple as utilizing the formula Verb + Noun + Date = A Goal.

Here are a few examples:

- Develop and implement customer feedback system by the end of the 2nd quarter
- Lose two pounds per week for the next six weeks
- Enlist six new affiliates for the XYZ program by the end of the 3rd quarter.

The bottom line: *“If you can’t measure it, you can’t manage it.”* Setting specific, measurable and achievable goals helps continually measure progress, and keep us motivated to achieve worthwhile objectives.

Goal setting is critical to Creating a Strategic Performance Advantage, but accomplishing those goals is what really matters. Focused activity is the means by which we make goals a reality. Breaking a goal down into easily achievable tasks is the key to goal completion.

“Success is the result of a few simple disciplines practiced every day.” (Jim Rohn)

Focused Activity

Here's where the rubber meets the road. Clarifying our vision, developing strategic initiatives, and setting meaningful objectives are all well and good, but there's still work to be done. The key is to identify what specific tasks or activities need to be completed, and in what time frame. Remember, the name of the game is not being busy, but rather completing tasks that will achieve a specific objective.

80/20 Time Management

Your Strategic Performance Advantage will be created by completing tasks that have the greatest impact on your vision and your objectives. One of the most effective techniques is to try and set aside 20% of your work day to focus on those tasks that will move you toward completing objectives. Assuming you work a standard eight-hour day, you would try to carve out 90 minutes of the day to work on your most important tasks. You don't need to focus on a single 90 segment of time. However, three 30 minute segments or two 45 minute segments would work quite well, but you do have to set specific time aside to complete important tasks. You'll have to actually set appointments on your calendar for task completion.

Always think in terms of completion. Focus on those activities that complete objectives. One of the primary reasons individuals and organizations aren't more productive is because they confuse activity with productivity. Successful and productive people focus on results and think in terms of finishing, not just starting an important task or project. You create a Strategic Performance Advantage by successfully completing one important task after the other, not by just having a large number of tasks in your queue.

Break Objectives into Achievable Tasks

Frame the description of a task the same way you framed an objective, just have a shorter time line. For example, if the objective is to develop and implement a customer feedback system by the end of the second quarter - then an action item might be to conduct weekly customer focus groups during the month of January. Each week in January, schedule a customer focus group and capture feedback.

In February, you can develop a proposal for a customer feedback system based on focus group feedback. In March, you could present your findings and make recommendations for implementing the new program, thus completing the original objective in the desired time frame.

Conclusion

Developing a Strategic Performance Advantage is simply a matter of gaining clarity on what you want to achieve, developing a few key initiatives, setting objectives to bring your vision to fruition, then taking the right actions at the right time. This time-tested process works for individuals and for organizations.

Creating a Strategic Performance Advantage will set you apart from the competition. In the process, you'll also increase your performance, productivity and profitability.