



Focus, Focus, Focus

It's been said that managers do things right and leaders do the right things. The former is about efficiency the latter is about effectiveness. It is easy to be busy but hard to work on the right things. Leaders must focus on doing the right things—those things that matter most to the success of the company. In short, effective leaders must drive the focus of the organization. Leaders must channel the time, talent, energy, and resources of the organization on tackling key priorities and goals. Owners must ask constantly, “What’s Important Now (WIN)?”

In today’s fast-paced, technology connected world, it’s easy for people to lose track of what is most important to the enterprise. They get so caught up in the day-to-day minutia and distractions (email, voicemail, cell phones, PDAs, etc.) that they must be re-directed, re-focused, re-oriented continually. Owners need to rein in their employees’ focus. Do not let your employees waste energy, time, talent, and resources on trivial matters; keep them focused on the company’s vision and its mission-critical priorities.

To help you manage the attention and concentration of your team, consider focusing them on six primary areas:

1. Satisfying your customers/clients
2. Getting results, not excuses
3. Improving continuously (innovation)
4. Maintaining profits
5. Keeping a long-term perspective
6. Having fun

1) Focus on satisfying your customers

Your company’s primary focus should be on exceeding the expectations of your customers/clients. Begin to establish a culture where your team falls in love with your customers and their needs/wants and not your own company’s products or services. You are in business to attract, delight and retain customers in a profitable manner for a very long period. The real value of your business is tied directly to the future, predictable cash flow from your highly satisfied and loyal customers. Without customers, you do not have a business.

How many times do we say and hear that the customer is King. You therefore need to treat them like Royalty. Make them feel important. They are. It should not be about your company or your services and products. Focus on keeping any customer problems or complaints to a minimum. If there are any issues these must be resolved immediately and effectively. Keep your customers delighted so that they keep coming back time and again. As a leader, have the courage to create an environment in which the customer is your enterprise’s primary focus.

As CEO, set the tone by visiting regularly the 20% of your customers which are probably generating 80% of your sales and profits, and keeping them satisfied. The 80/20 Paetros rule states that 80% of your efforts are directed on customers that generate 20% of your revenue and profits, etc. So learn to be effective and focus on the high value customers that most likely will be the 20% that generate 80% of your profits, and focus on improving the 80% rest to get them into the high value sector.

2) Focus on getting results

Next, focus your team on achieving results for your company. Establish the climate whereby activity is not confused with accomplishment; where thinking and planning are admired; where actual results are valued more than busyness; Where effectiveness (doing the right things) is rewarded more than efficiency (doing things right). Insist on intelligent, meaningful action and detest procrastination (paralysis-by-analysis) and excuses. As a leader, one of the most important jobs you have is to establish a goal-oriented environment with a solid expectation of performance. Insist on results and do not tolerate excuses and mediocrity.

3) Focus on continual improvement

After satisfying customers and insisting on results, the next focus area should be on continuous improvement. If your company is not improving, it is declining. If you aren't getting better, your competitors may well be. Therefore, establish a climate where continuous improvement and innovation thrive. Do not let your employees fear failure or making mistakes. Just eliminate repeated mistakes. Failure is not fatal, but failing to change might be.

As a leader you must drive out fear from your organization. If your company is not failing occasionally, either your goals are too low or your rate of innovation is too slow. Have your employees adopt the attitude that failure is not painful or shameful. Failure is merely valuable feedback on what not to do next time. Failure is fertilizer for future success. Failure is an incredible gift if properly viewed and used. If you are moving closer to your goals, you are winning. The quicker you fail and modify your approach, the quicker you get to your desired outcome.

Insist that your employees continually improve what they do and how they do it. Focus them on thinking about how to improve their roles, responsibilities, and contribution to the cause. Have them also improve your systems and processes. Remind them, "Good enough never is".

Encourage employees to try new things. Experiment, experiment, experiment! Insist that "we can always do better – let's find the way"! Take small steps to test ideas and learn more in the process. If something works better, keep it. If it doesn't, lose it. Know when to cut your losses. Admit mistakes and let go of failed ideas fast. Fail fast, fail cheap. Keep your ego in check.

Once a week, facilitate a one-hour business improvement workshop. Release the brainpower of your organization. For every good idea surfaced, assign a champion, due date, and key action steps to take. Good ideas not fully implemented are worthless. Reward employees for successfully implementing ideas that increase revenues, cut costs, improve operations or morale, or improve customer satisfaction.

Also, encourage healthy debate amongst your team. Allow everyone, in a constructive manner, to challenge ideas, policies and strategies. Even allow for productive and constructive conflict. When ideas are put to the test, they improve.

4) Focus on profits

Next, focus on growing your revenues and most importantly, your profits. Focus on both top line and bottom line growth. Focusing only on revenue growth is ego-driven and not too smart. Cash flow and profits are your lifeblood. Keep your gross margins strong.

Also, while cost containment is important to the health of your company, do not over-emphasize slashing costs. Stay on the offensive, not the defensive. Revenue growth is nearly endless, cost cutting is limited – you can only cut so much before you do real damage. Some costs are really strategic investments in the future of your business (new equipment, advertising, training & development, etc.)

Surround yourself with best advisors and mentors. Become a strategic owner and a team player with your advisors. Good professionals and advisors are invaluable investments in your business. As a leader you just show the way to be team player with your advisors so that your managers and employees can follow your lead as team players in your business.

5) Focus on the long-term

After profits, focus everyone on the fact that you are in business for the long haul. Do not be short-term oriented. As a Business Owner you are in a marathon not a sprint. Maintain the highest integrity and ethics. Your reputation is everything. Business is about sustaining lifelong relationships with customers, employees, investors, suppliers, advisers, etc. Repeat business is absolutely critical to the very life force of your company. There are no shortcuts to success.

If you do not have a vision where you want your business to be in say 2 years, 5 years, 10 years, how do you expect to get where you want to go. So develop a vision and then set goals. Goals must be set in concrete but must also be realistic and attainable, must be able to stretch you. Goals have to be seen not thought of. They have to be written down. If they are not written and set in concrete they are just wishes and wants. Once you have established your goals then put an action plan in place.

Focus on your goals and your long term vision.

6) Focus on having fun

And lastly, focus on making business fun. Celebrate when you achieve your goals. Celebrate your company's successes often and reward your employees for superior performance. Recognize success and praise and reward your team. Share the joy. Make coming to work a meaningful and fulfilling event. Establish an environment that is fun to work in that employees do not wish to leave as they are having so much fun. Drive for success but balance it with having fun.

Never forget, often as important as a paycheck, good employees want to learn and grow, be challenged and rewarded, and fulfill their cravings to be social beings. Make your culture an enjoyable place to work.

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