



TOOLKIT 6 - TOOLS FOR PRIORITISING AND FOCUSING

- ❖ **Work smarter not harder.**
- ❖ **Focus on the important issues.**
- ❖ **Manage your time and energies effectively.**

In an increasingly competitive and busy business world, it's very easy to rush around trying to be all things to everybody. Downsizing and 'the long hours culture', which has developed over the past five years, has exacerbated this problem.

The top management job is to work on the strategic and important issues for the business. They also need to spend time working **ON** as well as working **IN** the business (see toolkit 7).

So as the Departmental manager you need to prioritise and focus on those parts of the business which need your attention.

Here are some tools that Managers have found helpful in bringing focus and direction to their work. You can use them and you can encourage your top team to use them.

1. STRATEGIC PRIORITIES

Complete the following:

Our strategy/plan calls for

.....
(cost reduction, improving market share, building our brands, delighting customers, etc.).

Therefore I should be focusing upon

.....
(whatever it is) right now.

Or

Our strategy calls for and I have been spending the last month on (review your diary). Therefore have I got my priorities right?

2. FOCUS

Answer the following question:

On a scale of 1–100% (1 being very poor, 100 being perfect).

What chances of success does our plan currently have?

Or

How happy are we with our business?

Say your answer is 65%, then ask:

What do we need to do right now to move from 65 to 100%?

What's blocking our progress?

List your answers and focus upon them.

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To maintain short-term focus try cutting your plans to one sheet of paper, the 5 or 6 key points.

This could be for a meeting, a workshop, a project or a visit to a business unit.

Example

John McEnroe the great tennis player used to write down his game plan for each tennis game he played.

He referred to it sometimes during the game because he found that his plans and focus could go out of the window in the heat of the battle.

Staying focused is key in sport, it also is key in business.

3. TOP TEAM PRIORITIES

Get your top team together and undertake this simple but potentially very powerful exercise.

Tell them you want to ensure that 'We are all focused on the right priorities for the business.'

- Ask them to write down individually, without conferring, what they perceive the top three priorities for the business are for the next twelve months.
- Now ask them to write down, without conferring, what their three key priorities are for the next twelve months.
- Finally ask them to write down what they believe your three priorities should be for the next twelve months.
- Now share this information in order to clarify the:
 - Business priorities
 - Individual focus
 - Your focus

TIP: When you share the information guard against people rationalising 'We have all got just about the same priorities haven't we?' No, is usually the reality.

Sometimes when this exercise has been done the differences between individual's perception are so great you think you are looking at different businesses! But that's the point of doing it, to get focus and direction in your team's efforts.

If you really want to go deeper with this one, when people say, 'We are focused on the priorities already', ask them:

- What projects are you currently working on that focus on these priorities right now?
- Let's review our discussion honestly together and see how much time we are actually giving these priorities. Let's review and discuss. If necessary go back through each other's diaries together.

Stand back and light the blue touch-paper.

4. PLAY TO STRENGTHS

- Ask yourself 'What am I good at?' 'What do I really enjoy doing?'
- Now review how you have actually spent your time in the last three months. Don't guess; go through your diary.
- What do you learn from this review?
- Refocus on to your strengths and delegate your weaknesses to other people.

EXAMPLE

I (David Hall) am a plant in Belbin terms (The Belbin Team Type Analysis). This is an ideas person who enjoys seeing the big picture and spotting opportunities. I am poor at detail and following things through to completion.

Therefore I need a good PA who ensures the detail gets done and partners who are completer finishers to get projects completed on time.

5. **SEARCH FOR THE DOMINO**

A very powerful way to prioritise actions is to search and focus on the domino i.e., if you line dominoes up on their edge and space them 1" apart and then knock over the end domino the rest tumble down in order. So one action has an impact on lots of others.

If you have a list of ideas or important actions try to find the domino, the one, which if you fix or resolve it will have a major impact on a number of others.

EXAMPLE

A global chemical company wanted to develop its business. It used several toolkits to identify opportunities including the customer perception survey, system slippage and delighting customers.

A list of 30 improvement actions was identified. A debate with the management team identified their domino. They wanted to develop their business by selling more to existing customers, creating new customers and develop some new product applications.

The business sold through agents and distributors globally. Their agents also represented some of their competitors. They realised that if they built stronger links with the agents they could provide new leads, market information, product opportunities and perhaps even some competitor information. This one domino could have a real impact on a number of their key issues.

Departmental Head

During the next 12 months my top priorities are:

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-
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Team member

During the next 12 months I perceive the following to be my top priorities:

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