

IT TAKES FOCUS

by Nick Hughes

One of the common attributes of successful people, whether they are athletes, entertainers, or business leaders, is their ability to focus. They are able to concentrate all of their attention and energy on the right things in the right way. They are focus gurus.



Focus on the future

"To make a great dream come true ... you must first have a great dream." The vision is that dream. It is a passionate desire so strong, so important, it becomes embedded in the subconscious. Successful entrepreneurs have vision. They know precisely where they are going and why. They can articulate a vision statement that is so clear they can see it in every detail. They know where they are going; and they know they will get there.

The vision is their big picture. It keeps them on track as they develop strategies and take steps to grow the business. It gives them the place to focus on when overwhelmed by the mass trivia that invades their business lives. It keeps them focused on the important things and saves them from being overwhelmed by the urgent things.

Setting powerful three-year objectives is another means of keeping focused on the future. Knowing where the business must be in three years time provides the destination from which the road map can be built. Objectives provide the team with a common purpose. Objectives focus all activities towards the future.

Focus on the present

Successful people do what they should be doing and let others do everything else. As the authors of *Power of Focus* explained: "When you focus most of your time and energy doing the things you are truly brilliant at, you eventually reap big rewards."

It sounds so obvious and sounds so simple but we all know it is very difficult. Yet, if we are to emulate the practices of successful people, we must find a way to focus our energies on those present activities we do well. We must find ways to delegate the other stuff. Otherwise, we will remain caught in the stagnant pool of mediocrity.

Focus on the business you are in

Entrepreneurs love creating things and so when their business starts to become routine it is natural that they start looking for something new to do. Big mistake! Or, when we come across that once-in-a-lifetime opportunity we must grab regardless of its impact on our core business. Also big mistake!

People build super successful businesses by sticking to

their knitting. They understand what their business is and they do not stray into areas that dilute the focus. They know that the business must keep getting better and better at what it does. In the book *Good to Great*, Jim Collins describes how many of the companies that failed to become great deviated from their core business. They went into buying frenzies that took management attention away from their business. They lost their focus.

Focus on the critical success indicators

Successful people understand they cannot manage everything. They know they must identify the two or three critical success indicators for their business and focus their attention on them. The critical success indicators might be revenue, or product quality, or achieving the highest level of customer satisfaction.

Every organization has critical success indicators. Successful entrepreneurs know theirs and manage them closely. They focus their management time and energy on the critical success factors.

Focus on staying focused

The reality of running a business is that as soon as we walk through the door in the morning the unexpected happens. And that is the way the day unfolds. So how can we possibly stay focused when we must deal with the urgent matters as they arise? Either by not reacting to the urgent (sometimes impossible) or having a mechanism that quickly returns the focus to the important activities once the urgent matter has been dealt with.

This requires a discipline not normally associated with the freewheeling nature of very successful entrepreneurs. Richard Branson of Virgin comes immediately to mind! But don't be fooled. These people are extremely disciplined and have either very effective daily planning tools or very effective assistants—or both. They know that to build a successful organization they must focus on staying focused. **E**

Nick Hughes is President of Your Planning Partners. The company works with entrepreneurs who are serious about growing their business. They have a number of products ranging from half-day working sessions to their famous Strategic Focus Program™. They conduct regular seminars and publish an e-news for business owners who want to grow. For information on their programs, seminars and e-news visit their website at yourplanningpartners.com, or call 416 429-2415.