Leaders Accomplishing Results

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Abstract

Leaders need to produce effective results for the job targets and goals comprising the span of responsibility and for which they are accountable. Through the process of selectivity, leaders can identify the most important goals, the tasks necessary to successfully accomplish them, and pursue these tasks with a laser focus. Leaders manage themselves and their work by learning on the job how to maximize performance for successfully accomplishing results. They understand and apply energy in order that their effectiveness for accomplishing results is maximized. Leaders realize that working smarter—not necessarily longer and harder—is key to successfully accomplishing results.

Key words: leaders, accomplishing results, selectivity, mindset, focus, energy

1.0 Context

Successful leaders need to effectively perform the tasks related to job targets or goals that accomplish the results for which they are accountable. A leader's job description is a starting point for identifying the necessary job targets or goals for focusing efforts to accomplish high-quality results. Often strategic planning documents and other sources that identify *big picture*—short-term (one year) and long-term (multiple years)—goals for the organization holistically, and a leader's work unit specifically, are available and need to be imbedded in the leader's job targets or goals for their work unit. The point is leaders must specifically know, and then pursue with vigor what results they and their work unit need to accomplish for job targets or goals; identify the tasks to be fulfilled; and effectively perform the tasks so that the desired results are successfully accomplished. *Leaders as used here applies to individuals in supervisory, administrative, management, and executive roles in public, private, non-profit, and not-for-profit organizations.*

2.0 Selectivity

> "The fundamentals of becoming more productive are setting goals and maintaining energy and focus. No goals, no focus, no energy—and you're dead in the water" (Burchard, 2017, p. 177).

It seems that some equally hardworking and talented leaders are more productive regarding time efficiency, quality of work, and quantity of the most important tasks achieved than others. The logical question is, "What is it that the more productive leaders do differently?"

Hansen (2018a) advocates that the more productive leaders are experts at *selectivity*—excellent at identifying the most important job targets or goals and prioritizing the tasks to get them completed. Hirschhorn (2009) emphasizes that identifying job targets or goals to be accomplished are just words until a leader *takes actions* to accomplish them and makes oneself accountable. "You can set all the goals you want, but if you don't do anything to achieve them, nothing is going to change" (Hirschhorn, 2009, p. 93).

The most productive leaders determine which tasks to "let go"—not worth pursuing because of low-level importance or delegating them to others. Peter Drucker (as cited in Burchard, 2017) observed that "Nothing is less productive than to make efficient what should not be done at all" (p. 187). Davis (2017) poses a question that is apropos to the importance of selectivity and the leader's allocation of prioritizing time to identified tasks: "Do you ever reach the end of the day and feel as though nothing *of real value* has been accomplished" (p. 61)? Davis stresses that leaders should take time at the end of each work day to *reflect* on how well their time allocation matches the importance of tasks addressed. Reflection should include *retrieval* (What did I do? How well did it work?) and *generation* (How can I do it better next time?) (Brown, Roediger III, & McDaniels, 2014, p. 222).

The effective leader intensely pursues selected goals and related tasks with a laser focus. Haden (2018) observes that, "We all have our sweet spot—yet most of us spend a fraction of our day actually working in our sweet spot. The key is to find ways to delegate or streamline all of the tasks that distract you from doing what you do best" (p. 237). Haden also suggested the need to assess *personal commitments* a leader might make that take time away from addressing important tasks and goals at work. A personal commitment might be a re-occurring activity that a leader does weekly out of habit—such as attending a meeting for mainly a "ceremonial" purpose—that is inconsequential.

The desired outcome of selectivity is not to work harder (e.g., put in more time on the job), but to actually cut back on the quantity of work. High performing leaders also adhere to the *Occam's [Ockham's] Razor* axiom that advocates the best course of action is the simplest one (Hansen, 2018b). For a goal and related tasks, this means identifying the fewest steps to complete it, fewest meetings needed associated with it, and the shortest amount of time to attain a high-quality work product. In identifying the steps to complete the goal/tasks and the needed resources, the French writer Antonie de' Saint-Exupery (as cited in Hansen, 2018b) formulated that, "Perfection is finally attained not when there is no longer anything to add, but when there is no longer anything to take away" (p. 30).

3.0 Managing Oneself and Work

Leaders need to be *innovators* of work—changing how they do their jobs by knowing when to *say no* and effectively applying the selectivity of work principles. Maxwell's (2018) philosophy advocates the key to effective leadership is having priorities and using Hansen's selectivity approach (p. 27). Maxwell opines that being a *wise* leader encompasses knowing what to overlook. He also points out that, in reality, no one can manage time—it keeps moving on regardless of what a leader pursues. *How time is spent* is the crucial issue. Thus, *prioritizing work* is critical in that time is a known limited quantity. The worst scenario is the leader who tries to make everything priority number one.

Schwantes (2017) notes that "The secret to retaining the highest level of productivity over the span of a workday is *not working longer* but *working smarter* with frequent breaks" (p. 2-1). Regarding the *Frequent Breaks* approach, Schwantes advocates applying the "52 and 17 Rule" which means working with an intense focus for about 52 minutes followed by an approximate break from the task at hand for 17 minutes of relaxing and clearing the mind (p. 2-1). As Burchard (2017) notes, "Your brain also needs more downtime than you probably think—to process information, recover, and deal with life so that you can be more productive" (p. 184). In the context of the 17 minutes to relax and clear the mind, Pink (2018) advocates that a short nap expands the brain's capacity to learn and improves performance.

Some tasks for which a leader is responsible are "re-occurring"—they appear month after month, year after year. Learning from prior experiences with the task and becoming more proficient over time are crucial for top performance. Repeating how the re-occurring task was previously addressed is unfruitful unless perfection has been achieved. When perfection is still absent, *deliberate practice* through consciously focusing on improvement is needed (Ericsson & Pool, 2016).

The *quality* of learning is much more important to performance improvement than merely increasing the time spent attempting to improve the performance of a re-occurring task (Hansen, 2018b). Hyatt (2018) advocates the use of *activation triggers* that "are simple statements of actions that streamline the process of reaching our goals by anticipating whatever contingencies or obstacles we might face" (p. 207). The activation trigger concept helps leaders make better decisions in advance for re-occurring tasks and anticipating obstacles.

4.0 Learning to Get Better at Tasks

Hansen (2018b) advocates the *learning loop* approach to performance enhancement of a task. He identifies six highly effective tactics composing a learning loop based on leaders: (1) striving to make changes in an effort to improve, (2) trying out new approaches, (3) learning from failures, (4) demonstrating curiosity, (5) not assuming she/he "knows best," and (6) experimenting a lot with continuous improvement as the focus (p. 67-68). Hyatt (2018) advocates leaders willing to be innovative and open to a variety of perspectives regarding accomplishing goals, which aligns with several of Hansen's highly effective tactics. Other basics of the learning loop approach to improving performance of a task are: do → measures → obtain feedback → make needed modifications → redo (try again).

1. Do: Identify a new approach to completing the task based on well-thought-out logic and experience.
2. Measures: Identify and apply effective metrics to assess the effectiveness of the new approach.
3. Obtain Feedback: Solicit information from staff involved in developing the new approach to accomplishing the task with an emphasis on causation (If it worked, why? If it did not work, why not? What needs to be changed?)
4. Make Needed Modifications: Make the identified needed adjustments to the approach for addressing the task.
5. Re-do: Implement the modified approach and complete the cycle again, at least through measures (Step 2 above).

It is not unusual for a leader to encounter a *stall point* when striving for the optimal completion of an important task. A stall point occurs when the leader is making good progress toward task attainment and feels satisfaction for the effort and progress, accompanied with the feeling that what has been accomplished is "good enough." In reality, the leader knows that improvement of accomplishing the task at the highest performance level has not been achieved and the present progress is good enough. Hence, a sense of satisfaction regarding effort sets in. As John and Paisner (2018) note, "When things start to get good, we all have a tendency to get a little complacent. We lose whatever it was that pushed us to act in the first place, that feeling that we can do anything" (p. 28). The leader must recommit to excellence, "plow through" this stall point and achieve the best—not just good enough—performance in completing the task at the highest possible level (Hansen, 2018b). In specific situations, though, good enough may suffice because the task being performed significantly decreased in importance over time.

Marston's and Marston's (2018) concept of *transformative resilience* (Type R Mindset) is apropos to leaders working through the stall point. This concept advocates that leaders adapt to circumstances and grow in the face of challenges. Marston and Marston (2018) opine that the Type R Mindset encompasses *psychographics*—core values and beliefs—that do not allow leaders to be defined by adversity in the form of a stall point. Rather, the psychographics motivate the leader to work through the stall point and attain excellence in accomplishing the task.

A unique approach available to leaders for identifying solutions (e.g., sequence of tasks) to solve a problem and more effectively accomplish results is *human-centered design*, which "is a more responsive modality for work and problem solving" (Miller & Sheikh, 2018, p. 40). Miller and Sheikh (2018) explain this approach as:

> Some of the main tenets of human-centered design involve bringing multiple shareholders into the conversation early on to create a diverse pool of opinions surrounding a problem, prototyping multiple solutions at once to see which are the most successful options, and embedding robust feedback mechanisms into solutions so that quick adaptation is possible (p. 38).

New tasks for a leader to accomplish are opportunities to learn, grow, and gain recognition for the team and self. In the context of solving problems on the job through identifying the new tasks to be accomplished, the leader must create an environment in which staff can be creative, innovative, and intrinsically motivated to identify the approaches most likely to successfully complete the tasks (Bass & Bass, 2008).

The same holds true for the leader—the need to often think "outside the box" to identify effective approaches in accomplishing tasks to solve new problems.

It is imperative for leaders to initially have a clear picture of the problem in order to accomplish the effective resolution of it (Maxwell, 2018). Leaders need to avoid assuming that they truly understand the problem without seeking answers to questions focused on providing clarity of the problem—especially in regard to purpose and why the problem is even an issue. This includes a sound comprehension of the *context* in which the problem exists and its relationship to other issues.

Meetings often represent a task in and of themselves. In preparation for any meeting, the leader must identify desired outcomes to be accomplished. Preparation and laying the proper foundation with the participants prior to the meeting greatly increases the likelihood of success. This preparation will also ensure the effectiveness of the meeting in the least amount of time by staying focused on the desired outcomes. An agenda is a must, accompanied with estimated times for each item. Having no agenda or timeline allows a meeting to take on a life of its own and last much longer than necessary. Further, a smile and open, positive body language can go a long way in helping accomplish a meeting's outcomes (Shellenbarger, 2018). Many meetings are re-occurring such as a weekly staff meeting. Getting the preparation down to an ongoing process for these types of meetings is crucial for success and time efficiency.

5.0 Mindset[1]

The Arbinger Institute's (2016) Outward Mindset: Seeing Beyond Ourselves describes mindset as being *inward or outward*. A leader's mindset is paramount to enjoying the job and performing tasks exceptionally well to accomplish results. According to the Arbinger Institute, mindset is how a leader views oneself, staff, and others. With the inward mindset, leaders are generally self-centered and often pay little attention to the needs and wants of staff and others pertaining to what should be changed and improved in the work settings to accomplish goals and, thus, the desired results (Bartz, 2017). Leaders with an outward mindset see staff and others as similar to themselves—whose efforts and work matter to everyone and are paramount to attaining goals.

With the outward mindset, the approach to establish and meet job goals—and tasks related to them—is viewed as a collaborative effort that considers the creative and innovative ideas of all staff involved and causes an environment in which staff eagerly share ideas. Table 1 provides specific comparisons of the inward and outward mindsets for leaders in the context of working with staff and others.

6.0 Managing Energy[2]

"We should realize we have limited energy and devote it only to things that really matter" (Stulberg & Magness, 2017, p. 144). The more tasks we think really matter, the less energy we have to devote to any one of them. Only by becoming a *minimalist* can we become a *maximalist* regarding accomplishing results. This means minimizing distractions and activities that are extraneous to work. It also means avoiding office politics, gossip, and discussions unrelated to work to the extent possible (Stulberg & Magness, 2017). The most essential part about adopting the minimalist-to-be-a-maximalist strategy is figuring out what really matters and devoting *maximum* time and effort to these tasks, while allocating *minimal* energy to everything else (Stulberg & Magness, 2017, p. 146).

"Most of us respond to rising demands in the workplace by putting in longer hours, which inevitably takes a toll on us physically, mentally, and emotionally" (Schwartz & McCarthy, 2010, p. 61). Leaders often try to *outwork* increased job demands, which results in an energy drain. In the long run, putting in more time is not the answer to effectively addressing an increased workload. Leaders need to calculate "the right amount of effort [energy] necessary to achieve a goal" (Cardone, 2011, p. xi). This increased workload and time spent will become addictive and commonplace if a leader does not provide balance. The bottom line is that leaders need to allocate their energy so that it is not depleted and consciously focus on how best to use it for maximizing productivity. As Kogon, Merrill, and Rinne (2015) note, "Extraordinary productive people consistently *recharge* [their energy]" (p. 15).

The capacity for work energy comes from four sources: (1) body, (2) emotions, (3) mind, and (4) spirit. For each of these factors, energy can be expanded and renewed with *intentional practice* (Goleman, 1995). A resurgence in energy can be enhanced physically by leaders having proper diets, exercise, and sleep. Meditation, which creates relaxation, can also play an important role in regenerating energy. Energy regeneration can also be addressed by leaders taking periodic breaks throughout the work day to rest their minds.

Leaders must condition themselves to relax in order to regenerate energy (Kogon, Merrill, & Rinne, 2015). Reducing interruptions by others and those that leaders create on their own (e.g., hyperpaced tech-enabled activities such as emails, cell phone calls, texts, and tweets) are crucial to controlling depletion of energy (Kogon, Merrill, & Rinne, 2015). Expressing appreciation to others as well as receiving positive feedback from individuals, teams, and members of other groups with whom a leader works, are excellent sources for regenerating energy. The bottom line is that leaders must use their energy wisely to accomplish results for the important goals.

7.0 Focus[3]

> Bad news for self-proclaimed multitaskers: While some research continues to keep up the myth that you can productively do more than one task at a time, the human brain simply isn't designed to function this way. Attempting to divide your focus increases stress and decreases performance (Grenny, 2017).

Focus is concentrated attention—the ability to zero in on a goal/job target and see related tasks through to completion. It is represented by leaders having a clear understanding of what they want to accomplish and how to do so. Focus gives leaders *drive* (Dalio, 2017). Linking drive with ambition, and even impatience at times, can propel leaders to higher levels of focus and goal accomplishment (Charan, Willigan, & Giffen, 2017).

Focused leaders are not in a reactive mode to every issue that comes their way and not sidetracked by less important issues. Focused leaders are critical to developing a positive work environment for all staff. This focused leadership mentality allows them to lead beyond their individual goals and promote positive growth for the whole organization. Focused leaders resist being distracted from crucial goals that truly require their attention and concentrated effort (Bruch & Ghoshal, 2002). Borrowing from the *Conscious Communications* philosophy, when leaders intensely focus on something, their ability to accurately "hone in" on what needs to be done sharpens (Shores, 2017). The focused leader understands that an *interference dilemma* exists because of obstacles such as attempting to multitask or allowing irrelevant information to enter the mind (Gazzaley & Rosen, 2016).

Distractions, in the form of interruptions, are a major enemy of the leader striving to effectively apply focus. "Persistent interruptions become especially insidious when we are unaware of the peripheral role our surroundings play in shaping our thoughts, moods, and choices" (Grenny, 2017, p. 106). Leaders can greatly enhance their ability to focus by structuring their immediate surroundings and general work environment to intentionally minimize interruptions and other forms of distractions. This can be difficult, though, because of the expectations of others to have untethered access to them.

8.0 Concluding Thoughts

To be successful, leaders need to effectively accomplish results for job goals through effectively identifying and fulfilling the associated tasks. This requires identifying critical job goals, prioritizing them, and pursuing the accomplishment of the associated tasks with a laser focus that minimizes distractions and maximizes efforts of the leaders and those with whom they work. This identification of critical goals allows leaders to be successful in the most efficient amount of time. Understanding how to apply the outward mindset and effectively using and regenerating energy are keys to accomplishing the results for which leaders are responsible and held accountable.

9.0 Footnotes

[1]This section is based in part on Bartz, D., Thompson, K., & Rice, P. (2017). Principals managing and developing their human capital. *National Forum of Educational Administration and Supervision Journal*, 34(4), 1-9.

[2]This section is based in part on Bartz, D.E. (2017, September). Applying positive psychology to school administrators. *International Journal of Education and Social Science*, 4(8), 1-11.

[3]This section is based in part on Bartz, D.E. & Bartz, C.E.A. (2017, September). The resilient and focused manager. *International Journal of Business and Social Science*, 8(9), 1-7.

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Table 1

Comparing Inward and Outward Mindsets for Leaders Toward Staff and Others

Inward Mindset	Outward Mindset
1. Strives to control people	1. Strives to cause staff and others to be fully responsible and engaged in work
2. Often blames others when things go wrong	2. Takes responsibility for actions of oneself and staff in the work environment
3. Is narcissistic	3. Displays modesty toward staff and others
4. Consistently defends one's position	4. Works collaboratively with staff to solicit their opinions and collectively develop the best solutions for problems
5. Has interactions with staff and others that focus on protecting oneself	5. Has interactions with staff and others that focus on building positive relationships with and among people
6. Uses behaviors that sometimes try to manipulate staff and others in an attempt to improve one's own image	6. Strives to facilitate "committed behaviors" collectively with staff and others to improve work produced and achieve goals
7. Shows minimal regard for how to create "collective results" among staff and others	7. Is motivated about how to work with staff and others collaboratively and for others to collaborate with each other and oneself
8. Views staff and others in a context as to how they can help oneself achieve goals	8. Focuses on the needs and challenges of staff and others to create a work environment that prompts individual and team cooperation
Inward Mindset	**Outward Mindset**
9. Assumes that to simply change one's behavior is the best way to enhance the work productivity of staff and others	9. Understands that changing how oneself views staff and others are equally beneficial to everyone in comparison to merely focusing on changing behaviors toward staff and others
10. Focuses on how to make oneself "look good" for work produced, even at the expense of staff and others	10. Sees, thinks, and works on how to improve job performance through collaboration with staff and others that incorporates their needs and wants, and gains recognition for them

11. Often creates competition between staff and causes them to work independently of each other	11. Focuses on the staff as an entity which has collective belief of working with each other for the common good of the work unit and organization
12. Focuses mainly on the job responsibilities of oneself	12. Assists staff and others in identifying their interests and being motivated to successfully achieve what they need for the betterment of the work unit and organization
13. Focuses on getting the work "out the door" with little concern for its benefits	13. Focuses on the meaning and purposefulness of the work and the positive impact it can have on the work unit and organization
14. Is inclined to step in, take over, and direct the work of staff and others when not pleased	14. Helps staff and others understand what they need to do; provides developmental training, when needed; and furnishes the necessary resources to accomplish the goals of the work unit
15. Creates conflict that keeps staff embattled with each other (divide and conquer for control)	15. Focuses on preventing and resolving conflict among staff and others
Inward Mindset	**Outward Mindset**
16. Focuses on personal and professional goals and behaviors to protect and advance oneself	16. Focuses on the goals of the work unit and organization, and objectives and behaviors that take staff and others into consideration
17. Advances one's own agenda at the expense of staff	17. Focuses on working together with staff and others for collective results to benefit the work unit and organization
18. Identifies what can be taken from others to achieve objectives for oneself	18. Identifies what can be given to help staff and others successfully achieve their work objectives
19. Oftentimes tries to control the behavior of staff and others for self-benefit through power, authority, and fear	19. Relinquishes power and authority to empower staff's and others' abilities to be responsible and accountable for their work (Bartz, Thompson, & Rice, 2017)