



What to Do Next

Whether the economy's in a downturn or an upturn, here are the steps to extraordinary results.

By Paul Lemberg

Turbulent times offer huge opportunities to those who properly position themselves and remain in action. Here are a few simple, timeless steps to take. They will put you in action and cause increased results regardless of the state of the economy.

Get a Vision Check-Up.

Everything you do reflects how you see the world — whether implicitly, explicitly, consciously, or unconsciously. Consider your vision. Does it inspire you to do the things you must? Does it fill you with energy and get you out of bed in the morning? Is your vision large enough? Will it help you change the world — even a little bit?

Scan the Environment.

If you think the environment has changed, ask yourself how. What specifically is different? Are there more competitors or fewer? What has changed for your customers, funders, clients? What new trends affect the way you can or should do business? What product or service requirements have changed? Is there new technology you can and should apply? What new opportunities can you uncover? What do your prospects need now that they didn't need before?

Stop doing all the things that don't make a difference.

Is your market position still viable? If it is, look for ways to strengthen it. If it isn't, what's wrong with it? Is your target market shrinking? Are your perceived benefits no longer as valuable as they once were? Has your market advantage been eroded by hungry competitors? Have you become obsolete?

Scan the environment and figure out what's what with your customer and prospect base. Then decide what changes you need to make to capture their attention and fill their needs.

Set New Results Goals.

Results goals produce an end; they are about what you will have. Goals like: a million in revenue, 15% profit on product X, 50 new customers in July, a 5% direct response rate, the new product released by December 15th, or 10 new members by year-end.

Action goals are about what you will do. For instance, you'll contact 300 prospective donors, or send out 5,000 mail pieces. You will write and send two press releases each month, or contact 20 possible strategic partners.

With action goals, you have total control over whether or not

you do them; with results goals you may not have this same control — circumstances intervene, stuff happens. The world doesn't always cooperate. But you can control your actions; you *can* do what you say you're going to do. And if realizing your action goals doesn't give you the results you want, you can do more and different actions until you achieve your results.

Set new results goals that are consistent with your current vision and current market conditions, and make sure you have a way to reach those goals. But first, answer the question: How are you using your time? Will the things that fill your day help you realize your vision and your results goals? If your goal is to increase your new donor base by 20%, you must contact prospects, right? But if you're only speaking to existing donors, you'll never reach that goal. The results may be as good, but they will be different results.

Measure your accomplishments against your goals regularly — at least weekly.

Detail what you're doing each day — check if your daily actions and your committed results are a match. Stop doing all the things you do because they used to make sense. Stop doing all the things you do because someone else thinks you should. Stop doing all the things that don't make a difference. Only do what's likely to help you achieve your results goals.

Develop a List of 20 Actions to Take.

With your vision, environment scan, and results goals in hand, write a list of 20 — or more — actions that will help produce your committed results.

Why not just jump into the first thing that comes to mind? Because it may be the same tired old stuff you've been doing all along, and may not get you anywhere. Shift your brain into gear, push out your

thinking, stretch your mind a bit. You may come up with something radical. Or perhaps you'll rediscover a program that once worked but for some reason you dropped. Or you'll hear an audiotape or read a great book that will be just the right trigger, and that great idea will fall into place. Don't stop at 10, 15, or 17. Go for at least 20 ideas.

Set New Action Goals.

With that list of 20 in hand, set new action goals. Don't set too many — define a few critical action steps you can work on right away. When those are accomplished, you'll set new ones. Only set goals you're seriously committed to accomplishing — and ones which have a clear link to your results goals.

Measure Your Results.

Put a measurement system in place for each action goal and each results goal. You can use fancy software for this, or you can use something simple like the United Way thermometer in front of Town Hall. Or just write on a piece of graph paper.

However you do it, measure your accomplishments against your goals regularly — at least weekly. If you find yourself falling short, question what else you can do — more or differently — to make your numbers.

Take Right Action.

That's it. The timeless steps: Check your vision, scan your environment, set results goals, decide on action goals, take action steps, and measure results. Do these things and you're taking right action. Whether the economy's up or down, bad or good — you now know what to do next. Take action now. ■

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