



The Ben Franklin Program for Focusing on What's Important

Wishing you could jumpstart a new level of performance? Try these suggestions.

By Paul Lemberg

Here's a curious question: Do all your daily efforts push your organization toward your objectives?

For most organizations, the answer is no. People spend a fair amount of time doing things that don't really make the organization more successful. When you stop to consider it, there are a limited number of areas that make your organization succeed. Here's how to find those areas and use them to propel your organization to success:

Pinpoint Your Success Factors.

First, identify your critical success factors—those areas most vital to your organization's success. See "What Really Matters?" on page 13 to start you thinking.

Be specific when you identify your factors. Don't say "people" when the issue is recruiting, employee satisfaction, training, or compensation.

Test your assumptions by imagining a decline in a particular factor. How would that affect your organization? Now imagine an improvement in that factor. What would the impact be?

Do all your daily efforts push your organization toward your objectives?

There are a limited number of areas that make your organization succeed.

In selecting factors, limit your list to no more than seven. Why seven? Cognitive theory suggests that human minds are efficient at juggling from five to nine separate trains of thought. The average and oft-quoted number is seven. Our plan is for you to keep your eye on the ball, so you want to limit the balls to those you can keep your eye on.

Score Yourself.

Next, decide how well your organization is fulfilling each critical factor. If one of your target areas is your board of directors, for example, ask yourself questions such as these: Are all the board seats filled? Does the board fulfill its intended purpose? Are board members active, enthusiastic, and committed to your organization's mission? Then indicate how well you're meeting those criteria by assigning your organization a number between 1 and 10: non-performing (1), poor (2-3), mediocre (4-5), good (6-7), great (8-9), or outstanding (10). Although this ultimately is a subjective process, you want to make it as objective as possible.

Set New Goals.

Now determine a target score for each factor. If you've assessed your

current employee training at a 4 (mediocre), are you shooting for a 7 (good) or a 9 (great)? The higher your goal, of course, the more resources and energy you must allocate to fulfill it.

Close the Gap.

For each factor, ask yourself: What will close the gap between the current and desired scores? What actions will raise performance in that area to a higher level?

You may have intuitive responses to these questions, and when appropriate, trust your gut. If need be, back that gut response with research—but only when cost effective. (Sometimes the most cost effective research is implementation, particularly in simple matters.)

Limit your list to no more than seven.

Depending on the specific factor and the size of the gap, you may plan to close it in stages or shoot the gap all at once. You can launch one initiative at a time or implement several initiatives in parallel.

Once you launch your gap-closing initiatives, continually measure your results. Report your progress to participants and stakeholders, and post it publicly.

Follow the Ben Franklin Rotation Program.

As a young adult, Ben Franklin identified 13 virtues he aspired to.

Sometimes the most cost effective research is implementation.

To implement these virtues in his life, he devised a “Plan for Self Examination,” a program whereby he focused his attention, one virtue at a time, for one week at a time, rotating through the entire list four times a year. He kept a detailed log of the actions he took to develop the virtues in himself, along with his personal results.

I’ve adapted Franklin’s concept and called it the Ben Franklin Rotation Program. When you use this program, you’ll always have a strategy in place to improve every one of your critical factors. But in any given week, your primary attention will be on only one factor.

Using Franklin’s principles, at the beginning of each week, focus your mind—or the collective mind of your management team—on improving that week’s factor. What new actions can you take, what new attitudes can you adopt, what new or renewed approaches are available to enhance your performance in that one specific area? Do that “thing” wholeheartedly for the en-

tire week.

Franklin also suggests how to track your progress in this venture. Create a score sheet detailing your critical success factors. On this sheet, list each factor, its measurements, your current 1-10 rating, your target rating, and your next action steps for improving that rating. (For score sheet templates to help you in this process, visit www.lemberg.com.)

Also, give each factor a weight to indicate its relative importance so that you can develop an overall score. Each week, re-rate all the factors on the score sheet, and graph your progress. You may also graph the overall score. Publish the score sheet and the graphs. You can establish a reward system based on individual progress or total progress.

This simple system will focus your attention on improving each one of your critical success factors. With carefully selected factors, you insure both rapid performance increases and balance in your organization. ■

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What Really Matters?

Review this list of success factors, and circle those you believe are most important. You may have to add other, more specific or subtle factors to the list to describe the critical influences on your organization’s success.

- Program development
- Sufficient working capital
- Customer satisfaction
- Technical support
- Continuous quality improvement
- Fund development
- Volunteer management
- Employee recruitment
- Personnel retention programs
- Expense management
- Marketing communications
- Executive leadership
- Staff training and development
- Strategic objectives
- Values and beliefs
- Mission, purpose, and vision
- Individual accountability
- Productivity and effectiveness metrics
- Internal communications
- Strategic and tactical planning
- Financial controls and risk management
- Executive team
- Board of directors
- Board of advisors
- Market research

Your Go-To List

Begin your journey toward high performance with these *Nonprofit World* articles at www.snpo.org/ members:

- **What to Do Next** (Vol. 24, No. 1)
- **Seven Ps for Sustaining Success** (Vol. 21, No. 5)
- **A New Way to Evaluate Performance: Measure Your Use of Time** (Vol. 19, No. 4)
- **You’ve Got to Know When to Hold ‘Em, Know When to Fold ‘Em** (Vol. 17, No. 1)