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5 ELEMENTS OF EXTRAORDINARY BUSINESS PERFORMANCE

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INTRODUCTION

Business people are always looking for a key idea that will allow them to increase revenues, drive commissions, or deliver more clients. It can be an individual salesperson, a small business owner, the manager of a department or business unit, or a service professional – each is searching for something that will spark growth and produce more profits.

However, it is difficult not to be overwhelmed by the continuous onslaught of concepts touted as the means to deliver on these objectives. A survey of popular business performance improvement ideas yields the following: investing in employee engagement, re-engineering critical processes, implementing quality management techniques, changing the corporate culture, spurring innovation and creativity, creating uncontested market space, implementing a balanced scorecard, putting strengths to work, creating a marketing buzz, improving your EQ...and on and on.

Each and every one of these concepts, and many more, are useful, applicable, and beneficial. But which one is right for you - *right now*? Which one holds the key to unlocking the door that leads to extraordinary performance? This is the critical question, but, before we can begin to answer this fundamental question, there are two obstacles that must be overcome.

First, and perhaps most difficult, is the challenge addressed by Michael Gerber in *The E-Myth Revisited: Why Most Small Businesses Don't Work and What to Do*. Gerber recognized that a primary threat to business growth and development is the difficulty in finding – or creating – the necessary *time* to adequately address critical strategic issues.

Business people invariably feel trapped by the demands of running their business; demands that leave little or no time for assessment, review, or planning – all of which are vital to determining which of the myriad of ideas might lead to improved performance.

Second, many business people lack any semblance of a *strategic* plan that can guide decision-making or provide the baseline necessary to evaluate the suitability of new ideas or concepts. In these cases, decisions are often reactive or made under duress, which only multiplies stress and reduces the odds of making good decisions for the overall benefit of the company.

Extraordinary business performance is rarely, if ever, an accident. Success is a destination that requires a carefully thought out plan, and top performers create the necessary time to plan for that success. This White Paper will present the five key elements that all top performers - salespeople, business owners, managers, service professionals, entrepreneurs, and athletes - use to make the leap from average to extraordinary performance; elements which, in fact, can be duplicated in any area of your personal or professional life.

"Our goals can only be reached through a vehicle of a plan, in which we must fervently believe, and upon which we must vigorously act. There is no other route to success."

Pablo Picasso

MANY BUSINESS PEOPLE LACK ANY SEMBLANCE OF A STRATEGIC PLAN THAT CAN GUIDE DECISION-MAKING OR PROVIDE THE BASELINE NECESSARY TO EVALUATE THE SUITABILITY OF NEW IDEAS OR CONCEPTS."

THE 5 ESSENTIAL ELEMENTS

Performance improvements rarely happen without change; a change in perspective, in methodology, in structure, in behavior, or in execution. However, simply recognizing that things need to change in order to improve performance is much easier than finding the will or the time to make those changes a reality. That is why so many New Year's resolutions wind up as little more than vague ideas or weak promises. It is the same reason why many entrepreneurs fail to capitalize on a great idea, or why some great athletes never reach their potential.

In business, this problem often translates into a planning process that is best summarized by a phrase that begins with the words "I hope…"

- *I hope business is better this year.*
- *I hope the economy improves.*
- *I hope our advertising is more effective.*
- *I hope I reach my sales goals.*
- *I hope I can find more clients.*

Unfortunately, "hope" is a poor substitute for strategy, and extraordinary performance doesn't happen by accident. Success is the result of deliberate planning, the courage to examine your current practices, and the discipline to make revisions as necessary. Surely it is self-evident that another year of doing the same things the same way is unlikely to produce a different performance result – the age-old definition of insanity.

If we undertake to examine the success of any top performer - in business, in sales, in sports, or in life - we will discover the presence of five essential elements that are critical to extraordinary performance:

Vision ----------------------creates purpose

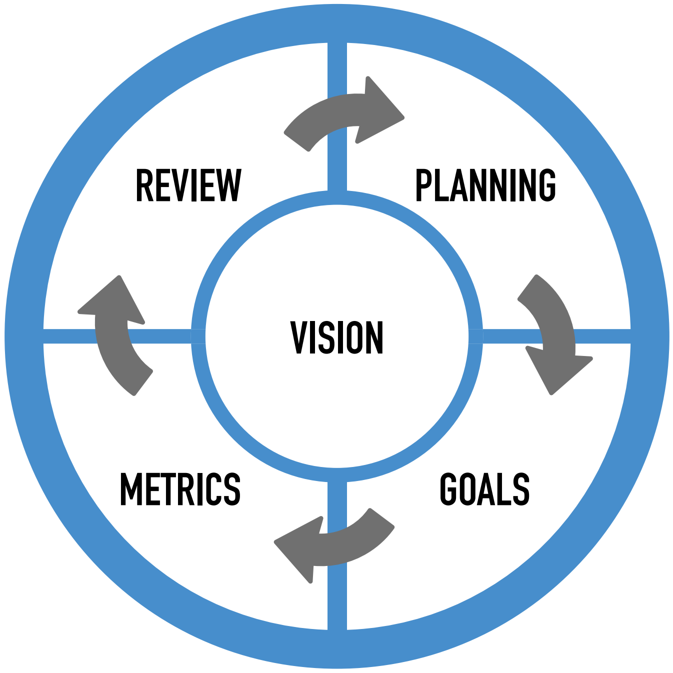
Planning ------------------creates direction

Performance goals -----create focus

Measurements ----------create accountability

Review --------------------creates validation

As you can see, each of these elements is responsible for creating a link in the chain of high performance. The removal of any of these elements from your business creates a serious weakness in your ability to make the leap from average to extraordinary results.



Vision creates *purpose*: an anticipated outcome that guides your planned actions.

Planning creates *direction*: a line leading to a place or point; an indication of what to do.

Performance goals create *focus*: the concentration of attention or energy on something.

Measurements create *accountability*: the obligation to demonstrate and take responsibility for performance in light of agreed expectations

Review creates *validation:* the evaluation of the correctness of an idea or course of action.

"There is nothing so useless as doing efficiently that which should not be done at all."

Peter Drucker

MEASUREMENTS CREATE ACCOUNTABILITY: THE OBLIGATION TO DEMONSTRATE AND TAKE RESPONSIBILITY FOR PERFORMANCE IN LIGHT OF AGREED EXPECTATIONS."

1 STEP ONE: VISION - THE FUEL THAT DRIVES PERFORMANCE

Jack Welch, the legendary CEO of General Electric for twenty years, observed that, "Good business leaders create a vision, articulate the vision, passionately own the vision, and relentlessly drive it to completion." Why? Because vision is the passionate belief that drives an individual to push beyond his or her limits, to buy into a seemingly impossible task, to adopt a noble cause and forcefully pursue it. In other words, vision creates purpose.

In 1989, landmark research by Carl Larson and Frank LaFasto revealed that a consistent element in *all* high performance teams is a *clear and elevating goal* – a defined vision of success that both unifies and challenges the team:

> *"First, high performance teams have both a clear understanding of the goal to be achieved and a belief that the goal embodies a worthwhile or important result. Second, whenever an ineffectively functioning team was identified and described, the explanation for the team's ineffectiveness involved, in one sense or another, the goal. The goal had become unfocused…"* [1]

Vision is the mental picture you create of your end result. For example, Ted Williams, the legendary Boston Red Sox left-fielder, said that his goal was to be recognized by the fan on the street as the "the greatest hitter who ever lived." To this end, according to one sportswriter, Williams "studied hitting as if he had been assigned to the Manhattan Project." Undoubtedly, a clear and elevating goal is an extremely powerful motivator.

A second, and critical, aspect of vision is the *values* that define an individual or organization. Those values, along with a compelling objective, answer a very important question: *Who are we?*

QuikTrip Corporation is a chain of five hundred convenience stores headquartered in Tulsa, Oklahoma. Celebrating its 50^{th} anniversary in 2008, QuikTrip's vision is simple: to be the best gasoline, convenience, and food retailer in the business, in the

eyes of their customers, their employees, and their *competitors*. To this end, each and every store is fanatical about meeting the company's standards and doing things right.

However, the company also clearly defines their corporate values. First, there is an unwavering commitment to quality in everything they do; in fact, everything they do or sell is guaranteed. If a customer is not completely satisfied, QuikTrip will refund the customer's money.[2] Second, there is an unwavering commitment to their employees – through extensive training, competitive wages, and frequent promotion opportunities. "We're in business for our employees," according to Chester Cadieux, founder and chairman of QuikTrip.[3]

QuikTrip answers the question, "*Who are we?*" very clearly for each and every member of the company. Every business decision is guided by the vision created by Cadieux, which has led the company to eclipse $7 billion in annual revenues, landing the company on the Fortune 100 Best Places to Work list for six consecutives years (No. 28 in 2008).

Take Away: Vision – a clear and elevating goal joined together with a set of guiding values - creates purpose. This is the spark that ignites the potential of companies and individuals.

> *"Teamwork is the ability to work together toward a common vision. The ability to direct individual accomplishments toward organizational objectives. It is the fuel that allows common people to attain uncommon results."*
>
> **Andrew Carnegie**

2 STEP TWO: PLANNING - THE ROAD MAP TO YOUR DESTINATION

Zig Ziglar, world-renowned motivational speaker, describes a phenomenon to his audiences that he calls "the day-before-vacation" attitude. This is the ability that people have to get enormous amounts of work done in a very short period of time – on the day before they start their family vacation. Realizing that dozens of things need to be done before leaving, people will write down every single item that needs to completed before they can leave, and then prioritize and sequence those tasks in order to complete them in a single day. It is vivid testimony to how much anyone can accomplish with a task list, a time deadline, and a clear and elevating goal!

In business, as in everyday life, planning is essential to top performance, because *planning creates direction*. Too often, day-to-day business decisions are determined by crisis rather than strategy, and acute "symptoms" are treated while underlying causes are left undiagnosed. A well-defined plan guides decision-making, allowing variables to be considered in the context of clearly defined objectives. And, when circumstances warrant, it is easier to make changes in direction when an existing plan can be analyzed relative to actual performance.

Quite simply, planning is the road map to top performance – it defines your starting point, your destination, and the route that you will use to arrive. A comprehensive plan also includes the mode of transportation, the items to be included in the bags you pack, and the preparations you make for both departure and arrival. In business, these items correspond to your products and services, and the support and resources needed to complete your objectives.

The planning process requires that you answer these three questions:

- Where are we now?
- Where are we going?
- How do we get there?

Whether you are a service professional, a sales representative, a small business owner, or a leader in a volunteer organization, these three questions provide the template for developing a well-defined plan. The objective is to clearly define the current situation, establish an overarching mission, and creates the strategies and tactics that will accomplish that mission.

> *"Have a plan. Follow the plan, and you'll be surprised how successful you can be. Most people don't have a plan. That's why it's is easy to beat most folks."*
>
> **Paul "Bear" Bryant**
> **Head Football Coach, Alabama (1958-1982)**

Create a Starting Point

The first step in creating an effective plan is to determine the status of your current situation. In order to travel to a destination, we first need to know what our starting point is, because our distance from that destination will be critical in our travel preparations. A trip to San Francisco looks much different from Orlando than it does from Sacramento or Phoenix. Preparations will be different. The directions will be more complex. It will take more time.

> THE OBJECTIVE IS TO CLEARLY DEFINE THE CURRENT SITUATION, ESTABLISH AN OVERARCHING MISSION, AND CREATES THE STRATEGIES AND TACTICS THAT WILL ACCOMPLISH THAT MISSION."

So it is with business planning. Circumstances may dictate that necessary changes should be made incrementally rather than all at once. It might be completely unreasonable to make wholesale changes in your business in a single year – or, on the other hand, it may be exactly what is needed. At the same time, small tweaks to a reasonably healthy organization may produce significant results – but, in either case, we won't know how to proceed until we analyze where we are *right now*.

Create a destination

Your destination – your defining mission – should be very specific. If your mission is to increase sales or profitability, what is the number you are shooting for?

If your mission is to develop a new product line or marketing campaign, be specific as to what you intend to accomplish.

Defining your destination in vague terms like "we need to sell more product" or "I need to acquire more clients" – is the equivalent of embarking on a road trip with a mission of simply "more driving" rather than arriving at a specific destination.

Create the means to arrive

Once your mission is defined, the next step is to determine exactly how you intend to accomplish that mission. People often race to this step when deciding what needs to be done, but without a clearly defined starting point and destination any course of action can be perceived as a correct decision. For instance, why not save on fuel expense by riding a bicycle to your destination? Sounds like a great idea – until you discover that your destination is twelve hundred miles away.

The *means to arrive* is created by defined strategies, which are then supported by specific tactics. In war, for example, strategy is choosing the battleground while tactics is choosing which weapons and troops to use to win the battle. Unfortunately, most planning focuses on tactics and ignores strategy. In the example above, traveling by bicycle is a *tactic*, which is neither good nor bad in and of itself. If the defining strategy is to arrive quickly with significant storage capacity, using a bicycle is a very poor tactic. However, a completely different strategy, if deemed appropriate to the mission, could make the bicycle an excellent choice of tactics. First, determine the strategies to accomplish your mission, and then fashion your tactics to support each strategy.

Take Away: Plans provide the means to fulfill your vision. Without detailed plans – a map to guide your way – it is significantly more difficult to make progress toward your objectives.

"Being busy does not always mean real work. The object of all work is production or accomplishment and to either of these ends there must be forethought, system, planning, intelligence, and honest purpose, as well as perspiration. Seeming to do is not doing."

Thomas A. Edison

> WITHOUT DETAILED PLANS – A MAP TO GUIDE YOUR WAY – IT IS SIGNIFICANTLY MORE DIFFICULT TO MAKE PROGRESS TOWARD YOUR OBJECTIVES."

3 STEP THREE: GOALS – ESTABLISHING YOUR PERFORMANCE EXPECTATIONS

Service professionals search for new clients. Small businesses pursue more profit. Salespeople want to increase their commissions. But how much? What is your target? The strategy to create a 50% increase in sales revenue will look much different than the strategy that creates only a 15% increase. While business people want more, they typically underestimate the critical necessity of creating specific goals that define what "more" looks like. As a result, many business people have few tangible goals beyond "work hard" or "sell more."

During the planning process, you create a destination; but, that destination should be clearly and specifically defined. It is not enough just to drive *more*, and, while it is helpful to know that you will be driving *west*, what is your specific destination?

Effective goals – performance expectations – would define the final destination explicitly, provide a time frame for arrival, and set the benchmarks for travel during that time frame.

Without specific goals – targets to strive for – two negative things occur. First, it is difficult

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to know if one's performance is on-track. Companies, for example, may pat themselves on the back for ten percent growth while the industry sector is growing at a rate of forty percent, or, the vast majority of that growth was the result of good fortune rather than superior execution.

Second, the lack of a defined goal makes it difficult to know what improvements should be made to improve your performance. If you are not sure where you are failing, how do you know where to focus improvement efforts? Is it poor product design or ineffective salespeople? Lack of productivity or poor cash management? Poor execution or bad design? Perhaps Yogi Berra said it best, "If you don't know where you are going, you might wind up someplace else."

For many years, physicians and athletes alike considered the 4-minute mile an unbreakable barrier. When Roger Bannister broke the tape in 3 minutes, 59.4 seconds at Oxford in 1954, he stunned the world – and he reached a goal he had set for himself more than two years prior to his historic achievement. All of his training had been focused on breaking the impenetrable four-minute barrier. Each failure to reach that objective caused him to reevaluate his plan. Ultimately, he accomplished what no one in the world had ever before accomplished.

Goals create focus - but they also serve as the primary driver of performance. Ideally, every action is determined by clearly written objectives, and unnecessary actions are quickly identified and discarded. In the broader sense, goals are used to establish performance standards for each individual in an organization. No one does his/her best work without a clear target.

Take Away: Performance goals provide the targets that serve to focus your efforts. Those goals define where you are going and provide the means to determine if you are making progress.

"In the absence of clearly-defined goals, we become strangely loyal to performing daily trivia until ultimately we become enslaved by it."

Robert Heinlein

4 STEP FOUR: MEASUREMENTS - THE IMPORTANCE OF KEEPING SCORE

What's the score? Who's ahead? How much time is left? Regardless of the game, it is the measurements that defines who is winning, or, who has the best chance of winning. The same measurements often determine if changes need to be made to specific tactics or strategies so that winning becomes a greater possibility. Ultimately, once the game is over, one critical measure determines who won the game.

Regardless of whether the objective is winning or simply improvement, measurement creates accountability to a level of performance. Only by assessing performance against a standard – a measurement – can one know if he/she is performing well or needs to take corrective action to improve.

For Bannister, the goal to become the world's fastest miler was defined very clearly by measurement – the four-minute mile. In 1951, Bannister ran 4:08, and decided that he needed to change his training regimen to improve his performance. By the end of 1953, he had reached the 4:02 mark and he continued to make minute changes to his race tactics. Finally, on May 6, 1954 at Iffley Road Track in England, Bannister reached his ultimate objective. He crossed

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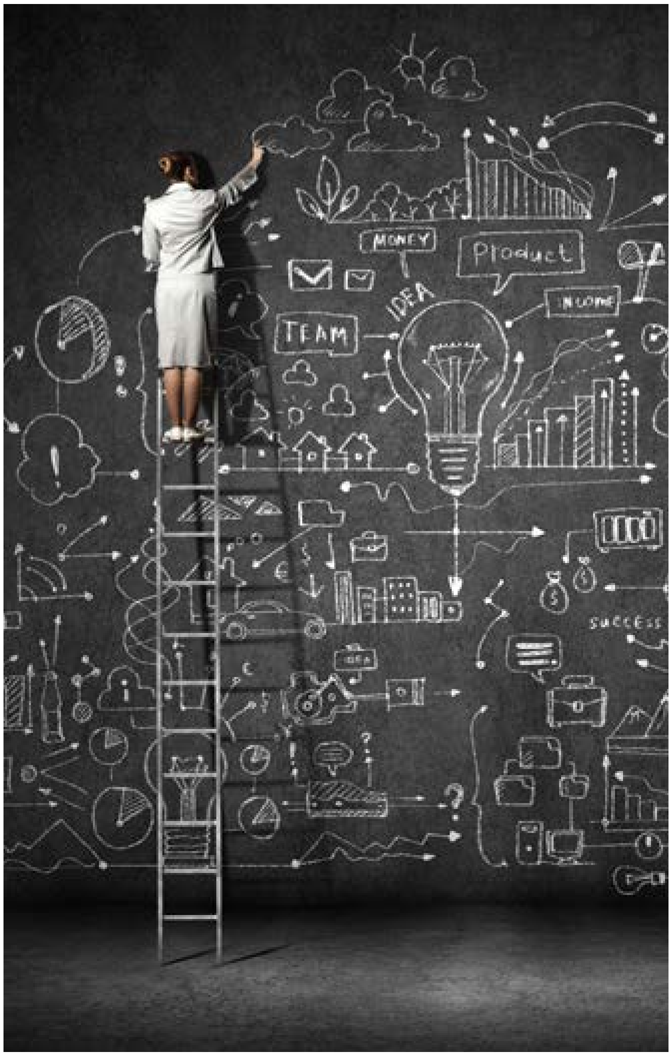
the finish line in 3:59.4, a performance that astounded the track world, but would have had considerably less meaning without a measurement to establish its uniqueness.

Consider the workplace: Without standards of performance and critical metrics in place, how is a manager to have an objective discussion with an employee regarding workplace performance? Perhaps one of the most challenging conversations a manager may experience is to have an employee say, "I'm working as hard as I can." Which is more important – an employee who works hard or an employee that consistently achieves an established standard of performance? Unfortunately, the real issue is not how hard someone *feels* they are working, but whether or not that hard work is producing an acceptable level of performance. Without a measure (or measures) that indicates performance



levels, it is difficult for a manager to assess that performance objectively.

Clearly, it is true that not every aspect of a person's job responsibilities will necessarily have a measurement attached. On the other hand, it is not at all unusual for an employee to have absolutely no objective measure in place to indicate how he/she is performing.

Without measurement(s) in place in critical performance areas, any argument regarding performance is completely dependent upon subjective observations – a situation that will necessarily result in conflict.

The bottom line is that without good data it is practically impossible to know *where and why* to make changes to positively impact performance.

Take Away: Measurements eliminate argument and create accountability to standards of performance.

"To execute strategy more effectively, a more positive and useful definition of accountability is required. We need to view accountability as both an organizational mindset and a series of behaviors, both of which we can learn and improve upon over time. Accountability requires a level of self-leadership that includes making, keeping, and answering for personal commitments. Such a perspective focuses on both current and future efforts as opposed to reactive excuses..."

Gary Harpst
Six Disciplines Execution Revolution

5 STEP FIVE: REVIEW – ASSESSING YOUR PROGRESS

Is your plan working? Are you reaching your objectives? What adjustments need to be made to maximize performance? The answers to these questions surface when performance results are compared to stated objectives. This comparison provides the opportunity to evaluate the validity of your plan, to assess the performance capabilities of those executing the plan, and to determine what changes need to be made to ensure success.

In many cases, the problem is not the plan itself – it is the *execution* of the plan. Regarding execution, there are, in fact, three distinct challenges to achieving high levels of performance: 1) the failure to create an effective plan that maximizes the potential of the individual or the organization, 2) the failure to effectively follow through on the plan, or 3) the failure to periodically review the plan and make critical adjustments as circumstances warrant. The point is that even a good plan can be derailed if that plan is discarded, ignored, or left unreviewed.

That is the power of creating periodic reviews of your carefully laid plans – to assess, to correct course, and to pave the road to your success with smaller achievements and little victories. Review is the feedback that allows top performers to fully realize their potential.

Take Away: Periodic review validates – or invalidates – your strategies and/or tactics. The only questions to be answered are what happened and what, if anything, needs to change?

"Often the difference between a successful person and a failure is not (that) one has better abilities or ideas, but the courage that one has to bet on one's ideas, to take a calculated risk - and to act."

Andre Malraux,
French author and statesman

CONCLUSION

It is difficult to *guarantee* performance results. It is, however, quite possible to have a significant influence on performance results. If we examine the best-of-the-best in athletics, in business, and in different areas of life, you will see that top performers share many traits - a burning desire to succeed, a dedication to hard work, and a thirst for continual improvement. But, what separates the average performer from the extraordinary performer is that the former hopes for success while the other *plans* to *succeed*.

And so it is with all top performers – success in not an accident.

> *"Being busy does not always mean real work. The object of all work is production or accomplishment and to either of these ends there must be forethought, system, planning, intelligence, and honest purpose, as well as perspiration. Seeming to do is not doing."*
>
> **Thomas A. Edison**

(ENDNOTES)

1 Larson, Carl and LaFasto Frank. Teamwork: What Must Go Right, What Can Go Wrong. Sage Publications (1989).

2 Source: "About QuikTrip." QuikTrip.com. Retrieved from http://www.quiktrip.com/aboutqt/aboutqt.asp

3 Oller, Samantha. "Retail Leaders of the Year: Chester Cadieux and QuikTrip." CSP Daily News (December 2007).

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

A highly acclaimed platform speaker, Kelly is recognized as a dynamic thought leader in the fields of leadership, sales development, and strategic planning. He is a business performance coach for executives and companies throughout the United States, working with organizations that range in size from $3 million to over $5 billion in annual sales revenue.

A national award-winning sales representative and sales manager, Kelly has spent the last nineteen years teaching and training organizational leaders in sales and executive management.

He has written two books: *1-on-1 Management™: What Every Great Manager Knows That You Don't* (2008), and *Quit Whining and Start SELLING! A Step-by-Step Guide to a Hall of Fame Career in Sales* (2013).

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