

On occasion I'm asked by young, up and coming executives for one of those magical sound bites that if followed, will propel them to the top of their field. Maybe it's the silver tinted hair, or perhaps the wrinkles around the eyes that convince them that my words are to be followed. Whatever the reason, I'm hesitant to give them a boiled down essence of success equation. But there is one word that seems to be an important ingredient of success in those I encounter who have created opportunities in their life. The word: Focus.

With so many inputs and distractions in our daily jaunt -- radio, TV, conversations, print, -- it is difficult to formulate what is important and stick with a particular route. We tend to be swayed by the impulse of the moment that defines what we want and who we are in life. It can be tiresome and unproductive.

Focus is the glue that holds our desired future state in place with our momentary activities. Focus defines the screen through which we will pass opportunities to determine their place in our forward procession to our goals. It is common to find individuals bouncing between the management fad of the week rather than deeply developing their own style. A successful person is not a generic mold. Persons of impact and purpose come as a mixed bag of talents and skills. There is no one personality characteristic that is a formula for success. Your greatest tool for creating an impact in your organization is the genuine you, refined over time to be the most productive and effective that you can possibly be. Focus keeps you real as to who you are as a leader.

On a broader organizational level, focus keeps the entity on track with what it desires to do in society. Successful organizations are very clear about who they desire to be -- typically in the form of a mission statement -- but most still succumb to the desire to chase market whims. Being focused as an organization is the leader's primary responsibility. Not allowing your department, your individual initiatives to get off course with the company's mission is a crucial, yet commonly overlooked task. Top performing organizations will stay the course and be the best they can be within that carefully defined sector. Top performing organizations are led by focused leaders.

Focus is the engine that moves mission forward. Managing the moment-by-moment, step-by-step journey is the mainstay of focus. All too often I see individuals getting lost in work at the expense of producing desired outcomes. Productive work involves understanding what next activity will propel you to your goal and then staying true to that next activity. It involves creating a protective bubble around your physical and mental work space. Allowing others to detract from your focused activities comes in the form of small talk, improperly assigned tasks, time wasting corrections and interruptions. Your focus will keep you glued to goal oriented next steps and will protect you from these distractions.

On an individual level, it is important to have a very deep personal understanding of what you desire to accomplish in life as the basis of focusing your day-to-day activities. I

encounter thousands of un-focused people a year and the one thing they have in common is that they feel like they are not making a difference in life. Making a difference, I believe, is a critical life encompassing desire that we all need. An unfocused wandering through the day's many options and decisions is a sure route to an unfulfilled life. Stay focused. Be fulfilled.

In its most basic form, focus involves asking the continual question: Is this right for me? When you understand your desired purpose in life and how your organizational efforts can fulfill that desire, you have the infrastructure to measure and monitor your activities to ensure you stay within those boundaries.

Stay focused to become a successful leader.