



4Q07

Focus

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'Tis the season... too much to do and not enough time! Decorations to put up, presents to buy and wrap, dinners to host, cookies to bake – that is if you're domestic – I buy them at a great, neighborhood pastry shop! Of course, all of this activity has to fit into the normal, day-to-day responsibilities of work/business, getting kids to school, helping with homework – things that already require more hours than most people have – unless, of course, you don't sleep much ;-)
Somehow, we find the time to get it all done and those things that fall through the cracks are probably not important. 'Tis the season... or is it? This sounds vaguely familiar to every day, every week, every month in most companies that I have worked for or with. Too much to do and not enough time.

In fact, one of the ways that we bring value is to help organizations prioritize what is really important to the business, to mobilize resources in those areas, and help them to maintain that focus. Often we do this via adhoc projects with specific improvement objectives, worked by cross functional teams, using appropriate, data-driven methods and tools. Sometimes call this Six Sigma, or Lean, or *Operational Excellence*[®], or There are too many labels to list and the label is insignificant as long as it is consistent. What is important, essential to results, is picking the right projects to focus resources and then, maintaining the focus long enough to achieve results.

I have worked with several organizations that have an effective process to identify and prioritize improvement projects. I have helped more who don't and both camps have benefited from the frequent, ongoing support that keeps resources focused on improvement priorities in the midst of the day-to-day business distractions and operating crises that inevitably arise and stifle progress. Now, in the absence of this kind of support, what can you, regardless of your level or position in your company, to create and maintain focus on those things that are really important to the business? Following are some questions to ask and answer:

- ♦ Do you know what's strategically important to the business? If not, why not? Who should you ask for clarification? HINT: who do you work for?
- ♦ Do you have no more than 5 specific objectives, with clearly defined measures and goals as part of your performance measurement system that direct your daily activities? If not, why not? Who should you ask for clarification? HINT: who do you work for?
- ♦ Do you take an active position to manage your daily activities? When you're tasked with something (a project, data collection, meeting, etc) do you bounce it against how your performance will be measured and challenge if it isn't aligned?

No matter the level or position in the organization, we can all take an active role in focusing our own efforts on those priorities that have a strategic impact on the business. If we don't know what those are, we should ask. It's really that simple. Filtering the unimportant, the uncontrollable, minimizing the chaos by eliminating the reactive behavior to the daily crisis – this is how we create focus. It can start with you! In the words of W. Edwards Deming "No one has to change. Survival is optional."

Now, I'm off to buy cookies because I'm measured on taste! Happy Holidays!