100-Day Projects

Focus is one of the cornerstones to being more productive. Effective people are clear about their focus for each day, each week, and over the next 100 days. That is, they think about and choose what they intend to accomplish in each of those time periods. They may shift their focus to other things depending on their schedules, interruptions, and daily requirements. But they are clear about where they want to be spending their time and energy.

The immediate areas for focus can be determined fairly quickly with a few questions:

- What commitments have I made that I need to complete today or this week?

- Where do I need to do something to maintain momentum on important interests or projects?

- What are a couple of things that I might do to keep working on that seemingly endless list of small incomplete items in my life?

- What three things can I accomplish this week that would give me a sense of fulfillment and accomplishment for the week?

The longer-term focus requires a bit more thought and is a place where thinking out loud with another person can be very useful. This is the area where creating and working from a 100-day plan can be effective.

Why 100 days? Well, it's short enough to get your mind around and long enough to get something meaningful done. At work, we usually have goals to cover the organization's fiscal year. While useful in matching our work with the organization's strategic intent, twelve months is too long a time period to create the level of urgency needed for this week and next. And at home, we tend not to have goals, so using this approach to improving performance is very useful.

So 100 days gives us a period where the light at the end of the tunnel is visible and we see that we can keep the train on the tracks until we get there.

A 100-day project has the most value when:

- Focus is on outcomes … something that is often missing in organizations.

- Use of milestones and commitments is central to the process.

- How people spend their time is results driven, not event or schedule driven.

- Project management practices are applied to all aspects of a person's life.

- People are held accountable to a specific set of outcomes for 100 days.

- Personal development issues are worked on in parallel with business results.

Steps involved in creating the 100-day project

1. The overall coaching process of creating, tracking, and discussing progress is agreed upon with beginning date, end date, and frequency of coaching conversations.

2. Goals and outcomes for every aspect of life are identified for the next 100 days. While some parts of life might not be covered, they are at least asked about in case a goal might be useful. Existing organizational goals are included. Some clients might request a focus on only their work. This is absolutely fine. The level of goal or outcome is identified by these three criteria:

   - Remarkable, or a stretch beyond our normal performance

   - Realistic if we maintain our focus

   - Worthwhile, as they add value to our lives

3. Once goals are set, identify the key steps or elements required to reach each goal.

4. Identify milestones for each goal for every two to three weeks to establish a path.

5. Then identify actions for the next two weeks, although some goals may not have actions in the next two weeks.

Starting new projects requires more than maintaining ongoing projects: It's always useful to remember a couple of things about momentum:

- In the beginning stages of any project, you need to put in lots of time and conversation—it's as if you are putting in 10 and getting out 0 or 1. Plan for this phenomenon. Find eight to twelve hours of time for a couple of weeks to get new projects started. Keep the energy and time levels up until you gain momentum.

- Projects also need maintenance. Everything slows without attention. Do at least one thing a day or a couple of things each week to keep momentum going on existing projects.

On developmental goals, it's all about awareness: Remember that two things change behavior: perspective and awareness. The whole notion of 100-day projects is actually an example of both. Being focused for 100 days is a perspective. Being clear about outcomes and actions leads to awareness.

In addition, if you are working on presence, or attention, or interrupting, or listening, or being gracious, or being less reactive, it is not about taking action. It is about noticing and requires all three access points: looking for/paying attention to—noticing in the moment—reflecting on your experience.

Tracking and discussing progress: Use these questions to manage the progress on each goal:

- What did you accomplish since we last spoke?

- If you didn't do something you intended to do, what did you do instead?

- Are any of the goals in danger of not being accomplished? If so, let's discuss what is required to get them back on track.

- Are these still the right things to be working on?

- Do you need to raise the goal now that you are fully engaged in it?

One comment: The intent of a 100-day coaching project is to give you a perspective from which you can work. The project may be simply about that which you already want to be successful. It does not need to include something new. It does include progress beyond what you will do alone.

Observations & Ideas