

Consulting
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Five Steps to Improve Everything

Peak Performance
Business Group™

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PEAK PERFORMANCE
BUSINESS GROUP



Five Steps to Improve Everything

Want to get better?

Do you want to improve your revenue, jumpstart a new business unit or overhaul your IT department? Do you want to improve your managerial skills or your conflict resolution abilities or your ability to delegate? Do you want to improve your personal financial situation, your health or your family relationships?



Here are five steps to help you improve all that and more.

1 Specifically Identify Exactly What You Are Trying to Improve

Often when people talk about the things they'd like to improve they use "fuzzy" terminology. The subsequent problem is people then pursue activities tangentially related to their objective.

Do people in your organization talk about improving abstract conditions like to be a "better manager" or to "use good judgment?" Chances are high they have, and chances are even higher these abstractions have caused dissatisfaction with people not attaining these "objectives."

Here are common examples of vague objectives.

- Be a better brand manager (IT manager, project manager, training director, etc).
- Improve listening skills
- Use good judgment
- Motivate staff
- Develop Effective managers
- Practice good customer service skills
- Take pride in their work
- Create a learning organization
- Provide opportunities for personal growth
- Contribute to the community
- Be a good community citizen



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Be Specific

No one has unlimited amounts of resources, like time, energy or money. The best way to improve your chances of being successful is to know exactly what you are trying to improve.

Improving processes is an admirable goal, but broad. Perhaps you can understand how a specific web-based software package can provide document management, workflow automation and needed electronic forms processing. See, much more precise.

You may want to be a better manager and in fact you will be, if you can specifically improve your ability to correctly identify and eradicate performance discrepancies.

Describe Evidence

In addition to being specific, identifying observable success indicating evidence (i.e. behaviors) can help ensure accomplishment.

- Can you explain your manufacturing process in such a way that customers comment on the effectiveness of our explanation (Now, I get it!)?
- Has improving your ability to effectively navigate price objections increased your personal daily sales totals?
- Instead of saying you want your people to “be better salespeople,” how about “placing 48-hour prospect follow-up calls which result in a follow-up appointment two-thirds of the time.”

- Improving listening skills could be more specific by using “echo” techniques making certain that you’ve heard what the other person communicated and getting their agreement. “So you’d like the project plan to reflect the new marketing budget constraints is that right?”
- Using “good judgment” is always problematic. Whose judgment do we consider good? And this usually comes into play when people are talking about handling customer situations. “When it comes to customers who are dissatisfied, we want you to use your *good judgment*.” This has warning written all over it.

How about giving parameters? Misunderstandings with customers will occur. *We want you to behave in such a way that in the majority of customer service situations, customers comment positively about your handling of the situation and pledge to remain a loyal customer.*

Perhaps not perfect, **but better.**

As you can see, the abstract examples above seem like very important and admirable objectives ... and they are. However, they simply are not specific enough to focus energies or enable us to realize when we’ve truly achieved success.

Bottom line: Specific is terrific.



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2 Identify and Eliminate Knowledge Gaps

First you have to perform something called “task analysis,” which is breaking down the steps necessary to competently perform. Then you have to determine which steps you perform competently and which you don’t.

In our 48-hour follow-up example listed above, the task might be broken down like this:

- Capture prospect’s name, contact information and interests.
- Get permission to follow-up.
- Place follow-up call.
 - Greeting
 - Gauge interest
 - Make offer
- Secure appointment
- Place confirmation call prior to appointment.

Now you have to evaluate your (or someone else’s) knowledge about how to perform these steps.

Do you know at least three different ways to capture a prospect’s name and contact information?

Can you effectively ask for permission to contact later?

Can you execute an effective phone greeting (many can’t)?

Can you gauge interest based on the prospect’s tone of voice and language?

Is your offer interesting, relevant and compelling?

Are you “closing” on the appointment?

Do you have an effective way to manage and confirm appointments?

Many people confide to me is they don’t like to make these kinds of calls because they can’t think of what to say when they call.

Here’s a hint, **don’t**. Don’t try to think something up, instead write something down. There is not one thing wrong with jotting down a handful of bullet points in advance about what you want to cover with an important prospect.



Bottom line: You have to know before you can go.



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3 List Success Factors and How They Can Help

Success factors are the strengths and resources you can draw upon to help you meet your objective. *These resources might include:*

- Local library
- High-quality web sources
- Knowledgeable co-workers
- Contacts at manufacturers
- Informed family members
- Mentor

Your strengths could include being:

- Creative
- Organized
- Well spoken
- Outgoing
- Methodical

Back to our example about the 48-hour prospect follow-up, you might go to the library and get a book about effective phone techniques (there are many), get guidance from a co-worker whose has great phone skills and use your natural organizational skills to help you track and keep numbers and contact information.

You won't use all your strengths and resources to achieve every objective you set, but it will inspire confidence when you put pen to paper and discover how many success factors are actually available to you.

Bottom line: There's no replacement for displacement (old motorcycle business axiom), create a high performance engine to meet your goals.

4 List Possible Limiting Factors and How They Can Be Minimized or Eliminated

This may be the hardest step because we believe what we think to be true. Sometimes we delude ourselves into thinking about something in a way that might not be accurate.

Perhaps you think you've come up with the greatest, can't lose, I-can't-believe-I-am-so-brilliant proposition to bring prospects back to your business. Your idea: giving away a promotional pen (Yikes!).

You think it will be great, but what will others think about it? That's when you pull out a tool called convergent validity. This is the concept of asking similar targets (not your co-workers and not your Mom!) what they think of your idea.



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In this example, you could ask existing customers if an offer for a promotional pen would have been persuasive enough for them to return to your business while they were still shopping the competition. You'll probably be surprised at the findings.

If you can't tell, I don't think a promotional pen is going to create stampedes of prospective new customers. It's just not powerful enough. What might be? A personalized review of how your product can improve their business, a behind the scenes tour of the plant or the opportunity to be one of the first to test a brand new product are much more compelling offers.

Some areas to check for limiting factors:

- You
- Them
- The offer
- The question
- The environment

Bottom line: Free up the brakes.

5 Create a Short, Fast-Moving Action Plan to Achieve It

Most people take way too long to start an initiative. "Well, before we start doing our follow-up calls, we need to decide how this will fit with our brand and our overall positioning in the market place, so let's have a meeting and talk with our marketing coordinator next month before we do anything."

Huh? Some projects require a blue ribbon commission, weeks of planning and a couple of Gantt Charts and some ... don't. The key is not to treat every plan as a nail and your only tool a hammer. The key is to figure out which project requires what approach.

Whether your improvement initiative is large or small, the key is to start doing something fast.

- Start reading relevant information.
- Talk to a trusted advisor about your plan.
- Create a bullet point outline of these steps.

I like to work out first thing in the morning because that way I'm doing it before I realize I don't want to and then ... well, I'm already in the gym I might as well finish.

Bottom line: Do something now.

Apply these five steps and you'll be able to
improve just about everything!



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An award winning author, speaker and sought after consultant, Mark's work has attracted clients as diverse as the Harley-Davidson Motor Company to the Executive Education Program at the University of Wisconsin and dozens of other leading organizations.

His speaking and training schedule typically includes 200 events per year and has taken him to 8 countries and 40 states. He keeps threatening his wife, Amy, to get an RV and visit the rest.

Holding a master's degree in adult education, Mark has also earned the National Speakers Association Certified Speaking Professional designation – There are only 500 people in the world who have passed the rigorous criteria to attain this coveted recognition. He is also a certified member of the Association of Finance and Insurance Professionals.

A prolific writer, Mark received Advanstar International's Grand Gold Award for editorial excellence for his article series, "Improving Human Performance." He continues to write monthly columns and even wrote a book about the music industry: *Guardian of the Gods – An Inside Look at the Dangerous Business of Music*. The reason Mark says was singular, "to get backstage at Aerosmith concerts."

Traveling by plane most of the time, Mark's favorite mode of transportation is his 2007 VRSCDX Harley-Davidson V-Rod, which has been known to "fly" as well.

Mark is the President of the Peak Performance Business Group™.

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