



## Gaining Focus Through Meaningful Objectives

*"If you aim at nothing, you'll hit it every time." ~Author Unknown*

You're riding your bicycle down the street and you see a rock. What do you think will happen if you focus on that rock?

You're going to hit it.

You may be thinking "No, I don't want to hit the rock, that's why I'm watching it—to make sure that I can avoid it," but I can tell you that if you focus on it, you're going to hit it. Your actions will follow your focus.

So if you're interested in being productive, the first thing you need to do is decide what it is that you want to 'hit.' Because if you don't have an objective in mind you may end up being incredibly busy, work crazy hours and still not feel a sense of accomplishment—because busy is not the same as effective.

Our clients are typically not interested in being productive for productivity's sake. Rather, they engage MPS because they realize that if they can fundamentally change the culture of their organizations, if productivity

If a Meaningful Professional Objective were to increase a key customer satisfaction metric year-to-year by 3%, then the Supporting Projects might include:

- Roundtables with top clients
- Enhanced training for Customer Support personnel
- Analysis of top problem areas

Supporting Projects are always driven by Meaningful Objectives, with typically no more than five Supporting Projects per Meaningful Objective.

### Metrics

When you're documenting your Meaningful Objectives and Supporting Projects, it's important to also identify the associated Metrics. Metrics are important because they are indicators of success, the basis by which you will judge successful completion (or not) of your Meaningful Objectives and Supporting Projects. They should be as specific as possible.

Ask yourself, "How will the outcome be evaluated, how will I know that I've accomplished the Objective?"

becomes *the* way of being, then they will see results that count—for both their clients and their stockholders.

The first step, then, to being productive is to know **what** you want. You'll then be able to identify **how** you're going to make it happen and, with specific **metrics** to define success, you'll be on your way. Let's start first with objectives.

## Meaningful Objectives

What is it that you want? What are your objectives? If you're going to make them happen, you need to know what they are. And your objectives must be meaningful because they're going to serve as your "North Star," guiding everything that you do. A sailor may tack back and forth, leveraging the wind and the currents, but it's always with an eye toward the final destination.

The best way to think about your Meaningful Objectives is to view them as the 'What.' Your company may use different terminology—Goal, Commitment, etc.—but it doesn't matter as long as you understand that we're talking about the 'What.' An objective may be a dollar target, such as a specific revenue or profit goal. It may be more qualitative, such as a research division whose objective is to provide guidance and recommendations for another organization's use. It may be to open a new regional office in a different geography. These are all good examples of 'What.'

And because these objectives are important, be sure to not take on too

Ideally there's an overall metric for the Meaningful Objective, although this isn't always the case; there should, however, *always* be a metric for the Supporting Project.

*"Life is what we make it, always has been, always will be." ~Grandma Moses*

You may have heard the story about three men who were clearing stones from a field. The first man was serving a life sentence and hauling stones was part of his sentence; for him, the labor was punishment. The second man had been lucky enough to secure a job which allowed him to feed his family; for this man, the labor was a means to an important end. The third man had a vision, which was to build a beautiful stone temple, where all could gather in times of celebration; for this man, hauling stones was a labor of love.

This story illustrates the importance of really knowing what it is that you want, so that your daily actions can be a blessing instead of a chore. Your ability to focus on the things that are important to you—both professionally and personally—and to execute Strategic Next Actions (SNAs) driven by Supporting Projects will put you on a path to making your vision a reality.

So the next time you're riding your bike down the street, look for a rock. And notice how—with a constant focus and each steady pump of the pedal—you're on a course to hit that rock. And then think about what it is that you really want to hit, and how you're going to make it happen. If you're going to

many. If you're spread too thin, you'll likely make some progress on some items but the probability of excelling in all of them is pretty low. We've found that our clients are most successful when they have between five and seven Meaningful Objectives. And, interestingly enough, we've found that this success is based on a balance of five to seven *Professional* Objectives and five to seven *Personal* Objectives.

## Meaningful Objectives - Personal

Do you have your Professional Objectives documented? Chances are you do, even if you only look at them once or twice a year for reviews. I want to change that, by the way, because keeping your Meaningful Professional Objectives front and center can be invaluable in helping you to filter, prioritize and manage non-strategic requests for your time.

But what about your Personal Objectives? Are they documented as well? I hope so, but only a fraction of my clients can say that they are. Here's why this matters – it's important to both you and to your company.

First—and I hope I don't have to convince you that it's important to have a life—but if you don't take care of yourself, you can't take care of anyone else. If the oxygen masks deploy on an airplane, you've got to put yours on first otherwise you aren't able to help those around you.

Second—your company cares as well. Many of our clients engage MPS to specifically address work-life balance

hit something, better your dreams than some rock on a road.

- *Cindy Russell, MPS Senior Consultant*

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Note: For more information on Meaningful Objectives, Supporting Projects and Metrics, see chapter 7 of [\*Take Back Your Life! Using Microsoft Outlook to Get Organized and Stay Organized\*](#), by Sally McGhee.

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## E-News Quote:

"The most important decisions managers face are abandonment decisions." ~ *Peter Drucker*

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## Our New Webinars!

**We are happy to announce two new products that, whether you're a TBYL veteran or a newcomer to our methodologies, will help you get to the next level with your work-life balance.** Each of the one-hour modules can be viewed anytime, anywhere you have an Internet connection — so you're never the captive of a classroom.

**The Take Back Your Life! 101 E-Mail Webinar Series, available now,** is a three-module program with MPS founder Sally McGhee and executive consultant John Wittry as

issues, because when employees have balance they typically have a more positive perspective, exercise better judgment and make better decisions. So work-life balance is a win-win proposition.

If you're still not convinced, you may be like some of my clients who have told me that they don't necessarily *want* to document their personal objectives. "I've got so much structure and discipline around my work life that I need to have freedom somewhere, and that's in my personal life."

But here's the challenge: if your personal objectives aren't on your radar screen, you probably won't hit them. Remember the bicycle and stone example? Too often, in the name of professionalism, we push our personal stuff aside and the reality is that we rarely find the time to pull our personal stuff back.

So get your objectives—both personal and professional—on your radar screen and into your IMS. They may be, for example, Financial (12-month savings goal), Health (reduce stress through regular exercise) or Relationship (monthly activities with partner and/or kids). I've also seen race car driving and quilting. What matters is that you create the opportunity to spend time on the things that are important to you.

## Supporting Projects

Sometimes my clients have extraordinarily long lists of Objectives and I've found, upon closer inspection, that they've often

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- **Writing E-Mail That Gets Results.** Learn how MPS' high-impact PASS model uses all parts of the e-mail to reduce volume and speed action.

- **Getting to Zero in Your Inbox.** Discover how the MPS E-Mail Processing Model™ can reduce e-mail in your inbox by 80%.

A succinct review of the TBYL fundamental concepts — using your collecting system, managing your inbox, prioritizing and planning your calendar—**The Take Back Your Life! Refresher Webinar Series, available August 1st**, is a three-module program that supports the high-performance workplace you're working hard to create. It helps you relax and regain quality time at work and at home. Refresh your knowledge with:

- **Managing Your Collecting Points.** Surrender the sticky-notes and free your mind of a million to-do's.

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included 'Supporting Projects' which are what I consider to be the 'How.'

The 'How' answers the question "How am I going to achieve my Objectives?" What initiatives, projects or activities do you need to plan, strategize and ultimately execute so that you can achieve the 'What?'

• **Prioritizing and Planning Your Calendar.** If you've lost momentum in completing your Weekly Review, here's inspiration and practical help.

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