

Performance Outcomes

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I am a victim of to-do lists. Yep. It feels like I can't help myself but to make to-do lists and then live my life from them. Saturday morning. What's there to do today? Make a list. Do it.

Then there are days I get tired of writing to-do lists. So what I do is rebel. No list. Just do what I want. That works for a single day. String a couple of those days together though and I produce no results.

I'm self employed, so my income depends on my performance. No performance, no food. Very simple. With a job, no performance, no job, no food. But you can string out your job far longer than when self employed before someone notices and fires you.

So how do I perform and produce? To-do lists are only a management tool. They are a way of remembering and focusing on things. How do I make the list? Now we are looking at the source.

When I'm reacting to life, I just make a list that includes everything that I think would help me survive life. In other words, I am putting items for my commitments, for things that are urgent but have no value, and for things that I have no business doing but for other people wanting me to.

A better way: Performance Outcomes

A more powerful context: create performance outcomes. Then create a list from those outcomes. And say NO to items that don't make a difference to the outcomes in your life.

What you are out to cause

A performance outcome is a statement of a result. What is most powerful is when it is written about people or groups of people. Examples:

1. People will be able to connect with more people with less effort.
2. Business will be able to reach more customers in less time.
3. Each member of a group will have an intimate connection to the purpose of the group and be willing to take actions to support the group.

How do you measure it

Once you have written a performance outcome, then quantify it with a specific measurable result. The result is specific in space and time and it is measurable with a number of method to know if it has happened. Examples to continue the above:

1. Phone calls per day per person
2. Quantity of sales per month
3. New members per month

We can see that each measurement is a way to measure how effective we are at producing the performance outcome. There is no one right measure - we get to make up any measure that works for our situation. Some measures may be more effective than others, however the trick is to choose a measure that you can commit to actually tracking.

What is the acceptable performance

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Now that you have a performance outcome and a way to measure it, you need to set a level of performance that is acceptable. Or perhaps you choose two levels - one is minimum acceptable performance, and another is a stretch goal. For the above examples:

1. 3 phone calls per person per day minimum, 6 as a stretch goal
2. 10 sales per month, 15 as a stretch goal
3. 5 new members per month, 10 as a stretch

The above levels represent a specific performance to achieve.

Creating actions: the pitfall

Given the above structure, the tendency is to look at the measurement and performance level, and then use that as a tool to plan your actions. This may achieve your measurement, but it may not achieve your performance outcome. Some example actions that result by looking at the measure, and not the performance outcome are:

- Tell people to contact more people because you want to improve your numbers.
- Offer a financial reward for people who achieve your measure.

Can you see that these actions will not alter "people being able to connect with more people with less effort?" It will achieve your measure but not cause your outcome.

Creating actions around the outcome

Remember, you created the measurement as a way of knowing if you are achieving the performance outcome. That's the real result. The "People will be able to connect with more people with less effort." part of it. Having 3 phone calls per person per day minimum is how you know if you achieved it.

Instead of thinking about "how to achieve the measurement," think about "what actions are necessary to cause people to connect with more people with less effort." Some actions could be:

- Create a central contact list that people can access - this decreases the effort of connecting by making information easier to find.
- Give everyone a Skype account with a subscription to call all phones in North America - this decreases the effort of connecting by removing a cost barrier.
- Create a method of growing the contact list - this increases the amount of people one could contact.
- Create a method of converting business cards into the contact list - this is "more people" available to contact.

Can you see that if you created the above actions, the result will be people connecting more with less effort? That's the outcome you sought.

Tracking the measurement

As you take action, your action will have an impact or not on the outcome you seek to achieve. To know if your actions are effective, you must track what's happening with respect to your measurement.

In our example with "People will be able to connect with more people with less effort," you may keep a spreadsheet each day where people write in how many phone calls they did each day. Then your spreadsheet can take an average, and show a bottom line number.

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# of calls	Day 1	Day 2	Day 3
Jay	2	3	4
Melissa	1	1	6
Ave	1.5	2	5

You may automate this process, or look at the skype records at the end of the month, count the calls and divide by the number of working days that month.

How you track the measurement will depend on available data and practicality. You may need to alter your measurement to work with available data if you cannot get the data you need.

Evaluating progress

Now that you have tracking data and can compare against your measurement, you can determine if your actions are effective or not.

In the above example, on Day 1, we did not achieve the minimum outcome. We then create new actions to see what the impact is.

On Day 2, Jay achieved the minimum, Melissa did not, and overall we did not on average. We may let our current actions take effect or change our actions.

On Day 3, Jay achieved the minimum, Melissa achieved the stretch goal, and overall we achieved the performance. Now we can continue to perform these action that lead to our success, or take new actions to achieve greater performance, or focus our attention on other performance outcomes.

What there is to do is to:

- continue doing the same actions if they work
- stop doing actions that don't work
- create different actions to improve results

It's a feedback loop. Alter Action. Track. Evaluate. Repeat.

The total process

The process for creating the system is:

- Write your performance outcome.
- Define a measurement to know if you achieve the outcome.
- Define a performance level for the measurement.
- Create a method to track the measurement.

And to operate and achieve your result:

- Create actions in alignment with the performance outcome, not the measurement.
- Track the measurement
- Evaluate your progress
- Determine new actions

If you would like for me to guide you through this process with yourself or your organization, please contact me.

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