

# “Keeping focused is key in pursuit of excellence”



I have been wondering for some time now why the word “Excellence” seems to have gone as far as management speak is concerned. It wasn’t that long ago, was it, when we were all being encouraged to pursue excellence as this was seen as the key to survival and growth?

For me being excellent as an organisation, or indeed as an individual manager or employee quite simply means being focussed on being:

- **Effective:** or “doing the right things”
- **Efficient:** or “doing the things right”
- **Economical:** or “doing things at minimum cost”
- **Excellent:** or “ doing the right things right at minimum cost” .

Fail to focus on any one or more and you no longer have an excellent organisation, or excellent staff. And you will no longer be doing an excellent job.

So if you are one of those folk who are fearing the fallout of the credit crunch, (and who isn’t?) then can I suggest that you need to try to remain focussed and not be too distracted by the events that are increasingly engulfing all your thoughts and attitudes? Indeed the more focussed you are the nearer you will be to having “excellent” career prospects.

But if you want to be focussed you will need to have a clear purpose because without this you will keep changing direction, changing jobs, and changing relationships etc. You will be hoping that with each change you make you will settle the confusion and fill that void in your job – and life.

Think about it. How often have you said: “This time it will be different”, only to find that in a matter of a few weeks or months your problems are still haunting you? Why? Surely it is because you don’t have a clear sense of focus/direction on your career.

Interestingly the power of focussing can be seen in light. With a magnifying glass the rays of the sun can burn paper. But if light is focussed using a laser beam it can cut through steel, and nothing can be more effective than a focussed career. So I suggest that you stop trying to do everything and do less. Hone in and concentrate on the on what matters, and stop confusing activity with outcomes or productivity.

And as I say this applies even if you are, at this very moment, going through great uncertainty for reasons largely outside of your control, in relation to your job or promotion plans. You need to concentrate, bend your energies in one direction and look neither to the right or the left.

The problem is that focussing is not easy, as you need to have a discipline that must be practised every day. But when it comes to practising the two most difficult challenges you face are:

- 1) The desire to do it, and
- 2) The discipline to keep at it.

There is no easy way to become a disciplined person but the encouraging thing is that it does not depend on talent or ability, nor is it a matter of conditions. It is a matter of choice. But once you make the choice and it becomes a habit two things emerge:

Firstly, there is a clear difference between the person who practises and the one who doesn't. Cyclist Lance Armstrong said: "Success comes from training harder and digging deeper than others", and surely he should know as he won a record of seven Tour de France championships.

Secondly, a winning spirit emerges as the harder you work the harder it becomes to give in to things that break your efforts, including fatigue, complacency, criticism, & disagreement.

So if you decide to focus even more intently on your career remember:

- 1. Focussing keeps you on Target:** If you don't you will find that you will be pulled in several directions, spending much of your time and energy on things that you really don't care much about. Someone put it this way: "Ours is a world where people don't know what they want, and are prepared to go through hell to get it". So stay focussed.
- 2. Focussing increases your energy:** Attempting everything, just as attempting nothing, will drain life out of you. Admiral Richard Byrd, the Polar Explorer, said: "Few men come anywhere near exhausting the resources dwelling within them. There are deep wells of strength that are never used." So stay focussed.
- 3. Focussing lifts you up:** It is said that the world stands aside to let anyone pass who knows where he or she is going. So just knowing where you are going and making an effort to pursue it can so easily distinguish you from everybody else. Even if you don't achieve your goal and even if others do not stand aside, your morale and enthusiasm will be increased. So stay focussed.
- 4. Focussing increases your performance:** Any good leader will appreciate that almost anything that has been done or achieved in a particular way over a specific period of time, can be done better. Remember in the Olympics the difference between a gold medallist and others can be a matter of a few hundredths of a second. So stay focussed.
- 5. Focussing demands that you pay a price:** Knowing what you need to focus on is immeasurably enhanced if you know what you need to give up. However this implies some degree of risk and failure. So while many folk regard focussing as a negative experience, due to the possibility of failure this does not have to be the case if you think of it in terms of discovery, learning and developing. So stay focussed.

Charlie Brown, in a Peanuts cartoon, lamented to his friend Linus: "Life is just too much for me. I've been confused from the day I was born. I think the trouble is we're thrown into life too fast. We're not really prepared". "What do you want", Linus asks: "A chance to warm up?"

While none of us really gets a chance to warm up, what we can do right now is to determine where we are, where we want to get to, and then focus on getting there.

So as you try to remain focussed in these days of uncertainty remember that it is not the size of the dog in the fight that counts. It is the size of the fight in the dog. So keep focussed!