

Focus Is the Gateway to Business Success

Focus doesn't get the respect it deserves in the business world. We hear a lot about motivation, stress, emotions, leadership, and team culture, but not much attention is paid to the role that focus plays in your ability to be productive.

So what is focus ? Simply put, focus involves the ability to pay attention to things that will help and avoid distractions that will hurt your work efforts. For example, to finish a report, you need to focus on the relevant information and analyses that will comprise the report. You must also avoid typical distractions such as emails, being hungry or tired, or the people around you.

Focus is important because it is the gateway to all thinking: perception, memory, learning, reasoning, problem solving, and decision making. Without good focus, all aspects of your ability to think will suffer. Without focus, you won't be as effective in your work because if you're not concentrating on the right things or are distracted, you won't be capable of getting your work done.

You also won't be 100% efficient without good focus because, every time your mind wanders away from your work, you are wasting time. Finally, you won't be as productive as you can because your work output will not be of the highest quality and it will take you longer to do it.

Here's a simple reality: if you can't focus effectively, you can't think effectively. And if you can't think effectively, you definitely can't produce the quality of work necessary to be successful. From this perspective, it's not difficult to see why focus is such an essential tool for business success.

Here's a way you can think of focus in your work. If you focus on your work intently without distraction for the time that is needed, you will do the work that is necessary. If you do the necessary work in a focused way, you will complete the work and produce a quality product in the shortest amount of time.

The key question then is: How can you ensure that you have ideal focus at work that will result in productive and efficient outputs?

Here are a few simple steps:

One thing I'm sure you would agree with is that a cluttered mind can't focus. If your mind is filled with stuff, such as all of the things you need to do today, you won't be able to focus well. So, go through your tasks and prioritize them. If you're like most business people, there are items on your calendar that you can either put off to another day, delegate, or not do at all. Also, clear your mind of anything that doesn't relate to your work such as family stuff (of course, easier said than done). The less clutter you have in your mind, the better you will be able to focus.

It's also not uncommon for business people to have cluttered offices that include myriad photos, books, assorted tchotchkes, a desk filled with junk, not to mention a flat panel on the wall that is always on. A work space filled with clutter means a mind filled with distractions. To help you focus better, simplify your office by removing unnecessary clutter. Sure, you can keep some family photos and mementos to make your office an inviting place for you to work. At the same time, get rid of anything that doesn't serve a specific work function and the, well, crap that has accumulated on your desk and shelves over the years. Bottom line: a simple work space is a more focused and less distracted work space.

The single greatest obstacle to being focused in this digital age is your technology including computers, tablets, and smartphones. The pings, vibrations, and other notifications signaling to you that a voicemail, email, text message, or social media update has arrived is a constant source of distraction. Recent research has shown two things about so-called multitasking. First, people who say they are great multitaskers (as most business people believe they are) are, in fact, the worst multitaskers. Second, there is no such thing as multitasking, at least not when it comes to work. Perhaps the best thing you can do to focus is that, when it's time to get work done, turn off your technology and focus on the task at hand without distraction or interruption.

- Focus on the 4 Ps: The first P is perform. When you are going to begin a project, for example, a sales report, strategic plan, marketing analysis, or financial projection, ask yourself what you need to perform your best and then create an environment that will allow for optimal performance. The second P is process which involves focusing entirely on what you need to do to complete a

high-quality product without concern for the outcome. The third P is present which means focusing on the here and now rather than on what has happened in the past or what might happen in the future. Finally, the fourth P is productivity which involves focusing only on those things and blocking out distractions that will enable you to be the most productive you can be.

If you can take control of your ability to focus and block out distractions, you have given yourself a powerful tool that will enable you to perform at consistently high level and be both effective and efficient in your work efforts. The result: better quality work, more success, and achievement of your professional goals