

LESLIE W. BRAKSICK, PH.D.



UNLOCKING SUCCESS

# Focus on the critical few

## Prioritizing your most critical assets can greatly impact your business

As businesspeople and business leaders, we have full plates. Whether it's balancing work, home, community, social obligations, aggressive business targets, strategic initiatives to sponsor/support/implement, unwelcome external influences, or customers expecting more for less, prioritizing all of that can be a daunting challenge.

**P**rioritize and focus are the business vernacular terms we always hear. We smile grimly, mutter "uh huh," and return to our overwhelming pressure cooker without changing a thing about what we do or how we are approaching our work.

But those words really are the key to managing our crazy world of over-commitment and under-capacity — when combined with two more words: critical few. Prioritizing and focusing on the critical few results, products and people who truly matter more than others is job No. 1 for executives.

### How to look at it

The facts: You have a critical few customers, without whom your business would dramatically suffer. Ensure that your organization serves those customers disproportionately well. That does not mean ignore the others; ideally, all customers would be served flawlessly.

You have a critical few products/offerings that make up the 80 percent in the 80/20 of your business. Ensure you get them flawlessly right. Your brand is set by those

core products or services. If you get it wrong there, the rest may not matter.

You have a critical few employees/direct reports who play a disproportionately impactful role in the success of your business. Your time should reflect that understanding. It doesn't mean ignore everyone else; it simply means that you cannot leave to chance that your key people are sufficiently directed, motivated, feeling challenged by their work and appreciated.

They are people you can build the rest of the organization around. You've got to get it right with these folks above all others and then rely on their help to reinforce and motivate the rest of the organization.

### Optimize and organize

So clearly, identifying your critical few customers, products and people is job No. 1 for results. How do you optimize your short list of the critical few? Simply answer these three questions:

- What are the critical business results you need to deliver?
- Who are the key performers who will deliver those results?
- What are the critical few behaviors that your key performers must do?

That reads like common sense, and it is. But achieving it isn't so simple.

### Don't forget reliability

You know your critical results and key performers right now, but what about those

all-important critical few behaviors that people must do to make it work? If people don't do the right things, you won't get results.

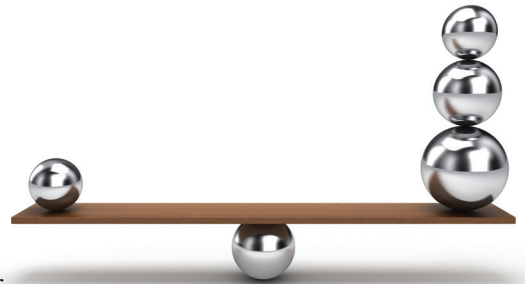
Many initiatives are designed to get those critical few behaviors to occur — behaviors that we think should automatically happen, but they don't. How do we get people to do the right things reliably?

It's not about making people happier at work. Many happy workplaces go belly-up. It's easy to be distracted by things that create fun and do little to improve performance.

It comes down to (1) pinpointing those actions, which if performed reliably, will move the needle for your organization and (2) ensuring there are reinforcing consequences for those critical few behaviors and corrective consequences for behaviors inconsistent with what you need. That alignment is necessary, and it is often overlooked.

So in a nutshell: Ensure focus on the critical few results, people and behaviors. Don't allow yourself or your organization to be distracted. Without the critical few happening well, you will spend many more hours fixing things than growing your business. ●

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