

“In order to survive, the organization must develop policies about what not to do, rather than on what else to do.” — Ichak Adizes

THE SECOND PRACTICE: Focus For Success

Maintaining focus is the single most important Practice of Business Success. If you are clear on what you want to do, the next step is to narrow your concentration until you pinpoint your exact target. Businesses do not fail because of lack of money or lack of customers. They fail because their leaders have not learned to center on their primary mission and purpose.

As an example of the power of a focused thought, think of the sun being your mind and a magnifying glass representing your mission and purpose. Now hold the magnifying glass between the sun and a sheet of white copy paper. With the light of the sun (mind) diffused, it has little effect on the paper (results), except to brighten it. When you move the glass (mission and purpose) away from the paper to create a finer and finer point of convergence, you direct the sun’s energy to a small point. Eventually, a hole begins to burn in the paper, setting it on fire. Such can be the power of focus in your company. Dedicated attention to your true function will result in success beyond what you ever could have imagined.

Small Size, Small Focus

The smaller our team, the more dedicated our focus must be. Here is an example of what I mean.

Years ago, I pulled into the Super Stop and Shop parking lot in Enfield, next to a white Dodge Ram van with black lettering that announced, “Expert Cleaning Services.” Beneath that was a list of jobs the contractor offered:

Industrial and Residential Cleaning

- Tile Floor Care
- Home Repair
- Water & Fire Damage
- Carpet Cleaning
- Ceiling Tile Cleaning
- Window Cleaning
- Construction Clean-up
- Painting

And More....

I was impressed. Our company had grown in gross sales to over two million dollars a year. I called it “our” company even though I was the sole owner. That is part of the “We Attitudes” of shared ownership by word association. It was not “my” company but “ours.” I did not hire “employees,” rather “we” trained “members.” We had almost two hundred members by this time, yet we did not provide nearly as many services as this “cleaning expert,” even though we had a full-time staff of half-a-dozen managers, two office assistants, an office manager, director of human resources, and a sales department.

The lanky, dark-haired owner of the van emerged from the store, opened the driver’s door of his van and was about to climb in when I introduced myself as the owner of Adams & Adams Building Services.

“Is this your company?” I asked.

“Yes,” he said proudly.

I told him that I was impressed with the number of services he offered. “You must have a very big team,” I commented.

"Oh, no," he said. "It's just me, the wife and her brother."

I shared with him that I had a much larger company.

"Oh yes, I know about Adams and Adams," he responded. "You're the big guys."

I asked him how he was able to handle all these tasks with just three people.

"Oh, it's next to impossible," he groaned. "Sometimes I feel like a one-armed paper hanger and, you know, you just can't get good help."

I wished him well, but, as I said goodbye, I knew deep inside that he was heading for disaster. He had failed to focus on a niche within the huge cleaning market in our area. There was no way he could do all of the services he offered well.

Our company's focus was on cleaning offices, factories, and warehouses in the Greater Hartford/Springfield area. We also provided carpet cleaning, window cleaning, and floor care. To diversify into additional areas such as residential cleaning, painting, repairs, or fire damage would have required us to dedicate a manager to each of these specialized areas. By focusing on our niche, we were able to concentrate our efforts in a market that was wide open to us, especially in the "Eighties" when new office buildings were popping up all over. We learned to say *no* when people asked if we did painting, repairs, or house cleaning. Eventually, we let go of most of our smaller one, two and three-night-a-week accounts, and other businesses that did not fit into our market strategy. We were on a fast track to growth, not wanting to be sidetracked or have our attention diverted by accounts that did not fit. Letting go of products or services that do not belong in your business design will someday save you from drowning.

So that I am clear on what I mean, let us look at another way to visualize focus. Picture yourself in a space station, orbiting high above planet Earth. You have an advanced telescopic system onboard, directed at the region in which you live. With the turn of a knob

you zoom in on your home state. Then, once again, zoom in on the town in which you live, then on your house, and even a room in the house. We could go on indefinitely, focusing even beyond our mind's capacity to grasp the infiniteness of the tiny. How minute does your focus need to be?

Help Me!

I am not writing about focus or any of these ten Principles or Practices because I have them mastered—far from it. Sharing these tools helps me overcome my own barriers as we struggle to build our new business, *Life Without Limits*. Teachers are the lessons they teach, for they teach what they must master. The vision for *Life Without Limits* began at a conference retreat in the spring of 1992. Four years later, I sold Adams & Adams Building Services so that I could devote myself to writing and speaking about *Miracles at Work*.

It has been over ten years since a voice directed me to become a Corporate Messenger of God and take this message on the road. I have often become so frustrated that I thought I would explode. Not long ago, I was ready to throw in the towel and give up. I was in a place of darkness. I could not write. When I tried to speak to an audience, I had to force the words out. My confidence in my mission and life's passion was at a new low. There seemed no way out. I began to pray and meditate more deeply, and I decided to face my fears. As a result, during a speech at the Springfield Rotary I felt a renewal—a Presence was helping me to connect with my audience. I began to dream again. I realized that we are not truly living unless we continue to dream and create. Only now, in the fall of 2003, is the dream becoming a reality.

I was able to focus enough again to finish this book. I was directed back to where I belonged. This was not in my comfort zone, but I knew I had to overcome my fears and the blocks to my own self-belief where love begins.

If we are stuck or in a dark place, having faith and surrendering to that Power within can lead us to the light that naturally shines in our souls.

We do not discover the things of which we are already aware, we just remember them. That *Aha!* experience comes from learning a way to overcome our handicaps. I am so seriously scattered that I have made it a study to develop ways for me to concentrate on one thing at a time. For a while, I thought I had Attention Deficit Disorder. What I really have is the wandering, inquisitive mind of an entrepreneur and dreamer. Throughout this book, I will be rediscovering these concepts with you as we struggle to create, nurture, and continually embrace a Life Without Limits.

Small Market, Broad Focus – Big Market, Small Focus

If you are small or just getting started and your market is huge, you could become an expert on a *segment* of that business. For example, a specialist in window cleaning, a master of residential window cleaning, or of computer graphics for online marketers in the photographic industry, or a coach for computer software businesses located within forty-five minutes of your home office. In contrast, the smaller your market the more diversified you need to be.

In the sparsely populated western part of the United States, small janitorial companies do a full range of services because of the wide-open spaces between towns and fewer commercial buildings. Think of the general stores in the small towns of Vermont and New Hampshire. They carry everything in order to sell enough to survive. The more potential

customers you have, the more minute your focus must be. The fewer customers in a specific customer base, the more diverse you must become.

The Big Rocks

If we have discovered our mission and purpose, how do we determine what the most important projects are to work on every minute of the workday? I have used the following method for years to determine my top priorities.

Begin the process by sitting quietly with a clean sheet of paper in front of you. Now, write down all the activities that you are involved in to build your company. Write spontaneously, without hesitation or judgment. Do not stop until you have identified at least twenty tasks. Now, circle the ten most important ones that will fulfill your company's purpose. Out of this group of ten, select the top six priorities that will take you to the next step in the advancement of your vision. These are the Big Rocks.

The next task is to place the Big Rocks in order of priority and work on the most important one first each day. Of course, the Big Rocks can be further broken down into the major actions needed to advance each project, and those into more, and so on. In each case, we select the top priority to work on first. This enables us to always be focused on the most important thing we need to be doing. Naturally, we find all sorts of contradictions as there are in all business practice such as, "I've gotta put out fires first," or "But the taxes are due," and "The boiler just broke," and "My service manager is out sick and I must fill in for him." Continually returning to our Big Rocks will take us where we want to go.

LIFE WITHOUT LIMITS
VISION QUEST – September 5, 2002

ROCKS—JOHN	PEBBLES—JOHN
<p><u>For September</u></p> <p>1) Final draft of chapters, summary to editors—End of September</p> <p>2) Finish synopsis of Miracles at Work</p> <p>3) Finish draft of proposal</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> A. Product B. People C. Place D. Price <p>4) Develop marketing plan</p> <p>5) Send query letters to six agents</p> <p>6) Get testimonials for both book and speeches</p> <p>7) Assist Dee with magazine query letters</p> <p>8) Speaking stage time once a week:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> A. Toastmasters <ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. Groton <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. ATM speeches <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Storytelling • The Professional Speaker • The Entertaining Speaker • Humorous Speaking • Communicating on Television b. Table Topics c. Toastmaster d. As VP Education e. Club Leadership Series i. Norwich ii. Corporate iii. New Mystic Club iv. Speech Contests v. Utility B. Public Service Clubs C. Religious Groups D. Women's Clubs E. Business Conventions <p>9) Formulate first of four keynote speeches—2 complete</p> <p>10) PATCO story outline</p>	<p>1) Take acting course—Ongoing</p> <p>2) Read publishing periodicals</p> <p>3) Spend more time at library and book stores</p> <p>4) The Artist's Way—September</p> <p>5) Farm Accounting</p> <p>6) ACT training—on hold</p>

Defining The Rocks

I first read of the “Big Rocks” idea on the Internet. This story is credited as having been written by Steve Duncan of the Montana State University Extension Service. Then, I modified the tale to reflect a *Life Without Limits* approach to doing business. I demonstrated the Big Rocks method of focusing on priorities first at Many Doors Wellness Center in Westerly, RI, in July of 2001. I prepared for that evening’s workshop by taking an empty, clear vase and filling it with six, walnut-sized, dark granite rocks from my backyard. In the basement, I found a bucket of sand we use in the winter, on the icy driveway. I filled a 32-oz. empty, Stonyfield Farms organic vanilla yogurt container with the sand. It was too coarse at first, so I strained it through a kitchen sieve. Then, I needed some pebbles.

Pulling my red backpack on, I rode my old twelve-speed bike down School Street to the Mystic Shipyard, where my sailboat “Miracles” is docked. The shipyard had resurfaced the whole yard with small, uniform, pebble-sized driveway stones. I checked around as if I was making off with something precious, then scooped up a container full and biked home. Now I had the rocks, the pebbles and the sand. The final ingredient was a can of *Busch Beer* that had been sitting on a shelf in my basement for years. With all the ingredients, I practiced a dry run of the demonstration before I left for the workshop.

During our workshop, I pulled the vase of rocks out of hiding from my blue and white thermos cooler, and asked the class, “Is the jar full?”

Surprise! Everyone answered, “Yes.”

Next, I pulled out the pebbles, poured them over the rocks, and shook the vase until they filled all the empty spaces. “Now is it full?” I asked.

“Yes,” they replied, again.

Good! Got them twice, I thought. Then I revealed the sand, and poured it in. I watched the students' faces as it cascaded between the pebbles and rocks. It was full now, right? Wrong!

I pulled out that blue and white can of Busch, popped the cap and poured it over the rocks, pebbles and sand. A stale beer smell filled the air. It reminded me of the taprooms my father took me to when I was a small boy.

Now the jar was full. I wanted the beer to serve as a representation of the addictions, compulsions, or bad habits that take up space in our sphere of potentiality—procrastination, excessive alcohol, overeating, the telephone, compulsions, or toxic relationships. We all have some undesirable traits to overcome.

The demonstration was completed, but everyone had a hard time identifying the rocks, pebbles and sand in their businesses. I needed to have a clearer example to define the Big Rocks.

It was not until the next day, when I shared the concept with Dee, my office manager, Dee, that I was able to clearly define the Big Rocks using our own company priorities. Dee set up a three-folder in/out system for me to organize our tasks in order of priority. She returned each folder to me after tasks were accomplished marked *Urgent, As Soon As Possible (ASAP)* and *For Your Information (FYI)*.

We simply re-named the files *Rocks* (red folder—Urgent), *Pebbles* (blue folder—ASAP), and *Sand* (folder—FYI).

The Rocks became the top priority or critical tasks (gotta get it done now). The folder included things such as drafts of *Miracles at Work: Building Your Business from the Soul Up*, a list of editors for the final draft, magazine query letters, and checks that needed to be sent out right away.

The Pebbles were next in line. This folder included drafts of other writings to review, letters that needed to be sent out during the current week or two, and a timeline for the winter promotion of *Miracles at Work*.

Finally, the green Sand folder contained addresses to put into the database, and papers to review.

Later, I discovered that I had been using this system for years without really knowing it. I had already developed a process of lining up my urgent tasks on the right hand side of my desk next to me (the rocks). Behind me, on the left side of my credenza, the pebbles were lined up, and to the right of that, the sand. I am a visual and feeling person, so this method of organizing my tasks enables me to scan and review. Since I can be scattered and have a problem focusing, I take one or several duties at a time out of the line-up and finish the task(s) in a place where I won't be distracted, such as in the back yard, onboard *Miracles*, or on my dining room table.

Getting Started

What are your rocks? Can you identify them now? Make a list of all the "stuff" in your "To Do" pile. Now, start to identify the urgent tasks and file them in a red folder, or make a staggered row on a side table with Rocks as a heading. Do the same for your Pebbles, and for Sand. As time goes by, you may shift the tasks up or down in priority. If they sit long enough, some will disappear. That is the rule of the vanishing "To Do" file. At any given time, eighty percent of your tasks will vanish, become obsolete, be reassigned to someone else, or take care of themselves. The other twenty-percent will eventually end up as the Big Rocks that propel you to success.

Congratulations! You are focused for success rather than scattered about with too many irons in the fire. Your priorities are now in order. You have identified or redefined your mission, purpose and priorities. You have established your focus and the most important tasks to accomplish. But, how do you solve the problem of interruptions, fires that erupt and need to be put out, and your wandering entrepreneurial mind? *You learned to stay focused and centered by practicing mindfulness in the Second Principle of Miracles at Work. To be centered, concentrated and living in the moment requires “listening” techniques.* That is what you will learn in our next chapter.

“What’s true in the morning is a lie in the afternoon.” — Carl Jung

*“Within each of us there is a silence –
a silence as vast as the universe.
We are afraid of it...and we long for it.”*

— Gunilla Norris