RAISING YOUR GAME

Introduction

There's a huge difference between being an employee and being an employee who's respected and considered a leader. Just like there's a huge difference between being an owner and being the type of owner who's truly respected and appreciated by his or her employees. Whatever role you're in, you want to be the kind of leader people look to for help, encouragement, and solutions.

As you start to accumulate more and more responsibilities, you'll need to find a way to manage all of them efficiently. To be successful, your goal should be to achieve the most you can with the least amount of effort ….

Ways to Raise Your Game Included in This Section are:

80–20 RULE—THE PARETO PRINCIPLE

In the early 1900's, an Italian economist by the name of Vilfredo Pareto created a mathematical formula describing the unequal distribution of wealth he observed and measured in his country: Pareto observed that roughly twenty percent of the people controlled or owned eighty percent of the wealth. An avid gardener, he noticed that 80 percent of the yield of his pea crop came from 20 percent of the pea pods. He then noticed that the same ratio appeared in the distribution of land in Italy, where 80 percent of it was owned by 20 percent of the population. He observed that this was a pattern in many other situations as well.

> What 20 percent of your efforts are generating 80 percent of your results?

His observations laid the groundwork for what's known today as the Pareto Principle. In 1937, Dr. Juran, Quality Management pioneer, applied Pareto's observations about economics to a broader body of work. As a result, Dr. Juran's observation of the "vital few and trivial many," the principle that 80 percent of the effects come from 20 percent of the causes, became known as Pareto's Principle or the 80–20 Rule.

The impact of this rule can have large consequences for businesses and help leaders identify where they should focus their energy and their money—on the 20 percent that can have the most impact.

You can apply the 80–20 rule to your life and your career:

- What 20 percent of your team is generating 80 percent of the productivity?
- What 20 percent of your customers are generating 80 percent of your revenue?
- What 20 percent of your efforts are generating 80 percent of your results?

In fact, we can take it further:

Meetings—80 percent of the decisions come from 20 percent of the meeting time.

Time Management—80 percent of your measurable results/progress will come from just 20 percent of the items on your daily To-Do list.

Interruptions—80 percent of a leader's interruptions come from the same 20 percent of people.

Product Defects—80 percent of defects typically come from 20 percent of input errors.

Website—80 percent of your visitors will see only 20 percent of your website pages.

Advertising—20 percent of your advertising will produce 80 percent of your campaign's results.

When we look at it this way, it seems obvious that most of the effects (80 percent) come from the smallest number (20 percent) of causes.

The lesson here is for you to stop wasting precious time and resources on endeavors that drain money, energy, and time. Invest in the things that provide the largest return. The key is in how you evaluate the questions you might ask yourself such as:

- Do you want to reduce your living expenses? Identify which 20 percent are using 80 percent of the resources—carefully consider whether they're really necessary and get rid of them if they aren't. Take a bagged lunch to work rather than purchasing it; you'll be surprised at how much you're able to save in a short time.

- Do you have talented employees? Focus their energy in the areas that accomplish 80 percent of your goals, and be sure they're praised and rewarded for doing so.

- Are you having problems getting through your to-do list? If something's not going to get done make sure it's not part of that 20 percent!

> Invest in the things that provide the largest return.

Use of the Pareto Principle or "Pareto Thinking" should become a way of life for you. Your ability to separate the essential from the nonessential will improve with practice, especially if that practice involves use of actual data and not just "eye-balling" the situation. Once established, this approach becomes a normal reaction to solving problems. In time, an experienced "Pareto Thinker" can even make quick, accurate judgment calls.

ASSUMING RESPONSIBILITY

If you want to be successful you have to have the ability to assume responsibility and be open to taking ownership of new projects that come your way.

If a person is giving you a task, it clearly means they're confident in your ability to see it through to completion. They're trusting in you to figure it out and do it the best way you can. When a new task comes your way, you might not be that willing to take it on; it might even feel like an intrusion—you're already busy. However, part of growth and being good at your job is embracing new tasks and responsibilities and you need to realize that doing so shows a willingness to grow. Sometimes it can be uncomfortable and stressful, but if you work out how to get it done you'll feel a huge sense of accomplishment afterwards.

> Embracing new tasks and responsibilities shows a willingness to grow.

If something is assigned to you, it's yours 100 percent until completion. So what do you do? You already have 40 hours, and you feel like you have too much work. What you need to do is to review all of your current projects along with their priority and present the options to the person who assigned you the task so you can both agree as to how to move forward. Share your thoughts about various ways you can manage the time for the new project, such as:

1. Working overtime.
2. Not doing your other tasks.
3. Doing this new task and shifting your calendar out.
4. Assigning this task to someone else.
5. Putting this task further out on the calendar to do at a later time.

Once you're clear about the unfinished projects, and have discussed the options with the person who assigned you the task, then the decision can be made as to how to get it accomplished.

Once you've accepted responsibility for the task, and you're excited because you know you're valued, your focus will be on how to get it done. It's important that people working with you on other projects or people waiting on projects from you are aware of the consequences to them of this new project of yours.

1. Notify anyone who's waiting on you for something what the new completion date will be.

2. Find a way to streamline some of your tasks so they take less time allowing you to accomplish everything close to the original deadline.

Now what? You might feel overwhelmed and not know how to begin. You know you have to start somewhere, so just take a moment to think the project through and then start. If you hit a road-block, go back to the person who gave you the task. Don't go to someone else for guidance because they may have no clue as to the goal or intended purpose so they might guide you down the wrong path. When you go to the person who gave you the assignment, they might realize they didn't make their goals clear or that you might not have understood how this project was to be used and they'll clarify things. It might even happen that when you re-discuss the goals and the purpose the whole nature of the project will be refined or changed. You might have to start all over again, but at least you'll know what the vision is.

> Make sure you under-stand the end goal and what you're trying to accomplish.

In order to do the task correctly, you need to understand the big picture. More importantly, you must understand its context. Make sure you understand the end goal and what you're trying to accomplish. Talk it through so you can be clear on your direction—ask questions so you know your destination. You might not be in a position where you can push back or doubt the person who gave you the project, but what should surface from the discussion is that there's agreement on its value, that it's worth pursuing, and also that it's part of the 20 percent you should be focusing on now.

Once that's established, you need to take control of the task until it's done:

- Identify the time frame for its completion.

- Find whether or not there's someone else on the team you're allowed to consult or work with.

- If there's a part of the task that requires someone else's input, be sure you include the person who assigned it to you when you email correspondence, so everyone is on the same page about where the project stands, and who the task is waiting on.

- If that other person can't get to their part immediately, then it's their responsibility to email back, with a copy to everyone, saying when they think they can get to it.

- Since the person who assigned you the task is copied on the correspondence, they have the option to say nothing and accept the schedule, or move priorities around to get it done sooner.

- If days or a week go by and you don't have what you're waiting for, send a reminder email, and copy the person who assigned the task to you. Remember it's still your responsibility to push the task to completion as quickly as possible, so you don't want it to fall off the radar. Everyone gets busy, and your boss might just assume it's been taken care of, when in fact it's waiting on someone other than you.

Take charge and proceed in a way that shows you have the vision and authorization to complete this project. If you need something from others, don't ask for permission just go and get it. Asking for permission is saying you don't believe that you're authorized to do so. If you need to ask for something because you need help, that's a different story—you should always ask for that. You've already been given the authorization, so do what it takes to get the job done.

> Growth doesn't come from being comfortable and inert.

Don't ask other people if they can do this for you because that just opens the door for a negative response. Tell them what you need to get done, and get their feedback on the best way to accomplish it. Be assertive in making sure the goal is met.

While you're working on the task, take full ownership of it by doing necessary research. Search the internet and learn everything you can about this topic. By seeing how others approach it you can increase your odds of doing an exceptional job on what's been assigned to you. You might see an opportunity for a new idea that didn't even present itself initially. What a picture of success that would be! Now you'll become the expert in whatever it is you were tasked with.

Always be willing to accept new tasks. Encourage them. Know that you'll be making mistakes, but embrace that fact that it's part of your growth. Growth doesn't come from being comfortable and inert.

Remember, there's no such thing as inactivity unless you're planning on being out of a job or going out of business! Accept responsibility for the tasks that are assigned to you and make adjustments in your attitude or workflow to accommodate them. Change means you're growing and that you've tried something. The truly successful person who cares about their career will be open to new tasks and expanding responsibilities—this shows they care about their future and the business that hired them. Think about how great it will feel to know that you've significantly contributed to the company's success by your willingness to keep growing and finding ways to add value.

CREATIVITY

Always strive to be one step ahead of others by thinking of creative and innovative ways to accomplish your goals. You won't reach your full potential if you continue doing things the same old way. Success depends on a good supply of timely information and creativity.

Innovation will create new or increased profits for your business, or result in a reduction of man-hours and resources required to get the job done. Just as you strive to stand out in a crowd, so should your work. The way you do a project, the way you present your ideas to others, and the way you implement your ideas should make them stand out from the others. Stay current with developing technology. If you believe a new tool or product will be good for your organization, be sure to bring it to the attention of the appropriate person if you aren't the owner. Don't be afraid to try new things and go beyond what you're used to.

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One way to be creative is to get inspiration from others. Watch what people buy, read, and wear. Be aware of the latest trends, whether or not they relate directly to what you do. Spend time on the internet searching for products and services, and advertisements that grab your attention and touch you emotionally. Always look for an aspect that you think is relevant and develop or adapt it for yourself or your company.

Read books about successful ideas and techniques used by others. Try them out! Step out of your comfort zone. If you don't know if an idea will work—try it! Then you'll know for sure… True leaders reach great heights by utilizing innovative methods. Expand your thinking. Stretch your ideas and embrace new experiences.