

Jim's Profit Accelerator 98: Focus Like a Sixth Grader

The biggest difference between good and great may not be 10,000 hours of practice, as Malcolm Gladwell suggests in his book *Outliers*. Instead of submitting to a debate about the 10,000 hours, let's look instead at focus. Most of us think of focus as looking intensely at something, as through a microscope or binoculars. That's backward. In fact, focus is about excluding from vision (and your brain) most of the non-essential inputs to enable clarity and rapid understanding. It's why multitasking is a teenage fantasy instead of a successful time management trick.

SPEED BUMP: Focus is the discipline that excludes most non-relevant input.

Yes, the 10,000 hours rule may be valid, but, regardless, we know that if a person devotes the 10,000 to a single venture (tennis, piano, or painting), she must be excluding massively. In fact, the excluding may be the most vital secret to success almost everywhere.

My lunch today was with a commercial banker who was a good enough swimmer to earn swimming scholarships at six different major universities. She talked about the surprise of having to master time management along with swimming when she went to college, because there was no free time. Ah, the beauty of focus!

SPEED BUMP: Focus is necessary but not sufficient for excellence.

I had to get that in before the uproar. Of course other elements play their part; without focus, however, they go untried.

I watched 97 sixth-graders play their spring band concert. The music was startlingly good, with waves of emotion to boot. More dramatic, however, was that 97 SIXTH-GRADERS were absorbed in their music for over 30 minutes. (Okay, I didn't check all 97 all the time, but I never saw a wandering eye.) For the two of you who don't know about sixth graders, they are never still. Unless they *want* to be still, like these band members did. Yes, that's focus with purpose.

SPEED BUMP: The band was focused because of their leader.

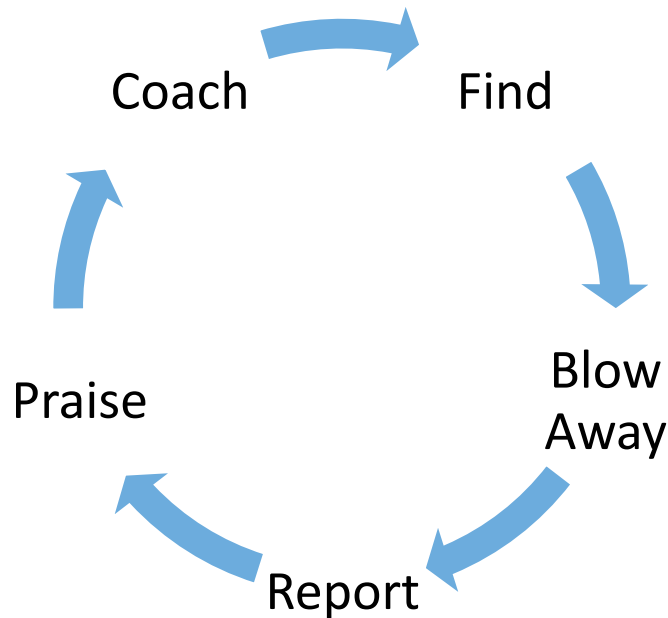
One of my clients, a large healthcare provider, took a revenue hit with the passage of the Affordable Care Act. In a review today with the district manager whom I coached, he reported the following after nine months: After the best fourth quarter in four years, their first quarter continued their jump in performance. By now you know that they did it with disciplined focus! They found three metrics that drove results, and taught all 10 of their clinic directors how to coach their providers to focus on the behaviors that would benefit their patients and the provider's results. Their focus was relentless, daily

and weekly, with careful attention to link individual skills and preferences to those metrics. And there was lots of praise to go around!

The results came partly by blowing away other measures and information, so that the key results stood out every week. This “focus by default” enabled sharp teaching and follow-through, without the distractions that commanded so much time. The distractions are still there, but the pride in success feeds the discipline to focus.

The process is this simple:

1. Find the key drivers of essential results.
2. Blow away everything else.
3. Report results publicly.
4. Praise lavishly.
5. Coach precisely.



ACCELERANT: Where’s your focus?

For more information, visit www.grewco.com.

Jim Grew is an expert in CEO-level strategy and executive leadership whose clients refer to him as the Business Defogger and Accelerator. Jim helps leaders swiftly discover the hidden opportunities within their businesses and exploit them for dramatic results. Nearly three decades of success as a COO and CEO coupled with his experience running nine thriving businesses provide the foundation for his consulting work as president of the Grew Company. He presents regularly to industry groups, mentors business leaders, and shares insights on his blog, BizBursts.com: <http://bizbursts.com/>. He holds BA and MBA degrees from Stanford University.