

## Focus: Essential for Success

by **MICHAEL SIPE, President — CrossPointe Capital**

The ability to focus is essential to achieving success in any area of life. For business leaders, maintaining focus is especially important. Focus helps us remain on track and ensures that we use our time effectively, leading to more successful results. Achieving and maintaining focus, however, is not always easy. Consider for a moment some of things that can distract us these days: countless global issues, China, the potential for nuclear war, the world and national economy, political division, social controversy, homelessness, addiction, mental illness, public safety, government regulations, inflation, hiring challenges, challenges in the kids' schools, health, relational issues... the list is endless.



When you think about it, there are so many distractions it's a wonder that business owners are able to get anything productive done at all. But the key lies in the ability to shut out the distractions and focus. That's why in our 10x CEO Group discussions we've been focusing on focusing. We start with awareness and intentionality, by listing the areas of life that require our dedicated focus, then listing the distractions that tend to break our focus, and finally by considering the ways we've found that help us regain focus, so that we can do more of those things. You might consider taking a few minutes to explore the same questions.

One of the key truths about focus is that we tend to attract whatever we focus on. We draw to us the people, resources and situations we most focus our attention on. This is true whether we focus on positive or negative things. Unfortunately, most of the things that usually break our focus and hinder our productivity are negative, like fears, worries, doubts, anxieties and troubles. Perhaps you've noticed that the more people fixate on their problems, the more problems they have. A problem focus attracts more problems. Unfortunately, it's all too easy for even the most accomplished business leaders and their teams to get stuck fixating on problems. Conversely, a positive focus on mission, vision, solutions and goals tends to attract desirable outcomes. Success breeds success.

Another fact about focus is that we go where we look. For example, when you ski, whitewater kayak, mountain bike, or motorcycle ride, if you look at what you don't want to hit, you're likely to hit it. If you look where you don't want to go, you're likely to go there. Whether running a class 5 rapid or running a Monday morning staff meeting, we need to focus on where we want to go, not where we don't want to go.

An additional consideration is that we tend to attract people, resources and situations based on what and how we speak. Words have power, and our focus is

materially shaped by how we speak to ourselves and about ourselves. A negative word here or there might seem like a small thing, but about 2,000 years ago Jesus' brother, the Apostle James, had this to say about the power of our tongues.

"A word out of your mouth may seem of no account, but it can accomplish nearly anything — or destroy it! It only takes a spark, remember, to set off a forest fire. A careless or wrongly placed word out of your mouth can do that. By our speech we can ruin the world, turn harmony to chaos, throw mud on a reputation, send the whole world up in smoke and go up in smoke with it. You can tame a tiger, but the tongue runs wild. With our tongues we bless, and we curse. Curses and blessings out of the same mouth! My friends, this can't go on. A spring doesn't gush fresh water one day and brackish the next, does it? Apple trees don't bear strawberries, do they? Raspberry bushes don't bear apples, do they? You're not going to dip into a polluted mud hole and get a cup of clear, cool water, are you?"

To control our focus and to direct our outcomes, we must control what and how we speak. As leaders, it's also incumbent on us to monitor and positively influence the speech and culture of those we lead. We can't expect to draw clear, effective thinking and actions out of a pool of polluted thoughts and language.

A final truth is that we become what we think about all day long. This idea was popularized by Earl Nightingale in his classic work *The Strangest Secret*, which is highly worth reading or listening to. Mr. Nightingale also taught that we become the product of who we associate with, what we read, and what we listen to/watch. Along those lines, Jim Rohn, another of my mentors, taught that we are deeply influenced by the people we spend time with — famously saying, "You are the average of the top five people you spend the most time with."

To summarize then, we tend to attract and receive what we focus on, and our focus is shaped by what we think about, what we read, what we watch, what we listen to and who we associate with.

If we can agree that we tend to attract and receive whatever we focus on, then the question of what we are to focus on becomes extremely important. Depending on their situation, season of life and specific concerns, different people focus on different things. Unhoused people focus on where they will sleep. Hungry people focus on eating. Sick people focus on health. People in love focus on their relationship. Parents focus on their children. Some people focus on their work. Business owners focus on their business. People passionate about their hobby or sport, focus on that. Prisoners of war focus on survival. All that is fine, and the principles summarized above apply to whatever we choose to focus on. The operative phrase, however, is "whatever we choose."

What we focus on is a choice. Clearly, situations arise that require short-term focus, but even deeply challenging situations or seasons still afford an opportunity for choice. One example is the personal choice written about by Viktor Frankl in his book "Man's Search for Meaning." This chilling, yet inspirational story of Frankl's struggle to hold on to hope during his three years as a prisoner in Nazi concentration camps, is a true classic. Frankl's training as a psychiatrist informed every waking moment of his ordeal and allowed him a remarkable perspective on the psychology of survival that has forever changed the way we understand our humanity in the face of suffering.

Other prisoners made different choices, of course. The key point is, whether in a POW camp or on the way to another ordinary day of work, we do not have to be victims of circumstance. We do not have to allow distractions to dictate our focus. We each have a choice as to what we focus on. We each have the opportunity to prioritize our focus. So, as a leader of your family, as a leader in business, as a leader in the community, what will you choose to focus on today? How about every day? And what tools, techniques and practices will you employ to help you maintain focus in the face of countless distractions?

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