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### **Realize Performance Breakthroughs**

Unfortunately, many managers do not attempt to fundamentally change their business processes. Instead, they settle for incremental 'challenges': increase sales 2%, reduce cost 1%, or offer a new product every two years. They should be establishing breakthrough goals to stretch the limits of possibility and inspire the organization. Strategies which value breakthrough over mediocrity are well within the reach of today's businesses, regardless of size or industry.

With deep irony, the assumption that breakthrough change must steal significant resources from bread-and-butter work is simply wrong. Employees may struggle mightily but diminishing returns and incremental goals usually go together. What if the underlying business processes aren't even the right ones for today? Are you sure your processes actually support your customers and employees. Or, unrealized by everybody, do they create unnecessary work?

Incremental goals emphasize departmental thinking. Breakthrough goals demand process-wide, if not corporate-wide thinking to yield integrated solutions and better processes for all.

#### **Turn an Expense into Investment**

Incremental thinking dooms employee efforts at business improvement. Also, small gains are more difficult to maintain than is often appreciated. The costs of achieving them belong in the ugly recurring expense category. Why not invest in the talent and creativity of your employees instead? For example:

- Your company may be working on a project to reduce the cost of document storage. Rather than scanning paper at the end of the line, why not invent a process that needs no paper in the first place? You may be able to turn 1% cost savings into 10% and eliminate a lot of wasteful steps at the same time.
- Perhaps your software development team just pulled off a major coup. Will you just reward the heroes, or ask the team to go further? Can the team improve the software process for everyone before moving on?
- Rather than accept a 2% sales improvement, spend time with your customers. Really listen. You may be surprised to learn how much new business is possible- but you might need to make some deep changes to get it!





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Wayne Gretzky, "The Great One" of hockey, was once asked how he could always be in just the right place to make the day's breakthrough play. He said, simply, "I skate to where I think the puck will be". Lesser players, thinking incrementally, can only hope to chase the puck all day long.

### **Achieve Breakthroughs Every Day**

Organizations must make breakthroughs if they are to avoid continuous improvement ruts. Why do the efforts of some companies lose steam, even when using proven strategies such as ISO-9000, Six Sigma, Lean Flow, or Total Quality Management (TQM)? Why do other companies, using the very same techniques, get better and better results with no end in sight?

Successful companies insist on breakthroughs. They continually reinvent their approach to process improvement. I recommend these practices, which will bring daily breakthroughs to any organization:

- Spend time with your customers. Identify exactly what they really want today, not what you believe they told you in the past. What measurable things would make your company an irresistible choice?
- Keep your team focused on the big picture. Your processes exist to serve customers (both internal and external), employees, and shareholders. To be successful all stakeholders must be satisfied.
- Set goals which cannot be achieved through "business as usual".
- Start any improvement effort with the end in mind, even when there is no clear path to reach the goals.
- Provide your employees with advanced process improvement tools. Six Sigma, in particular, is a powerful breakthrough methodology.
- Do not hesitate to seek expertise from outside your company.
- Use the special perspective you enjoy as a leader to help employees "see around corners".
- Value integrated process thinking over departmental success all the time. Do not allow any department to sub-optimize your business.

Companies making daily breakthroughs have a special commitment to their customers and employees. When enabled to change the rules, employees





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will stay excited about process improvement. Customers will reward your business with more sales. So, rather than settle for incremental goals, go ahead and shoot out the lights. Anything less may be an expensive waste of time.



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