

Specificity

If there one "secret" to becoming a better leader, apart than goal setting, it would have to be specificity. It might be the most powerful leadership principle in the world.

Specificity moves new leaders to the front of the class. It turns rising stars into supernovas, and it helps average project managers get results. If you are a decent leader who wants to become excellent, keep reading. And for those of you at the top of the pyramid—mastering this principle will make all the difference to those who serve under you.

Specificity. Eleven letters... five syllables... one word that unlocks one of the most powerful principles in the world. "Prove it," you say. Fasten your seatbelt and let's go.

In their groundbreaking book *The Power of Full Engagement*, authors Loehr and Schwartz proved that managing your energy is even more important than managing your time if you want to lead a meaningful and productive life. In the section on precision and specificity there are four astounding studies that every leader, every pastor, every manager, and every parent should read. Why? Because the studies tap into a principle that will help us make an actual difference.

In one study a group of participants were asked to write a report and turn it in at a certain time. Half of the participants were asked to say exactly when and where they would accomplish the task... A group of ladies who had already tested "highly motivated" were asked to perform breast cancer self-examinations. But only half of them had to report where and when that would happen... A group of non-exercising college students were told about the benefits of a fitness program, and were asked exactly when and where they would exercise.

In a final study, one that is emotional for me, recovering drug addicts were studied during their withdrawal period, a point of extremely low self-control. In an effort to help them find employment, they were asked to write a short résumé by 5:00 p.m., and half were asked when and where they would complete the task.

The results are astounding. In the control half of the report-writing group only 33% completed the task—but **75% of those who said when and where** they would complete the task were successful! In the control group of ladies, only 53% did the breast exam, whereas almost **100% of those who said when and where** they would accomplish the task completed the exam. The college students who needed exercise? With all other forms of motivation 39% of them started exercising—but that number went to **91% when the students specified when and where** they would complete the task.

WHY THE BIG INCREASE? Here is the "secret." The participants were able to *focus their energy to positively complete a specific task* rather than depleting their energy by resisting certain habits or laziness all day long. **If you bring your energy and your intent to laser-like focus, your chances of accomplishing a task are far greater** than going through the day, the week, the month simply "intending" to do something... something that usually doesn't get done.

The drug addicts... this illustration is emotional for me because I've seen it lived out. My little sister was a drug addict who was in and out of prison. I've seen people reduced to nothing, no self-control, no dignity, no life. As a matter of fact, in the study not a single drug addict completed the task, not one....

At least not in the control group. Of those who gave a specific time and place, however—**80%** of that group completed the task! Yes, it works even for those with little or no self-control.

Leader, start with yourself on this one. Pick an area that you've struggled in and write down the exact time and place that you are going to do something. Be specific! If the past is an indicator of the future, you might not accomplish the task exactly when and where you said, but missing the deadline will trigger something in your mind: "Oh yeah, I was supposed to do that a couple of hours ago—I need to get that done!" And you will go back and get it done.

When you have personally seen the results, then invite others on your journey.

Business leader, when your team members have an important task, perhaps something with a deadline that has been missed in the past, ask them to write down for you exactly when and where the task will be accomplished.

I hope every pastor in North America will use this principle to call people to steps of faith and greater obedience. Ask the people under your care to pull out a piece of paper and write down exactly when and where they will apply the biblical principle you've preached on. Then they can join the Apostle Paul in saying, "But one thing I do..." (Phil. 3:13)

These studies reveal that even high motivation fails us when we don't have the time or energy to get something done. But focusing our efforts helps significantly. We become better leaders and we can help others lead more effectively.

lives—people like my little sister.

My sister Joyce is doing awesome (I say through my tears). She has been set free by Christ and her passion for God dwarfs my own. I'm incredibly proud of her. She is now focusing her energy on going back to school. She earned her GED and just received a "B" in her first college course. Precision and specificity are meaningful concepts in her life. Lord willing, they will be in mine as well.

Seek God, keep moving, show up, lean forward, trust... and go for it!

Rob McLeland, Executive Director, North American Baptist Conference
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