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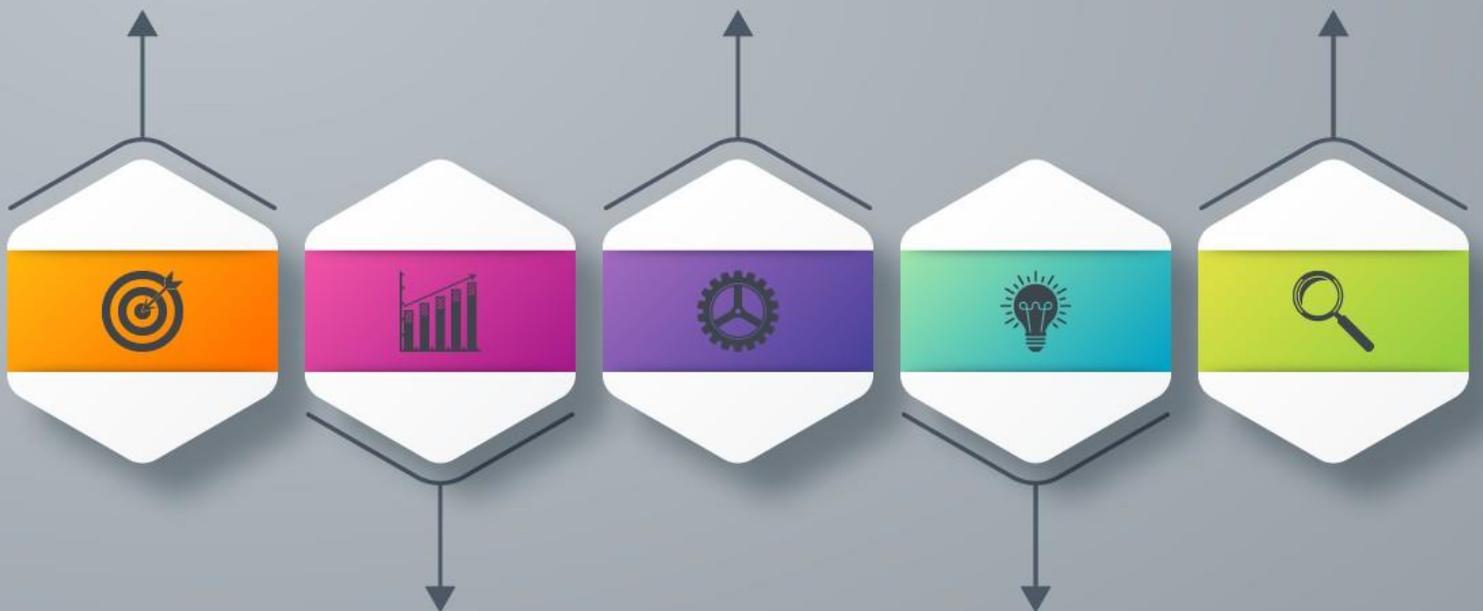
5 Rules of Engagement for Breakout Performance

Follow these 5 rules to help your entire staff – and your company – achieve transformative results.

Whether you work at a small tech startup or a large established manufacturer, there is an implicit understanding that business success can be easily quantified. In fact, it doesn't really even matter whether you are a CEO or a sales rep, the common wisdom is that there are identifiable numbers that can objectively determine if you are a success or a failure. For some, it's quarterly revenue and profit results; for others, it's hitting sales numbers or reaching product development milestones.

In many ways, there is an elegant logic to this view of business achievement and success. In a world full of endless layers of nuance and opinion, tangible metrics of business performance are irresistibly attractive. You either achieve your goals or you don't. You're a winner or a loser, a hero or a goat. And at its root, there's also a fundamental truth behind this focus on sales and revenue and profit and loss numbers. If a business can't earn more than it spends over a stretch of time, it's not a viable company: it's a hobby.

But there are real and serious limitations to taking such a binary approach to measuring success and failure. Think about it: what is the natural human response to a salesperson not reaching their monthly number? While some may react by redoubling their efforts to do better in the future, plenty more will become dispirited and lose motivation. Others will look to lower their sales targets to ensure they'll reach them in the future. Even those who do hit their numbers can expect their feeling of victory to be fleeting because the result is often increased expectations.



Besides being a blunt instrument, this black and white approach to measuring business success is actually counterproductive, particularly if the goal is to achieve transformative performance improvement. That may sound counterintuitive, but a moment's thought makes it obvious. Simply put, the fixation on a binary "success or failure"-oriented measurement of performance ignores something fundamental: a company thrives or flounders based on what all of its people are able to deliver. And like it or not, the circumstances, opportunities, and challenges that people face in their jobs – not to mention the experience and skills they bring to their positions – vary widely, even within the same company or department.

Performance rules that recognize human nature

Rather than continue to employ an overly simplistic and inherently flawed approach to assessing the job performance of your employees, what is needed is a system that recognizes and encourages both outright success and concerted effort towards a goal. We call these 5 Rules of Engagement for Breakout Performance, and they are designed to assess how someone is performing right now, while also providing the tools, skills, and encouragement required to continuously improve.

Make no mistake: goals and objective measures still matter. But what is different with these Rules of Engagement is that each individual will always be empowered and encouraged to achieve their goals regardless of how they've performed over the past month or quarter.

By moving from a "winners and losers" paradigm of achievement to an approach that recognizes the reality of how people actually work and strive, these rules can transform individual results and the overall success of an organization in dramatic ways. Adherence and adoption of these rules also fundamentally changes how managers do their jobs. In order to work properly, the rules make it incumbent upon managers to be flexible and smart in how they work to draw the best out of their employees.

Put another way, a monolithic management philosophy that leads a manager to exclusively take either a hands-off or a micromanaging approach simply doesn't work. We all instinctively know that there are some people who need structure and daily attention, while others flourish if you just leave them alone. Adjusting your management style to best support team members has an added benefit beyond simply improving results. It naturally translates into employees taking greater ownership of their work and feeling both more rewarded and valued for their efforts.

Simplicity is important here because any rules we ask managers and employees to follow will automatically be ignored if they are too arcane or abstract. With that in mind, here are our 5 Rules of Engagement for Breakout Performance – a dynamic series levels that prescribe exactly what approach to take in each situation.



Rule 1 | Hit your Goals

You should be hitting your goals.

It may seem counterintuitive to focus first on goals, given what we've already said about their inherent shortcomings. Goals still matter, though, because they establish an important benchmark for gauging what an individual needs to do to perform better in the future, and because the organizational goals each employee contributes to achieving are, in fact, relatively objective.

But establishing goals for individuals and entire organizations can't be approached in an arbitrary, undisciplined way. Managers often make it difficult for their teams to succeed by setting vague objectives. To be effective, goals must be specific, time-bound, and measurable. In other words, both managers and their employees should be able to explain quickly and easily what they are aiming to achieve, when they are supposed to reach their goals, and how much progress they are making at any given time towards their objectives.

At the same time, powerful goals that drive people to achieve also need to be reasonable and obtainable. This is not to say that goals should be set so low that they're easy to achieve, but rather that they should be ambitious enough to require concerted effort to achieve.

It's also important that the objectives individuals in an organization strive towards cannot be divorced from the goals of the company as a whole. They must be tightly connected and complementary. For example, if a company wants to grow its revenue by \$10 million over the next quarter or year, the responsibility for reaching that business-wide objective has to be spread across individual sales teams and translated into a measurable number for each individual salesperson. Keep in mind that setting revenue goals isn't just about boosting the sales quotas for individuals. It also requires establishing new, time-bound and measurable targets for those in operations, finance, marketing, and all the other divisions of a company upon whom the sales team members depend in order to do their jobs most effectively.



Rule 2 | Improve

If you're not hitting your goals, then you should be improving.

One of the most counterproductive aspects of employing an all-or-nothing approach to assessing an individual's performance is that it doesn't encourage or reward effort. The simple reality is that individuals and organizations – especially those seeking transformative growth – are often going to miss their necessarily ambitious goals.

By not routinely recognizing improved performance, companies and managers are missing a significant opportunity to reward the effort and diligence of their employees and are failing to help workers reach their full potential – a failure that hampers the growth of the organization as a whole. That's why it's so important that whenever employees miss their goals, managers take a step back to assess how much individuals have improved over their past performance.

This approach provides needed positive reinforcement to encourage employees to build on their progress, while also giving managers opportunities to coach and guide their staff about ways to accelerate improvement. Championing progress and using it as a springboard to continue improving will increase the likelihood that employees will obtain and surpass their future goals.



Rule 3 | Clear & Credible Plan

If you're not hitting your goals and you're not improving, then you should have a clear and credible plan for improvement.

Anyone who has been a manager knows the sequence of events that usually takes place when goals are missed – particularly when they're missed repeatedly and aren't accompanied by any evidence of effort or progress towards those goals.

Managers who empower their staff to decide the best tactics and strategies to reach their goals often feel burned and misled when their employees fall short. This can trigger an overreaction in which managers who are inclined to be hands-off instead become micromanagers. For their part, micromanagers often become even more intrusive with their staff, giving them very little latitude to turn their performance around.

To put it mildly, these responses are neither empowering nor motivating to an employee. A far better reaction is to require those who haven't achieved their goals or demonstrated meaningful improvement to present a clear and credible plan for how they plan to improve in the future. When managers establish this expectation up front, it becomes incumbent upon each employee to proactively craft a credible plan about how to reach the goal.

Employees must also be willing to sit down with their managers to seek feedback that will tweak their roadmaps to success. This collaborative approach ensures that all employees have agency and accountability for their own success while drawing on the expertise and support of their managers. It also encourages managers to supply the training and resources their employees will need to execute their plans – training and resources the employees are more likely to take advantage of rather than resent because they mesh with each employee's plan for improvement.



Rule 4 | Ask for Help

If you're not hitting your goals, you're not improving, and you don't have a clear and credible plan for improvement, then you should be asking for help.

Nobody likes to admit they need help. But even the most accomplished executives and salespeople require guidance and assistance—in fact, a willingness to seek help is a characteristic that leads to professional success.

That is why it's vital for everyone in an organization to know that seeking help is a display of strength and confidence, not weakness. Sadly, this is not always the case, just as a willingness to fail is not always deemed a good thing. Far too many people will struggle silently, become frustrated, and lose their motivation rather than concede that insights and guidance from their peers and managers could help them.

A culture that encourages and rewards those who seek help is far more likely to unleash the genuine potential and talents of its people than one that shuns and punishes it. But those seeking help have to do so out of a genuine desire to improve. It can't be a grudging request for assistance; it must be sincere, and those seeking help must be willing to act on the feedback and guidance they receive.



Rule 5 | Red Zone

If you're not hitting your goals, you're not improving, you don't have a clear and credible plan for improvement, and you're not asking for help, then you are in the Red Zone.

Even in the most ideal and supportive organizational cultures, there are times when things just aren't working. In those instances, people are failing to hit their goals, not improving, not proactively formulating a roadmap for success and not asking for help. We call that the red zone.

As the term indicates, the red zone is a time to stop and seek answers to a number of elemental questions. Is there a disconnect between what an individual wants in their professional life and what the company is trying to achieve? Is there a situation outside of the workplace that is making it difficult or impossible for a person to perform up to their potential? Something is broken, and establishing a red zone where there is freedom for managers and their employees to explore and diagnose the problem elevates the possibility of finding a constructive way forward.

To be clear, there is no judgment in the red zone. Rather, it is a safe place where managers and employees can recalibrate an employee's professional purpose and performance.

While it's important to have frank conversations once you've entered the red zone, the ultimate purpose is to find a solution to what's broken. Working together, employees and managers should emerge from the red zone with a measurable and time-bound plan for improvement. This is clearly a good development for the individual who is struggling. But it's also an acknowledgement of the limitations of managers. No amount of savvy and empathetic management can fix business dynamics that are fundamentally broken. The way out of the red zone necessarily requires the manager and employee to work together.

These 5 Rules of Engagement provide a framework to dramatically improve the performance of organizations by unleashing the intrinsic potential of their entire workforce. It works in everything from

small startups to large organizations, and with everyone from sales personnel to customer service representatives.

Beyond a commitment to implement these rules, organizations that want to benefit from this transformation need a tool that provides centralized, real-time visibility into how well individuals are performing against their goals. The capacity to measure performance is limited today because results are scattered across numerous computer and software systems. It can take an extraordinary amount of time to even uncover the relevant information, let alone understand how to use it to provide feedback.

Nowsight™ makes it easy for companies to continually access timely information, which allows managers and employees to connect what they're doing each day with progress towards their goals. Only with up-to-date and accurate information and frequent feedback can individuals and companies accelerate their performance.

For more information on how Nowsight™ can help your organization eliminate waste and improve performance, please visit us online at www.nowsight.com

