

THE SHORT-TERM FIX THAT CAN CREATE A LONG-TERM PROBLEM

by Glenn Williams



Stress and fatigue are understandable at certain times of the year – think of the mad rush in anticipation of the holidays, or the lead up to rolling out a major change initiative. But what if exhaustion is starting to creep in earlier than expected? What do you do when you find yourself looking at the calendar and quietly despairing that you’re expected to keep up this pace all year?

If you feel like you are constantly putting out fires, being pulled in different directions and spending your limited decision-making energy solving problems, it makes sense if you’re feeling exhausted and drained. You’re most likely experiencing what we call negative stress. This type of stress depletes our sources of energy and focus, affecting our performance, well-being, and relationships.

Richard Rumelt, author of *Good Strategy/Bad Strategy* highlights the necessity of correctly identifying the core issues before you can enact change.

*“A talented leader correctly identifies the one or two critical issues in the situation – **the pivot points that can multiply the effectiveness of effort** – and then focuses and concentrates action and resources on them.”¹*

Perhaps a critical issue or “pivot point” in your context are the types of goals you are setting. While there are many different goal setting strategies, from our experience of working with leaders from different industries around the world we have discovered there is an important distinction between a ‘transactional’ and a ‘transforming’ goal. One key difference is in how they impact our energy.

The difference between transactional and transforming goals

We are all familiar with transactional goals – they are the broad objectives that we reactively set in response to an immediate problem. This may look like:

“I need to get a better work/life balance”.

Consider this same goal but with a solution-focused approach:

“Over the next 3 months, I will sit down with my family and create a realistic plan that enables me to switch off work, invest in their interests, have some fun on the weekend, and look after my health.”

The first has the aim of broadly trying to achieve greater work/life balance (which is often seen as an unattainable), while the other focuses on a person’s wellbeing and relational health. This tangible investment in the people and things that bring greater energy significantly transforms the outcome and your ability to achieve the goals you set.

In our personal lives and in business it is essential to address immediate needs as they arise

(transactional goals), however without clarifying and implementing transforming goals, the transactional goals that were supposed to be a short-term fix can become a pattern of behavior where you are so busy addressing issues there's little time left to work on or walk out your vision.

Without a clear vision a leader's capacity to achieve sustained performance is compromised as goals become a source of stress rather than a source of energy.

Rather than create negative stress, when we are aligned with our vision – directing our efforts, time and resources toward our purpose, passion, and values – we are more energized, motivated, and focused, and therefore more likely to achieve the goals we set.

Transforming individual, team and business goals

A transforming goal inspires action and generates positive stress – a sense of knowing that your hard work is contributing meaningfully to your own success and that of your team and organization.

The benefits of setting transforming goals applies to teams as well as individuals. They produce greater performance from the teams you lead, as they can see themselves in the goals that are being presented and the outcomes they are expected to achieve. There is a difference in “doing” a task and contributing in a meaningful way to the greater goal of realizing the vision. The potential for higher performance is greater when people connect with a vision, purpose, or passion behind the goal. A team that can't see the purpose beyond the tasks they are expected to complete can quickly become demotivated and disengaged, affecting performance and workplace culture.

What's the bottom line?

Multiply the effectiveness of your efforts by pivoting from transactional to transforming goals. Transforming goals inspire and motivate as they direct people to align their time, effort, and resources around meaningful goals bringing greater energy, focus and momentum. What goals can you transform for greater success?

References

- ¹ Rumelt, R. (2017). Good Strategy/Bad Strategy: The difference and why it matters (Main ed.). Profile Books.