

Golden Hours

By Phil Olley

I was once coaching a business owner who said that even though he wrote out a plan every day, he never got near the most important actions on his list. There was a mix of procrastination, but also frequent interruptions, and a lack of focus at play here. He felt that his days were largely reactive, and seldom did he get chance to develop opportunities, make proactive calls to build future business.

I ventured that he should have a Golden Hour every day.
"What's a Golden Hour?" he asked.

What are your Key Result Areas?

Success is about doing a few things well on a consistent basis; a few things that all lead to the Key Factor- that one result leading to our success.

There will be a number of activities that contribute to the achievement of this. So, for example, for the salesperson to be successful, the Key Factor is making sales. Yes. And there are a number of activities that relate immediately to this. For example:

- Prospecting for fresh clients
- Arranging to meet them – making the calls
- Conducting the meetings with them
- Selling solutions for them
- Follow up.

Let's call these, Key Result Areas (KRAs).

Which brings us to the 80/ 20 rule: or Pareto Principle, with which I am sure you are familiar. Briefly, Pareto was an Italian mathematician who observed in 1906 that 80% of the land in Italy was owned by 20% of the population; he developed the principle further and similar correlations were found with wealth and property in other areas of the world.

It is a common rule of thumb in business; e.g., "80% of your sales come from 20% of your clients".

- 80% of your profits come from 20% of your customers
- 80% of your sales are made by 20% of your sales staff

And... 20 percent of your actions lead to 80 percent of your results.

So, by focusing attention on those actions that have the greatest impact in leading to the results we want, we can improve our success.

The question really is do you know the 20 percent of your actions that create 80 percent of your results. And can you focus more on these actions, and reduce the amount of time, energy and focus applied to the actions that produce less.

In reality, there will be around 5 areas of activity that lead to your results: your Key Result Areas (KRAs). This is about understanding the process of how you get your most important results, just as with the example of the salesperson earlier.

Being strong in these areas will achieve your results. Being weak in just one of these areas will jeopardise your results. And not investing the time, energy, focus into actions in these areas will mean you never achieve your results.

Many things may need to be done to support these KRAs, but focusing on these KRAs leads to success.

And that means measuring: because what you can measure you can manage. You see, at each stage, for each KRA, those who are most successful set performance standards – quantity, quality, frequency and so on. These are the yardstick by which you know you are taking focused action. They create a “daily diet” of activity that revolves around your KRAs, that turns Activity into Productivity.

In addition, it’s important to measure the performance, the actions, and equate these with the results you are getting, so that in order to improve the results you know where to make improvements in the actions (both in terms of quality and quantity). Once you know your numbers, you can plan to implement changes, and have some knowledge of the results you will get.

It does require a slight change of focus from the norm. The key is to focus on the activity that produces the result, rather than on the result itself. That way you focus on the things you control- a system of productive actions. The results take care of themselves when you have a system of actions designed to lead to specific results. You see, focusing on results alone is very dangerous for consistency. Sometimes, results don’t go for you. But that mustn’t impact your resolve to action. Most people are deflected from doing the right things because they are not getting instant results. So they stop taking the right actions that will lead to results. They also get dis-heartened because they were relying on results to fuel their mindset. You will notice that high-achievers have a different focus... on the actions that lead to the results. They resolve to do the right things, better.

So, what KRAs does your success depend upon?

What actions do you need to take? And what are the performance standards you set, daily/ weekly/ monthly?

The fact is, successful people have developed successful habits in their Key Result Areas.

A Golden Hour each day...

Back to our business owner and his initial question, “what’s a Golden Hour?”

On average, business people are interrupted once every 7 minutes - whether it is by a phone call, colleague, subordinate, or senior. It becomes a habit. And it’s getting worse, with the buzzing of gadgets being a major source of interruption. So much so that many people self-sabotage and can’t stay focused for more than 7 minutes. The result is that what would normally take an hour to do, now takes all day. And conversely, we can often get the day’s most important work done in one hour as long as we follow a few simple steps.

Imagine what it would be like to set aside an hour, free from interruptions, when you are able to get done those key actions which produce the most important results. As long as the time, and space, and work, is organised in advance it really is possible.

I call this the Golden Hour... and here are ten keys to making it a success:

1. Put it in your diary... the most important hour of the day.
2. Focus on the end vision. Imagine how you will feel to have completed all of the key tasks, and the fantastic results that will produce for you.
3. Make sure you have plenty of physical energy available for this hour. It’s no good booking it in for just after lunch!
4. Protect the time. Tell your secretary, PA, colleagues that you are undisturbable for the next hour.
5. Have someone take incoming messages for you. That way you can call them back in priority order. Not only is your Golden Hour extremely effective, but your next hour also!
6. Plan the hour in advance... have the relevant files available, the phone numbers prepared, and everything you need close at hand.
7. Work from a clear desk. Keep the one thing you are working on right in front of you, but nothing else. Don’t allow your peripheral vision to be cluttered with other tasks.
8. Stay at your desk. Have all of the work set up in order on the right hand side (preferably on a separate side table). Take one task at a time. When it’s finished, move that file to the left hand side (again a separate table if possible).
9. Batch all your phone calls together. And know what you are going to say in advance. Have a single sheet on the front of each file with notes indicating the key points you need to discuss, or even a mindmap. That way, if you can’t get through to the person, and they call you back later, the notes on the file will quickly remind you what you wanted to call about.
10. Once the Golden Hour is complete, reward yourself. You have probably completed the equivalent of one full day’s work in a single hour. You’ve certainly done 80 percent!

Start by having three such hours planned into your diary for the coming week. Then increase the pace over subsequent weeks. And watch the results flow!