

Choose Your Focus

In his book, *Quiet Leadership: Six Steps to Transforming Performance at Work*, David Rock proposes a model called Choose Your Focus. Rock proposes that the thinking involved in any conversation or project planning activity will fit into one of five levels. By following either a structured process through the levels, or being able to recognize whether the current thinking is occurring at the right level, decisions and actions can be taken more efficiently and effectively.

The five levels are:

1. Vision thinking: Have we clearly defined the reason – the “why” and the “what” – of the project, the meeting or the conversation? Consider carefully the objective and your “Measures of Success”.

2. Planning thinking: At this level, we are trying to define the actions needed to achieve the vision, without getting into the details. At this level, we need to make choices about the processes or methods to be used. We may need to choose to focus on certain segment of the overall project.

3. Detail thinking: At this level, we define or take the actions – who, what and when – that moves the project or conversation from thinking to delivery. Having the processes defined at the planning level allows this stage to become more productive. Questions can be resolved by looking back at the planning stage or vision.

4. Problem thinking: At this level, the conversation or thinking focuses on what has gone wrong, or could go wrong. Questions such as “why did this happen?” and statements including “but” or “however” often lead to a focus on the problems. Problems abound whether in work or life. When we stay in this level of thinking, we are not working on solutions; solutions involve thinking in the levels above.

5. Drama thinking: When all else breaks down, we are left with nothing but an emotions. We are no longer even analyzing the problem or taking action steps. Addressing emotions may be necessary before moving back into action.

As an example in my own work, a colleague has suggested that I conduct a goal-setting/action-planning seminar. She assures me that she has some other people interested in the program and it is sure to draw together a group. Immediately my head spins with content, structure, pricing and reels with problems of location, publicity, and logistics. In fits and starts, I work through some of these details and problems, all of the while noticing that I am floundering.

How often do we find ourselves in meetings or in personal projects revisiting the same ground time after time? Using this model of thinking, we can begin to identify the nature of our thinking and assess whether we need to go to another level. With my seminar it means looking back at my vision (some of which you can find in my last blog) and evaluating whether it is consistent with my business direction. That was easy – it was consistent – but the seminar raises questions about the planning. In particular, what mechanisms will be I be using to reach my target audience and how will I divide my resources (primarily time) between those mechanisms? Once I determine where seminars fit into my business model, the details will fall into place.

Here are a few ways that you can use this model.

- Use the model in meetings to structure the agenda.
- Keep the model in front of meeting participants to identify the focus of the discussion

- When presented with an issue by an employee, colleague or family member, identify the level of thinking and structure your questions to move to the appropriate level.
- When opportunities present themselves, identify where your thinking should be to enhance productivity.

What ways can you find to use this model?

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