

IMPROVING YOUR FOCUS

by [Steve Brown](#)

Everyone has trouble focusing now and then at work. Perhaps that is due to an overly-fun weekend, lack of sleep, worry, or something else. The simple fact is that we all have trouble focusing on daily tasks at times. A few things we have learned over the years that may help your focus include: turning off email when working on a task; taking a walk to clear your head when you finish one major task and before you start the next one; breaking bigger tasks into smaller ones so you can make and see progress being made; plan your day and prepare your to do list for the next day before you go home; exercise and stay hydrated by drinking water as you work through tasks. Try these out to gain extra focus, improved productivity and complete more projects. As you work to focus more effectively today, we turn our attention to the value of ending projects you have already begun. Sometimes you have to step back and do a little spring cleaning, so you can clear out the mind and begin to move forward again. Whether that means shutting down a project that doesn't have customer value any more; discontinuing a new product that didn't quite work out as planned; or eliminating a new vacation tracking manager like we just did (too complex, time consuming, etc.); eliminating non-essential things from your daily life can be valuable from time to time. No matter how good your bank is at controlling wasteful processes, they inevitably and invariably creep in, so stepping back occasionally to test and retest just makes sense. One way to take a good run at this is to ask each department manager to identify activities that are going on in their group that do not add value but still happen. Once the list is in hand, ask why those things still occur and think about the processes they support. Are these required under regulations, procedures or processes? Is there a better way to do things that doesn't jeopardize underlying risk management? Can you eliminate steps in the process and still achieve the same result? Mapping out an entire process from front to back can help identify redundant steps, processes and issues that are just not required, so doing this from time to time is helpful to the bank. Another area bankers are focused on right now relates to the profitability of a given area, unit or product. Asking tough questions, such as whether customers use the product in question; whether it produces an acceptable risk/return profile and whether the bank can sell more of the product or customer interest is waning are all good to test. Such challenge questions force department leadership to focus on providing an answer through the lens of profitability and can surface issues that can be addressed to boost performance. Maybe the sales processes need to be refined, perhaps customers just don't care anymore, or perhaps it is time to add or bundle services with the one that is struggling to enhance profitability. These are all fine ideas that can start by simply challenging the status quo. Beyond challenging the processes around products and services, banks should also look at where time is being wasted. You can only improve what you measure and monitor, so getting going down that path is a good idea. Start by taking a ride on transactions that flow through the bank and make sure you go through every single step. Doing so can help identify areas where over-processing may be occurring. These can include a lack of automation, too many required approvals, writing a formal memo when a quick email would suffice, etc. These are just some of the ideas to get you started down the road to better efficiency through focus. We know times are tough for bankers right now, so it might be a good idea to step back and survey things ahead of you to gain a clearer focus. Don't jump into technology just for technology's sake, don't be afraid to try something and then end it either, don't worry about the small stuff if it doesn't matter and make sure you challenge the status quo along the way.

BANK NEWS

M&A

Crescent Financial Bancshares (\$1.1B, NC) will buy ECB Bancorp (\$944mm, NC) for \$51.6mm in stock or about 0.78x tangible book.

M&A

Landmark Credit Union (\$2B, WI) has announced plans to buy Hartford Saving Bank (\$194mm, WI) for an undisclosed sum. Landmark has taken over 10 CU's in the last 3Ys, but this will mark its first acquisition of a bank.

Branch Purchase

BNC Bancorp (\$2.4B, NC) will buy two branches from Hampton Roads Bankshares (\$1.8B, VA) for an undisclosed sum.

More Attacks

Wells Fargo suffered website attacks yesterday, as cyber attacks against U.S. financial institutions continued (Bank of America and JPMorgan were attacked earlier).

New System

The FDIC announced a new system it will use to classify violations of consumer protection rules uncovered during examinations. The three category method ranks violations based on different levels of risk to consumers and institutions. A "Level 1" violation is "low-severity," meaning the violation was "isolated or sporadic" or had a limited impact. A "Level 2" violation is "medium severity," indicating "systemic, recurring, or repetitive errors that represent a failure of the bank to meet a key purpose of the underlying regulation or statute." A "Level 3" violation is "high severity," that causes "significant harm to consumers or members of a community".

Libor Change

The British Banking Association, the group in charge of overseeing Libor rate setting, have voted to give up control as a result of the recent manipulation scandal. Libor is tied to trillions of dollars of financial contracts worldwide, so the move helps pave the way for British authorities to become more directly involved in overseeing it.

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