



When you face challenges or get stuck in difficult situations, PAR is your key to getting back on your feet.

Shoot for PAR!

It's safe to say that many learning and development professionals may be hesitant to roll out a training program that 99 percent of their team will never achieve. That's just what golf pros face—less than 1 percent of their students will ever realize the goal of shooting par on a single round.

You, too, should shoot for par, but luckily, your odds of success are far better.

There is a new definition of par for the business world. It's not the usual meaning of the word, but rather a simple set of ideas that will help you and your organization dramatically improve your odds of success.

Let's take a step back. Every day, companies, and more importantly, the

people who work for them, find themselves in difficult situations—competitive threats, financial pressures, changing technologies, and a need for high-potential talent. The world isn't getting any easier, and people find themselves stuck in the old ways of doing things.

That's where you come in. Like your counterparts on the links, it's time to help your team shoot for "PAR:"

By Krissi Barr and Dan Barr

- **Prioritize**—focus on what matters most.
- **Adapt**—see change as an opportunity.
- **Be Responsible**—take ownership of the outcome.

Remember these three ideas by the acronym PAR. Just as par is the standard of excellence on a golf course, so, too, is PAR the key to excellence in business.

You may be wondering why all the golf references. The PAR concepts came from our original belief that there was great commonality between success in golf and success in business. And the closer we looked, the clearer the connections became.

Whether you are in business or playing a round of golf, you are going to face challenges and get stuck in difficult situations. No matter where you are when it happens, PAR is your roadmap to digging out and getting the right things done.

Prioritize

It almost goes without saying that getting the most important things done is critical to the success of any organization, but the truth is that it's a lot harder to keep that focus amid all the distractions. And in today's difficult economic climate, that has never been truer. The difference between success and failure often comes down to whether leadership had the ability to focus the entire organization's attention on the things that are really most important.

Consider the following questions to help identify your highest priorities:

- What are the top three goals we want to accomplish?
- What are the most significant trends that will affect our markets over the next five years?
- What are our most pressing short- and long-term threats?
- Are we properly positioned to attract, retain, and motivate our number one competitive advantage—our employees?
- What emerging markets offer significant growth opportunities and leverage our current strengths?
- What are we doing to develop technological competitive advantages?
- Is our corporate vision statement engrained in our culture, and does it send us in the right direction?

Prioritizing is also important on a smaller scale. The hourly question of "What should I do next?" should always be answered by first asking "what is my highest priority?" A great way to do this is to break down your top two to three strategic initiatives into detailed action steps with due dates and metrics.

Beware of the time zappers such as email, incoming phone calls, meetings, and other things that can take your eye

off the ball. One strategy to manage your time is to set aside certain blocks of the day to do administrative tasks and other times to focus just on your top initiatives. The bottom line: Don't be incredibly busy doing nonproductive things.

Adapt

The business world is changing at a blistering pace. There's unrelenting pressure to do things faster, better, and cheaper.

To compete and win in business, companies need to ensure that they keep looking a few years down the road. To do that, the best firms foster an environment that encourages innovation, regardless of how small the change. Once this spirit of innovation is engrained in your culture, you will move faster, build loyalty among your employees, and discover new ways to stay ahead of the competition.

Why is adapting to change so important? Because companies that do it fastest are often the ones that win in the long run. An ingrained spirit of innovation and constant improvement are the twin cornerstones of your future.

Business leaders need to paint the picture for employees to help overcome the natural resistance to change. How? Talk with them, share your vision, and most importantly, let them know that change means taking chances.

Finally, make sure you develop your ability to sense change early so you have time to adapt to it, because you can't adapt to a changing environment if you don't know it exists. Keep your antenna up. It is critical to let your partners know that the best thing for everyone in the long run is to get ahead of the change curve and see change as an opportunity.

Be responsible

Responsibility starts at the top of your company and flows down to the front-line workers. Companies that take responsibility for caring about their customers, their employees, and their communities will succeed in the long run.

Businesses need to earn a profit, but the days are gone when they can ignore

their impact on the environment, the safety of their products, and the well-being of their employees. In today's world, these are non-negotiable issues, and any organization that refuses to accept them will have to deal with the painful consequences.

More importantly, responsibility in business is a personal thing. Every employee has to take ownership for his individual work. This means making sure the project that is due on Friday gets done by Friday...no matter what it takes. Only when every player on your team takes his individual responsibility personally will the entire organization thrive.

True responsibility also means not just talking about what you're going to do but taking action on it and being accountable for the results. The bottom line is that people understand what it means to "own the outcome." It doesn't matter whether it's a person or a company that owns a result—the same principles apply.

Definitive action plans and progress metrics need to be established to ensure that progress is on track. It is here that the "owners" hold themselves and each other accountable for results. There are several good templates to use as resources, including Kaplan and Norton's balanced scorecard and the time-tested OGSM (objectives, goals, strategies, and measures) model.

Make this PAR mindset an integral part of everything you do and you'll dramatically increase the likelihood you'll dig out of a tough situation, get the important things done, and ultimately succeed.

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