

BY RONALD F. POL,
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Increase Legal Department Value

Establish a Goal Focus

Dear Lex,

I'm the general counsel of a Fortune 500 company. I lead a team of seven lawyers. I report to the CEO. The problem is that he's always on our backs to add more value with fewer resources.

We already work long hours during the week and most weekends. None of us take proper vacations. Our partners and children see us very little as it is. We haven't increased staff numbers in the legal department for five years, even though the company has nearly doubled in size during that time.

We already provide excellent service to all parts of the company. We have an "open door" policy. We try to turn around everything that hits our desks within seven days, and the urgent things get done within two days. Satisfaction surveys of the major divisions in the company show that most people think that we do a pretty good job.

We've already taken a razor to our external legal spending. We're outsourcing less than we ever have before. We've reduced the number of law firms that we use, made them more accountable, and put innovative fee structures in place.

We give the CEO a monthly report detailing what each lawyer has been working on. The contents are grouped under headings that cover the major areas of our work, such as litigation and disputes, mergers and acquisitions, other commercial transactions, industrial relations, and intellectual property.

Despite all of this effort, I suspect that the CEO still looks at us as no better than a "necessary evil." I get the feeling that he sees us as a drain on scarce resources. He says that we don't focus enough on the things that really matter. He won't allow me to promote my people or pay them more, so I'm finding it hard to keep them.

I like being a lawyer, but I'm wondering whether I should throw in the towel and open a bookstore.

What do you suggest? Please help!

Sincerely,

Frustrated In-house Counsel



Dear Frustrated In-house Counsel,

Thanks for sharing your story.

Many of my readers are in-house lawyers, and I hear similar stories every week. The good news is that I've learned a lot from my correspondence with them over the years. I've come to understand some of the causes of problems like the one that you have described and can suggest some practical steps that you can take to solve these problems.

As I see it, you have two options: change your career or change how you work.



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CHANGE YOUR CAREER

First, you could open that bookstore. Perhaps running a bookstore is your true calling. After all, you probably decided to be a lawyer before you really knew what it was all about.

I know what you're thinking. You've invested a lot of money and time in your current career. You've never given up on anything before. You can't afford to earn less money because of your family commitments and lifestyle. Although these thoughts may be true, don't let them hold you back. Instead, think about how much longer you've got to live. If the law is no longer for you (or never was), then maybe you're better off getting out now rather than hanging on until retirement. As someone once said to me, "If you're on the wrong bus, the sooner you get off the better."

Have you ever thought that these troubles with the CEO might be a wakeup call? It might be the push that you've been waiting for to go in search of something that really excites you. I know of many

former in-house lawyers now building businesses of their own in a variety of fields.

Take me, for example. I've changed careers many times. Before each change, I was afraid to let go of what I had established for myself. But after each change, I wondered what the fear had been about and wished that I had made the leap sooner.

Even if you don't change careers, consider investing some time in renewal and reflection. From your letter, it sounds as if you don't get to do these things very often. Perhaps you need to review your work/life balance and take those vacations. Even if it does nothing else, this time away from work might remind you of the good things about your career and give you fresh energy to tackle the problem with the CEO. And although you may not see it, perhaps your team needs a break from you as much as you need a break from them.

If opening a bookstore is too much of a leap, at least consider changing roles. Maybe you can move into a commercial role in your current company. Maybe you can become the general counsel of another company. Maybe you can go into a law firm. Don't confine your thinking to your current role. It might help to discuss the options with a career adviser, your friends, and your family. Let me know what you decide.

Other readers in a similar situation have told me that they've enjoyed some of the books listed in the sidebar on page 105.

The first option is to think about a career move. The second option is to stay in your current job and solve the problem with the CEO. Let me give you some details on this point that may be helpful.

CHANGE HOW YOU WORK

I've had letters from a number of people who have solved a similar problem with their CEO. There are two parts to the solution of changing how you work: change what you work on and change how you report.

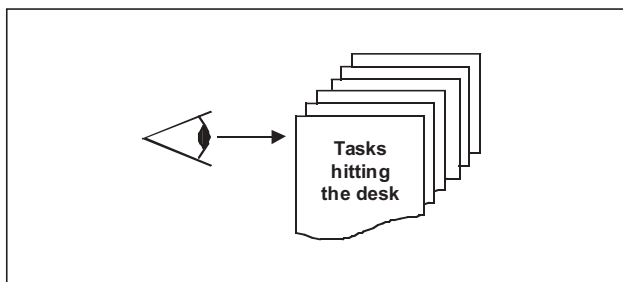
Change What You Work On

When you think about changing what you work on, think about it this way: a person can do a great job of laying carpet in the wrong room. I think that this thought illustrates your problem.

You said in your letter that you and your team do a great job of solving the problems that hit your desks. But like the person expertly laying carpet in the wrong room, you may be doing a great job of solving problems that aren't really important to the company.

Have you ever asked the CEO to describe the greatest problems facing the company? If so, have you analyzed how your efforts solve the problems on the CEO's desk? Have you sought out tasks that solve the company's greatest problems? If you're like many other in-house counsel, you haven't done any of these steps. You just assume that the work hitting your desk is the work that you should be doing. Am I right?

I hasten to point out that I don't blame you if the answer to the first three questions above is "no." Lawyers typically focus on the work on their desks, as we were trained to do in law school and in the practice of law. I'd even go so far as to say that your position description and key performance indicators ("KPIs") (or whatever your company calls them—for simplicity's sake in this answer to your letter, I'll call them KPIs) probably say that you should work on the tasks sent to you. Given all of these facts, it's no wonder that so many in-house lawyers measure their success by how well they complete the tasks on their desks. If I had to put a label on these lawyers, I'd call them task-focused. Let me explain, using the following diagram.



That's you on the left, focused on the tasks hitting your desk. You may ask, "What's wrong with focusing on the work on my desk?" Nothing is wrong with this approach, strictly speaking, but it certainly won't get you where you want to go. Why? Because the tasks hitting your desk may or may not be what the CEO wants you to work on, and unless the CEO is sending you work, the chances are good that you're working on the "wrong" things, at least from the CEO's point of view.

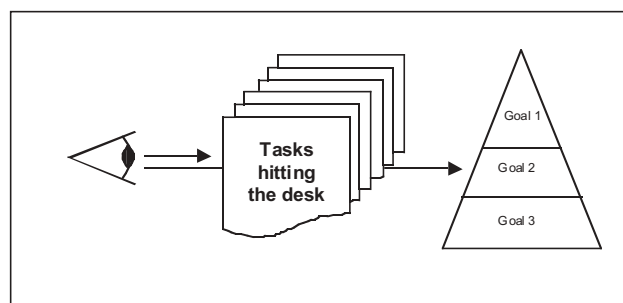
More important, by focusing on the tasks on your desk, you're letting the people who send work to you determine your relevance to the CEO. Can you begin to see what might be causing the conflict with your CEO?

Your CEO focuses on a bigger picture. He looks beyond the tasks hitting his desk. He's busy trying to achieve a set of underlying goals for the company. The board and shareholders measure his success and the success of the company by the achievement of those goals. The CEO doesn't care how the goals are achieved (within reasonable boundaries, of course—and that *is* part of your job). The point is to reach these goals. These goals are always on his mind and keep him awake at night.

Your company is in the private sector, so the underlying goals might be such things as closing more sales, finding better staff, releasing new products to the market, managing costs, and closing down unprofitable operations. If you were working for the government or in the nonprofit sector, the CEO's goals would surely be less profit-driven, but they would still exist and would still keep him or her awake at night.

You are task-focused, but your CEO is goal-focused. I came to this conclusion because you describe him as wanting you to focus on the things that matter most to him, and what matters most to a CEO are long-range goals.

To illustrate how the CEO sees things, look at the next diagram. Your CEO is on the left, focused on both the tasks hitting his desk *and* the company's underlying goals. The difference is that the CEO can "look through" tasks to see the underlying goals. It's like having Superman's X-ray vision.



Can you see that you are task-focused and that the CEO is goal-focused? Can you see that the tasks

hitting your desk may or may not relate closely to the CEO's goals? By recognizing these realities and by becoming more goal-focused in the things that you work on, you have a much higher chance of helping your CEO achieve the company's goals and, not incidentally, improving your relationship with him. Later in this letter, I'll give you more specifics about how to become goal-focused, but let's have a quick look at the second part of the solution.

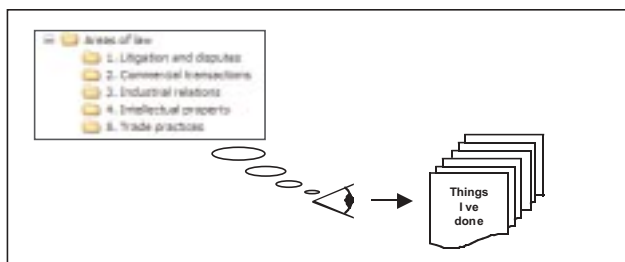
Change How You Report

The second part of the solution concerns changing your monthly report. Let me take a guess at the method that you currently use for your reports.

It's just after the end of the month. Your monthly report to the CEO is due. You sit down with a list of everything that you and your team have been working on. Rather than just list everything that happened, you try to group the activities in a meaningful way. Without a second thought, the groupings that you choose reflect the way that *you* look at the world. I know this scenario because you told me in your letter that the groupings in your report reflect areas of law. I'd say that most lawyers look at the world this way. This observation is not a criticism—it's just the reality of how most lawyers are trained.

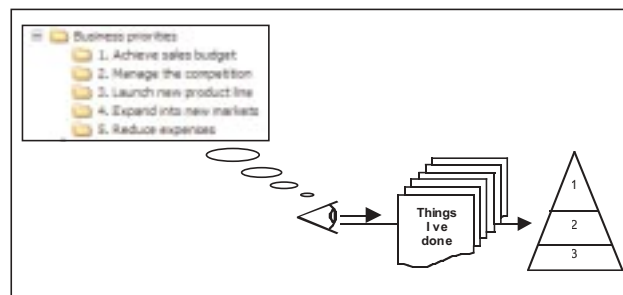
Dig out your last monthly report. Look at the headings that you used. Can you see that they reflect the way that *you* look at the world? Just like you, your reports are task-focused.

Look at the next diagram. There you are in the middle, mentally organizing the things that you've done into areas of law. It's a bit like the way you organize documents into folders on your computer.



Unfortunately, this way of looking at the world doesn't reflect how your CEO looks at the world. As I described earlier, the CEO looks at the world from the perspective of goals rather than tasks or areas of

law. His X-ray vision allows him to classify work according to these goals, as in the following diagram.



The CEO's goal focus means that he spends as much time as possible working on achieving those goals. Additionally, the goal focus helps the CEO report to the board and the shareholders in ways that they understand and that are important to them.

By delivering a monthly report based on your way of seeing the world, you are in effect saying to the CEO, "I'll leave it to you to translate my report into your way of seeing the world." You are forcing him to make the connections between what you've done and what matters to him and the company. This approach is dangerous for at least two reasons.

First, the CEO may not be able to do this translation easily because he speaks "corporate" and you speak "legal." Second, even if he is able to translate your report into his language, he may not have the time or the inclination. As a result, you may be working on things that contribute directly to achievement of the CEO's top priorities, but he may not see that you are doing so because you're not presenting things in a way that makes sense to him. You must consider your audience to communicate effectively. It's really not your reader's or listener's duty to comprehend what you are writing or saying. It's your duty as writer or speaker to make it as easy as possible for your reader or listener to understand your ideas as quickly and effortlessly as possible.

As previously discussed, you probably picked a classification scheme for your monthly report that seemed obvious to you. But this simple choice may be causing part of the problem with your CEO.

You can tell a lot about people by the way that they classify things. You can tell how they look at the world, what they focus on, and what they ignore. For example, ask colleagues in other departments to show you the folders that they use to store

From this point on . . .
Explore information related to this topic.

ONLINE:

- ACC's committees, such as the Law Department Management Committee and the Small Law Departments Committee, are excellent knowledge networks and have listservs to join and other benefits. Contact information for ACC committee chairs appears in each issue of the *ACC Docket*, or you can contact Staff Attorney and Committees Manager Jacqueline Windley at 202.293.4103, ext. 314, or windley@acca.com or visit ACCA OnlineSM at www.acca.com/networks/ecommerce.php.
- John B. ("Jack") Douglas III, "Reebok Rules," *ACCA Docket* 10, no. 2 (Spring 1992): 40–45, available on ACCA OnlineSM at www.acca.com/protected/pubs/docket/Spring92/reebok.html.
- FAST COMPANY magazine, at www.fastcompany.com/magazine/13/hbrplus.html and the career-move series at www.fastcompany.com/guides/reinvent.html.
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- Michael Roster and Gloria Santona, "Client Service in an In-house Environment: Two Perspectives on Evaluating Service to the Corporate Client/Implementing Client Service Techniques," *ACCA Docket* 16, no. 1 (January/February 1998): 50–58, available on ACCA OnlineSM at www.acca.com/protected/pubs/docket/jf98/cliservice.html.
- Thomas L. Sager, "Six Sigma: Positioning for Competitive Advantage," *ACCA Docket* 19, no. 1 (January 2001): 18–27, available on ACCA OnlineSM at www.acca.com/protected/pubs/docket/jf01/six.html.

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AT ACC'S 2003 ANNUAL MEETING:

- Are you looking for even more information on this topic? If so, plan to attend ACC's 2003 Annual Meeting October 8–10 at the San Francisco Marriott. Visit www.acca.com/education03/am to learn more about the meeting.

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computer documents and emails, and you'll be amazed at how much you can learn about the various ways that they look at the world.

I'm sure that you've heard the buzz words "paradigm" and "paradigm shifts." To translate from the cliché into English, a paradigm is simply a model. Your problem is all about paradigms: you and the CEO are trying to communicate, but you're using different models. You, the lawyer, use an "area of the law" model, but the CEO, a business person, uses a "business priorities" model.

If you're interested in reading more about paradigms and classification schemes, again see the sidebar on page 105.

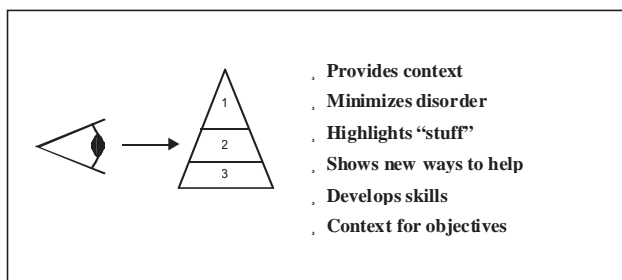
I hope that what I've written here makes sense. Before I go any further, I'll recap the two parts of the problem:

- By confining your focus to the tasks hitting your desk, it's likely that you're not spending enough time on tasks closely related to the company's top priorities.
- By organizing your monthly report according to areas of law, you're making it difficult for the CEO to understand how your work relates to the goals of the company. You're speaking different languages, and the opportunities for misunderstanding are abundant.

Solving the problem requires you to "look through" your tasks to see the company's underlying goals. By organizing both your work and your monthly reports around those goals, you will greatly improve your relationship with the CEO. But the benefits of developing a goal focus don't stop there.

SIX BENEFITS OF APPLYING A GOAL FOCUS

In-house lawyers who have used a goal focus in their work, including the organization of their monthly reports, have noted six other benefits.



Provides Context

An awareness of and focus on underlying goals can give in-house lawyers a useful context for their work and their roles, a mission to work towards, and, most important, a feeling of control about the progress of their careers. In-house counsel have told me that the context provided by understanding the underlying goals links all of their tasks together into a unified and cohesive mission. From your letter, it seems that you would benefit from having a context, a mission, and a sense of control.

Minimizes Disorder

A goal focus has helped many in-house lawyers overcome the feeling that their professional lives are nothing more than an endless series of urgent and unconnected tasks. The movie *Groundhog Day* comes to mind here. A goal focus can help bring a feeling of control and order to a job that otherwise might be a chaotic, shapeless jumble of tasks. With an eye on the underlying goals, everything will start to fit into place.

Highlights "Stuff"

An awareness of the underlying goals has enabled in-house lawyers to distinguish between the tasks that are important and those that are merely "stuff." Once you've made the switch to a goal focus, tasks that aren't closely related to achieving one of the underlying goals become unimportant. The new focus will give you justification for not doing some of the tasks that hit your desk and for using simple systems to handle others.

Shows New Ways to Help

A goal focus has helped some of my readers identify underlying goals that they had been ignoring previously. As a result, my readers have been inspired to get out of their offices and find tasks that contribute to achieving those goals. This use-some-initiative approach is often necessary because the person sending work to you will be task-focused and may even underestimate the kinds of jobs that lawyers are capable of doing.

Develops Skills

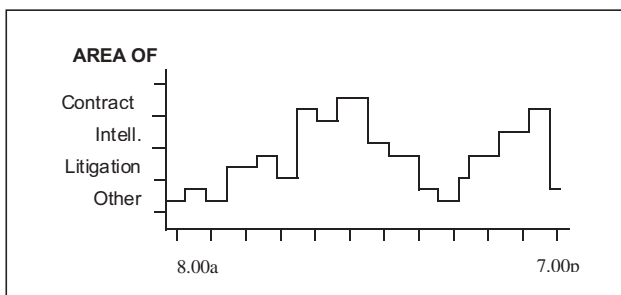
Learning to focus on goals rather than tasks has helped many in-house counsel develop new skills. Thousands of lawyers can complete tasks well—in

fact, many of the younger, smarter lawyers coming up through the ranks may be able to complete tasks better than you—but not many lawyers can see the underlying goals and respond to them in meaningful ways. Those lawyers who teach themselves to identify and focus on the underlying goals will be known as people who provide exceptional value to the company.

Context for Objectives

Finally, in-house lawyers have told me that a goal focus helps them set realistic personal objectives, collect performance data in a meaningful way, and add as much value as possible. A goal focus will help you frame your discussions with and reports to the CEO, improve your performance reviews, and make it much easier for you to succeed with your goals in your salary discussions.

To illustrate some of these points, think about your average work day. If I asked you to plot how you spend your time, you might draw something like the following diagram. The changes in the graph show the time that you spend on tasks in the areas of law on the vertical axis.

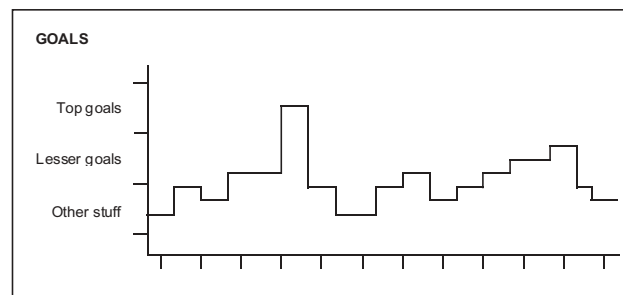


The graph reflects a task focus in which a day is arranged by areas of law. The graph also shows that you switch tasks many times during the day.

Imagine yourself presenting this diagram to the CEO as an explanation of how you spend your time. Do you think that it would prove to him that you are contributing to things that really matter to him? Chances are that the diagram would either confuse him or would reinforce his belief that your only concern is the law and not his goals.

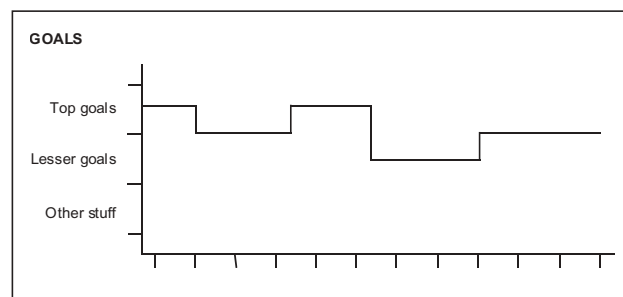
Let's assume that you shift to a goal focus. You know about and focus on the underlying goals of the company. You feel responsible for doing your part to achieve these goals. If I asked you to plot your time

for the same day, it might look like the following diagram.



Now that you've plotted your time according to goals, it's easy to see that you're spending too much time on low-value tasks, the "Lesser goals" and "Other stuff" listed in the diagram. Also, the diagram shows that you still switch tasks many times, making it impossible to think deeply about the goals and how you can help achieve them.

The good news is that it's possible to reorient your day so that it looks like the following diagram. In this profile, you spend more time on achieving important goals and less time switching among tasks. Where have all the low-value tasks gone? You have avoided or eliminated them or put systems in place to handle them. Later in this letter, I'll tell you a bit more about how to do those things.



Imagine showing this third profile to the CEO. Imagine that it is *all* that you show him each month by way of a monthly report. Don't you think that it would be vastly more useful to him than your task-focused activity report? Here are some of the reasons that I think that it would be vastly more useful to the CEO:

- It shows him that you understand the company's top goals and that you focus most of your time on achieving them.

- It shows him that you spend significant pieces of uninterrupted time tackling those goals.
- It shows him that you spend little or no time on the lesser goals and other stuff, presumably because you've eliminated it, delegated it, or put a simple system in place so that clients can solve these problems for themselves.

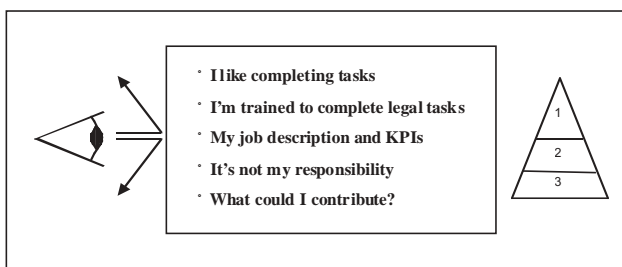
The diagram is not just words and assertions about how you add value. It's tangible proof of your new focus and value.

If I were your CEO, I'd hire the person represented in this diagram to work for me in an instant.

Maybe you're convinced that it's a good system but also convinced that it would never work for you in your current job or your current legal department. I'll stop here and address those concerns.

BARRIERS TO DEVELOPING A GOAL FOCUS

Let's assume that you see the logic in focusing on goals rather than tasks. Here's the hard part: making the shift is not easy. It can feel uncomfortable, like trying to write with your other hand. Additionally, you may need to overcome several personal and institutional barriers in order to make the transition. By telling you about these barriers in advance, I can help you make the shift more easily.



“But I Like Completing Tasks”

Lawyers like completing tasks. We get satisfaction from crossing things off our to-do lists. By contrast, achieving goals is more complex: the goals are nebulous, the strategy for reaching the goals keeps changing, and, worst of all, the goals can take forever to achieve. So, Frustrated In-house Counsel, as you set out on your journey to convert yourself from a task-oriented person to a goal-focused person, be aware of the need to move beyond instant gratification and know that this move requires a lot of self-control.

“But I’m Trained to Complete Legal Tasks”

Many lawyers don't feel qualified to focus on goals. Their time in law school and in law firms taught them to solve problems using legal principles. Moreover, lawyers aren't trained to examine the goals underlying the tasks that cross their desks or to ask whether the task is really worth anyone's attention. But you don't need to feel restricted by your legal education and experience. A task focus is not a life sentence. It is possible to move beyond your training. Many of your colleagues have done so already.

“But What about My Position Description and KPIs?”

Your position description and KPIs probably direct you to be an expert at completing tasks in the shortest possible time with the greatest degree of skill and with little or no emphasis on an awareness of underlying business priorities. Don't let those documents keep you from developing a goal focus. To overcome this barrier, I suggest that you rewrite your position description and KPIs. I'll talk a bit more about this later.

“But It’s Not My Responsibility”

Lawyers are not used to feeling responsible for the success or failure of their employer. They think that their job is to keep things legal. If the empire crumbles, that's someone else's problem. Lawyers think that at least they did what they had been asked to do. But with that sort of attitude, is it any wonder that CEOs don't see in-house lawyers as a source of added value?

“What Could I Possibly Contribute?”

Many in-house lawyers feel incapable of contributing to the bigger picture. They feel that they don't have sufficient knowledge of all the relevant issues and haven't had the relevant business training. On the other hand, these lawyers know how to complete legal tasks, so they complete legal tasks. This way of thinking is, obviously, self-limiting. Lawyers possess many talents—the ability to design a strategy chief among them—that can help the company achieve its goals. Further, as a lawyer, you're not locked into conventional business wisdom, and you're able to ask insightful questions. Never underestimate the importance of these skills

in helping your company solve pressing corporate problems.

None of these task-focused beliefs should keep you from developing a goal focus. Try looking *beyond* the surface of your training and career. See the greater possibilities lying underneath.

SIX STEPS TO MAKING THE TRANSITION

I know what you're thinking now: "Assuming that I get beyond the barriers, exactly how can I switch from a task focus to a goal focus?" The following six steps, illustrated in the series of diagrams below, will help you make the transition.

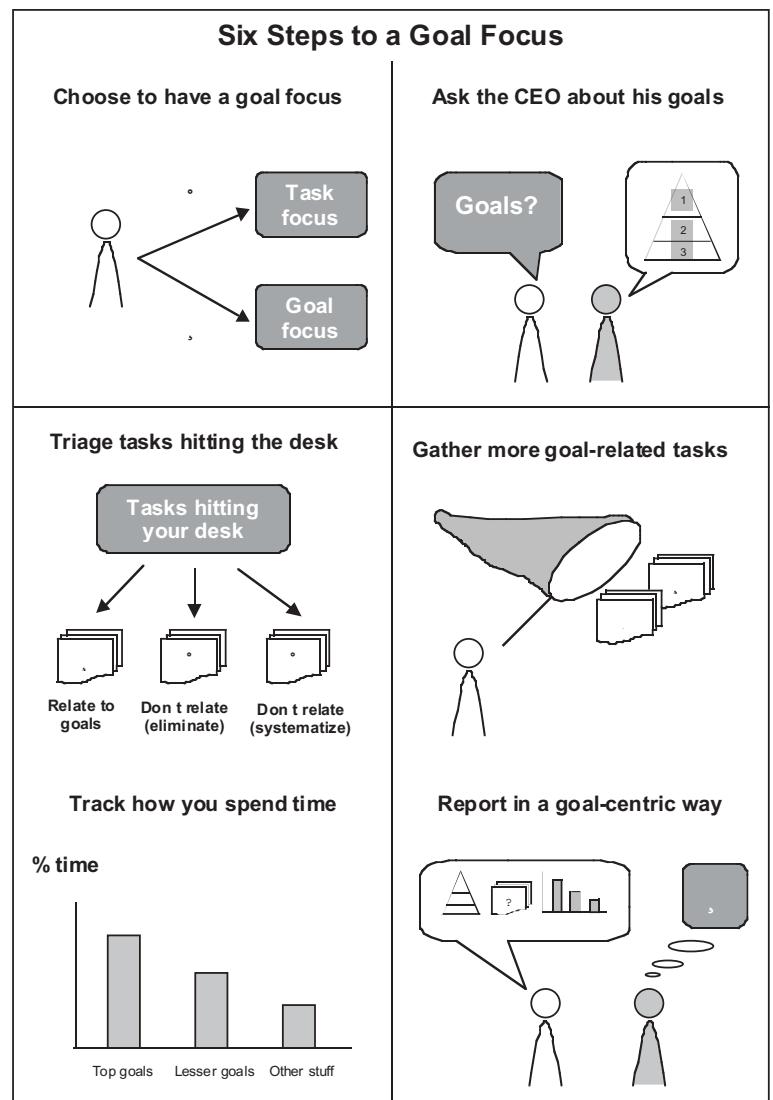
Choose to Have a Goal Focus

The first step is to decide that you're responsible for helping the CEO achieve the company's underlying goals, not just completing tasks that people toss your way. In addition to the things that I mentioned earlier, here are three suggestions for helping you take on this responsibility:

- Decide that you're no longer a bystander. Start feeling responsibility (within reasonable limits) for helping the company achieve its underlying goals, whatever those goals might be. Commit, to the greatest practical extent, to being involved only in those situations in which a close connection exists between what you do and what matters most to the company. Obviously, you will need to be flexible about this commitment, but the increased focus on goals instead of tasks will serve you well.
- Ensure that a goal focus appears in your key departmental documents, such as departmental mission statement, position description, KPIs, meeting agendas, and monthly reports, that make up so much of your existence in the company. Go on—dig them out and rewrite them. Scrap the standard lines about "excellent customer service" and "open-door policy" and add language that announces that you work only on projects that relate closely to the company's top priorities. Scrap the KPIs that announce "seven-day turn-around time" and add language about using systems to help clients deal with recurrent low-level activities themselves so that you can work on matters more closely related to the

company's underlying goals. Add a KPI that has to do with thinking deeply about what matters most to the company. Remember that you don't want to do a great job of laying carpet in the wrong room.

- At your department meetings and retreats, make the first agenda item a free-ranging discussion of the things that currently matter most to your company. Invite senior business managers to make presentations to your group on the things that currently matter most to the company. This attention to underlying goals will send a message to your team and to the CEO that the new focus of the group is on the things that matter most, regardless of the stuff hitting the desk.



Ask the CEO about Goals

Now that you've decided to make the shift, the second step is to become knowledgeable about the company's major goals.

You must do this step, no matter how hard it seems. This step will take a lot of street-level detective work. Chances are good that even the CEO will have a hard time explaining these goals, but don't let that likelihood stop you.

Let me let you in on four secrets about these underlying goals. First, in your company, the underlying goals may be elusive, hard to pin down. Second, underlying goals are unique to a company, so you can't look elsewhere for help in figuring out your own company's goals. Third, your company's underlying goals will differ over time, so you will have to keep updating your knowledge. Fourth, the CEO may find it hard to talk about the underlying goals in concrete terms. His inability or reluctance to articulate goals may make your search even harder, but search you must. Here are two suggestions to help you in your search:

- Have an open-ended conversation with your CEO and division heads about the top priorities facing the company. Don't just ask them how you can help, because they probably won't be able to answer that question. Instead, ask, "What can you tell me about the top three priorities facing the company now and over the next five years?" Armed with their answers, you will need to go make yourself useful and figure out how you can help.
- Be innovative in your methods for learning the company's priorities. Go on the road with sales representatives. Have conversations with real customers. Read industry magazines and business books, especially the ones that the CEO reads. Go to industry and sales conferences. Instigate an internal secondment, a temporary transfer to another department in the company.

Again, check the sidebar on page 105 for books to help you in your search.

Perform Triage on the Tasks Hitting Your Desk

Now that you know what the company's goals are, you must avoid spending time on tasks that aren't really helping the company achieve those goals. Happily, you can do so even if the CEO is sending unimportant tasks to you. Here are some suggestions that others have found helpful:

- Perform triage on the tasks hitting your desk by dividing them into three groups: the tasks that relate closely to goals, the tasks that don't relate to goals, and the tasks that don't relate to goals but can't be eliminated. You keep the first, eliminate the second, and develop simple systems to handle the third.
- Get out of the habit of believing that everything that you do is unique and that it can't be documented. Stop thinking that the best place for all of your knowledge is in your head, rather than embedded in a system or process. Don't think that you will be giving up power by recording how you do things.
- Establish methods for keeping low-level tasks from hitting your desk in the first place. If certain low-level tasks just can't be avoided, implement a simple, time-saving system to deal with them.
- Ensure that you have blocks of uninterrupted time in your day to think about the company's goals. Freeing yourself from the low-value things that clutter your office, your schedule, and your mind will produce time that is best devoted to thinking about the company's goals. To the extent possible, avoid unproductive meetings, constant interruptions, and distracting piles of paper in your office.
- Just say no! Decide that you don't have to do everything that hits your desk. Don't expect to give immediate service to every client who appears at your door. Assume that you have the power to choose what you work on. Get over the tendency to think that work is a popularity contest.
- Close the office door (if you have one), set your phone on do not disturb, and turn off your email alarm. Tell people that you aren't to be interrupted and work away from the office occasionally.

Gather More Goal-related Tasks

Now that you've freed up a bit of time by getting rid of low-value tasks, you can think deeply and creatively about new ways to use your considerable skills to help achieve the company's goals. Again, here are some suggestions that have worked for others.

- Don't ignore a top goal just because it doesn't seem to have an obvious legal dimension and don't confine yourself to using just your legal

skills to solve problems. There is considerable room for in-house lawyers to apply a broader set of skills to a broader range of business issues.

- Because you've now sidestepped or systematized most of the low-level work, go out and recruit high-level tasks, even if you've already got a handful of high-level tasks on your desk. Take a broader view of your role than just completing tasks that hit the desk.
- Open a file on each of the company's top goals, even if you can't yet see how you can help. Assign responsibility for tracking each goal to someone in the legal department. Discuss the goals at the start of each department meeting and department retreat.
- Ask your external legal advisers to suggest creative ways for you to help achieve the company's goals. They might know of productive ways to use freedom of information laws, court procedures, negotiation tactics, and other methods that you may not have thought of yet.
- Ask other internal service functions in your company what they are doing to help achieve the goals. They might have novel insights that you can use.

Track How You Spend Time

In order to prove to yourself and others that you're goal-directed, it's important that you track your time according to the company's goals instead of areas of the law.

This goal-directed time-tracking will be important for reinforcing the idea that you're focusing on what matters most. Also, it will help you prove to the CEO that most of your time goes to the things that matter most to the CEO and to the company.

Report to Management

The final step is to ensure that your monthly reports reflect your goal focus. Here are some thoughts on this issue:

- Sending a monthly report to the CEO is great because, as you may know, the value of your work does not speak for itself. These monthly reports mean that you have a regularly scheduled opportunity to report to the CEO on how the legal team

has contributed to the achievement of the company's goals.

- Make sure that your reports make the connection between what you do and what your company needs to have done. Don't be afraid of being obvious or even pedantic. It is important that your reports reflect the CEO's outlook on the world. Structure your reports around the CEO's goals by using them as section headings. This method of reporting shows senior management that you are knowledgeable about the company's goals, that you are focused on helping management achieve these goals, and that you take a broad view of your role in the company.
- In your reports to and discussion with senior management, list everything that you are doing to help achieve the goals, even if these efforts have not yet produced any results. Results often occur long after efforts have been initiated. The very fact that you are making an effort is worth noting.
- A goal-centric structure in your reports will show the CEO that the things that are keeping him awake at night are the things that are keeping the lawyers up at night, as well.

CONCLUSION

Frustrated In-house Counsel, I've given you two options to explore in resolving your problem with the CEO. The first involved a career change, and the second offers suggestions for solving the problem.

Assuming that a career change was not something that would seriously interest you, I discussed a number of techniques to help you develop a more effective relationship with your CEO. My main message is to shift from a task focus to a goal focus in two important areas: the tasks that you choose to work on and your method for reporting to the CEO. I outlined some benefits of and barriers to such a shift and six practical steps to follow in making the shift.

I hope that you enjoy learning to see beyond the tasks hitting your desk and find great satisfaction in organizing your professional life around a goal focus. Let me know how it goes.

—Lex A