

# Achieving the perfect day

## How taking a fresh approach to focusing your organization can become a habit

Is your business struggling to achieve several goals simultaneously? Leading companies across a number of industries are taking a fresh approach.

**A**t a major refining plant, safety performance lagged, and with equipment malfunctions disrupting operations, reliability fell below standard. Environmental



**STEVE JACOBS**

Chairman and senior partner

CLG Inc., a business management consultancy that advises executives on how to achieve new performance, culture change and lasting competitive advantage through the principles of applied behavioral science.

Steve is the lead author of "The Behavior Breakthrough — Leading Your Organization to a New Competitive Advantage."

[sjacobs@clg.com](mailto:sjacobs@clg.com)  
[www.behaviorbreakthrough.com](http://www.behaviorbreakthrough.com)  
[www.clg.com](http://www.clg.com)

exceedances occurred frequently — alarming communities and providing fodder for public opposition. Operating costs outpaced competitors.

A new plant manager was assigned responsibility for leading top quartile performance. He interviewed staff, launched a back-to-basics campaign, established new processes and set targets based on industry benchmarks. Six months later, performance hadn't changed much.

When queried, employees indicated they hadn't known what was really important to focus on day to day. Was production what really mattered — even at the expense of safety and environmental risks? Or were safety and environmental factors priorities?

### Focusing on a single day

Leadership decided to try something unusual: It focused the plant on achieving one day free of safety incidences, unplanned disruptions due to equipment failures, environmental exceedances and lost profit opportunities. A perfect day.

Employees rallied. They achieved a single perfect day, and from there focused on extending the number of perfect days consecutively.

Within nine months, environmental incidents fell by nearly 75 percent, safety and production both increased 50 percent and employee commitment increased by almost 75 percent.

### Addressing critical behaviors

What underpins the perfect day? The refining plant addressed critical behaviors

that, if changed, would engender new results.

For example, employees needed to openly discuss potential risks and near misses. Managers needed to ask more about risk areas and near misses, thank people for reporting near misses and record findings as a way of facilitating their dissemination.

Management framed a clear plan for changing behavior, implemented it and measured the progress. To apply the perfect day approach to your organization, business unit, function or team, ask yourself these questions:

- What's the equivalent of a perfect day for us?
- What do we need to do that we're not already doing consistently to achieve this?
- Does my team have:
  - Clarity regarding what it needs to do, how and why?
  - The skills?
  - The opportunity? (If I ask them, what will they say about this?)
  - The motivation?
- If my team lacks any of the above, what's my plan?

Make time to define perfect day targets together. Observe staff behavior on a regular basis. Routinely ask, "What's getting in the way?" and confirm that what gets raised gets addressed. Provide regular feedback to individuals and small groups. Finally, let people know you appreciate the progress they're making along the way.

Many organizations are charged with changing multiple things at once. If that's you, don't despair. Focus on one thing: The perfect day. ●



**SOCIAL MEDIA:** To learn more about Steve Jacobs' latest book, like its Facebook page [www.facebook.com/BehaviorBreakthrough](http://www.facebook.com/BehaviorBreakthrough) and follow on Twitter @CLGBB.