



How did you measure your success in 2022? Return on Investment? Built or broken team relationships? In what ways are you defining success in 2023? Whether it's profit margins you are evaluating or accomplishing your next big project, it's worth stopping and looking at HOW you are measuring success and if it's the right measure for you. Cheers to a productive and powerful 2023.

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FACILITATE AN AFTER-ACTION REVIEW

I am often asked to facilitate an after-action review (AAR) upon the completion of a project. It's a bit more formal than a standard debriefing and allows the participants to truly understand what happened and create some preventive and mitigating strategies for the next project.

AAR typically occurs when the project went south...but can also be applied to glorious projects that we wish we could clone and replicate!

Over the years, I have cobbled together a standard set of questions that are presented in this order (for the most part).

1. What did you set out to achieve?
2. What was your plan to achieve this?
3. How did this change as you progressed?
4. What went well and why?
5. What surprised you?
6. What frustrated you?
7. What delighted you?
8. What did you not see coming?
9. What could have gone better?
10. What advice would you give yourself if you were to go back to where you were at the start of the project?
11. What were the two or three key lessons you would share with others?
12. Can you think of a story that summarizes your experience of working on this project?
13. What should we have learned from this project a year from now?

14. Are there any lessons for you personally?
15. Based on the conversation, what actions should we put in place to prevent and/or mitigate these problems from occurring again OR what actions should we put in place to ensure we have continued success like what we experienced on this project?

I may do a bit of pre-work to document the facts of what happened from start to finish by asking the team “crowdsource” that timeline of activity. We gather the folks together (either face-to-face and/or virtually) and start with the first three questions.

In the face-to-face environment, I’ll post questions 4-9 on separate flipcharts around the room and we’ll travel as a large group (or breakout into smaller groups) to answer the questions. We then reconvene and ask the deeper dive questions 10-14. We finish the AAR with a round of “takeaways” – going around the room to ask each person to contribute to the action item list. Finish the session with any accountabilities that need to be applied to the action item list.

Viola! That’s how you facilitate an after-action review (AAR)!

THE POWERFUL PANELIST BOOK SNEAK PEEK

Perhaps you’ve been asked to serve as a panelist in an upcoming panel discussion...and you may be wondering, “What do I have to do to be prepared?”

That’s a GREAT question, as I have seen too many panelists do absolutely NO preparation. Okay, they might have read the descriptive email on the flight into the city or briefly chatted with the panel moderator. I affectionally call this the “show up and throw up strategy,” where the panelists think they can get by with sheer brilliance.

Unfortunately, it rarely works that way. A brilliant, D.E.E.P. panelist is willing to do the work. And it’s really not a huge lift, but can make a huge difference to the audience and their perceived value.

How to Prepare to Be a Brilliant Panelist:

1) Think about the audience. After all, they are the reason you are having this awesome discussion!

- *In Their Shoes.* Imagine the types of people (even specific individuals as a model) who are likely to attend. Think about the questions they are likely to ask.
- *Social Media.* Use the conference website, a blog post, social media, or other feedback tools to glean questions from the community. Ask them to submit their most pressing issues and challenges.
- *Interview.* Ask the conference organizer for the names and contact information for three “influencers” or “heavy hitters” who may be in the audience. Ask them what they would like to hear about and what challenges they are facing.

2) Research your fellow panelists.

- *Google.* Google their work and views they hold on the topic. Depending on how much time you have and how critical this panel is, take the time to review their websites, social profiles, books, reviews, bios, blogs, recent presentations, media mentions, papers, etc.
- *Take notes.* You don’t need to know *everything* about the panelists’ lives, but you should have a basic idea of their points of view on the topic. This will make it much easier to connect with them and discern the areas of agreement and disagreement.

3) Consider the format. Is it the typical panel format, or will there be some other key areas to engage with the panel moderator, your fellow panelists and/or the audience?

Chat with the meeting organizer and/or the panel moderator to determine the key fundamentals such as scope of the topic, who will be in the audience, the key objectives, etc. You can even use this handy checklist to help guide the conversation.

From this conversation, you should have a firm grasp on why you were selected. Your role, diverse viewpoint, and relatability to the audience. You'll want to leverage these strengths.

4) Be thoughtful. Based on your role, diverse viewpoint, and relatability to the audience, determine what contribution can you make to the conversation. If controversial, talk with your legal team about what can and cannot be said.

5) Identify three key messages you believe the audience can derive great value from.

With each of these key messages, identify an example, a story, demonstration or prop that will make your idea come to life. And don't forget a short, "Twitterable" soundbite that audiences will remember after the panel discussion is over.

6) Think about a final takeaway, insight, or idea you want to leave the audience with. I'm a big fan of asking the audience to do something – a "call to action" – based on what they heard.

7) If you are nervous, role-play some questions and talking points with a colleague (and/or the legal team). Really push yourself to make sure you are giving value to the attendees.

8) If you are in a heavily regulated industry, make sure you **run it all past the legal team**.

9) Optional: Check out the panel moderator. Have they ever moderated a panel before? Just because they are a nice and/or famous person doesn't mean they have the skills to facilitate a robust panel discussion. If you can, see if they have any video uploaded on YouTube. How interactive are they? Is the tone conversational? Once you have a sense for their style, you'll be better prepared to engage in the conversation.

All of this means you probably have to do a lot more work than you signed up for. BUT if you want to make this an outstanding, powerful panel, you will have a greater chance of success when you do the work!

FROM THE BOOKSHELF: BIG POTENTIAL: HOW TRANSFORMING THE PURSUIT OF SUCCESS RAISES OUR ACHIEVEMENT, HAPPINESS, AND WELL-BEING

It's the beginning of a new year (2023) and I pulled Shawn Achor's book, *Big Potential: How Transforming the Pursuit of Success Raises our Achievement, Happiness, and Well-Being* out of "saved for later" into my Amazon shopping cart. It arrived the next day on my doorstep and I completely devoured it. So much so, that I think I'll have to go back and re-read parts.

The main premise of the book is that working as individuals we can tap into some success – Achor calls this "small potential." When we tap into those around us, we can leverage those relationships into "big potential" and even greater success. Sounds reasonable enough, especially when he weaves in stories, examples, and practical how-tos.

Frankly, nothing in this book is earth-shattering BUT it does create a playbook by which to be a great and successful team player:

1) Surround yourself with positive influencers. This tenet reminds me of motivational speaker Jim Rohn who said, "You are the average of the five people you spend the most time with." Achor then expounds on what that really looks like and how you can do it.

2) Expound your power. Four specific strategies to galvanize others:

- Recognize that you can create change wherever YOU are (even if you are not the designated leader)
- Develop an elevated pitch

- Reward and reinforce people's efforts to create change
- Help others see meaning in their lives

3) Create a prism of praise and recognition. Arguably the best part of this book as Achor would probably call me a "praise miser." "By denying the light of praise, we extinguish it. By bending the light toward others, we magnify it." He has six strategies for magnifying the power of praise:

- Stop comparison praise
- Spotlight the right
- Praise the base
- Democratize praise
- Unlock the Hidden 31 (those people who are positive but not expressive at work)
- Don't just praise the outcome – praise *to* an outcome

4) Defend against negative influences. Five strategies to defend, disarm and overcome those forces that threaten our energy, creativity, passion, and potential:

- Build a moat
- Build a mental stronghold
- Learn the art of Mental Aikido
- Take a vacation from your problems
- Pick your battles

5) Create collective momentum. Three practical strategies for channeling positive, collective energy in the direction of your goals:

- "Create Tours of Meaning" (move away from describing your daily duties and talk about the larger meaning in your work)
- Use vivid direction (because the more vividly we can picture something, the more attainable it feels)
- Celebrate the wins

All in all, a good read if you want to tap into even greater potential and success.