

The 20/60/20 Rule Of Leadership. Don't Go Solving The Wrong Problems

Tool to avoid getting involved in a leadership Landing-gear Fix. It's a tool that will help you avoid wrong problems and focus on the right ones. It's called the 20/60/20 rule. And it will save you aggravation and help you avoid wasting time.

Several decades ago, a passenger jet approached a Florida airport with the pilot and co-pilot struggling to fix what they thought was a malfunctioning landing gear. The landing-gear light was on, signaling that the gear was deployed; but both men did not hear it actually deploy.



As the men sought to understand whether they had a defective landing-gear light or a defective landing gear - the co-pilot actually taking up a hatch and getting down into the wheel well -- the aircraft kept losing altitude. Too late, a warning alarm sounded and the plane crash, killing all aboard.

Quite possibly that tragedy has subsequently saved many lives. For the pilot and co-pilot's actions have been used in flight simulation training programs to demonstrate how NOT to troubleshoot problems in the cockpit.

The incident has become known as the Landing-gear Fix, a diligent attempt to solve the wrong problem. Of course, they had a landing-gear problem on their hands. But unbeknownst to them, they faced a far more serious problem, a pending crash.

The Landing-gear Fix is a leadership lesson. In the quest to get results, many leaders often focus on Landing-gear Fixes - putting their time, resources and talents into solving wrong problems. In fact, it's been my experience working with thousands of leaders during the past 20 years that most leaders are either working on the wrong problems or working on the right problems in the wrong ways.

In this issue, I'll give you a tool to avoid getting involved in a leadership Landing-gear Fix. It's a tool that will help you avoid wrong problems and focus on the right ones. It's called the 20/60/20 rule. And it will save you aggravation and help you avoid wasting time.

When you are leading a group of people of whatever size to get results, understand that roughly about 20 percent of the people are **intractable**; they won't do - or at least won't want to do - what is required. Another 20 percent will be your ardent cause leaders in **getting it done**. And 40 percent will be **on the fence**.

How does this rule help you focus you on the right problem?

For one thing, it gives you a template of where to put your time and resources.

I wish I had known about the 20/60/20 rule early in my leadership endeavors. In the military and later in other venues, I often gave inordinate amount of attention to people at the intractable end. That people were upset with me and my leadership and the direction I wanted to take organizations upset me - more than it should have.

I did not know that if you are not getting a portion of the people upset with you, you are not challenging them enough as a leader. I did not know that the anger of the people you lead is the door prize of leadership.

Apply the 20/60/20 rule to a project you undertook in the past. (Remember, those are not exact percentages but approximations.) Which category did you focus your time, attention, and resources on? Was it the right category to do so? What would you do differently? How might you have moved people from the intractable end to the highly motivated end? How did you deal with the people in the middle, the 60 percent? What category demanded your best resources and efforts? What could you have done differently to improve your results?

What are the lessons you learned in applying the rule to a past project? List at least three specific ones.

Now apply the 20/60/20 rule to a present leadership effort. This rule is about saving you time, money, and resources and getting you more results to boot. There are several ways to use it. First, as a straight up template.

How might the lessons you learned in applying the Rule to a past project now help you apply it to this present one?

Focus on one of the three categories. How will you expend your time and resources? It does not matter which category you focus on. The importance of the rule is that you have the option. Without this rule, most leaders scatter their focus.

Don't get caught applying diligent solutions to the wrong problems. Apply the 20/60/20 Rule, and you'll focus on getting the right results in the right way at the right time.

Short note about the author

The author of 23 books, Brent Filson's recent books are, THE LEADERSHIP TALK: THE GREATEST LEADERSHIP TOOL and 101 WAYS TO GIVE GREAT LEADERSHIP TALKS. He is founder and president of The Filson Leadership Group, Inc. ? and for more than 20 years has been helping leaders of top companies worldwide get audacious results. Sign up for his free leadership e-zine and get a free white paper: "49 Ways To Turn Action Into Results," at www.actionleadership.com

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