

WILL MANCINI

with Dave Rhodes and Cory Hartman



YOUNIQUE

Designing the Life
that God Dreamed for You

Chapter 17

NINETY DAYS FROM NOW

How Anyone Can Accomplish Dramatically More without Working Harder

*“Whenever anything is being accomplished, it is being done,
I have learned, by a monomaniac with a mission.”*

—Peter Drucker

People think I work hard. But I have a secret: I don’t actually work *hard*; I work *focused*. And there is a big difference.

This chapter is all about that difference, and it reveals one of the most important practices in the book.

You know by now that I’m passionate about simplicity. So despite the inescapable complexity involved in knowing and naming a life’s identity and direction, I am obsessed with summing it all up in a simple, supple, actionable way.

I believe that all elements of the master tools of the Vision Frame and the Horizon Storyline achieve this, but I especially love the radical simplicity of the LifeCall and the ninety-day goal, which sits in your Midground Horizon (figure 17.1). Both are incredibly concise. And both are irresistibly motivating.

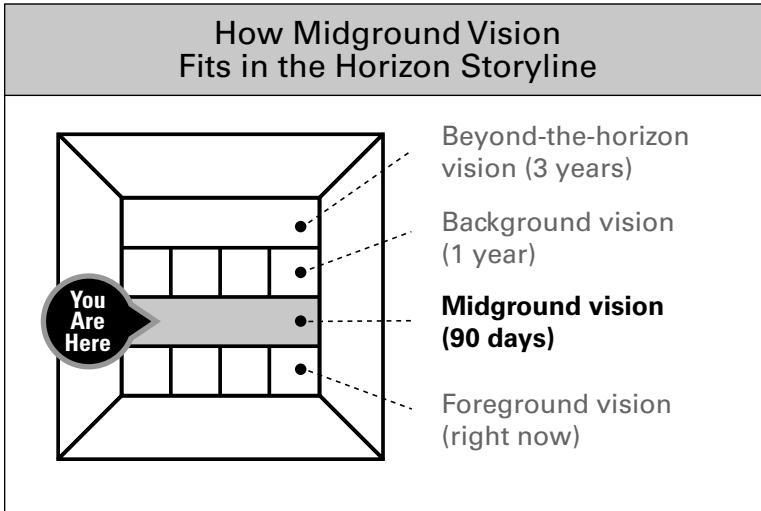


Figure 17.1

Your LifeCall tells you what's important always. Your ninety-day goal tells you what's important now. Both stand with succinct singularity.

If the only things you did to put this book into practice were to (1) align your emotions, habits, and commitments repeatedly to your mission in life and (2) devote yourself to one new goal every ninety days, your life in ten years would be indescribably richer than it is right now.

Why do a strong LifeCall and a gripping ninety-day goal each have such a powerful influence on a person's life? The Power of Focus.

The Power of Focus

In fourth grade I learned a lesson in optics that was indelibly etched on my memory. I certainly wasn't the only kid in history to learn it, but I've never forgotten it.

I learned it the first summer day I took a magnifying glass outdoors. Positioning the lens between the sun and the earth, I slowly raised and lowered it and watched the circle of sunlight beaming through the glass expand and contract on the ground. The smaller the circle got, the brighter it got. Condensing the light to a brilliant pinpoint, I watched the dry leaf under it start to smoke and catch flame.

It amazed me how much energy was silently pouring through that magnifying glass the whole time, whether the light was concentrated or diffused. And it amazed me how merely focusing the energy would start a fire.

I'm still amazed by it. I don't believe any of us know how much energy is coursing through our lives, even if we're experiencing a prolonged period of weariness and fatigue. We don't recognize how much power we have to harness it, because it usually stays unfocused. But when all that energy gets directed toward one target, a fire starts that changes us and the world around us.

Through Auxano we have seen this practice repeatedly reap bountiful fruit with teams. Attack one big goal at a time together—not five—and teams surprise themselves with their mountain-moving mojo. Other organizational consultants practice the same thing. Patrick Lencioni counsels leaders to set what he calls a “thematic goal” or a “rally cry” as a singular point of focus. The team at Franklin Covey calls it a “wildly important goal”—“WIG” for short. Nailing that singularity-with-specificity to the door is the open secret of the productive life. As Tim Ferriss put it, “Life favors the specific ask and punishes the vague wish.”¹

Focus enables us to do more. It also enables us to travel further. In short, focus expands. I learned that from my other big optics lesson.

If we were standing in a room together with daylight streaming through the windows, and if I shined a flashlight at a wall twenty feet away, you might faintly see the circular beam it would cast on the wall. But if I pointed a laser with the same energy as the flashlight up at the moon, an observer with a powerful enough telescope could mark its red dot on the lunar surface *238,900 miles away*. Hard to imagine that distance? Well, it's like traveling across the contiguous United States at its widest point in a straight line eighty-nine times—does that help?

Focus especially enables us to go further faster when it is linked to another superpower of Midground Vision: the Power of Ninety Days.

The Power of Ninety Days

There is something about a ninety-day period—approximately one quarter of a year—that is entwined deeply with the operating system of human beings. Ninety days is roughly the length of a season in temperate climes. It is about the length of a school semester and the span of the business quarter.

Ninety days also has the intriguing characteristic of being just out of reach. It is far enough away from the here-and-now to imply a substantial journey but close enough that we can cross it with a solid burst. It is enough time for an individual to accomplish

Your LifeCall
tells you
succinctly
what you're
supposed to be
doing always.
Your ninety-
day goal tells
you succinctly
what you're
supposed to
be doing now.

something truly significant. You would not believe what people can achieve in three months. (A list of my favorites is in the Top Ten Panel below.)

Top Ten Panel: Big Accomplishments in Ninety Days

1. A Moscow architectural firm will build you an environmentally friendly, 1,300-square-foot home within ninety days of order.
2. Boot camp turns a couch potato recruit into a ready Marine in just under ninety days.
3. Thru-hikers walk the Pacific Northwest Trail from the Continental Divide to the Pacific Ocean within ninety days.
4. A human baby *in utero* is fully formed and can open and close its hands and mouth by ninety days after its conception.
5. Blogger Maneesh Sethi developed and lived out a plan to become fluent in a new language (in his case, Italian) in ninety days.²
6. In FDR's first ninety days in office in 1933, he saw passage of the Emergency Banking Act and the Federal Emergency Relief Act; created the Civilian Conservation Corps, the Tennessee Valley Authority, and the Securities and Exchange Commission; and nominated the first female Cabinet member, Frances Perkins.
7. John Steinbeck wrote the first draft of *The Grapes of Wrath* in ninety days in 1938.
8. In 2004–05, Frenchman Vincent Riou became the first person to sail around the world in a monohull vessel, solo, in under ninety days.
9. On July 8, 1914, the Boston Braves baseball club had a record of 29–40, dead last in the National League. Over the next ninety days they won a whopping 74 percent of their games to win the league pennant and eventually a World Series championship.
10. Mozart composed two piano trios; a violin sonata; two piano sonatas, including his most famous; his last three symphonies, arguably his greatest; and three other pieces of music in ninety days in 1788.

This crucial principle is missing in so many life-planning approaches, but businesses are beginning to figure it out. The fourth quarter of the year is almost always a company's most productive, sometimes more than the previous three put together. That's because year-end deadlines ratchet up the urgency. Brian P. Moran teaches

organizations to redefine their “year” to be twelve weeks long and to repeat the cycle every three months to capture this kind of momentum and lock down execution over and over.³ Setting a ninety-day goal makes the “Important” into the “Urgent.”

The Power of Ninety Days is harnessed by setting one—*exactly* one—just-out-of-reach goal and driving toward it with laser-beam focus. It is simply incredible how much you can do when you use this method—especially when you use it repeatedly. Ride a rifle bullet into the future, not a scatter shot.

The Power of Stacking Goals

My favorite illustration of this principle is the ingenious technique devised by General Erwin Rommel to move his German armored division across North Africa during World War II. Rommel—a brilliant tactician employed by an evil regime—was nicknamed “the Desert Fox,” and his tank division was called “the Ghost Division.” How did Rommel and his force earn such awe-inspiring nicknames?

Imagine you’re a tank driver, enclosed in a cramped, dark, metal box with three men, broiling all day under the fierce North African sun. Your lips and face are chapped; your mouth tastes like grit. All you hear is the loud, dull roar of the diesel engine and the squeak of the churning tracks under you. All you smell is fuel, oil, and sweat. All you see out of the slit before you is featureless sand—no rivers, no vegetation, no animals—reflecting blazing sunlight so bright that it burns your eyes.

Then, after one hour of creeping across the desert, everything looks exactly as it did sixty minutes before. And this continues for hundreds of miles. It’s more than enough to sap the fighting spirit out of anyone and to slow progress to a crawl.

Rommel’s brilliant innovation was to send a fleet of Kübelwagen—the German Jeep—ahead of the column to place a line of fifty-gallon drums, each with a huge flag sticking out the top, at intervals so that a tank driver could just see the one ahead. With the remarkable shift of focus those flags provided, the driver was no longer driving to some distant place he had never seen, miles and miles away. Instead, he was just driving to the next flag . . . and the next . . . and the next. Each flag passed was an accomplishment—it meant progress.

The psychological boost this gave Rommel’s men was enormous. It compelled them to drive their tanks straight and swiftly. It enabled the entire force to come upon its enemies by surprise, traversing vast distances to appear seemingly out of nowhere.

In the same way, you can do amazing things when you focus on one single goal after another. Do a quick calculation. Let’s pretend, following Moses’ remark in Psalm 90:10, that you have eighty years to live, total. With four ninety-day periods every year, how many do you have left to work with? I have 127. Imagine what I could do if I

accomplished 127 substantial goals over the course of the rest of my life. Imagine what *you* could do!

See, just as with Rommel's oil drums, those goals aren't a scattered, random assembly. Focused by your LifeCall, they trace a line that takes you somewhere. I repeat, *focus expands*. It's paradoxical and not what you'd expect, but the tighter you narrow what you're trying to accomplish, the wider the vistas that open up before you down the road.

Goals also "stack" when you take them one at a time. They create a flywheel effect when you accomplish one goal after another. Have you ever set up dominos in a long, serpentine line for the joy of seeing them fall in a swift, steady wave, one after the next, after you toppled the first? Well, did you know that the momentum of a falling domino can knock over a domino about 50 percent larger than itself? If you line up a series of dominos each one-and-a-half times larger than the one before, the first domino—even if it is the size of a Tic Tac—can set off a chain reaction that eventually topples the 29th domino, with the height of the Empire State Building!⁴

In the same way, a sequence of ninety-day goals, even very modest ones, compound over time. They multiply your Five Capitals in ways you couldn't imagine and make your dreams come true.

If your one-year objectives are the mountains in the distance, and the "NOW-rhythms" of your Foreground Horizon (which I'll talk about in the next chapter) are your dashboard, then your ninety-day goal is what you see a quarter-mile ahead as you're driving down the highway. It's worthwhile to enjoy the view of the mountains, and you need to check the dashboard frequently. But if your eyes don't spend most of their time watching where you're going, you'll wreck. If you *do* stay focused on the road ahead, however, you will eventually reach the destination beyond the horizon that you've been dreaming of.

Top Ten Panel: Benefits of Focusing on One Goal Every Ninety Days

1. One ninety-day goal makes it easy to focus attention daily without having to adopt a new system or tool or app.
2. One ninety-day goal powers your prayer life in new ways.
3. One ninety-day goal stretches your faith in a meaningful direction rather than leaving it complacent in seven.
4. One ninety-day goal eliminates the false optimism of assuming you're getting somewhere and the discouragement of feeling you're going nowhere.

5. One ninety-day goal regathers personal energy that has been dispersed and fragmented.
6. One ninety-day goal creates an “eye of the storm,” as a center of calm singularity amid the swirl of needs and responsibilities competing for your time.
7. One ninety-day goal, repeatedly set, gives you plenty of time to create a splendid variety of goals in many aspects of your life.
8. One ninety-day goal—after another, after another—grows you to attempt things ten, twenty, and thirty years down the road that you would never imagine you could accomplish today.
9. One ninety-day goal set and reset over time builds a track record to chronicle your journey with God like none you’ve ever seen.
10. One ninety-day goal at a time is easy to track and celebrate with yourself and others.

How to Set a Ninety-Day Goal

Your ninety-day goal is teed-up inside your Vision Frame (identity) and fed by your longer-range dreaming. Now it’s time to plan and act. You have all the context you need to commit. Meditating on the three sets of questions below—while bathing them in prayer, as always—helps you brainstorm a range of emphases for your next ninety days.

Life questions to jump-start your brainstorming:

- What is the next best step for my life right now?
- What has God been up to lately and how is that providing direction?
- What is my life asking me to do differently?
- What am I now ready to achieve?
- How have I been getting in my own way?
- Who needs dramatically more attention from me?
- What needs dramatically more time from me?
- If I woke up tomorrow and all of the sudden my life was wonderful, what would have changed?

Vision Frame and Horizon Storyline questions for “quality control” and integrative planning:

- What LifeCore (value) do I need to realign or strengthen?
- Which LifeScore storyline is thriving that I want to accelerate?
- Which LifeScore storyline is just surviving that I want to see revived?
- When I look at my one-year objectives, which one is most urgent?
- Which one is most important?
- Which one am I most motivated to accomplish?
- What am I tolerating that is delaying a one-year objective?
- What single goal would have the greatest impact on *all* my one-year objectives?
- What aspect of my three-year dream am I energized to advance right now?
- What is holding back my three-year dream from being fulfilled?
- What goal would produce the most progress toward my three-year dream?

Questions to reduce your list and validate your top ninety-day goal selection:

- What goal would still motivate me six weeks from now?
- What goal would bring a smile to God and my loved ones the most?
- What goal, if accomplished, would set me up best for my next goal?
- What goal makes the most sense given the unique timing of the next three months?
- What goal would most super-charge my LifeCall (mission)?

When you have a healthy list, select one emphasis to move ahead with. Your ninety-day goal can be directed toward a difficult target or it can be dedicated to an area where you already have a lot of momentum—it doesn't matter. While selecting wisely is as important for a ninety-day goal as it is for anything else, don't lapse into paralysis by analysis. Peter Drucker was exactly right when he wrote, "It is better to pick the wrong priority than none at all."⁵

Once you've settled on your emphasis, convert it into a goal that's "S.M.A.R.T.": *Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Relevant* (to the long range), and *Time-Based*. One issue to pay attention to is how ambitious the goal is. Do you tend to play it safe or bite off more than you can chew? Do you need more faith, or do you need less folly?

Another thing to pay attention to is whether the goal grabs your gut and doesn't let go. Is it the sort of thing you're going to want to pray for every day? Are you eager to share it with family and friends?

Once you decide on your ninety-day goal, own it even more. Write it on a card for the car dashboard or scribe it on your bathroom mirror with a dry erase marker. Add it to an inspiring photo and make it the lock screen on your phone. Eat, sleep, and breathe it for the next ninety days.

Having a ninety-day goal, however, is only half the battle to achieving it. You also need practical steps to reach it. Forging them is what the next chapter is all about.

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