Making IT HAPPEN

A Year of Structured Continuous Improvement to Boost Your Career and Business Results

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Disclaimer:

The author of this guide book and course has tried to present the most accurate information to his knowledge at the time of writing. This book is intended for information purposes only. The author does not imply any results to those using this book, nor are they responsible for any results brought about by the usage of the information contained herein.

Welcome

Thanks for purchasing 'Making It Happen'.

The original Making It Happen course was designed to allow you, and your team, to undertake a new lesson each week.

This download version, however, gives you all the lessons and sprints in one go. Each lesson is designed to help you develop your own improvement skills and abilities. The focus of this course is to help you become more effective as a 'change agent' within your business.

The lessons include practical activities, you will need to test the ideas in your own business and develop your own toolbox as you go.

Part 1 – Contains the 'Productivity Boost' section of tools, designed to be used as and when you feel that you need to raise productivity levels.

Part 2 – This section hosts the original thirty 'lessons' and are structured so that you can tackle one topic a week. In this download version please feel free to dip in and out as you see fit.

Part 3 – The four original sprint projects (which took the course from weeks 36 to 51) are held in this short section

All of the downloads are linked to the relevant sections, and also listed at the end of this guide.

If you have any questions as you go along, please feel free to drop me a line. My email address is gilesjohnston@smartspeed.co.uk.

Enjoy your journey,

Giles Johnston

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Part 1 – The Productivity Boost

The Productivity Boost was the final part of the original course. It was a day one bundle of quick to implement ideas that can dramatically improve both personal and business performance.

In this section you will be able to review and explore all eight of the Productivity Boost modules.

PB1. - The End of a Process

You can tell a lot about how effective a business process is by looking at the back end of it. All of the mistakes, problems and communication errors find their way to the back end of a process.

When I walk into a business for the first time I like to look here to see what is really going on. If the process is being operated in a calm, considered and productive way then that is a really good sign. If the process is frenetic, chaotic and stressful, well there may be a story behind this…

In this module I would like you to pick your main business processes and examine its final step(s). The worksheet attached will guide your thinking through a number of areas, which I will explain here:

- Process Owner

Identify the process owner – are they clearly defined within the business and does this person realise that they are responsible for the process? Do they know how to improve the performance of their process and do they have their eyes open?

- Delays – Before

Before the final step(s) of the process are executed, are there any delays before it can start? Identify them here so that you can do something about it.

- Delays – During

Is the final step of the process smooth, or does it too get stuck part way through? Identify the delays so that you can tackle them.

- Gripes

What drives you mad with the end of your process? What doesn't work as well as it could and what would you change if you could wave a magic wand?

- Mistakes

What kinds of mistakes happen in the final step of the process, or arrive from previous steps in the process? List them here.

- Missing / Bad Info

Is the information that you need to work with correct, or is it missing key data? Good information is vital to an effective and efficient process, so list your issues here.

- Obvious Improvements

Now that you are looking at the end of your process, what stands out as any changes you would make to the overall process? Do you need to change the start of the process, or the middle? Do you want to get rid of parts of it, or add in a couple of missing elements? List the points here.

- Non-Conformances

What happens during the process that doesn't comply with any standards you have defined in your business? This could refer to your quality management system, your standard operating procedures or instructions given by the senior management team. What doesn't conform? List the points here.

Once you, and hopefully your team, have been through this worksheet the bottom of the sheet is for you to capture the improvement actions you need to undertake. The template has five slots on it, but by all means capture more than five improvement actions if you are on a roll!

If you can tweak how your business processes work, so that the end of the process is relatively problem free you will know that you have made a positive change in your business.

Download

PB1 – End of a Process – worksheet

PB2. What are Your Personal Losses?

How your day plays out will have a massive impact on your personal productivity, and this obviously has a big knock on to how many improvements you can make (as well as the energy required just to complete your day job!).

Attached to this module is a simple time tracker to help you get a grip on this. I am proposing that you use this periodically, as you feel that you need to use it and am not proposing that this is a permanent feature of your day (unless you feel that it should, of course!).

What you do with the recordings is the most important part of the process, after all if you don't do anything with the information then you are wasting your time. There are some key features of this time tracker that I would like to draw your attention to. You don't have to use all of the options, just the ones that make sense to you. Let me talk you through the sheet:

Time Tracker and Evaluation

Date:							
Time	**Activity**	**P / R**	**On / In**	**Plan**	**Do**	**Check**	**Act**
08:00							
08:15							
08:30							
08:45							
09:00							

Time Blocks

These are shown in the first column as fifteen-minute blocks. The formulas in the analysis use fifteen-minute increments for their calculations, but feel free to tweak these as you see fit.

Activity

This is meant to only hold a few words, enough to remind you what you were doing during the time period.

P/R

The first of our analysis fields. P refers to 'pro-active' and R for 're-active'. If you were working on important work, that wasn't an emergency, select a 'P' and if you were working on a crisis / urgent demand then select 'R' from the drop-down list.

Getting the balance right between pro-active work and re-active work can massively shift your productivity levels.

On / In

An alternative view of how your time is being used is with the distinction between working 'on the business' versus 'in the business'.

If your time slot was used developing how the business works then select 'On' from the drop down box. If you were processing day-to-day items then choose 'In'.

Depending on your role this split will be different, the key is to understand what good looks like for your role and change your focus as you see fit (i.e. if your processes fundamentally don't work you probably need to spend a little more time working on your business rather than in it, at least until the problems have gone away).

Plan, Do, Check and Act

The third option on this tracker is to record your activities against the PDCA (aka, Continuous Improvement) cycle.

If your activity was related to planning then enter 'X' into the corresponding cell in the Plan column.

Likewise, if you spent the time executing a plan, or normal day-to-day tasks, put your 'X' in the Do column.

If you were reviewing progress and checking results, your 'X' would go into the Check column.

And, finally, if you were deciding on how your approach needs to change your 'X' needs to go into the Act column.

Many businesses are poor at planning, reflecting on what they have done and choosing to act differently. Look at your splits and decide if you need to put more emphasis in one, or more, of these areas. If you get this right, the amount of time required for the 'Do' phase minimises.

Automated Analysis

As you may have guessed, if you choose to print out the worksheet and fill it in with a pen the automated analysis won't work. Don't fret, the pattern of letters in the analysis columns will tell you all you need to know.

If you have used the Excel spreadsheet in the manner mentioned above then the table on the second page (image below) will calculate the time spent in each style of working.

As I said earlier, the three different types of analysis can be done together, or just one or two of your choice. These analyses will work independently, if you want to use it.

Analysis

	P	R	On	In	Plan	Do	Check	Act
Total Time	105	75	135	30	15	270	60	45
%	58%	42%	82%	18%	4%	69%	15%	12%

The point of this exercise is to help you understand what choices you are making with your time and what is being imposed on you.

If you have a boss, you can use the information to ask for their help to change how the working day is structured.

If the choices are clearly in your court and aren't aligned with your plans to change how the business work, and aren't helping you to achieve your plans, then it should become more obvious how to use your time differently going forward.

As I said at the start, the intention is that you use this format for a few days to get a proper snapshot of how your days pan out so that you can properly analyse what changes you want to make to drive up your personal productivity and results.

Download

[PB2 – Time Tracker]

PB3. Hour of Pain

This simple strategy is a great approach if you find your day being broken up by interruptions, stopping you from getting on with your work.

Continuous improvement projects often fall foul of this. The day can become so inefficient through the constant stopping and starting that we only just seem to have enough time to get the 'day job' completed.

So, let me share with you an approach that has worked for my clients - the 'Hour of Pain!'.

How it works

This approach is for those of you that have colleagues in your business that have a similar issue. This only works if there are two, or more, of you that want to conquer the same problem.

Determine how much time you want to spend on your work / project / thinking and give your phone to the other person. For that time (typically an hour - hence the name) you are free to lock yourself away and get on with whatever it is that you need to do. When the hour is finished you get your phone back.

If this is a true partnership you then swap and take the other person's phone for the agreed length of time, hence subjecting yourself to the 'Hour of Pain'.

Also, if there are more of you wanting to take advantage of this approach you can figure out a rota to get the most out of this approach. One hour of pain to help out several people... it works!

Why it works

This approach works on a very simple idea that if you get stopped during a task you have to ramp back up to you full operating speed. Everytime you get stopped you punctuate your thinking and it is analogous to being in peak hour traffic. You stop and you start. You get there, but slowly. Your average speed is pitiful. Compare this with travelling at night time – clear roads! The hour of pain approach is like travelling at night whilst the other person is in thick traffic.

Remember, busy days are always like thick traffic and you'll never get a chance to 'drive at night' unless you come into work when your clients aren't at work themselves, or if you come up with an arrangement like this.

I have seen projects that have been stalled for years reaching their conclusion in just a few weeks with this approach.

I have witnessed improvements that have been under people's noses become a reality within days, just by blocking out some time.

And, I have seen chronic complaints disappear overnight, because some time had finally been spent on the issue (just imagine all of the happy faces!).

This approach can work, if you can find someone to share the 'Hour of Pain' with and figure out an arrangement.

PB4. Measuring Your Productivity

Productivity is a discussion point for many businesses.

As I write this, in the UK, the term productivity is bandied around in the news constantly (as in we don't have high enough levels).

Productivity is only one form of KPI (Key Performance Indicator), but nonetheless a useful one when put into context with the rest of the business.

Do you have a productivity measure in your business that you use as part of your decision-making process?

The basic productivity formula is:

How much stuff you have produced / How much resource it costs to do it

This can vary from business to business, but this can often be measured as invoiced sales per labour hour for many businesses.

You can vary this to suit what your business does and how you are able to measure your activities, the key point being that you decide on what you want to measure and then keep on measuring it to ascertain where you are on your productivity boosting journey.

Actions to consider here are:

- Agree on how you want to measure productivity in your business.
- Find ways to report this information, preferably automating where possible.
- Decide how the information will be reported, who it will be reported to and when it should be reviewed.
- Consider what rules need to be in place to handle the information should it go in the wrong direction (or starts jumping upwards for that matter).
- Reflect on what other KPIs you have in your business at this moment in time and what else you would need to measure in order to keep your productivity

measure in context (i.e. there is no point you being productive if you are making no profit).

- Decide when you are going to start using this information.

Tracking your productivity as you implement improvement ideas into your business can be really useful. It can help with the evaluation of the improvements (as part of the Plan, Do, Check, Act cycle) and can demonstrate to your team the impact of their efforts.

PB5. Process Driven Meetings

A simple technique to boost the productivity of your business is to implement process driven meetings. If you manage the process correctly then you have a really good chance of eliminating performance sapping tasks and help the team work effectively together. The good news is that they don't take long to devise and after they have been fine tuned shouldn't take long to run.

At the end of this instruction is the download box, a Word template can be found there that can be used as a worksheet to help you plan your own process driven meetings.

Instructions

1. Choose an area, or function, in your business that you want to apply this thinking to.
2. Identify the **Inputs** this area needs**, its** main **Process** steps and the **Outputs** that this area of the business is responsible for.
3. Under each section identify the check questions that come to mind. These are the questions that will let you know if the area of the business in question is on track. Ideally these should be 'yes / no' questions.
4. Identify what attendees need to be present, how often you want to run the meeting, its time, the location of the meeting and how you want to capture the meeting actions.

Process Driven Meetings – Planning Worksheet

Business Area / Function	

	Input	**Process**	**Output**
Key activities			
Check questions			

Attendees	
Frequency	
Time	
Location	
Action	Minutes / Screen / Board

Three points of interest

- Capturing the actions are really important, and the more visible the better. If you can get them up on a whiteboard where everyone can see them – great!
- The first couple of meetings might take a little longer than expected… this is quite normal. Use these experiences to clear out old problems and clear the decks.
- If there are ongoing issues in the business, around this particular function, you may choose to have more frequent meetings at the outset (daily, or weekly) and relax this as the issues and problems you have faced dissipate.

Process driven meetings can really help you to change the mindsets of your team and drive a new level of performance through the business. Have fun developing your meetings.

Download

PB5 – Process Driven Meetings – Worksheet

PB6. The Project 'Cupboard' Method

If you are like me, or like plenty of other people that get fired up by improving how a business works, you will likely have a constant stream of ideas for new projects.

Many people I speak to have this experience. They get their teeth stuck into a project and just as things start to get moving a new idea pops into their heads. This new idea then starts to take hold of their imagination and effort is then switched to the new idea, leaving the original project hanging.

And, if you recognise this in your own life, the pattern then repeats…

The simple method I am about to share with you isn't just for improvement projects though, it can be for any kind of project – anything that consumes your time for a prolonged period of time.

A little story

Before I tell you about the approach, let me tell you about a chap called Rob.

Rob had been very successful with his business when it had a limited range of products. But, once he got started with developing new product ideas his inspiration just wouldn't stop. The result was that his business was stalling and he struggled to complete any of his business improvement or product development projects.

Using the method I am about to share with you, Rob was able to approach his project in a more disciplined way without losing the fun of having lots and lots of new ideas for his business. In just a few months he had transformed his business back to a stronger version of what it was before he got hooked on all of the opportunities flying around his business.

And, if you are wondering why it is called the 'Project Cupboard', the name came from a discussion about spinning plates. When you decide to stop spinning so many plates, where do you put them – in a cupboard!

The method

The Project Cupboard method is very simple and contains three elements:

1. Executing your project(s).
2. Capturing new ideas.

Rotating your projects in a controlled manner.

Let me take you through the three steps.

Executing your projects

Firstly, let's clarify how you want to undertake your projects.

- How much time can you spend on your projects?
- How much time do your projects need?
- How does this fit in with your normal day-to-day routines?

Once you are happy with the answers to these questions this part of the method is all about doing, nothing else, within the constraints you have defined above.

Capturing new ideas

This element of the method is acknowledging that new ideas will continue to pop into your head whilst you work on the plans you already have in place. When a new idea appears capture it. Capture the idea enough to get the main details and then put it away for later (into your 'cupboard'). I suggest that you spend no more than five minutes capturing the idea, using a mind map, sketch or a list should be enough to capture the idea without throwing you off course too much.

The point of doing this is to get the idea out of your head so that you can go back to focusing on the project at hand. Five minutes is my suggestion, use whatever time works best for you. The principle I want you to focus on here is the clearing your mind to unleash maximum efficiency when it comes to working on your projects.

Rotating your projects

The final element of this method is to be happy with the choice you have made with regards to which project you are working on. As a starting point I recommend that you consider reviewing your projects on a weekly basis.

If you are fortunate enough to have completed a project during the week, then you are reviewing your list of other projects for a replacement.

If you haven't finished a project, but are really itching to get involved with another project, then consider pausing the project you are working on currently and deliberately switch activities. If you do this I want you to be conscious of how much time is required to complete the first project and what the impact of delaying the project is. If there is lots of time remaining and the impact isn't great, then it could make sense to switch.

The number of projects you have on the go at any one time might also be a factor that you need to consider. A handful of smaller projects that you can work on alongside each other might be fine, but for more complicated stuff you may need to throttle back to just one project. If in doubt – work on fewer projects.

I hope that you find this method simple and effective, to help you deliver more projects into your business. New ideas are certainly the lifeblood of moving a business forward, but if none of the ideas get to see the light of day the original idea was pointless.

PB7. Rolling Planning Horizons

If you are looking for a strategy to help you implement more improvement projects (therefore improving both your personal productivity and your business' productivity) then this idea can really help you out. I have included a worksheet with this module, although you can use any form of planner layout once you get the hang of the basic idea.

Before I get into the mechanics of how this approach works let me explain why I am sharing it with you. One of the drawbacks of generating improvement ideas for your business is becoming impatient and trying to undertake too many improvements at once. The likely outcome of this approach is that lots of improvements get started, but not finished.

How this approach works

1. Draw up a list of the improvements you want to implement over the next twelve months (or whatever period you are looking at, between 3 months and 12 months).
2. Prioritise your improvements and spread the implementations over the four quarters of the year, using the Year Planner worksheet.
3. At the start of the first quarter, split the quarter's improvements (or stages of the improvements) over the three months of the quarter. Or put another way, set your targets to achieve the goals for that quarter.
4. At the start of the first month, split the activity required to achieve the month's targets over the four weeks of the month (don't get too hung up if it is a five-week month at this point).
5. And, at the start of the week, split the week's targets over the course of the week – creating daily targets.
6. Roll the plans as follows:
    a. Each new quarter – Review what was achieved last quarter, roll over any items that weren't completed and reflect on the one-year planner to create your targets for the next quarter.
    b. Each new month – Like the quarter, review what wasn't completed in the last month and roll it forward. Review the quarter plan for the month and spread out the targets over the four-week window.
    c. Each new week – Roll the previous week's tasks over and review the month's targets to set your targets for the week.

Keep your different horizons visible and focus on checking off the actions for the week.

This may seem a simple tool, but it can really help you to keep track of your improvements and direct your focus when the day-to-day busyness tries to get in the way!

Play with the format and tailor to suit your own preference, but keep in mind the principle behind this idea – steady improvement actions each day leads to better weeks, brilliant months and fantastic years. Your personal productivity (especially in terms of implementing change) will soar and the results your business reaps has the potential to be huge.

Download

PB7 – Rolling Horizons - Worksheets

PB8. Tying Up Loose Ends

If you are looking to boost your personal productivity as part of your wider business productivity journey, then your loose ends are certainly something to consider.

There is only so much that we can think about, and handle, at any one time. This amount differs from person to person, but loose ends have a way of gnawing away at our minds to stop us truly performing at 'full tilt'.

In essence I am offering you a mental spring clean so that you can perform at your best. Periodically returning to this method throughout the year (or whenever you feel lost with either your business activities, or your improvement actions) will help you to keep on top of your workloads and be both effective and productive.

The method

1. Brainstorm a list of outstanding issues.

This list can include your projects, your gripes, your stuck actions, decisions that haven't been made, your emails or whatever is floating around your mind when you create this list.

The intention of this overall exercise is to help you unclutter your mind so that you can focus properly on closing our the correctly prioritised sequence of activities in your business, so don't worry about creating a complete list – just the stuff that is in your head (at this point).

2. Quick sweep.

Is there anything on the list that you could get rid of? There are two main ways of looking at this step.

The first is to look at anything that no longer needs to be done (or no longer adds value to your or your business) and cut it from your list (obviously agreeing with other people if they are involved with this activity or its output).

The second way to look at the quick sweep is to identify anything that could be completed quickly (as in it would only take a few minutes to complete). These quick fixes may become more obvious to you if you estimate how long you think it would take you to complete the tasks. If you can identify these quick actions pencil them in for the next day or two and get them completed.

3. Postpone actions.

Look down your list of what is left. Are there any items that could be postponed to a later point in time? Identify these items and use the **Rolling Planning Horizons** approach to schedule these effectively.

4. Prioritise the remaining items

By now, hopefully, you should be left with a list of activities that need to be completed in the immediate future that will take longer to complete than your 'quick fixes'.

There are many ways (or rules) to help you prioritise your activities. There may be strategic themes running through your business, or there may be deadlines that you need to meet. If you don't have either of these two factors then I would encourage you to evaluate your list based on these three factors:

- Benefit to the business
- Cost to implement
- Speed of implementation

Those items that give your business a huge benefit that doesn't cost much to implement and can be done quickly can be given priority, based on this approach.

If that approach doesn't suit you then please use whatever works for you, but come up with a priority sequence for your remaining items.

That's the method for the mental spring clean. Use it whenever you're getting bogged down and don't feel that you are moving forward.

Part 2 – The Structured Modules

In this section you will experience the original thirty lessons of Making It Happen.

When I planned out the course sequence I structured the lessons with the intention of starting with some quick wins, into practical change management methods and then finished off with some leadership tinged modules.

All of these tools and techniques are the same ones I use with my clients. Some you'll recognise as 'old favourites' and you will discover my twists on the classics. Some you might not have come across. Either way, you can use these resources as stand-alone solutions to current business challenges, structured training for your internal continuous improvement teams or as personal development to be consumed at your leisure.

This is the end of the sample.

To purchase the full course, please visit:

http://www.making-it-happen.website