

Achieving Quick Wins

Building Confidence with Quick Results



Build confidence with early wins.

Do you remember the last time you started with a new organisation, picked up a new client, or were promoted to a new role?

You might have felt the urge to prove you were up to the task at hand, and you probably felt some pressure from your boss or client to provide quick and noticeable results.

Many of us have faced situations like this at some stage of our careers, and there's no doubt that it can be a nerve-wrecking experience. This is why securing a "quick win" is so useful for building your own self-confidence, and for boosting your boss's confidence in you. We can all benefit from securing these early achievements when we step into a new situation.

In this article, we'll examine what quick wins are, we'll look at when they're most beneficial, and we'll think about how to achieve one when you really need it.

What are Quick Wins?

Quick wins are visible successes that you achieve early on when you start a new job, transition into a new role, or start working with a new client. They're usually made within the first stages (30-90 days) of the new role.

In today's breakneck business environment, there's a lot of pressure on leaders and managers to prove that they have what it takes to get the job done quickly, which is why quick wins are so important.

They're also beneficial because they boost your confidence, and they help to establish authority within your new team. When you prove that you can get results, you gain respect and credibility

with your colleagues and team members. This, in turn, can pay off when you begin working on long-term projects. Any fence-sitters, cynics and doubters will now know that you "walk the walk", and that you're willing to work to make change happen!

Quick wins can also help you find allies and get noticed, both of which are important when you're in a new role.

When to Go for Quick Wins

When you're reporting to a new boss, and responsible for a new team, you need to prove that you're able to get results. Quick wins are important here because they create excitement and raise morale.

They also help because they can work as milestones for bigger goals. For instance, imagine that your new boss wants to see you cut spending by 30 percent within your first year. This might look like a difficult goal, but you could secure a quick win by breaking this down into smaller increments, such as finding ways to cut spending by 5 percent by the end of the month.

Quick wins are also useful when you begin working with a new client or customer. They show your new client that change is possible, and that their investment in you, or your organisation, is worth the cost.

If you have several long-term projects scheduled, you can use quick wins to keep yourself, or your team, motivated after one project has finished and before the next begins.

Think of your quick wins as punching the accelerator in a car. You want to get ahead, but once you've started and have established your momentum, you need to pace yourself with longer-term projects and continuous improvement.

Quick wins also need to be meaningful. It's important to choose ones that are tied closely to goals that matter to your organisation, your department, your boss, or your client.

Tip:

Achieving quick wins should never replace long-term, big-picture planning, and they should always be part of your overall aims and objectives.

How to Identify and Secure a Quick Win

One of the most challenging aspects of securing a quick win is deciding where to focus your energy. When you step into a new role or a new client relationship, you're likely faced with a mountain of new information and new goals. How do you decide where to focus your efforts?

First, give yourself some time to get used to your new position. It's important to build an understanding of your new responsibilities, and your new team, before you create a plan for an early win.

Once you feel a bit more comfortable in your role, you need to decide which goal you want to work on for your first "win." But how do you know which goals will give a quick win, and which ones might turn into major projects?

You can get some ideas by looking at goals already set by your department or organization. Which ones haven't been met yet? Are there any that involve several steps?

An essential tool to use here is the **Action Priority Matrix**. This tool helps you sort through several activities and goals so that you can see clearly which would work best as quick wins, which might be "thankless tasks", or which might turn into major projects.

If you're working with a new client or customer, then run all potential projects by them first. Make sure that your goals, and theirs, are in alignment.

Next, get your team excited and engaged about this new goal, and establish a sense of urgency. This involves regular communication - your team needs to understand why you're all going to work on this goal, and what the immediate benefits are going to be.

Make sure you seek their feedback on the project. Listen actively to their suggestions, and be emphatic if they voice uncertainty or concerns. Remember, they're in a transition phase as well. Respond to their questions and criticisms with candor and respect.

Once you've achieved your first quick win then focus on continuous improvement. It's highly unlikely that your first quick win will be perfect, which means that it can be improved. Make sure that you're humble enough to recognize this!

Common Mistakes

When it comes to securing quick wins, there are some common traps that people fall into.

Mark E. Van Buren and Todd Safferstone from the Corporate Executive Board surveyed 5,400 new leaders to determine how quick wins affected their success or failure. They published this research, titled "The Quick Wins Paradox," in the January, 2009 issue of the Harvard Business Review.

The most common mistake they found was that leaders can focus too heavily on details when they attempt to secure an early win. This intense focus can make you lose sight of your overall goals. It can also alienate members of your new team, and lead to bigger losses down the road.

Another common mistake is reacting negatively to criticism. The authors say that new leaders often focus their quick win on an area they know well. Because of this, they're often unwilling to entertain criticism, choosing instead to view it as an attack on their expertise, or as a backlash from team members unwilling to change.

Intimidating others to get what you want, and jumping to conclusions, are also frequent mistakes.

Do what you can to avoid these common errors so that you, and your team, can achieve a clear and mutually rewarding quick win.

Quick Win Example

Indira, a member of a health care organisation's IT Department, has had several recent successes managing a team while her boss was on maternity leave. When her boss decides not to return, Indira gets promoted to a supervisory role within her department, essentially taking over her boss's position.

The problem is that her organization will soon be making the enormous transition to Electronic Health Records (EHR). This costly and complex transition has been planned for over a year, and Indira's new responsibilities are directly tied in with this transition. Her new boss wants to see proof that Indira is capable of leading a team through a complex project before their go live date.

Indira spends her first 10 days getting used to her new role, and getting a handle on her responsibilities. She knows she needs to secure an early win to put her boss's fears to rest, as well as to assert her authority over her new team.

Using the Action Priority Matrix, Indira is able to sort through the mountain of tasks and potential projects that are on her plate. With the help of the tool, she's able to see that there are three high-impact, low effort projects she could consider.

After consulting with members of her team, she decides to move on her favorite idea: creating an in-house marketing campaign to get the entire hospital excited, and educated, about the transition to EHR. The task is important, because without the education and support of everyone in the organisation, moving to EHR could be disastrous.

The project takes Indira and her team two months to complete. They create a website full of information and benefits about the new system, including simple training videos and podcasts to teach everyone how to use the new system. They even set up a chat feature where anyone with a question can chat live with the IT team when they need help.

Indira's boss is impressed with her ability to get this project completed, and Indira has strengthened her relationship with her new team by turning to them for advice and assistance.

Key Points

Quick wins are visible, meaningful accomplishments that you focus on attaining within the first few months of a new role or new client relationship. Quick wins not only give you much-needed confidence, but they also help motivate your new team, and prove to your organisation that you're worth the investment they've made in you.

The most challenging aspect to quick wins is deciding where to put your focus. Make sure your project is in alignment with goals already set by your organisation. Keep your team informed and excited about the project, and listen to what they have to say.

Avoid making common mistakes when it comes to securing quick wins. Focusing too heavily on details, intimidating others, and jumping to conclusions will produce negative results and cause you to lose ground with your new team.