

# Taking Business to a **HIGHER** LEVEL



An Executive White Paper by  
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Over the past 25 years, I've had the pleasure of consulting with many of the world's best-run businesses. Along my journey, I've witnessed a rising tide of entrepreneurs, business owners, and corporate leaders who now take a different path for themselves and their organizations. It is a path that shatters old models of business measurement and embraces the new realities of our ever changing business landscape.

These pathfinders refuse to succumb to following the omnipresent herd mentality of leading their organizations solely upon the worn-out mantras of more profit and greater market share. They realize that, surrounded by the aftermath of the recession (layoffs, overwork, underpay, limited options), their employees and customers crave something more, something bigger, and something that has more meaning than a stock price or a quarterly return.

Today's most progressive leaders are committed to take their businesses to a higher level. They have moved beyond being caught in the traps of success. Instead, they lead their companies at a higher level that focuses more on purpose, passion, and people than on profit, power, and prestige.

In other words, they lead their firms from success to significance.

## The Higher Level Process

There are four steps to move a business from success to significance: clarity, leverage, execution, and impact.

### Step #1: Clarity

The first and most important step of a higher level business is clarity. Clarity means the business plan and strategy are free from ambiguity, confusion, or misunderstanding. Clarity results in a simple, crystal-clear picture of what the business is and where it is going.

Here are a few of the most critical questions a higher level leader clarifies.

#### What is our purpose?

A purpose is the compelling reason the business exists. It's not a mission statement or motto. Rather, a purpose is the essential core reason the organization must exist and the foundation upon which it will ultimately have impact. Higher level firms understand their compelling purpose ultimately inspires the long-term passion and performance of their people.

#### What is our Point of Dominance (POD)?

The point of dominance is a statement of specific market segment/niche the business will "own." It does not mean this niche is the only customer segments to be served. However, it is the core target group that is served. Without a clear POD, a business often falls into the fatal trap of attempting to be all things to all people.

## Higher level business leaders are therefore called to move their organizations from success to significance!

#### What are our core convictions?

Convictions are those values, beliefs, or attitudes upon which you will never negotiate or violate in business or in life. Convictions are those moral absolutes every employee must embrace and live in order for the business to move to a higher level of impact.

#### What is our brand promise?

Brand promise is the business' true, credible, & measurable customer proposition. It goes beyond a mere marketing slogan or logo. It summarizes the core customer experience from the customer's perspective and represents the business' culture unleashed!

### What is our CoreScore™?

The CoreScore™ is one (no more than two) key operational measure(s) that are the core drivers of productivity and success. The CoreScore™ is rarely a sales or profit number – those are outcomes of successfully hitting the CoreScore™.

A great example of a CoreScore™ is Southwest Airlines' 20-minute gate turnaround. Everyone in flight operations (pilots, flight attendants, baggage crew, gate crew, etc.) understand to reach their financial targets, all ground operation crews must together turn around every plane in

Additionally, higher level firms assess each employee's strengths on at least three levels:

- 1. Work styles** – their natural, intuitive approach to work
- 2. Work rhythms** - their peak performance schedule (PPS) of maximum output and productivity, and
- 3. Work results zone** - the intersection of their passion and skill

**“A good plan violently executed today is better than a perfect plan next week.” General George S. Patton, Jr.**

20-minutes or less. It is their maniacal focus on this one simple measure that ultimately drives Southwest Airline's overall success.

### What are our 3-year strategic priorities?

Higher level firms forecast a maximum of 4-6 strategic priorities per year over the next three years. Each year's Scorecard also contains the 6-8 top organizational goals per year with target results.

### Step # 2: Leverage

The second step in taking a business to a higher level is leverage. Leverage means to maximize both the organizational and individual strengths of the business.

A debilitating mistake made by far too many traditional companies is to waste precious time, energy, and resources in the attempt to improve their weaknesses rather than maximize their strengths. As management guru Peter Drucker taught, a key role of management is to “maximize strengths and make weaknesses irrelevant.”

Within higher level firms, leverage begins with how well the organization is using its non-human resources. I often guide teams through a powerful experience to assess every current and future activity on its impact vs. the effort needed to produce the results. “Sacred cow” projects are quickly killed, and low impact activities either streamlined or all together eliminated.

### Step # 3: Execution

The third step in taking business to a higher level is execution. Execution is the system that produces the desired business results.

Whereas struggling organizations typically focus upon forms, check sheets, and “gotcha” memos, higher level firms understand execution is:

- **Team based** – every employee is held accountable,
- **Leader guided** – leaders inspire excellence rather than force compliance,
- **Systems driven** – all employees know their personal productivity goals, and
- **Time sensitive** – deadlines are taken seriously.

Higher level firms take execution seriously. It's not that traditional firms don't, but higher level firms are passionate about quickly executing the business plan because they understand it, buy into it, and desire to see the long-term fruits of their labor. They live by the execution philosophy of World War II General George S. Patton who said, “A good plan violently executed today is better than a perfect plan next week.”

To ensure effective execution, I coach my clients to create a simple one-page annual MAP (My Action Plan) that lists the firm's annual goals and their personal personal goals.

Every employee then has direct line-of-sight into how their performance drives overall business success.

We further guide our client's execution through creating a 90-Day Goals Board for each employee with dates for goal completion. The Goals Board becomes the leaders coaching sheet to ensure progress and alignment for each employee.

### Step #4: Impact

Ultimately, the outcome of any business effort is impact. There are four levels of impact. Level I is Financial Impact, those traditional measures such as sales, expenses, profit, and return on investment. Level II impact is the Organizational Impact. Organizational Impact includes both internal (resources, culture, etc.) and external (brand, market position, etc.). Without question, all organizations must set realistic yet challenging financial and organizational goals and forecast their impact or risk failure.

Today's best companies, however, take their impact measures to a higher level. Level III impact is Personal Impact. From work-life balance to ensuring long-term employability, higher level firms focus time, attention, and resources on the whole person – not just the worker.

Finally, the highest level of impact is Level IV – Spiritual Impact. In my award-winning book, **Finding and Keeping Great Employees** (AMACOM 1996), I discussed

in detail the four core drivers of business culture: customer-driven, process-driven, innovation-driven, and spirit-driven. As I forecasted back then, the spirit-driven culture remains the fastest growing type of business culture in America (and now in the world).

There are three types of spirit-driven cultures: religion-focused (Chick-fil-A, Service Master), social-focused (Ben & Jerry's, Patagonia), and employee-focused (Zappos, First Tennessee Bank).

Regardless of their core focus, these firms measure their performance at the highest level possible: the soul-deep spiritual impact of what they do upon their colleagues (fellow employees), constituents (suppliers), customers (internal and external), and communities (local and global).

## The Road to a Higher Level

Though following this four-step process, you can lead yourself and your organization to a higher level of significance and impact.

As you contemplate leading your organization to a higher level, may I offer you this caveat?

Leading a business to a higher level is not easy.

**But trust me – it is worth the effort!**

## About Dr. Jim Harris

Dr. Jim Harris is founder of The Jim Harris Group and To a Higher Level LLC, international consulting, speaking, and coaching firms dedicated to guiding leaders and their teams to a higher level of success and significance.

An award winning author, professional speaker, and seasoned business executive, Dr. Jim is internationally renowned for his transformational approach to leadership, business, and people excellence. His clients include such world-class firms as Best Buy, Walmart, IBM, Johnson & Johnson, and State Farm, as well as hundreds of associations, healthcare, and services companies.



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