

## Sole Survivor: Capitalizing on Momentum

*This series of Columns is for the BPM expert who has set up shop as a sole practitioner inside a company. It may be that the organization is brand-new to BPM and this is an experimental venture, or perhaps there is simply not enough money to staff up just yet. In any case, you are largely on your own.*

*In the first Column of this series, I suggested that a way to gain credibility quickly is to choose a methodology and focus on process improvement. The second Column discussed how to find the kinds of opportunities that could have a significant impact on the business and raise your profile. This Column is about some of the things you can do to capitalize on your early successes, and prepare for the opportunity to expand your reach.*

### Become a Sales Pro

Once you have a successful project, you need to use it shamelessly to sell your capabilities. Take every opportunity—every conversation, every presentation, every meeting—to show what you’ve done and brag about it. In doing so, you project enthusiasm and confidence, and you get even more enthusiastic and confident next time. Sounds like a salesman’s job, right? But that’s what it takes to expand beyond a single success. You have swing from technical expert to promoter because it’s the only way to get more successes.

I used to have a guy working for me who didn’t want to get involved in the sales end of the business. He was quite adept at process modeling, running projects and dealing with clients but he saw himself solely as a technical expert. He wanted, he said, to remain “pure”. But of course he was actually relying on other people (including me) to get new projects and hand him work. His attitude changed when he went out and his own and started a business. He quickly learned that purity doesn’t fill the belly.

So learn how to sell. If you’re not comfortable in the role, focus on your work and not yourself, and talk about it. Smoothness will come with practice. You can hire or find someone to do your selling for you, but my experience has been that you cannot totally avoid the role of selling and promoting, so why not get good at it?

### Develop a Plan

Once you begin to be viewed as an asset, potential clients may also begin seeking you out, and that’s great but it can also lead to a trap. Let’s say you have had success running process improvement projects, as I suggested in Column of this

series. One project leads to another, then another and another. Pretty soon you have time for nothing except projects.

Being asked to do the same thing over and over is a form of typecasting, and it can really narrow your range of opportunities. Something like typecasting happened to the Rummler-Brache Group while I worked there in the 1990's. We attained a reputation for our expertise in process improvement, which was enjoyable and profitable for a time but eventually became a restriction. While inside client organizations we would see opportunities to do such things as strategy formulation or organization redesign (which we were quite capable of doing), but we were often not seriously considered because we had been tagged as "the process people". One reason why Geary Rummler eventually sold off RBG and founded Performance Design Lab was so he could return to a holistic approach to organizational improvement.

Typecasting may be okay to you if you have decided that your focus should remain on process improvement. But there's a lot more to BPM—and to organizational transformation—than process improvement, and if you need to do some of those other things (measurement, process management, leadership), you can't just be reactive.

You need a plan even if it's only you just now—a plan that spells out your goals, your strategy and your actions for achieving the goals. The plan should include a section on your clients: who they are, what *their* goals are, how you can help them, what actions you can take to engage them. If you have multiple clients, the list should be prioritized—not every client can be served at once, so the plan should spell out whom should you target for a series of successes that builds momentum and visibility, while remaining open to opportunity.

## Develop a Budget

You also should develop a budget. This should include dollars and the resources you will need to carry out your plan. Another part of the budget, though, should focus on intangibles.

A colleague of mine used to recommend to both managers and fellow consultants that to be successful they needed to have a "behavioral budget". His argument was that because there are only so many hours in the day, days in the week, months in the year, we need to budget our precious time. If we are doing one thing, we cannot be doing another, so what are those absolutely vital things we should be doing to advance our agenda and achieve our goals? And what are those things we should not do, or stop doing, because they suck up valuable time but don't provide sufficient returns? His motto was to "focus on days, not dollars".

## Envision the Future

If you have a plan and budget, it's a projection of how you see the future unfolding—how you will serve your clients, how you will expand your capabilities, how you will build on your successes for greater and greater impact. You may find it helpful to summarize this future in a simple model that you can use to explain your intentions to others. Allow me to illustrate:

In about 1980, Bill Wiggernhorn was hired to establish a corporate training and development organization for Motorola, which had big ambitions to vastly improve

quality and set itself on a path to greatness. So Motorola Training and Development (MTEC) was started up. Within five years Wiggernhorn used MTEC to create Motorola University, had staff and facilities around the U.S. and then the world, and was instrumental in Motorola's winning of the first Malcolm Baldrige Award in 1988.

But that level of achievement was unexpected to many inside the company. Many leaders and employees at first viewed the new corporate training department with hostility. The HR department, inside of which was housed the traditional training departments, fought MTEC tooth and nail for resources and support.

Despite the unfriendly environment, Wiggernhorn had a plan, which he showed periodically to his staff members and selectively to a few supportive executives. The plan was illustrated by a very simple model (see Figure 1, which is a rough approximation from memory), which showed that Wiggernhorn intended to expand MTEC from a mission focused on training and development to a larger mission encompassing performance improvement to ultimately becoming a recognized vendor of training and performance to the outside world. This was an astonishingly ambitious vision, given that few leaders inside Motorola had any faith in MTEC's value at the time. But the model proved pretty darn accurate. MTEC did expand from a training-only role to providing performance improvement services, and eventually it did offer its training products and Six Sigma consulting to Motorola's own vendors and to the external world.

Here are some lessons we can learn from this example about building a vision, a plan, and a model:

- Keep it simple, simple, simple

A lot of "visions" and plans sink from their own weight, overloaded with details that may or may not prove true or useful. I have seen any number of BPM expansion plans that are so laden with information they are almost impossible to grasp. The details have to come eventually, of course, but too much too soon just gets in the way. And a lack of detail actually helps you be more flexible in your thinking. Lock yourself into a highly detailed model of the future and you might turn down a promising but unexpected opportunity because it doesn't fit your model.

- Be careful about sharing the vision

Wiggernhorn did not broadcast all of his intentions, particularly the one about becoming a vendor to the outside world. He could have been accused of empire-building (a fair assessment) and his internal enemies would have been fought him even harder. So he was selective in what he shared and to whom.

- Sell the vision

But on the other hand, use the model to engage and energize those who must or might support you. Wiggernhorn showed his staff his model often, as a way to inspire us (we weren't just doing projects, we were building something) and to help us understand how some decisions were made that would help us along the path (for example, building a bricks-and-mortar school at Motorola, which was not in anyone's plan when MTEC was formed). Once again, salesmanship is an essential skill.

This concludes the sole survivor series. Either you have decided to remain as a one-person shop permanently or you are beginning to build an organization to expand your capabilities. Either way, it's in the plan.

## Author



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Alan was employed by Motorola for ten years as an internal consultant on organizational performance. As a member of the team that founded Motorola University, he was the first person to introduce Geary Rummler's pioneering concepts in process improvement and management to business units within Motorola. Alan advocated and led several of the first groundbreaking projects in process improvement that evolved to the invention of six sigma and Motorola's winning of the first Malcolm Baldrige Award in 1988. Alan was also involved in major restructuring projects at Motorola, and in job design work, compensation planning, workplace literacy, and educational program development.

After joining The Rummler-Brache Group in 1991, Alan led major successful performance improvement engagements within Fortune 500 companies. His experience spanned several industries and the full spectrum of corporate functions and processes, such as strategic planning, manufacturing, product development, financial management, and supply chain. Major clients included Shell, Hewlett-Packard, 3M, Citibank, Motorola, Steelcase, Citgo, Hermann Miller, Louisiana-Pacific, and Bank One. After leading many high-profile projects, he became a partner and Managing Director of Consulting Services at RBG. He led development of much of RBG's products and services, and was responsible for selecting, training and mentoring RBG's consultant teams. Upon leaving RBG, Alan founded his own consulting company, where he continued to practice in the field of performance consulting. He was also involved in several organizational restructuring initiatives in the U.S. and in Asia.

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