

Mastering Relationships

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Purpose/Outcome/Process

“Never confuse motion with action.” – Benjamin Franklin

We don't always know exactly how to execute on requests or activities all the time, because the pace of things can be intense, and the volume of activity and obligations coming our way can be overwhelming.

This pace can lead to overly casual approaches to actions. “Let's meet on Friday and talk about this” often feels like an adequate response to a decision point. But, it might be a recipe for inefficiency and confusion or, even worse, an opportunity forgone which could have resulted in a real breakthrough.

How to fight this?

One very simple and useful tool is POP, which stands for Purpose, Outcome, Process.

How to use it: simply ask, in a formal and sometimes informal way, what is the POP for this activity? This means

- **Purpose:** Why? Why are we undertaking this? What is the purpose?
- **Outcomes:** What specific outcomes do we want to accomplish as a result of this action?
- **Process:** What steps will we take to achieve these outcomes and fulfill the purpose? What will the experience be of people being asked to undertake this task?

This tool can assist you to:

- Help others and yourself get clear on the purpose and outcomes of any intended action.
- Help instill in individuals, teams and organizations an ongoing discipline of focusing on results rather than activity.
- Create more real results with less effort

How to Use It (continued)

Step by Step. First, to your **Purpose**. It is worth spending some time on this. If you think about a meeting with a potential investor, partner, board member, stakeholder, etc, it is tempting to go straight to “my purpose is to get this person to agree to invest.”

Probably not. Your purpose, at the highest level, is to engage the person across from you in such a way that they like you and are comfortable with you, are interested in what you're doing, and might be willing, at some point, to have a more meaningful conversation about a partnership.

The implication of thinking about your purpose very carefully, and in the broadest possible strokes, creates an opportunity to think through all the ingredients and actions that might serve that purpose. Instead of bringing a term sheet, you might instead

- Research what they're interested in
- Find out where they live and have lived before
- What they used to do professionally
- How many children they have
- What their latest blog post was about
- What they've invested in before
- etc etc.

And then you would build a process, later, that incorporates all sorts of activities that you wouldn't necessarily think of if you were simply trying to “get an investment.”

Then, to the **Outcome**. In this case, this might be simply to open a more durable channel of communication and to find out a way to schedule another meeting or encounter. Whatever your outcome is, *it must be tangible and action-oriented—a visible result that can be seen and touched by everyone*. Such as:

- Write X down and put it in Y location
- Assign follow-up to this person, with these parameters, and create a check-in schedule
- Reach out and make sure that this upcoming encounter has an agenda and is supported with these documents

The **Process** supports in a very specific way the purpose and outcomes. As mentioned, the pop for a meeting with the potential investor would include a fairly exhaustive list of

advanced research into the person's interests, history, context in which they work, and any other potential benefits or constraints that would enhance or inhibit their ability to engage with you in a meaningful way. Any effective encounter should be supported by a process—for example, read this document in advance that outlines the problem and the potential solution and come ready to offer two other solutions; reach out to the client and describe the ways in which others have managed through this situation, create and post a checklist that has input from all the participant for review, etc., etc.

When to use it:

When initiating any purposeful activity – small or large:

- a telephone call
- a meeting
- when coaching or training individuals or groups to be more effective.

While it can be used in a specific situation to help focus planning, its greater value comes from establishing it as a regular habit in groups to fine-tune group performance in advance of every activity.

An Example: POP and Meeting Planning.

We want our meetings to be a productive use of our time and energy.

No item should go on the agenda without:

- a clear purpose and specific outcomes that are worth the time and attention
- a process that will likely achieve the purpose and outcomes in the allotted time

Critical questions in planning a meeting agenda might include:

- Is the Purpose clear?
- Is the Purpose relevant and of interest to most of the people attending?
- Is the Purpose sufficient to warrant the investment of time?

Critical questions regarding Outcomes in planning a meeting agenda:

- Are the Outcomes clear and specific? A useful guide to action?
- Do the Outcomes advance the Purpose?

- What would success look like? How will you know if you have accomplished your Outcome?
- Are the Outcomes of sufficient importance to warrant the investment of time?
- Are the Outcomes realistic given the amount of available time and the information/expertise present in the room?

Critical questions regarding Process in planning a meeting agenda:

- How exactly will the Process deliver the outcomes?
- What kind of facilitation will be needed to ensure success?
- Where might there likely be breakdowns in the Process?
- How will you handle breakdowns if they arise?

An Example: POP and an Important Conversation

We often feel like “we need to talk,” without planning for the conversation. Conversations are the most important relationship management tool available to anyone, so they deserve at least a POP.

Purpose: why am I initiating this conversation? To change the working relationship forever? To re-establish a more effective working relationship? To understand why my colleague is acting a certain way? To share something important to me?

- After some thought, it is to create a shared understanding of the situation without pushing toward a solution, but in preparation for a second conversation.

Outcome: at the end of this conversation, what will be different, exactly? Will this person no longer work here? Will we have an agreement going forward that frames the new style and/or process that governs our relationship? Will we both have a crystal clear picture of how we both see the situation we are in?

- And agreement, written down, to schedule and structure a second conversation.

Process: am I bringing an evaluation process to bear on this conversation? Are we looking over materials together? Do I have a proposal that I want this person to understand? Will we look over a new contract? Have I prepared the meeting adequately in advance, with an agenda, background materials, and a clear statement of outcome?

- Share a document that outlines the challenge as I see it, without offering a solution.

An Example: POP and a lunch date with a key influencer

- Purpose: To establish a relationship that lasts with someone who I think will be a positive force in what I am trying to do.
- Outcome: A positive impression. A second meeting. An introduction to others with a similar background.
- Process: look up this person's background and connections on the internet. Think through areas of common interest. Find something to share with this person that will help them see the possibilities in moving forward in collaboration with you. Prepare your calendar for a second meeting. Think through additional easy requests. Find something that you can help this person accomplish.