

HORIZONS OF FOCUS[®]

—DAVID ALLEN

THE ALTITUDE MAP

“Work” is defined and managed from at least six different horizons, corresponding to different altitudes of perspective. These range from core intention—the understanding of the purpose and values of an undertaking, enterprise, or life—to the most mundane—the next physical actions required to move them forward. Clarity is enhanced and distraction reduced when the multiple horizons with which you are engaged have been assessed and the commitments emerging from each one have been appropriately identified, captured, and implemented. Alignment of the various horizons produces maximum productivity.

Priorities are determined from the top down—i.e. your purpose and values will drive your vision of the purpose being fulfilled, which will create goals and objectives, which will frame areas of focus and accountability. All of those will generate projects which will require actions to get them done.

Each horizon is equally important to clarify, however, to get things done, and the content of your thinking and commitments will be different on each horizon. A key driver for your life may be to assist others in achieving their dreams (purpose), which you will express by becoming a world-class athlete and spokesperson (vision), for which you will achieve a starting line-up position on a national team (goal). To do all this you need to maintain a rigorous training program (area of focus). You realize you want to get a new personal trainer (project), for which you need to call your college coach (next action) to get his recommendation.

An altitude map can be used to identify which conversation, at what horizon, with yourself and others, might have the most value, at any point in time. It could be at any level or include a combination of them. You may know the long-term goal but have yet to identify the projects needed. You may know the vision but not the actions and who’s doing them. Etcetera. Keeping your thinking current at all horizons is a dynamic process—as your world and your awareness of it change, so must these arenas of your focus be continually updated.

Following is a generalized list of the Horizons of Focus, with typical formats and suggested frequencies of visitation. (Samples given from a hypothetical business—Gracie’s Gardens.)

HORIZON 5: Purpose and Principles

Ultimate intention for something, and the standards for its success. Why are we doing this? What are the critical behaviors?

Formats: Off-sites with partners, board, team, family; initial discussions for launching projects, meetings, whole enterprises; life planning

Frequency: Whenever additional clarity, direction, alignment, and motivation are needed

(Gracie’s Gardens: “Provide the highest-quality landscape and garden materials to delighted retail and wholesale customers”; “Strong and lasting customer relations; environmentally friendly products; well-supported staff,” etc.)

HORIZON 4: Vision

What it will look, sound, feel like with successful implementation. Long-term outcomes and ideal scenarios.

Formats: Off-sites with partners, board, team, family; initial discussions for launching projects, meetings, whole enterprises; life planning; annual revisiting of enterprise direction; ideal scene development; personal treasure maps

Frequency: Whenever additional clarity, direction, alignment, and motivation are needed

(Gracie's Gardens: "Recognized as the #1 garden and landscaping store in the Tri-County district; a fun, interesting, creative, informative place to browse and shop, attracting discriminating clientele who love to spend time and money on an on-going basis," etc.)

HORIZON 3: Goals and objectives

What do we want and need to accomplish, specifically, within the next 12 to 24 months, to make the vision happen?

Formats: Off-sites with partners, board, team, family; strategic planning; annual goal-setting and broad planning sessions; life and family planning

Frequency: Annually; quarterly reviews and recalibrations

(Gracie's Gardens: "By year-end, 15% sales growth, 20% profitability, wholesale business established and in the black," etc.)

HORIZON 2: Areas of focus and accountability

Important spheres of work and life to be maintained at standards to "keep the engines running."

Formats: Job descriptions; organization charts; employee manuals; personal lifestyle checklists; family responsibility designations; project checklists

Frequency: Performance reviews; monthly personal check-in's; whenever job or life changes require reassessment of responsibilities

(Gracie's Gardens: "Executive, administration, PR/marketing, sales, finance, wholesale operations, retail operations," etc.)

HORIZON 1: Projects

Outcomes we want to achieve that require more than one action and which can be completed within a year.

Formats: Overview list of all projects; project plans (defined sub-projects)

Frequency: Weekly Review; whenever next action contents are not current

(Gracie's Gardens: "Set up wholesale division, get the books current, hire Director of Marketing, finalize Acme contract, upgrade HVAC system," etc.)

Ground: Calendar/Actions

Next physical, visible actions to take on any project or other outcome; any single action to take about anything.

Formats: Calendar, Next Action lists (e.g. calls, errands, at home, at office, talk to boss about...); action folders or bins (e.g. read/review, bills to pay)

Frequency: Multiple times daily; whenever a question about what to do next

(Gracie's Gardens: "Draft plan for wholesale division, email Sandy re: bookkeeper recommendations, call Brandon re: lunch meeting, review Acme purchasing history, surf web for competition ads," etc.)