

The Focus Project



Filtered Thought Leadership “Top Business Books Summarized for Financial Planning Leaders”

November 2020

By Eddy Ricci, CFP®

Presented By

lead  *advisor*

www.lead-advisor.com

Accelerating Firm Building and Career Advancement for the Wealth Management Community

Active Search & Recruiting | Resources & Research | Concierge Advice & Consulting

lead  *advisor*

RICCI, CFP® 1



www.lead-advisor.com

Active Search & Recruiting

We provide insight and time leverage for firms and practitioners looking to grow their team. We actively find talent with a niche focus in wealth management.

Resources & Research

Check out our simple tools and content for geared for both career seekers and employers in the wealth management space.

Concierge Advice & Consulting

We help our clients think creatively about practice growth, facilitate study groups and other customized engagements to provide our perspective from talking to wealth management professionals every day on the front lines!

Contents

Introduction.....	4
What is Filtered Thought Leadership?	
Preface for This Edition	
Key Concepts & Ideas	5
“The Focus Project” Summarized	
Eddy’s Commentary for Advisors.....	11
Eddy’s Commentary for Wealth Management Firm Leaders.....	12

Introduction

What is “Filtered Thought Leadership”?

The purpose of “Filtered Thought Leadership” is to provide the “key concepts and ideas” from today’s top business and leadership books to professionals in the financial advice industry. I am not sure if I love the phrase “filtered” but you get the point.

It’s tough to argue against reading more, as we know it will help us be better professionals and leaders—however it can be tough to find the time and focus to complete recommended books. I found in my financial planning career, countless books were recommended to my peers and I, even given as gifts. The majority of us had good intent to read these books however we rarely make the time to complete the books we know we should be reading.

This is an attempt to summarize books in a few pages, specific to the concepts that can best help people in our profession. This will be a tool to keep advisors and leaders aware of key studies, trends and ideas that will aid their conversations with prospects, candidates or the advisors they coach.

The final pages offer my perspective on how the core concepts could be implemented by leaders in the financial planning industry. I offer the key concepts FIRST, without my suggestions, so that you can think freely of how you could apply before seeing someone else’s take on implementation.

We purposely omit fancy fonts, pictures (unless necessary) and stick to basic text to comply with reading “on the fly” and avoid formatting issues depending on your device.

This Edition

“The Focus Project”

By Erik Qualman

2020 Published

“The Focus Project” is about achieving more by doing less. The author, Erik Qualman, known as Equalman, is a best-selling author and speaker on the topic of digital leadership. He broke through with his book “Socialnomics” in 2008 around using social media in your business and life. He has been the head of marketing for various companies and now runs a marketing firm in addition to being an international speaker.

In “The Focus Project,” Qualman walks us through a yearlong experiment where he “focuses” on one important part of his life each month. The book is influenced by the author’s own experiences, other books and many studies. When Qualman asked some of the most successful people in business what their number one challenge was, it was “focus.”

Just in time for “planning season,” use the summary to think about what are the FEW things that require your FOCUS in the new year instead of piling on the priorities. I enjoyed this book and highly recommend it for you and your teams to read in its entirety going into a new year.

Key Concepts & Thoughts

Qualman kicks off by sharing that the number one challenge of the most successful people he talks to is “FOCUS.”

He shares lack of focusing on what matters most is like an illness sweeping the world right now and it drains energy and attitude. “PURSUE LESS IN ORDER TO ACHIEVE MORE.”

Being overscheduled isn’t something to be proud of - it’s something to avoid at all costs.

Qualman shares that each month throughout the year, he will relentlessly focus on ONE THING that matters most in his life. Before he dives into the learnings from each month, he shares an overview of findings.

- Systems, routines and processes trump willpower
- A not-to-do list is more important than your to-do list
- If you try to help everyone, you will end up helping no one
- Trying to be the best at everything is the surest path to being the best at nothing
- Start simple
- How we spend our days is how we spend our lives

He goes on to other notes for a focused life through his project, listing 99 in total. I will share my favorites:

- Questions are the building blocks of great relationships
- Our children will not always listen to us, but they always watch what we do
- Innovation is simply a series of failures
- Planning makes the difference between relaxing and rushing
- If it doesn’t challenge you, it won’t change you
- Less, but better. The best productivity tool is the word NO
- TIME is how kids spell LOVE
- Leaders know that “let’s get started” is better than “let’s get ready”

Qualman gives a simple table for figuring out which parts of your life may require more focus. The largest gap between importance and performance may be the places to start.

Item	Importance	Performance
Family	10	3

From here Qualman challenges the reader to have their own focus project by:

1. Determining what you want out of life and what makes you happy
2. Intentionally focus on each and every day
3. Pick one thing each month, each day - to be hyper focused on.

The book then follows 12 chapters of monthly focus.

January's focus was on "growth." Specifically, here, Qualman was focused on growing the business. In order to do a project each month, he knew the business would have to be humming. For a first focus project you should choose the one thing right that must go right for everything else to become doable.

Since FILTERED THOUGHT LEADERSHIP is for busy business leaders, we will spend the most time on summarizing this chapter.

Sales growth is measurable and may be the most challenging part of his life. He decided on sales for 2 hours per day for 31 straight days in January.

Accountability Study from American Society of Training and Development calculated stats on the probability of completing a goal:

- You have an idea or goal 10%
- You decide you will do it 25%
- You decide when you will do it 50%
- You commit to someone you will do it 65%
- You schedule accountability check ins: 95%

Qualman shares a business story about the importance of FOCUS and Growth. In short, Yahoo!! in 1998 was the 6th most recognized brand in the world, simply for being a search engine. They wanted to be so much more - sports, weather, news, finance, etc. To help with search technology, they started to work with a small tech company lead by 2 Stanford PhD's, who had an algorithm called PageRank. The students offered to sell the algo for \$1MM to Yahoo!!, Yahoo!! passed because they instead wanted to buy Overture and get into pay-for-click ad business. Within four years, PageRank went from offering the sale of their algo to Yahoo!! from \$1MM to \$5 Billion. At that point, Yahoo!! execs were hesitant to buy it, because they recently bought BROADCAST.COM for 5.7B from Mark Cuban, but never integrated it and was suffering from the loss. Yahoo! was trying to be good at everything instead of focusing on their search engine function. As you guessed, PageRank and the two Stanford students were Larry Page and Sergey Brin - Google's founders

"Life is simple, but we insist on making it complicated" - Confucius

Sales is about helping your prospects FOCUS. Questions that are too open, too big or too overwhelming maybe good in learning about a prospect but may hinder them from focusing on a decision to take action. Sometimes asking a prospect what they DON'T WANT can help them focus and eliminate over-thinking.

In business, keep your emails SHORT and HUMAN. The use of images can help the client focus.

People remember and connect more to "strange" numbers. Instead of asking for what a 5-star experience looks like, ask what an 11-star experience looks like.

The best way to build relationships is to ask focused questions that help the respondent deliver focused answers.

In case you were wondering, Qualman had a record sales month in January by focusing 2 hours a day for 31 days.

February was dedicated to focusing on Time Management. This was mostly on protecting his schedule and getting organized. He uses an analogy about luggage. **HARD LUGGAGE** has a limit, **SOFT LUGGAGE** allows you to keep stuffing things in for the trip! Often the soft luggage breaks or doesn't fit in the overhead compartments... We overstuff our lives too frequently.

"For every minute spent organizing, an hour is earned." - Benjamin Franklin

Qualman goes on to talk about "triggers for habits." This work is influenced by **ATOMIC HABITS** by James Clear. (We reviewed this book earlier in 2020. Please reach out for that summary.) In short, you write out trigger statements pairing an existing habit that is followed by a new habit you are looking to build. "AFTER I DO _____ (established habit) I will _____ (new habit)."

Thomas Corley spent five years researching habits of the rich. A common habit was blocking out time to think and brainstorm in their calendars. The ten core topics they think about: career, finances, family, friends, business relationships, health, goal setting, problems, charity and happiness. Often, asking themselves the following questions:

- 1) What can I do to make more money?
- 2) Does my job make me happy?
- 3) Am I exercising enough?
- 4) What charities should I be involved with?
- 5) Do I have good friends?
- 6) Which business relationships should I spend more time on? Pull away from?

Multitasking decreases your IQ in the moment by up to 10 points which is the equivalent of the effects of not sleeping for 36 hours or twice the impact of smoking marijuana.

Qualman goes on to talk about how **NOT TO DO** lists are more important than **TO DO** LISTS. He shares that Warren Buffet suggests people to write down 25 career goals on a single piece of paper, then circle the top five and then separate into two lists, - the top five and the other 20. You may have assumed that Warren would want you to spend most time on the top five and then chip away at the other 20 when time allowed. Warren said that was wrong...and that the list of 20 should be the 'AVOID AT ALL COSTS' list until the TOP 5 list was completed.

Qualman references being organized and focused during meetings and shares Jeff Bezos' two pizza rule that many of us have heard. If 2 pizzas cannot feed the amount of people in the meeting, then there are too many people in the meeting and productivity will go down.

The three-minute rule: If something can be done in less than 3 minutes - do it now. Less than three will set you free.

"Simplicity is the ultimate sophistication"- Leonardo da Vinci

March was dedicated to family and friends. Here Qualman gives examples of how he had to start saying **NO** to more things in his life to spend quality time with his family. He offers 5 ways to say **NO**.

- 1) Don't overthink it and just say no, politely. "Sorry, too much on my plate right now."
- 2) Alternative. "I can't today but tomorrow I will be in that area."
- 3) Plan out your no's by knowing your schedule each week and letting people know: No, because of the project you are working on...

- 4) Be selfish. It's your schedule not theirs. You can't reach your own goals if you are always taking on someone else's challenges.
- 5) Start small by saying NO to two things this week.

Shoot for harmony and blend, not balance.

Where can you trim time? Where can you cut 25% of your time?

April was dedicated to HEALTH for Qualman. Below are some quick hits from the chapter:

- If you are having a hard time falling asleep, drink this: 1 cup warm water, 2 tablespoons of organic apple cider vinegar and 1 tablespoon of organic honey.
- Wake up times for top executives: Tim Cook 3:45 AM, Richard Branson 5:45 AM, Bog Iger, 4:30 AM.
- Snooze buttons are set to 9 minutes because 10 minutes will get you back into a deep sleep, which would then mess with your brain hormones for the rest of the day.
- Qualman made a WORTH IT/NOT WORTH IT list for himself. Worth it was GOOD WINE, GOOD PIZZA, CHOCOLATE AND BRIE.... not worth it was WHITE CHOCOLATE, AIRLINE FOOD, SUBPAR WINE AND MAYONNAISE.
- He references SELF CONCEPT THEORY which states if you think you are something, you are more likely to do it. "I am a smoker, who needs to quit" won't be as effective as saying "I'm no longer a smoker."

May was focused on relationships. Ask yourself, "Am I happier than I was last year?" Much of this happiness may be connected to deepening relationships which requires INTENTIONAL and QUALITY time.

Bezos asked himself these three questions before he hired someone at Amazon, and it ties to business relationships: 1) WILL YOU ADMIRE THIS PERSON? 2) WILL THIS PERSON RAISE THE AVERAGE LEVEL OF EFFECTIVENESS? 3) MIGHT THIS PERSON BE A SUPERSTAR?

7 seconds is all it takes to make a first impression. The best ways to strengthen strong impressions and relationships: 1) Let the other person do the majority of the talking 2) Smile 3) Be Vulnerable 4) Give a Sincere Compliment 5) Tell a Story

June was dedicated to learning. A month of focused learning is better than 10 years of nibbling at the edges.

A women's college golf team had an average score of 101 which was cut to 81 in one year, with a new coach. The new coach focused 5 of 6 days practicing on the short game only instead of mindlessly hitting balls. Intentionally focus on the 1 thing that will make the more dramatic difference.

For the best learning, turn to the outside. Hasbro was thinking about how they could get more out of the MONOPOLY brand. They decided to learn from a survey of Monopoly players instead of coming up with new internal ideas. They found out that 50% of players cheat at the game. So, they made a CHEATER'S EDITION which became the most successful launch in over 100 years in the company.

July was focused on creativity. The key learning here was what BILL GATES learned from WARREN BUFFET. Warren flipped ahead to his calendar a few months out to show what APRIL looked like and there were only 3 calendar entries. Warren said there would only be 4 or 5 by the time

April rolls around. He does this so he has time for deep thinking and key relationships. Bill used to think every minute needed to be packed. Richard Branson leaves time in his calendar just to dream.

When failing, we tend to get creative with ADDING more options to help us improve. We should get creative in what he can take away. BURBN(inc) was a social media app that did “check ins”. They were running out of money and realizing that users weren’t using all the features. The one feature that they were using were posting stylized photos of what they were doing. Updating people by PICTURES only.... BURBN(inc) took away all other features and became Instagram.

Doing more work outdoors can lead to more creativity. We spend 90% of our time indoors.

August was focused on empathy. Loving someone doesn’t mean making life easy for them. You can prepare the road for the child or the child for the road. Qualman uses a baseball story and the size of home-plate to teach empathy is about accountability. A retiring coach in Nashville addressed 4,000 coaches to explained what he learned about life. He asked, “how wide is home plate in Little League?” - Someone said “17 inches” The coach asked again about how wide the plate is in high school - same reply - 17 inches... he goes on to COLLEGE and then the MINORS and then the MAJORS. The answer was always 17 inches. He then asked, “what do they do with a big-league pitcher who can’t throw the ball over 17 inches?” They get rid of him!... Don’t make the plate wider for your kids.

September was focused on mindfulness. The key here is being mentally present in the particular place you find yourself. Studies show that you can train for willpower in two ways: physical activity and meditation. A Stanford psychologist shares that willpower is our body’s ability to send extra energy to the brain’s prefrontal cortex which keeps track of our goals and overrides impulses/cravings. Our willpower can be depleted during the course of the day.

Stress can kill brain cells and even reduce the size of the brain/shrinking the prefrontal cortex, responsible for learning and memory.

Qualman talks about the Diderot effect in this chapter. Diderot created the encyclopedia but was far from rich. His daughter was getting married and he couldn’t afford a wedding until Catherine the Great bought his personal library from him. With his sudden wealth he then bought a new robe. His new gown was so nice it made all of his other clothing look out of place....so he replaced everything....and then went into further debt than he was before! He was not mindful of his new wealth.

Bestselling author, James Clear offers help around this issue: 1) Buy items that fit your current system 2) Don’t buy anything for a month 3) Buy one and give one to someone else...you want a new TV, give your old one to someone 4) Wanting is an option, not an order you must take!

October was dedicated to giving. Give people more focus - instead of asking them how they are doing, ask them to rate how they are doing 1-10 but cannot use the number 7 for a score. Too many people select 7 and you don’t know where they stand. An eight or higher you can feel like they are in a good spot. A six and below likely not in a good spot.

The Ben Franklin effect shares that people will LIKE YOU MORE if you ASK THEM TO DO YOU FAVORS. Ben was trying to win over a statesman that opposed his policies. This person had a rare copy of a book, and Franklin asked him if he could borrow it. Then man said yes, Ben read it and then wrote a thank you letter. They became lifelong friends after this.

November was dedicated to gratitude. Qualman references a study by Will Bowen who has had 11 million people take his challenge of going 21 days without complaining about anything. Bowen says,

“complaining is like bad breath, you notice it when it comes out of someone else’s mouth, but not when it is out of your own.” Trade your expectations for gratitude.

Qualman concludes the book in December for the reader to start creating their own story.

Eddy's Commentary for Advisors

The Focus Project had many thoughts and anecdotes that could be helpful for an advisor. Some were on how you run your business and others were about tactical communication changes when working with clients.

The Focus Project reminds us that we can overcomplicate our lives. Many times, we can overcomplicate our process with clients. It could be a prudent exercise to have your advisor peers and other trusted professionals with no financial planning expertise audit your typical client presentation. How do you present the financial plan? How do you explain recommendations? Is it too complicated for most people to focus and take action? Can we ask clients what they “don't want” when we are feeling stuck in a process and looking for them to make a decision? How can we better understand the “clutter” that is getting in the way of inaction?

Create FOCUSED questions so they result in FOCUSED answers for your clients.

If you ever use a 1-10 rating system when asking clients questions, (with 10 being a perfect score) tell them they cannot score themselves a 7 so you have a better understanding of their feelings on the topic. 8 and above is much different than 6 or below. 7 you cannot get a good read on.

We know that prospecting is what drives revenue as an advisor and is often what advisors, at every level, can improve upon. Whether it is the process in obtaining referrals, the quantity or the quality, even top advisors admit they “aren't good prospectors.” Qualman references the self-concept theory where habits are more likely to be followed when it is part of your identity. So instead of saying, “I need to prospect better” start reconditioning to “I am a top tier prospector.”

Can you build referral language based on the Ben Franklin concept – people will like you more if you ask THEM for a favor. Can you simply use language such as, “Mr. Client, could you do me a favor?” Assuming a yes... “Can you introduce me to your colleague....?”

Leave “white space” in your calendar. Most of us cannot have a calendar like Warren Buffett's, with only 5 meetings per month. We can however block time to simply think about the business.

How can you keep your emails to clients OR new emails to prospects both SHORT and HUMAN?

Eddy's Commentary for Firm Leaders

I was very guilty (and I still am in some respects) of “adding on” to our systems when in firm leadership. A new training, another weekly meeting, etc. It was always in effort to be more supportive to our advisors. As I consult with firm leaders/business owners and I continue to read great business books like The Focus Project, it is clear that I need to creatively think about eliminating more and master a few systems, maybe you and your team do as well. Maybe you can ask yourself and team, if we had 1 system for activity coaching, 1 system for sales skills and 1 system for knowledge/planning acumen, what would it be in each category? How do we then MASTER that one system in each category and have accountability on both the firm's part and the advisor's part in each. Activity accountability may be easy - but what are the mutual accountability systems for the firm and the advisor when it comes to skill and knowledge?

Firm leaders probably need more “white space” in their calendar for thinking and brainstorming, than most professionals since there are so many demands. “Being overscheduled isn't something to be proud of, it something to avoid at all costs.”

For many firm managers/leaders, recruiting will drive the economic engine of the office. Much like Qualman, can you dedicate 2 hours a day, for 31 days straight, towards recruiting efforts?

“Questions are the building blocks of great relationships.” - What are the five questions you or your team members NEED to consistently ask in an in-depth interview with a potential advisor?

Can you run through Bezos' questions with your team before you make an offer to a candidate:
1) Will you admire this person? 2) Will this person raise the average level of effectiveness? 3) Might this person be a superstar?

When coaching advisors, help them understand the study around accountability from the study of American Society of Training and Development referenced above. How can these statistics be weaved into your interviewing process or annual planning process, so advisors understand most of the exercises and meetings you hold for them? (vision/study groups/1x1 activity coaching).

How can the golf coach story about focusing 5 of 6 days on the short game to lower average team score from 101 to 81 be used in your training and coaching? What is the keystone skill that needs to be practiced over 80% of the time?