

High Leverage Activities (HLAs)

Do you want more leverage and better results from your time? If your answer is yes, then read on. The core Tony Jeary International methodology is *Strategic Acceleration*, which spawned from his thirty-seventh book, a best-seller with the title of *Strategic Acceleration: Succeed at the Speed of Life*. The core of the book is what is often referred to as the magic formula—Clarity, Focus, and Execution—which is now utilized around the globe in a worldwide movement. The single biggest takeaway from the book, which falls right in the very middle under “Focus,” is *High Leverage Activities* (HLAs). So many people and so many companies fail to super-charge because of poor prioritization at all levels. The book has been proven out now for over a decade in small- and medium-sized companies, as well as in some of the largest cultures in the largest organizations in the world. The message is simple: HLAs are the cure for time and resource waste.

Focused Thinking Produces Extraordinary Results

It’s pretty safe to state that everyone wants better results in both their personal and professional lives. In order to achieve better results, though, you must eliminate the distractions that plague you daily and learn how to identify and focus on the things that really matter. If you

can identify the activities in your day that will produce the greatest impact, and then find ways to concentrate on those activities most of the time, your results will be vastly superior.

There is a popular anonymous quote that says, “What consumes your mind controls your life.” If you want extraordinary results, and if you want to get those results faster, in a compressed time frame, it requires focused thinking. Focus is not something that comes naturally for most people, and that’s why it’s a skill that must be learned, polished, and practiced.

Distractions are a natural occurrence in every person’s life. When something pops into our mind, our brain often wants to move in that direction. If we lack the discipline and focus to stop that process, distractions can rule our lives and consume our valuable time. *No single skill or habit has a more powerful impact on results than the ability to eliminate distractions and focus on the High Leverage Activities (HLAs) that have the greatest potential to advance your strategic goals and objectives.*

Understanding Leverage

Every journey has its starting point; and your journey to your organizational or personal vision begins with: 1) clarity of what you want, and 2) understanding time and leverage. We all have the same amount of time, and in essence we can only find more time for one activity by taking it from some other activity. (The one exception is what Tony has termed an *Elegant Solution*—when you are so clear on what you want to accomplish that you can often stack them, doing two or three things at once.)

So how do you know how to budget your time? You use an “organizing principle” that assigns a value to time. I believe the single most powerful organizing principle is maximizing leverage by prioritizing action according to which actions are highly leveraged (produce extraordinary results faster) and which actions are low leverage.

In order to determine leverage, you have to have a North Star to guide you—a crystal-clear values-based vision of what you want to achieve, both personally and professionally. With a constant vision to guide your efforts and the organizational principle of high leverage, you are on the road to success.

Once you have a clear vision, you can begin to set realistic goals. Every goal carries a “to-do” list required to achieve the goal, which can get pretty long and complex very quickly, even in small organizations.

When looking at the concept of *High Leverage Activities*, you must determine which tasks will move you toward your goals, which are the building blocks of your vision, with the resources you have. To some degree, all organizations have limited time, money, and talent. The ultimate plan is figuring out where to put those resources to drive the results you need to reach your goals.

In the Rights of Medicine Administration creed for nurses, the mantra is “the right dose of the right drug for the right patient at the right time.” The same concept holds true in management. You have to apply the right resources at the right place in the right measure at the right time. So how do you know the answers to those questions? You evaluate their potential leverage.

Goals are not created equally in terms of moving toward your vision. Some get you there quicker than others. Some cannot be achieved until others are achieved first. Action items aren't created equally, either. Some move you toward your goals more quickly than others. You, as a leader, must evaluate each task's potential leverage. That's what *High Leverage Activities* are all about. You have to weigh the return (movement toward your vision) against the investment of resources required for each.

When you can apply the concept of leverage to your thinking, you can create strategic conditions that allow you to win more frequently and expend less energy or effort in the process. This means getting more done with less.

HLAs: The Cornerstone of Extraordinary Results

High Leverage Activities (HLAs) are those actions that will result in the most valuable outcomes and advance your vision faster. They are the absolute answer to superior execution. Superior execution often means getting things done right the first time, meeting deadlines, exceeding expectations, and strategically managing resources. It means creating more value at higher levels of efficiency. Superior execution means getting extraordinary results faster. When a significant portion of time (yours and your organization's) is invested in focusing on and leveraging these activities (six to eight), it will mean you're constantly making the most positive choices, and a winning trend will get established faster.

When you have multiple objectives, how do you prioritize them? You use the HLA principle: Determine which objectives will get you where you need to go the fastest with the

most minimal use of resources. How do you determine which tasks will achieve your objective fastest? Use the HLA concept as your core organizing principle. HLAs provide a common language for motivation and communication.

Using HLAs also provides clarity for action. Your people see that driving results for a vision is the common denominator for decision making, and not politics or personalities, and they accept the need for common action. Using HLAs, your people will see rapid progress they probably didn't think possible; nothing is more motivating than seeing success happen.

HLAs also give you a common denominator for measuring and evaluating. This gives team members confidence that results matter, results will be rewarded, and results measured will be real. And HLAs provide a method for individual achievement. They can see and measure their progress relative to effort expended and know when they are really helping move the needle.

How to Identify Your HLAs

High Leverage Activities get you the results you need faster, with less expenditure of time, money, energy, and talent. Conversely, *Low Leverage Activities* (LLAs) consume resources and drive results more slowly. Identifying HLAs is simply a powerful organizing principle for prioritizing your to-do lists. It gives you a much better sense of what's activity and what's productivity. (Google Tony Jeary's "Activity Versus Productivity.")

MOLO (More of/Less of) is a powerful exercise introduced in the book to help you identify what should be done more often or less often to ensure your time is best invested on proactive, productive HLAs instead of on time-wasting, less effective tasks. The idea of MOLO

is to determine what you need more of to achieve the goals that build your vision. Sometimes you are making an affirmative statement that you need less of something because you know it's eating resources to no purpose (like excessive meetings). Often, though, you discover that you need less of one thing, because to get more of another you have to redirect finite resources. Life (and business) is full of tradeoffs.

Top of Mind (TOM) is another requirement for developing a sustainable HLA list. The things you think about the most occupy a theoretical place Tony calls *Top of Mind*. If there is a particular opportunity that consumes your thinking, that's a clue that the topic may be an HLA. If your vision requires a dramatic increase in sales and you have been thinking about where sales opportunities are geographically or demographically located, then opening new territories may be an HLA.

The 80/20 rule—the notion that 80 percent of our results come from 20 percent of our effort, or activities—is a powerful concept for both life and time management. In fact, leveraging that truth can revolutionize your results! You simply identify the 20 percent of your activities that are producing the best results and focus on those things; those activities then become your HLA's. When your ability to eliminate distractions and focus on those HLAs becomes a habit, your entire life will change, and the results you achieve will be dramatically improved. And since our personal lives spill over into our professional lives and vice-versa, HLA's represent a better way to think about everything we do.

Another significant lesson for leaders relating to HLAs, which Tony emphasizes in his work *RESULTS Faster!* is saying “no” strategically. Learning when and how to say “no” is one of the most valuable lessons of leadership. Handling “no” the wrong way can cause disastrous

consequences, and yet handling “no” the right way can become a strategic habit. Gaining leverage in your life starts with focus, and focus is the key to tackling HLAs.

As you begin to create and identify your own HLAs, it’s important that they be directly related to your strategic vision and, of course, align with your brand. Simply stated, if an action item does not have the potential of furthering your vision or brand position, it’s probably not an HLA.

One of the major differences between the people who get the results they want and those who don’t is how they are investing their time. Anyone willing to seriously evaluate how they’re spending their time can identify the minutes they are wasting every day. It’s unrealistic to think you can work 100 percent of your time within your HLAs. The goal is to invest the bulk of your time (70+ percent) on HLAs, in both your personal and professional life, and to organize your time in such a way that you can efficiently handle those necessary items that are LLAs without giving them an inappropriate amount of time and attention. The key point is that an HLA focus helps filter out tasks or commitments.

Here are a few examples of HLAs:

- Coaching and nourishing your team members
- Impacting those you serve
- Planning your day
- Sharpening your skills/learning

Distractions often pull us down to *Low Leverage Activities*—those actions that consume our time that have the least amount of return toward our vision. LLAs are typically task-oriented in nature.

Some examples of LLAs are:

- Wasted meeting time because of poor preparation
- Doing activities your subordinates should be doing
- Chasing down things due to lack of organization (on your computer or in your desk, your briefcase, etc.)
- Unnecessary paperwork
- Prolonged telephone calls

Take a minute to think about this question: What percentage of your time do you (and your team) spend in *High Leverage Activities* (HLAs), and what percentage of your time do you (and your team) spend in *Low Leverage Activities* (LLAs)?

Working in HLAs is a mindset. It creates clarity of what is important. It supports a culture focused on productivity based on the right things, and it's about executing for exponential results FASTER.

Exercise: Documenting Your Professional and Personal HLAs

HLAs aren't just for corporate planning, organizations, or team management. The concept is every bit as valid (perhaps even more) for individual leaders in planning and executing their specific role and their overall lives. It doesn't matter if you are the CEO or receptionist or front line manager. The HLA concept moves all needles, and all needles need to move.

Tony created a time model that shows we all start with 168 hours in a week; when you take away 56 for sleep and 12 for maintenance, that leaves you with 100 hours—50 to invest in your professional life and 50 to invest in your personal life. What we all have in common is an absolute limit on time. The goal, then, is greater utilization of your time to produce the right results faster. You need to start with clarity of vision. What do you need/want to accomplish? Then MOLO your life, personally and professionally. What do you need more of and what can you do with less of? Maybe you need more time to think or to work on an important presentation. Maybe it's coaching others. Or as CEO, maybe you need more time to consider acquisition opportunities to attain your vision. You only have so much time, so what can you use less of to gain the time required?

Use the MOLO matrix below to determine what you need more of and less of...

MOLO (More of ... Less of)

What do we need to do more of?

#	What	Why	Who
1			
2			
3			
4			
5			

What do we need to do less of?

#	What	Why	Who
1			
2			
3			
4			
5			

What do we need to start doing?

#	What	Why	Who
1			
2			
3			
4			
5			

What do we need to stop doing?

#	What	Why	Who
1			
2			
3			
4			
5			

What do we need to do differently?

#	What	Why	Who
1			
2			
3			
4			
5			

Now, using the information you gained from the MOLO exercise, as well as the *Top of Mind* and 80/20 rule concepts, list six to eight HLAs for your professional life and six to eight HLAs for your personal life:

Professional:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____
6. _____
7. _____
8. _____

Personal:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____
6. _____
7. _____
8. _____

Exercise: Documenting Your Professional and Personal LLAs

Now let's look at your Low Leverage Activities (LLAs). Using the same information, document below some of the LLAs you have identified in both your personal and professional life. What are you doing that distracts you from doing the HLAs that will lead you to achieving your vision faster?

Professional:

- 1. _____
- 2. _____
- 3. _____
- 4. _____
- 5. _____

Personal:

- 1. _____
- 2. _____
- 3. _____
- 4. _____
- 5. _____

Author Bio:

Tony Jeary, The RESULTS Guy(TM), is a prolific author with more than fifty titles and advisor to the most admired companies in the world. He personally coaches the presidents of such companies as Walmart, Sam's Club, Ford, Firestone, TGI Fridays, Shell, Texaco, and American Airlines. His agency, headquartered in the Dallas/Fort Worth area, has the single focus of helping its clients think better, hence clarifying visions and then ensuring those visions become reality in less timeframes than most people can even imagine. He lives next to his RESULTS Center. Tony has been happily married for more than twenty-five years and has three great kids—two exceptional adult daughters and one extraordinary son-in-law.

Visit www.tonyjeary.com