

# Focus

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[Home](#)[Mission](#)[Services](#)[Testimonials](#)[Clients](#)[About](#)

## Stay Focused and Flexible

It's easy to lose focus when things get busy, or just plain bad. Change, and particularly uncertainty, causes most people to narrow their thinking to "tried and true" techniques. Moreover, we can get so caught up in details that we lose sight of what's really important - the big picture.



The best course of action is always a balance of focus **and** flexible thinking. For example:

- What do our customers value NOW? Look to your best customers for guidance on this.

- What do we deeply understand, and do exceptionally well?
- What do our customers want more of? Less of?
- What things are we now doing that - honestly, now - we're not very good at?
- What underserved needs can we use our skills to profitably serve?

These are simple questions, but digging deeply for the answers can reveal great opportunity.

For example, Tom's Electric Appliance Manufacturing Co. (TEAM Co.) was losing market share to low-price competitors, so the senior management team thought deeply about their business. They discovered their strengths were:

- We understand home kitchens and Moms
- We're good at designing practical and reliable small electrical appliances
- We know Moms want convenience and speed in the kitchen
- We're good at managing our sales channel to retail stores

However, the TEAM leaders also recognized they were inexperienced at direct business-to-consumer marketing, lacked the styling to compete in the high-end gourmet market segment, did not have a flexible supply chain, and were not very good with electric motors.

So, TEAM Co. chose to design two new mass-market products with patents that would make me-too imitations difficult. Each product had benefits their core customers would appreciate, and the simple design kept manufacturing costs down. The MultiMode Griddle and FastBake toaster oven were both successful products.

TEAM Co. also did another very smart thing: All employees were encouraged to develop "Stop doing" lists for consideration by managers. Productivity rose, morale soared, and the president wondered why he hadn't done that sooner.

Keep your eye on the bridge to the future, remember what you stand for and do really well, and think creatively!

*Tom Wagner*

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