



Focus

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Your “Sarah Palin List”

Today is Election Day, and the American electorate will choose leaders who reflect our political priorities. Priorities and politics remind me of a term I coined some months ago while talking with a client: a Sarah Palin list. The idea behind it is always relevant for leaders, regardless of the electoral calendar.

My objective for a Sarah Palin list is to maintain focus on your most important issues, and the analogy of crib notes written on one’s palm seems appropriate.

As a reminder, during a speech in February 2010 cameras recorded 3 key topics the former Alaska governor had scribbled on her left palm. Palin was ridiculed by her political opponents, but the concept was a good one! Never lose sight of the important issues, and keep the reminders handy, *pun intended*.

A Sarah Palin list is not a set of principles, or life goals, or key metrics, or a routine to-do list. Instead, this list includes the top focus areas for the present. (The “present” is, of course, where we live, so keep an elastic concept of the time frame covered by that term.) Your focus areas could include completing a major project, or competing for a customer, cash flow, or other business or personal issues important to you. The significant point is to maintain disciplined thought and disciplined behavior in a prioritized, systematic approach.

For example, suppose growing your business by building your brand is a strategic priority. This is a long-term proposition, and most businesses don’t have enough money to do it quickly. So, how would a long-term project fit a Sarah Palin list? The answer is to focus on the next action necessary to achieve the long-term goal. In this example, you’d use the next step in the brand-building process. That might be data gathering or budgeting or carrying out a specific activity. The important thing is to keep working, bit by bit, on the big and important long-term goal. If you don’t keep the “next action” steps in mind, the chances are you won’t reach your destination.

The number of items on your Sarah Palin list should be limited by the *spirit* of what you can write on your palm. It should also be in your routine scan – something you'll notice regularly.

Right now, glance at your left palm; that's the ultimate in accessibility.

Tom Wagner

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