



chapter 3

NIDO QUBEIN on Being Focused

Nido Qubein came to the United States as a teenager with a head full of dreams, a handful of English words and no contacts. He also brought the simple belief that a clear vision, hard work, discipline and focus would make those dreams come true. It worked. Today, the widely acclaimed business leader, author, speaker, consultant and philanthropist not only lives his dreams, he has dedicated his life to helping others seek and achieve their dreams, too.

Nido is the recipient of significant speaking awards including Master of Influence, The Golden Gavel (from Toastmasters International) and the International Hall of Fame. He is also the recipient of many honors, including the Ellis Island Medal of Honor, and he is the founder of the National Speakers Association Foundation.

Nido Qubein has demonstrated his leadership as chairman of Great Harvest Bread Company (with 210 stores in 39 states); CEO of Creative Services, Inc. (an international management consulting firm); corporate director of BB&T Corporation (the 11th largest financial institution with 28,000 employees and \$91 billion in assets); and chairman of McNeill Leberman (a public relations and advertising agency). He has also served on the board of directors for 13 organizations.

How has Nido achieved such impressive accomplishments? To put it simply, he's focused.

Excellence is a habit

Nido Qubein is known as the entrepreneur who teaches transformational leadership, which he's been doing since the mid-1970s through consulting, writing, speaking, training and education. It's been an evolving process. He began with just a body of information; then he honed it and improved it. In time, it has developed into a reservoir of knowledge, and then at some point, it evolved into a degree of wisdom.

He came to America for college at age 17. He had 50 dollars in his pocket, and he didn't know a single person. In addition, he spoke very little English. He worked 10 hours a day to pay for college and taught himself English. He learned the language by taking 3x5 cards and putting 10 English words on those cards. He memorized the spelling and meaning of those 10 words. The next day, he would take another set of 3x5 cards and write another 10 words while reviewing the 10 words from the day before. By doing that daily, he developed a habit. Aristotle said, "Excellence is not an act. It's a habit." It's a habit that we acquire through training and habituations. Something that is worth doing is worth doing well. He discovered that good habits are hard to develop, but they're easy to live with. He also discovered that bad habits are easy to develop, but they're hard to live with.

That's how Nido learned the English language: slowly and methodically. The average American has over 5000 words in his/her vocabulary. When Nido was 17 years old, he knew only a few dozen English words. However, he went on to write

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over a dozen books, create 100 audio programs, and develop 100 videos that were translated into 19 languages for over 70 countries. He completed his undergraduate and graduate degrees in business, and upon graduating in 1973, he started a

business selling leadership material through direct mail. He built that business slowly and surely, then sold it and began others. Today he runs four businesses and serves on the boards of numerous others.

The point is simple, Nido says. “No one can whine as to why they can’t achieve their goals or dreams. You have to be willing to work hard enough and smart enough.”

Life lessons

Four fundamental principles helped Nido get to where he is today. First, he learned that there are two pains that each person suffers from. You either suffer from the pain of discipline or you suffer from the pain of regret. One of the primary characteristics that a person must develop in order to create a solid business is discipline. We must be tenacious. We must be committed. We must be able to work hard. Most people are willing to work eight hours a day and think that they can succeed that way, but that is a very limiting premise. We have to work hard, smart and with discipline. For example, Nido reads two books every week. Each day he gives himself one hour to study on a topic or area of his interest. He also writes or calls at least three of his clients every day, which supports his commitment to be a conflict-free person. He chooses not to have problems in relationships. Once a year, the week before Thanksgiving, he makes a list of people with whom he’s had a conflict or disagreement. He approaches them and tries to resolve that problem and work through it.

He also learned that who you spend time with determines who you become. So, if you want to become successful, surround yourself with successful people. To become great, you must first walk hand-in-hand and side-by-side with great people. He learned that by:

- Emulating heroes, models and mentors.
- Reading hundreds of biographies and autobiographies of accomplished human beings.

- Observing the mistakes of others.
- Deciphering and analyzing the failures that he has had in his own life and extracting from them ideas and methodologies so he can do better next time.

The third fundamental principle is that learning is a continuum. Every single day before he goes to sleep, he asks himself, “*What did I learn today that I did not know yesterday?*”

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Then, of course, you have to learn that you can be creative, but more importantly, you have to be innovative. How can we do this differently, how can we do this better?

He has probably had a million examples of failure. He once invested in a business that he knew very little about. When the economy turned and things got tough, he found himself in an argument with partners, and realized that he stepped into that business because of emotional decisions, not rational ones. Consequently, he didn’t know enough to save himself and he wound up losing a lot of money.

We do all kinds of little things that eventually add up to big things.

Lastly, Nido learned that you must have consistent execution. We have to stick to it. We have to persevere. The tipping point doesn’t happen

until the cumulative effect takes place; we do all kinds of little things that eventually add up to big things. In business, there are no rose gardens without thorns. There are always things to deal with and to work on.

The biggest influence

The single most influential person in Nido’s life was his mother. She had a fourth grade education, but Nido would put her care, dedication and character against 25 Ph.D.’s from the

finest Ivy League schools. She worked day and night to feed five children after her husband died when Nido was six years old. She went on to instill solid wisdom and gave very fruitful and purposeful suggestions, recommendations and guidelines for living life to the fullest. His mom would say, for example, always learn from the experts because the experts have their knowledge in order. If your knowledge is not in order, then the more of it you have, the more confused you become. Meaningful change comes from within, so make sure you change yourself from the inside out. When you do that, you will find that while every improvement is the result of change, every change does not necessarily result in improvement.

Later, he learned all kinds of things from many other influential people, such as business people, industrialists and community leaders. One of these leaders is William Horney. At 85 years young, he is a man who built a business, is an industrial leader, a highly respected community leader, and an individual who understands that it's better to give than to receive. He understands the basic principals of how to run a business and how to be a transformational leader. After Nido met him at a social gathering, they met frequently, talked often and dialogued about life. They became very close friends. Eventually, William became the chairman of Nido's scholarship foundation. The Qubein Foundation gives about 50 scholarships to college students every year. Through osmosis, observation, advice and guidance, William molded much of Nido's thinking and contributed considerably to his ability to be a leader himself.

Meeting the challenge to stay focused

In developing a business or a personal brand, the biggest challenge Nido sees for himself and others is staying focused. Focus becomes actually more important than intelligence. If there's a choice we have to make in life, it is whether or not we choose to be in focus.

When our life is dynamic, when we have many

opportunities, when we're invested in a variety of avenues, it is challenging to stay focused. Without focus we really can't get much done. We won't be very productive. Behavioral economics says that for every behavior we display, there

Focus is a by-product of purpose.

must be economic benefit. We must get something in return. If we're not focused, we'll do many, many things. Even a good time manager can't be as high

a performer or as productive a leader if they aren't focused. When we focus on the most important thing, we find that other small things take care of themselves. Focus is a by-product of purpose. The clearer our purpose in life, the more focused we are on our true priorities. Once we're focused, we know which areas to delegate, which areas to completely throw out the window, and which areas to devote our best resources to.

When we're in focus, our life takes on a new level of clarity. Just as a camera lens focuses light to form a photographic image, our mind focuses our thoughts, feelings and actions to form a clear picture of who we are and where we're going.

Focus leads to balance, which means success

To the question, "How do you define success?" Nido responds with one word: balance. When he is spiritually, mentally, physically, socially and economically balanced, then he regards himself as successful. He's focused on maintaining a balanced perspective in his life. He wants to be socially active, economically independent and progressive, developing spiritually, growing intellectually and physically fit. Although work is very important, each area really matters. We have to focus on all of the things in life that contribute to progress and satisfaction.

Nido implements his philosophy on a daily basis by first understanding what his priorities are, then working according to those priorities – starting with the most important thing

first. Putting this into practice on a daily basis becomes habitual. We get into the habit of doing whatever it is we believe is most important to us. The key is to organize and schedule your day and your life in a way that is non-controlling and allows you to delegate tasks to others.

The personal rewards of Nido's business success include a feeling of fulfillment, clarity of purpose, and the feeling that his efforts to make the world a better place to live and work will help him become a better person. He gets a great sense of gratification from his work. The principal reward couldn't be measured by money, awards, connections or by businesses. At the end of the day, we are measured by the people we have helped, the legacy we have left, the stewardship we are invested in, the philanthropy we have exuded and displayed, and by the seeds we planted in the lives of other people so that they can go out and do something worthwhile in their life.

We multiply and leverage ourselves through other people. That is why Nido is so engaged in areas of life that really do not have anything to do with him making money. In fact, they sometimes cost him money. Along those lines, he does a lot – whether it's chairing a \$20 million campaign for his alma mater; sponsoring a Thanksgiving luncheon for 600 business executives to remind them of what Thanksgiving is all about (which he's done for the last 13 years); bringing famous speakers and singers to inspire and inform them; chairing a United Way campaign; or being invested in his church. Each one of those things brings him a much greater sense of purpose than making money, or claiming high speaking fees, or receiving the Golden Gavel or the Cavett Award, or any other professional achievement.

If I were to die tomorrow, what would I most regret having not done?

Clearly, it's about purpose. It's about fulfillment. It's about answering the question, *"If I were to die tomorrow, what would I*

most regret having not done?" And since you're not going to die tomorrow, what's keeping you from doing that? Self-interest is a wonderful thing, but enlightened self-interest is 10 times better. Nido quotes William Barkley, the Scottish theologian, who said, "Always give without remembering. Always receive without forgetting." Whether it's about giving in business, giving in life, giving money or time, whether it's giving advice or coaching ... this is what makes life truly fulfilling. If we find the happiest people in the world, we find that they are engaged passionately in something they care about, something that they would do even if they weren't getting paid. That's why they live longer and happier lives, and that is why they are more effective.

Get the client to say "I need you in my life"

Nido is a critical thinker who helps his clients build transformational leadership in their organization. As a consultant, his strongest ability is to guide others through critical thinking to arrive at premises that are based in reason and on sound assumptions, and therefore can help contribute to good strategies. For example, he's the chairman of Great Harvest Bread Company, and he's been able to guide the leadership of that company in building more stores and becoming a national brand. They've taken the branding initiative from brand awareness, to brand preference, to brand insistence.

He worked with another company that was doing about \$10 million in domestic sales 25 years ago. Today it's about \$700 million. People don't stay in the business – as he has for nearly 30 years, generating millions in fees each year – without really being a sound advisor and without creating bottom line results. The thing that he and his consulting company are always after is getting enough clients to say: "I need you in my life." If they can get a client to say that, they have a client who is committed and loyal. Then they continue to build sound business relationships and trust. Trust leads to reason. Once

they have a reason for the thinking processes, they focus on the issues at hand that can best bring the desired result. Focus leads to value and value leads to success.

In the consultant's world, expertise is essential to success. Nido's expertise is in critical thinking and transformational leadership – in helping leaders grow employees that are high achievers, peak performers or terrific producers. He delivers his service through blended avenues of learning – auditory, kinesthetic and visual. He uses the written form, the oral form, the in-person form, and other formats to make sure that the individual learns. Then, delivery includes a follow-up process to ensure that what a person understands intellectually is in fact something that they will apply to get solid results.

The most important competency

For Nido, the most important skill is listening. If you assume instead of listening, you often conclude the wrong things. Listening means you have to hear what the other person says, but more importantly, you have to hear what she or he doesn't say. You listen with both your ears and your eyes. You listen with both your brain and your heart. You listen with both your experience and your capacity to project forward. When you listen, you really listen for someone's needs, fears, aspirations and goals, and then bring forth what you know. Listening is a very, very tough competency. Listening can lead to focus. Listening can lead to reason. Listening can lead to education. Listening can lead to solutions. Most people want to fix the blame. A listener will always aim to fix the problem.

He figured out the importance of listening the same way he's learned everything else. He read about 200 biographies and autobiographies of great people. He also applied a simple exercise: find people you admire, look for the commonalities they all possess, and write down the five features

Listening is a very, very tough competency.

or characteristics that make them extraordinary. Nido found that each person has some unique attributes and some common attributes. One pattern that all of these extraordinary people have is that they are good listeners. Consequently, he concluded that listening must be a vital skill to possess.

Nido focused on acquiring that skill. When watching television, for example, he'd listen to what the broadcaster said and then when the broadcaster finished saying a sentence or two, he would mute the television and repeat out loud what the broadcaster just said. He'd do it again and again and again. In a meeting, for example, he would listen to what someone said and before responding, he would attempt to summarize what he thought that person said. He made listening an active process. He did profiles to learn about the different kinds of listeners, like the appreciative listener, the comprehensive listener, the evaluative listener, the discerning listener. He would try to figure out what kind the other person was and how to engage the person most effectively.

Like any activity, listening is a discipline. Remember, it's about discipline or regret. Life doesn't give us what we need. Life gives us what we deserve. We have to focus on a habit. It's the same way he learned English with 3x5 cards. It's the

The best way to be interesting is to be interested.

same way he learned quotations, by writing them down, carrying them around, looking at them 10 times a day. If we want to focus on listening, then with every person we talk to we have to really listen – to their name,

to what they say – and we must be able to repeat what they said back to them. And then we find that excellence is becoming a habit; it's not an act.

Albert Hubert once said, "One machine can do the work of 50 ordinary people, but no machine could do the work of one extraordinary person." Extraordinary people always are very good listeners. That's why we find them interesting. The best

way to be interesting is to be interested. Part of being interested is being attuned to what the other person is saying to us, not only verbally, but what they are saying nonverbally as well.

Positioning versus promotion

Nido doesn't really *promote* – he *positions*. It doesn't matter how much we know or what we can do. What really matters is what other people believe and perceive we can do for them. Nido wants his personal brand to stand for value. As a result of knowing him or doing business with him or being engaged with him, people benefit in a very valuable way – value based not on how he defines it, but on how the other person interprets it. Essentially, he positions himself as a problem solver, a solution provider, a critical thinker who can guide his clients to the microcosmic essence of the issue and then gently help them arrive at conclusions that make sense. He provides a clear vision, a solid strategy, practical systems and consistent execution.

To be more specific, Nido positions himself as a resource of value in numerous ways. He connects with his clients frequently. He works from a list of 100 of his most important contacts, and once a month they receive something from him. He employs the generosity factor. If he sees a book that he likes, he might buy 10 copies of it and send it to his clients. He participates actively in his community, and he has been the trustee of probably a dozen organizations. He's on the board of all three of his alma maters as well as the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. He engages in philanthropy and stewardship, and sends the message to others about what is really important to him. He's the founder of the National Speakers Association (NSA) Foundation, and even has an NSA award of philanthropy named for him. He also donates at least 20 percent of his income each year.

While that doesn't sound like positioning, it actually is. Take his definition of success: balance. He wants every piece of

his life to execute itself according to the way he lives his life. Ironically, all of these pieces position him, all of these pieces promote him, and each piece creates what he calls relational capital. There are four kinds of capital: (1) financial capital, (2) reputational capital, (3) educational capital, and (4) relational capital. The more people we know, the more circles of influence we engage in. Somehow, in some way, the universe has a way of taking care of us. Nido gets his enormous referral circle working for him. All of his business comes from referrals. He strongly believes that when we do good, somehow good comes back at us.

What really matters is what other people believe and perceive we can do for them.

He has a very, very full plate, but it's all purposeful, useful and meaningful. He has intentional congruence working for him. All of the things on his plate interrelate with each other. They feed into each other. They propagate each other. There is leverage and synergy working for him, and the results end up being tremendous.

Personal branding tips

First and foremost, you have to extend *genuine value*. Clients will pay attention when you help them get what it is they want from life. The number one thing is to be valuable – to ensure that results are created when people do business with you.

Second, you must be *authentic*. Authenticity is significantly greater than charisma. While being charismatic and dynamic are wonderful traits, being authentic is precisely what the world expects of you. Another big piece of authenticity is congruence. If you have congruence in your life, then what you say, how you think, and the way you act comes together to make a complete picture. What matters even more than what you do is who you are. The state of being leads to the state of doing. You have to “be” before you can “do.” That’s what authenticity is all about. It’s comes from within the person.

Third, be a *disciplined worker*. Figure out which parts of the day are the most creative hours for you. For example, early in the morning is Nido's most creative time. That's when he does his best writing and thinking. He reserves the afternoons for meetings because it's a less productive time for him. That discipline is a big point, especially for the self-employed professional. Entrepreneurs have no boss watching over them to make sure they are getting the job done. They have to be their own boss. They have to supervise their own behavior. Part of that discipline is a belief in behavioral economics, that every behavior you display must produce economic benefit.

Personal brand management is a discipline

Personal branding means you've got to tell people who you are, what you do, and why your service is better than, different from or more special than your competitors' service. It is about your uniqueness, your differential advantage or your unique selling proposition, and it's about you being a real person. Personal branding is about how other people perceive you. It's about shaping the first thing they think when your name pops up.

Personal branding is about how other people perceive you as a real person.

Nido has a brand. He wants his name to be associated with the image of an immigrant entrepreneur who came here with nothing, and went on to build wealth and significance in his life. He wants to be remembered as the man who helps other people, who teaches other people how they can be transformational leaders and build better companies, and grow better people, and make better contributions to the world.

Eight Insights from Nido Qubein on Being Focused

1. Having a focus is a by-product of purpose. The clearer your purpose in life, the more focused you are on the areas that really have priority in your life.
2. Good habits are hard to develop, and they're easy to live with. Bad habits are easy to develop, and they're hard to live with.
3. Something that is worth doing is worth doing well.
4. Always give without remembering. Always receive without forgetting.
5. Extraordinary people always are very good listeners. Make listening an intentional focus of habit.
6. It doesn't matter how much you know or what you can do. What really matters is what other people believe and perceive you can do for them.
7. Our state of being leads to our state of doing. We have to "be" before we can "do." Be authentic.
8. There are no rose gardens without thorns. When things get tough, the tough get going. Consistently execute, and persevere.

Nido Qubein's Viewpoints

We can't motivate people

"How do I motivate my team to do the things I want them to do?"
The answer is: *"You don't!"* We can't motivate people. They are already motivated. But you can determine what motivates them and use this knowledge to channel their energy toward your organization's goals.

All people are motivated

Some people are like water in a faucet. They have the motivation; all you have to provide is the opportunity. The water is already motivated to flow, but it doesn't have the opportunity until you open the tap. Others are like mountain streams, which flow swiftly but follow their own channels. People, too, may move energetically, but toward their own goals. We should make it worth their while to channel their motivation toward the results management is seeking.

People do things for their own reason, not yours or mine

When asking people to do something, we need to illustrate what's in it for them. It could be through rewards and recognition, or appealing to their sense of pride and achievement.

The key to effective communication is identification

When something becomes personal, it becomes important. When our clients and our employees begin to identify with who we are and what we are, good things begin to happen.

The best way to get people to pay attention to you is to pay attention to them

That means *listening* to others, not just hearing them. Listening is active; hearing is passive. If you listen to individuals long enough, they'll tell you what their concerns and problems are. It's amazing what you'll learn.

Pride is a powerful motivator

Everybody is proud of something. If you know what makes your people proud, you can use that insight to channel their motivation.

You can't change people; you can only change their behaviors

To change behavior, you must change feelings and beliefs. You must connect with people, not just communicate with them. This requires more than training. It requires education. When you train people, you just try to teach them a task; when you educate people, you deal with them at a deeper level relative to behavior, feelings and beliefs. (The word education comes from the Latin word *educo*, which means to change from within).

The listener's perception becomes the leader's reality

What they see is what we get. When we speak to a group, they don't respond to what we say; they respond to what they understand us to say. When others observe our behavior, they respond to what they perceive us to be doing.

We all judge ourselves by our motives; but we judge others by their actions

Put another way, we're inclined to excuse behavior in ourselves that we find unacceptable in others. When our employees are late for work, it's because they're irresponsible and have no interest in their jobs. When we're late for work, it's because we were attending to necessary details that had to be taken care of. When team members engage in undesirable behavior, we shouldn't try to assess motives or change them. Just deal with the behavior. We can't change the motives of our employees, but through positive or negative reinforcement you can affect their actions.

And finally...

Nothing can add more power to your life than concentrating all your energies on a limited set of targets. ¹

Simon Says ...



To watch a sample video of Nido's dynamic presentations, go to www.nidoqubein.com and click on Audio/Video Clips.



Read *How to Be a Great Communicator – In Person, on Paper, and on the Podium* by Nido R. Qubein.

Those who learn to communicate effectively with people at all levels, of both genders, and from a variety of cultures and backgrounds will be the pacesetters. Your power to influence the lives of others is as great as your ability to communicate. This book will show you how to communicate effectively with diverse audiences.

