

Benjamin Franklin “Invented” *Self-Help* and *Strategic Planning*

What I learned from my 11th grader’s US History assignment and how it applies to today's institutions

As a former Presbyterian and avowed Deist in his later life, Benjamin Franklin rejected the sentiment that church teaches people how to be good Christians, and advocated his higher cause of teaching people to be good people. (This is not the time to debate the correctness of his perspective, but to learn how we benefit from it.)

With this notion, Benjamin Franklin “invented” both self-help and strategic planning!

In 1726, at the age of 20, he launched a personal project to arrive at “moral perfection.” As he reflected on it, he believed in the value of the progress, even without the achievement of the goal. Further, upon reflection, Franklin realized many direct and indirect benefits he had not considered in advance: specifically in learning about himself and the people and institutions around him, and by building relationships with mentors.

Modern people and organizations can use this model in the strategic development of their own businesses, schools, or nonprofits and of their leaders and employees. His process is straightforward, focusing on the mission and the metrics to track his progress.

Franklin’s structure: mission, goals, strategies, tactics, metrics, and communication!

Mission: To achieve moral perfection, as an example for future generations.

Goal: To replace poor habits and offenses with virtuous ones.

Strategy: Develop a list of virtues & define them simply. Order them to facilitate adoption.

Tactics: Focus on each one for a week in turn until mastered. Chart transgressions daily.

Metrics:

**KSF*'s – A supportive wife, wise friends, diligent tracking, and weekly analysis.

**KPI*'s – Number of transgressions decreases over time, even after adding a new habit.

Communication: Include section on this topic in autobiography* to share with everyone.

(*This book is where I discovered Franklin’s foray into self-help and strategic planning.)

Ask us to help you use this model to support your Corporate Social Responsibility or Family Philanthropy strategic planning initiatives.

For the curious, Benjamin Franklin’s precepts were:

1. Temperance – eat not to dullness; drink not to elevation.
2. Silence – speak not but what may benefit others or yourself; avoid trifling conversation.
3. Order – let all your things have their places; let each part of your business have its time.
4. Resolution – resolve to perform what you ought; perform without fail what you resolve.
5. Frugality – make no expense but to do good to others or yourself (i.e. waste nothing).
6. Industry – lose no time; be always employed in something useful; cut off all unnecessary actions.
7. Sincerity – use no hurtful deceit; think innocently and justly; and, if you speak, speak accordingly.

8. Justice – wrong none by doing injuries, or omitting the benefits that are your duty.
9. Moderation – avoid extremes; forbear resenting injuries so much as you think they deserve.
10. Cleanliness – tolerate no uncleanliness in body, clothes, or habitation.
11. Tranquility – be not disturbed at trifles, or accidents common or unavoidable.
12. Chastity – rarely use venery but for health or offspring, never to dullness, weakness, or the injury or your own or another’s peace or reputation.
13. Humility – Imitate Jesus and Socrates.

[Note: A friend added that last virtue to the list; clearly Franklin never achieved it.]

Thank you, Jennifer Levine Hartz, corporatehartz@yahoo.com, 404-285-4725.