

A woman with curly hair is smiling and looking towards a man who is partially visible on the right. They appear to be in a meeting or collaborative work environment. The woman is wearing a dark top, and the man is wearing a dark sweater and glasses. They are sitting at a table with papers and a glass of water.

5 Winning Ideas to Improve Your Business Results

(even when already doing well!)

These ideas are for you – and every size of team

Standing still should never be an acceptable option in any business. Unless you are improving, you are already slipping back.

Through personal experience of leading businesses and as a consultant to organisations of all sizes these 'winning ideas' have proven success.

They can work for you.

Tricordant consult with leaders equipping them to overcome challenges and achieve great results.

You need to improve. You've tried it before but not got the desired results. Now it could be different.



At Tricordant we know through research and practice two principles causing the need to improve:

- Poorly organised work wastes money and damages people
- Pressure on leaders to deliver results can lead to poor decisions

Our 5 Winning Ideas:

1. Top Drawer
2. Quarter Challenge
3. Embrace the Eco-System
4. Grow Your Strengths
5. Refine Your Processes

Special Bonus Idea (when you really want to grow):

Overhaul Performance Management

Each of these winning ideas is tried and tested.
You could soon be at the stage of doing them all.
Realise amazing results and wonder why you hadn't done this before.

Let's get down to business (growth!)

Winning Idea Number 1: Top Drawer

The name top drawer comes from the day when all we had was paper and the things of greatest importance were kept in the top drawer of a desk. In English it also has the meaning of high social standing and importance.

This is an improvement idea of great importance – but maybe not able to be implemented just yet.

The principle here is ‘what if...’ I remember once as an IT Director asking my team to compile a shopping list of all the hardware we needed to totally re-equip the organisation I worked in. They thought I was crazy especially when the total cost came to multiple £million. Then one day I received an email asking for bids for capital monies needing to be spent within the next four weeks. Within an hour of receiving the message my bid was in and I received over £3million to buy servers, computers and more. I knew these kind of capital opportunities came now and again, and I wanted to be ready.

Nobody thought I was crazy then!

The principle of ‘what if’; just like scenario planning in strategic development is about thinking through what opportunities you can take advantage of. Maybe a financial windfall. A competitor going out of business or launching a new and better product.

There will be many opportunities to consider in your business.

Maybe you have the ideas already or you may want to organise a brainstorm session with a group of key staff. Think the unthinkable.

Develop a Top Drawer improvement idea for when you need to bring it out (the process can also benefit your strategic planning).

This is one to have fun with and someday you will be ready to reap great rewards.

Winning Idea Number 2:

Quarter Challenge

I love this idea and use it regularly as a mainstay of my improvement consultancy work with clients, as I did in my operational leadership.

Challenge because you are going to challenge a group of staff to improve an area of the business where they are currently unhappy.

Quarter because you will do this on three month cycles, so up to four times a year with a different group of staff dealing with different challenges. (You may choose to only do twice, missing holiday or very busy seasons.) You may even end up with parallel groups.

This idea is so simple and so rewarding (for the business and staff involved):

- **Bring together a group of staff**
 - Could be a specific department, but better if across the organisation (or different teams in same department)
 - Include people from all levels (but not the most senior)
 - Include the outspoken and radical (maybe even those seen as difficult) – but do keep a balance
 - Depending on the size of business/department your group could be from 6 through to 20 in size
- **The group determine the topic; not you or other leaders. You only pose 1 question and 1 challenge:**
 - What is the thing in the company (Department) that most dissatisfies you and you want to see improved?
- Develop the way to improve it and how it can be practically implemented within 3 months (or so)
- **A clear briefing is essential:**
 - Their task is directly related to improving the business
 - Minimal (or no) budget is available (at least initially)
 - They self-appoint a leader of the group and also one or more people to record their outputs
 - They will present to a group of senior leaders who will challenge to determine robustness of thinking
- **Hold the presentation and do everything you can to accept the idea. Be positive and help to refine if necessary. Be prepared to be surprised and personally challenged. Please really listen to what they are saying to you.**
- **Communicate, communicate and communicate. Let the whole business know what you are doing and how much you appreciate the team. Celebrate success along the way.**
- **Repeat with a new team.**

TOP TIP

These groups will be even more effective when leaders can be part of the team rather than being an outsider. Once your employees know you are serious with involving them go ahead and join a team; but remember you are not the leader of the group. It will be even more insightful.

Ideas will have varied levels of success. It is essential to always celebrate the team for coming up with the idea; then let them have another go – soon!

Winning Idea Number 3: Embrace the Eco-System

This idea should just be 'Listen!' but that sounds harsh and most leaders already think they do listen; but do they? What you think?

No doubt you've heard the classic eco-system explanation – put a bowl of boiling water into a fridge and what happens? The cold fridge wins. What happens when people or new ideas are introduced into your business? Do you really know or just think you do?

How much time do you spend listening in and to your business?

Stephen Covey in his book '7 Habits of Highly Effective People' lists as habit 5 'seek first to understand then to be understood'. Great leaders listen and understand their organisation.

Who and what makes up your eco system?

There will be staff (different levels and teams), customers and suppliers but there are also the various processes and products or services that make up your business.

The starting point for this winning idea is to map your eco system. You may want to do this with other members of your team.

How do you listen to and embrace an eco-system? Here are 2 top tips:

- Engage people in conversation and invite them to talk openly. This is not a time to be defensive. Just listen and take notes. Do this with individuals and with groups. Cover all levels and disciplines of your business. Include new starters and an absolute must is to engage with suppliers and customers. Make this part of your monthly work disciplines and keep it going – you will be amazed at what you learn (good, not so good and downright poor).
- Observe the work and ask questions of the team doing the work. Make this a positive time where the staff know you are looking to them for ideas on how to improve. This is absolutely not about finding fault or laying blame. For you this may be a tremendous development opportunity.

This winning idea is purposefully placed in the centre of the 5 ideas. It is central to all your improvement work.

When you are known for wanting to improve and to positively engage with your eco system you will get significant input. And improve your business results.

Give it a try!

Winning Idea Number 4: Grow Your Strengths

Do you know your strengths, personally and in the business? If not, its time you did. If you do build on them to improve your business.

In terms of personal strengths consider taking a Strength Finders assessment. This is a profiling tool developed by Gallup based around 34 personal strengths. The principle is to spend time using and developing our strengths and not working to overcome our weaknesses. This flies in the face of so many development programmes.

We are our strengths and they are the route to personal success.

The same with business. Improvement must focus on getting the maximum out of our strengths.

Where are you successful? Where are you seeing growth?

Is your business context changing and are you keeping up to date with market changes?

By following the earlier winning ideas, especially 'Embrace the Eco-System' you will gain valuable insights to help you understand your strengths.

There is one other key element – data (used correctly!).

You will be familiar with the 80/20 rule (Pareto Principle). At a simple level this says that 80% of output comes from 20% of effort (and many other similar examples). The application for business improvement is to ensure you concentrate on those areas of your business delivering 80% of sales/profits. Do not be tempted to focus on developing the 20% areas (at least not at first and only when you know there is definitely development potential).

Your quick improvement gains will come from improvement initiatives in the 80% area.

The context around you may be changing and the 20% is where you see the future and you need to improve - FAST! Go for it but make sure you protect the here and now by also doing some improvement work in the 80% area.

Winning Idea Number 5:

Refine your processes

By the time you get to this winning idea you will hopefully have tried some of the others and have a better understanding of where your processes can be improved. The first enlightenment may be in understanding you do have work processes and are part of a system. This is essential to remember.

W. Edwards Deming is seen as the father of modern day business improvement techniques and his ideas are as relevant today as when he was developing them over 50 years ago. He says:

‘People are not the dominant cause of errors’.

Process improvement and the teaching of Deming is a major subject too detailed for now; however here are some key insights and tips.

- Carefully consider the data you use for analysis; ensure the data directly relate to the process you are seeking to improve.
- Be clear and specific what you want to improve and the outcomes you are planning for.
- Prepare to experiment and test different approaches making incremental improvements.
- Investigate how much work is done through genuine activity (true demand) and how much is done due to mistakes (failure demand) including earlier in the process.
- Understand you have a ‘system’ and consider the impact on the wider system (including people) of the improvement changes you make (don’t create unintended consequences).
- Use data to monitor changes in performance.
- Be aware of misunderstanding variations in process performance. Natural variation (common cause) is inevitable in any process so do not amend based on that. Look out for where unusual variation (special cause) occurs. This is the area ready for improvement work.

Improving processes can be the most detailed of all improvement work. Follow the above tips and you can go a long way.

Call us if you need more help – 0800 542 9290

Bonus idea: Overhaul Performance Management

This is an idea to float with you if you really want to go the extra mile in working with your staff to increase personal performance and satisfaction – in turn significantly improving business performance.

What do you have to do? If you are like over 90% of businesses and organisations it will entail you implementing a totally different performance management system; based on Continuous Performance Management. There are 3 key elements of this system:

- Conversations
- Feedback
- Recognition

If you have been implementing our earlier winning ideas you will already be doing all 3 of these; you just need to bring them together.

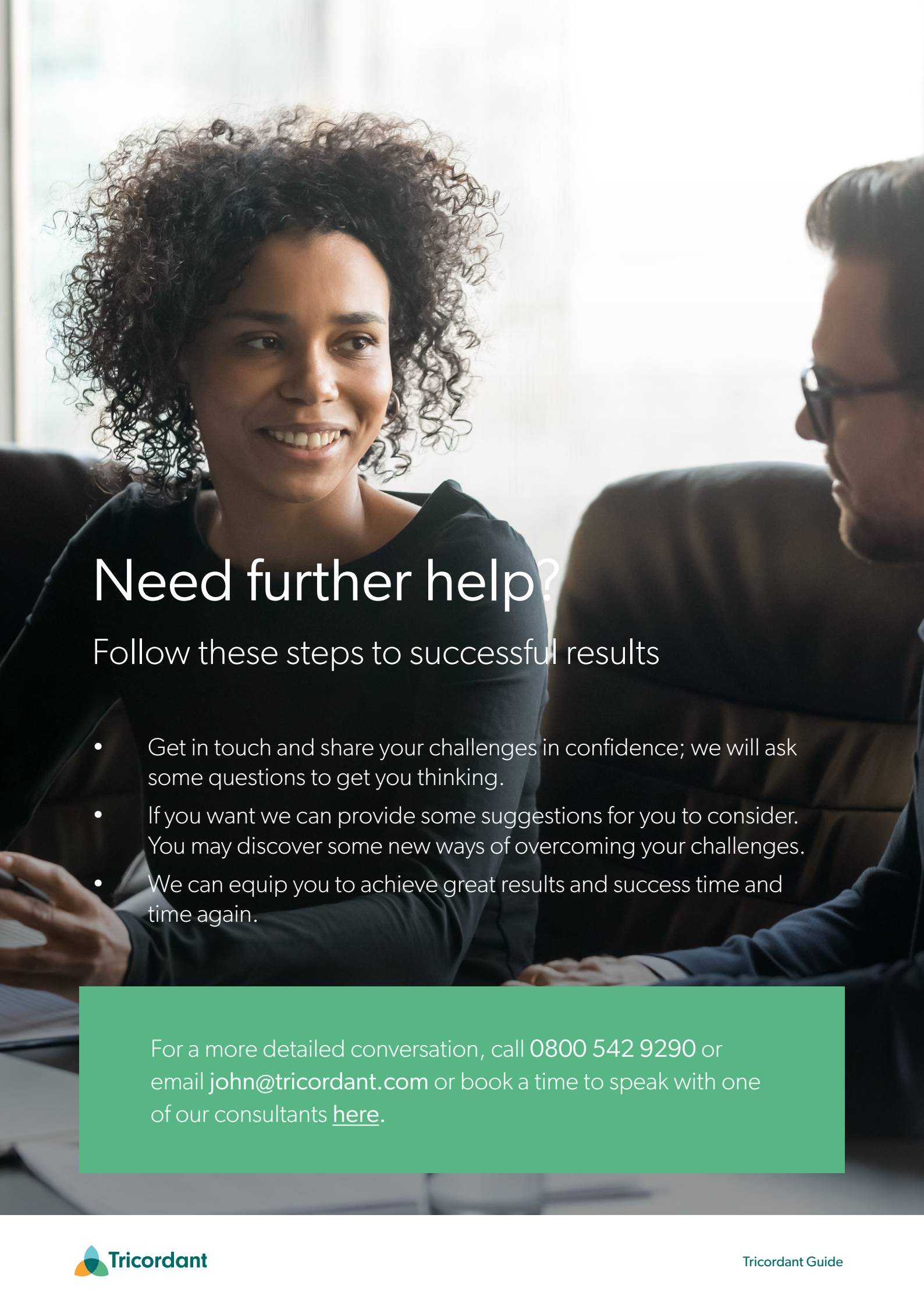
Standard performance management systems rely mostly on annual reviews whereas continuous performance management means just that; continuous and ongoing. Management and staff talking, feeding back and recognising challenges and successes in real time.

This performance management system can be successfully aligned with OKR's (Objectives and Key Results) which is simple mechanism for agreeing corporate, department, team and individual objectives.

We use this in Tricordant and transformed our internal development performance. If you want to read more on this subject I recommend 'Measure What Matters' by John Doerr.

I trust you have found these winning ideas to be great food for thought and they have challenged and stimulated you to action.

You are keen to improve your business so do have a go with these ideas.



Need further help?

Follow these steps to successful results

- Get in touch and share your challenges in confidence; we will ask some questions to get you thinking.
- If you want we can provide some suggestions for you to consider. You may discover some new ways of overcoming your challenges.
- We can equip you to achieve great results and success time and time again.

For a more detailed conversation, call 0800 542 9290 or email john@tricordant.com or book a time to speak with one of our consultants [here](#).