



On Annual Planning Meetings

WHY THEY MATTER AND HOW WE RUN THEM

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A Message from the CEO

At Ninety, we get how hard it is to build and run organizations. Our cloud-based platform contains each of the essential concepts, tools, and disciplines needed for leaders to become damn good, if not great, company builders.

We believe we're moving into a new Age of Work — what we refer to as the [Age of Understanding, or Work 8.0](#). The coming of this age was inevitable, but the pandemic accelerated its arrival by about ten years as so many people transitioned to remote or hybrid work models.

When we say Work, we mean finding value and purpose in our occupational roles — not just punching a time clock.

One of the most notable characteristics of Work 8.0 is that we now have an almost infinite array of opportunities to find Work. This shift will see more and more people reshuffling where and how they Work.

The good news is we've been studying company building for decades and have a well-informed, time-tested understanding of the essential concepts, tools, and disciplines needed to master great company building.

In short, great companies understand who they are, what they are, where they are, where they want to go, and what it's going to take to get there.

This guide is all about how to master a particular skill, discipline, or tool set. It's one of an array of guides associated with building a great company.

Across all our content, rest assured that our relentless priority will always be to simplify the hard work of aligning and focusing teams so organizations can thrive.

Gratefully,

Mark Abbott
CEO + Founder, Ninety

Purpose

This Ninety Guide is part of our series on the meetings necessary to build, operate, and scale a damn good, if not great, company. This guide addresses **Annual Planning Meetings**.

Every 90 days, we hold Planning Meetings (PMs) to focus on the big picture. We review the first three quarters with [Quarterly Planning Meetings](#) (QPMs), and we close out the year with an Annual Planning Meeting (APM). We collectively refer to these two meeting types as Planning Meetings, or PMs.

Why do we dedicate so much content to meetings? Because every business has them, no matter how big or small. And because meetings can either be the foundation of a company's excellence or the bane of its existence.

Based on decades of company-building experience and data, we have a clear road map for how best to design and run effective meetings that help teams [get smart stuff done](#) (GSSD), achieve breakthroughs, and grow their business.

We're happy to share our road map because delivering free, high-impact company-building information is part of our mission to help organizations focus, align, and thrive.

LET'S DIVE IN.

- **Read it**

- » We've designed this guide to make it easy to quickly absorb the information. Skim for highlights, glance for big ideas, or dive in for a deeper understanding.

- **Save it**

- » Continue to use this guide as a high-value reference. Highlight, underline, or circle what's most useful. We've even left space for notes.

- **Share it**

- » The information and advice on these pages should be shared. We deeply believe that useful resources should be accessible to all.

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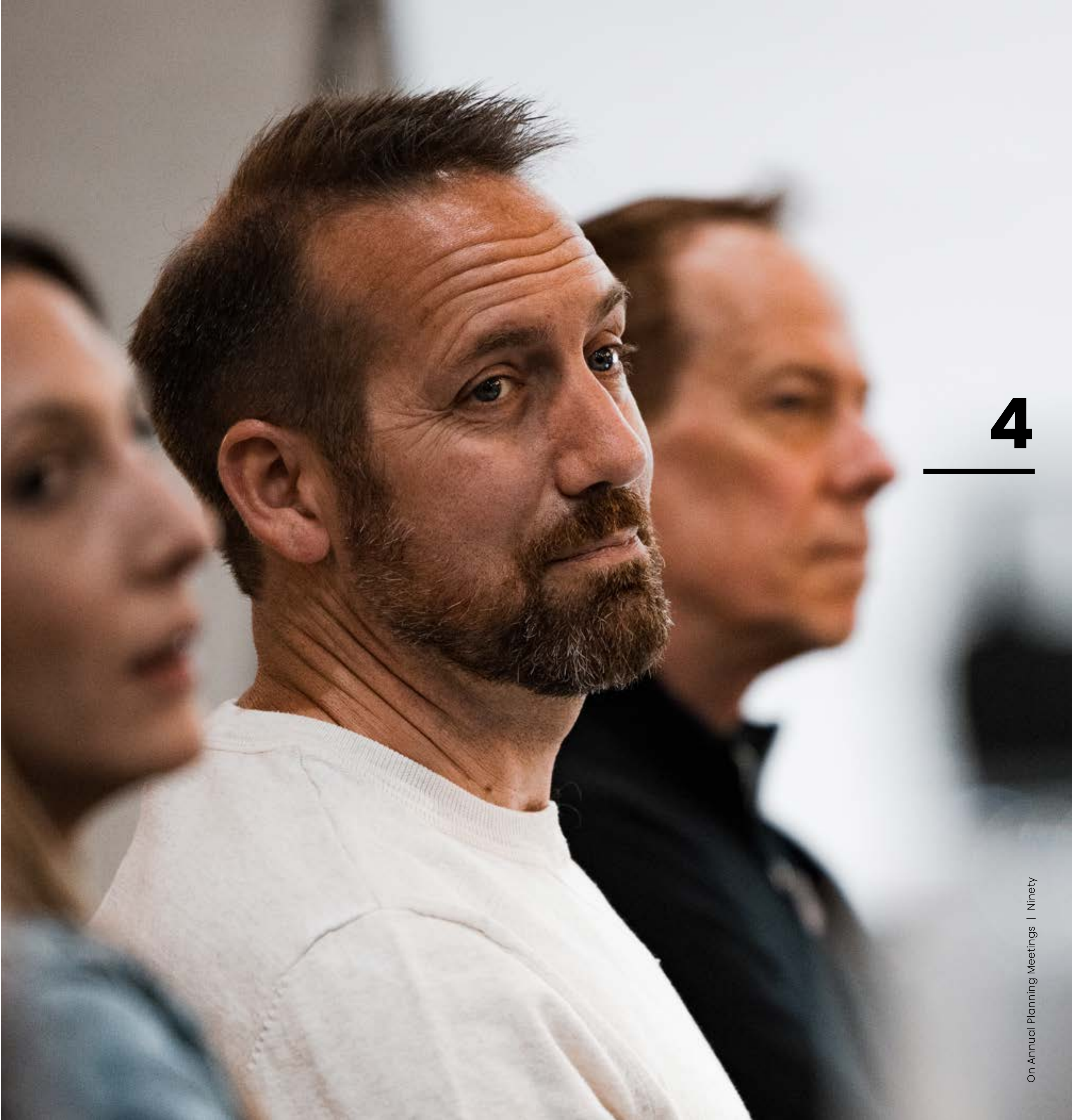
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Why Annual Planning Meetings

Once a year, the [Quarterly Planning Meeting](#) (QPM) gets expanded into an **Annual Planning Meeting (APM)** to accommodate the deeper, longer-term strategic work of reviewing our company's vision and revisiting 3-year, 1-year, and associated Numerical Goals (that is, revenue, profits, and critical company-wide key performance indicators, or KPIs). For simplicity's sake, we'll refer to these collectively as Team Goals. This annual process ensures our vision continues to inspire us and our Team Goals continue to lead us in the right direction. Just like in our QPMs, we then set new 90-day goals (we call them [Rocks](#)) based on our updated long-term goals and [vision](#).

Our APMs typically last two days because, in addition to setting new Team Goals, we add other things to our agenda to focus, align, and thrive as an entire organization (not just as a Senior Leadership Team). The fact is, every major [business operating system](#) (BOS) includes an annual meeting cadence marked by two full days for Senior Leadership Teams (SLTs) or one full day for departments or other teams.

This guide will predominantly focus on how we run our APMs. (We refer to how we do things as "the Ninety way.") In certain sections, we will also talk about how we coach our coaching clients in the first or second year of our relationship. Some sections of the APM (like the Team Health section) tend to evolve over the years.

Day 1 Agenda

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SECTION 1: OBJECTIVES

We open the meeting with our facilitator aligning the team around:

1. The outcomes we want to achieve during this meeting
2. The steps (aka agenda) we will take to achieve them

When we first started, a BOS coach acted as our facilitator. Now that we are APM gurus, one of our SLT members owns this role.

SECTION 2: CHECK-IN

As with our [Weekly Team Meetings](#) (WTMs) and our QPMs, the check-in section, or Segue, is designed to ease the team into the two-day session.

At Ninety, each team member shares their:

- Top three professional “wins,” “good news,” or “greats” over the past year
- Top personal “win” or “good news” for the year
- One professional “great” that was unexpected
- Expectations for this two-day session

We always start with a “volunteer” — we like to ask “Who wants to be the brave one?” — and go around the room clockwise until everyone has shared. For virtual sessions, the facilitator determines the order.

Check-In sets the
tone of the APM.

SECTION 3: QUARTER AND YEAR REVIEWS

During this section, we reflect on the previous quarter first and then on the whole year. The objective of the quarter and year reviews is to determine how well we did as individuals, as a team, as a department, and (when the SLT is meeting) as a company.

QPMs and APMs provide a great opportunity to measure progress, strengthen team accountability, and celebrate wins.

GOALS REVIEW

We begin by reviewing our Team Goals for our most recent periods (quarter and annual), including:

- **Numerical Goals** — Our financial goals and the goals associated with the company's most important key performance indicators (KPIs). We compare budget versus actual numbers for categories like revenue, number of paying users, and net promoter score.
- **Rocks** (during the quarter review) and **1-year goals** (during the year review)

For each item, the facilitator prompts the owner of the Rock (during the review of the quarter) or goal (during the review of the year) to declare whether its objective was achieved.

If the team is struggling to determine if a Team Goal was completed, we likely didn't make it sufficiently [SMART](#) (specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and time-bound). Making

Team Goals SMART creates clear agreements on what we want to accomplish, eliminating doubt and debate when it's time to mark it "Done" or "Not done."

Items that are not done count against the team's percentages for Team Goal completion.

After we review the quarter and year, the facilitator summarizes the results, stating the percentages of Team Goals completed. At Ninety, we celebrate when we hit our financial goals and KPIs, along with at least 80% of our Rocks or annual goals. While we strongly prefer to hit 90% or more, 100% often means we didn't stretch enough when setting goals.

QUARTER AND YEAR GRADES

Then, each team member assigns the periods (quarter and year) a letter grade: A, B, C, D, or F. We recommend that everyone first write their grade on a piece of paper so no one is influenced by others.

When everyone is ready, the facilitator goes around the room and gets each team member to share their grade. If the grades vary by more than one point (for example, if someone graded the quarter an A- and someone else graded it a C+), this could indicate a lack of alignment among team members. The facilitator drives a conversation to discover what produced the misalignment. Often, a team member doesn't have all the facts, but occasionally there is a real misalignment around priorities, and it's essential that it's addressed at some point during the two-day annual.

REFLECTION

We finish each review (quarter and year) with these questions:

- Did we accomplish what we set out to accomplish?
- What were the big wins?
- What were the misses and failures?
- What lessons can we learn from the previous quarter and year?

Almost every review generates issues and Rock or goal candidates. We add those topics to our long-term issues list to Raise, Discuss, and Resolve (RDR) on Day 2. As with our QPM, we use the long-term issues list to help us organize both issues and goal candidates.

PRIORITIZING GOALS AND ISSUES

At Ninety, we use the following labels for prioritizing goals and issues:

- 5** = Company Rock candidate
- 4** = Department/Individual Rock candidate
- 3** = Key Topic
- 2** = Must RDR today
- 1** = Rock candidate or issue for beyond this quarter

This ranking system enables the team to organize all the issues and opportunities as we move through the two-day session toward establishing the company's new 3-year, 1-year, and 90-day goals (Rocks) and KPIs. It also helps determine which issues must be addressed during the APM and which ones will be addressed later.

SECTION 4: TEAM HEALTH

At Ninety, we strongly believe the root cause of our success is and always will be our people. And since people rarely work alone, the health of our teams is paramount.

[Team Health](#), like an individual's physical health, does not maintain or improve by itself. It requires attention, effort, and commitment. During the APM, we take time to engage our team in a couple of Team Health exercises. Here are three exercises we facilitate with our first- and second-year coaching clients:

1. **Personal History.** In this exercise, each team member answers 5–7 personal history questions. The questions are relatively mild, but they tend to bring people together as everyone shares about their lives outside of work.
2. **Five Dysfunctions of a Team.** This exercise created by Patrick Lencioni is described in his best-selling book by the same name. Though it may seem a bit uncomfortable, it's designed to increase trust among team members.
3. **The One Thing.** In this exercise, each team member declares, for every other team member, what their most admirable trait is and what is one thing they would like that person to either start or stop doing for the benefit of the entire team. The result is that each team member promises to start or stop doing one thing based on the feedback they receive. The rest of the team holds them accountable for that promise over the following year.

To learn more about Team Health exercises, visit the Appendix.

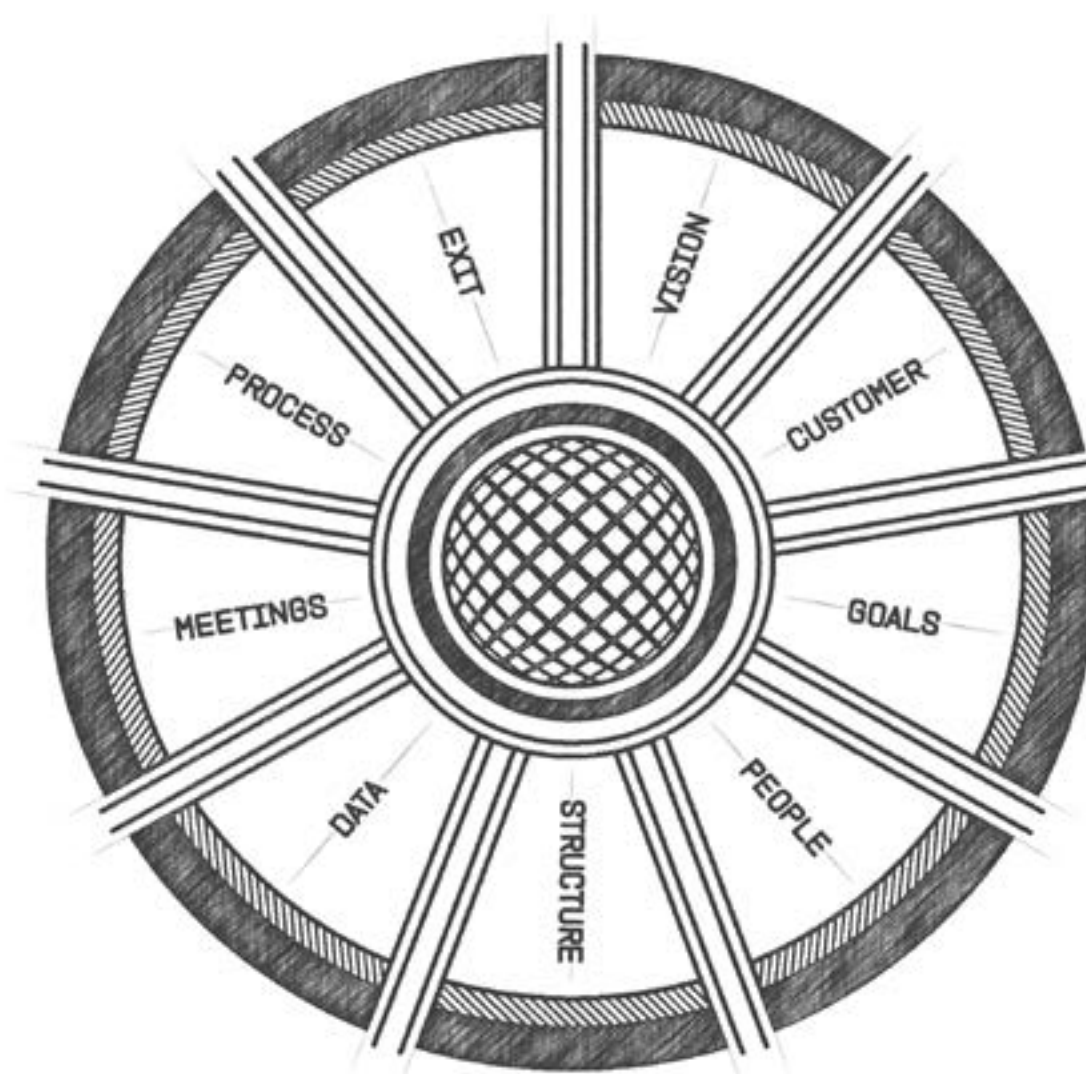
Team Health requires
attention, effort, and
commitment.

SECTION 5: 9 CORE COMPETENCIES REVIEW

During this segment of the APM, we review the results of our [Org. Fitness Review](#). Depending on the organization, the team may have already taken the Review in preparation, or they may complete it on the spot. We use the assessment's data to discuss where we are in terms of mastering the [9 Core Competencies](#) essential to building a great company.

At Ninety, we find the following questions useful as we debrief the Review's results:

1. What results represent the most consensus? Why?
2. What results vary most significantly from person to person?
3. According to the [assessment](#), what are our organization's greatest areas of opportunity?



1

VISION

Our ability to define our organization's highest aims and the extent to which all our people work to turn the [vision](#) into reality.

2

CUSTOMER

Our ability to know who our [Ideal Customers](#) are and to serve them consistently at the highest level.

3

GOALS

Our ability to establish, track, and achieve short-term, medium-range, and long-term [goals](#).

4

PEOPLE

Our ability to support our people by codifying, promoting, and maintaining a healthy, thriving [culture](#) centered around Core Values.

5

STRUCTURE

Our ability to clearly define [organizational structure](#) around Core Functions and getting the right people in the right seats.

6

DATA

Our ability to define, align to, and track [Key Performance Indicators](#) that give us an actionable pulse on the business.

7

MEETINGS

Our ability to conduct effective, efficient [meetings](#) that help us thrive.

8

PROCESS

Our ability to identify, document, and follow the [processes](#) that define how we do business.

9

EXIT

Our ability to strategically plan for a future sale or leadership transition.

The 9 Core Competencies are discussed in detail in the [On 9 Core Competencies Guide](#).

SECTION 6: SWOT ANALYSIS

One important objective for the APM is to uncover any big strategic issues. We achieve this through a **SWOT analysis** of the organization's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats.

The primary purpose of a SWOT analysis is to develop full awareness of the key factors that support or potentially could challenge our collective ability to build a great company. It's intended to identify **internal** (strengths and weaknesses) and **external** (opportunities and threats) factors that are favorable (strengths and opportunities) and unfavorable (weaknesses and threats), as they relate to achieving the company's goals and turning its vision into reality.

During the first APM, the team creates a SWOT analysis from scratch. Here's how we do it:

1. **Brainstorm** — The facilitator asks the team members to independently record what they think are the business's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats.
2. **Sort** — The facilitator then divides the team into two groups, A and B. The A group gets together and creates a combined list of all the strengths and weaknesses they identified. The B group does the same for opportunities and threats.
3. **Add** — Once done, the groups trade places. The A group adds to the list of opportunities and threats the B group created, and the B group does the same for strengths and weaknesses.

If the meeting is held virtually, the facilitator uses virtual boards to follow the same steps.

During each subsequent APM, the team revises the previous year's SWOT (recorded in Ninety). To do so, the facilitator asks the team:

- Have we developed any additional strengths this past year?
- Have any of our identified strengths diminished to the point where they are no longer strengths or have become an issue?
- Have we developed any additional weaknesses?
- Have we addressed any of our identified weaknesses to the point they are no longer weaknesses?
- Are there any new opportunities in the marketplace we should consider?
- Have any of our previously identified opportunities been exploited or disappeared?
- Are there any new threats in the marketplace we should prepare for and address?
- Have any of the previously identified threats been addressed or disappeared?

Once the SWOT analysis has been completed, the facilitator walks the team through each of the four lists (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats) and determines if any of them should be added to the long-term issues list using the priority ranking system we referenced earlier.

Want to learn more about SWOT? Check out our [SWOT Brief](#).

SECTION 7: VISION AND FOCUS FILTERS

Here, we make sure the Senior Leadership Team is still 100% committed to the Focus Filters core to our vision. These include our [Core Values](#), [Compelling Why](#), [Compelling and Audacious Goals](#) (CAGs), [Ideal Customer](#), [Compelling Value Proposition](#), and [Customer Journey](#).

If needed, we adjust these items to reflect changing market conditions and the current [Stage of Development](#) in our company's evolution. We record any potential changes in [Ninety's Vision tool](#).

HOW IT WORKS

The facilitator prompts the conversation with questions such as:

- Do we still love our Core Values?
 - » Do we hire, review, reward, and fire our people around these values?
 - » Are we using the Core Values in our [Quarterly 1-on-1 Meetings](#)?
- Is this Compelling Why still what drives our company?
- Is this industry and niche still where our company focuses on delivering value?
- Are we totally sure our CAGs are still big, wonderful, and energizing goals for everyone in the organization?

- Have we clearly defined our Ideal Customer?
 - » Are we satisfied with how we defined our demographic, geographic, and psychographic customer filters?
 - » Have we created a list of prospective Ideal Customers?
- Does our Compelling Value Proposition still clearly define why our prospects buy from us versus our competition?

If the responses to any of these questions are negative, either the facilitator seeks to rapidly resolve the issue or the team adds it to the long-term issues list.

Want to learn more about Focus Filters? Check out our [Focus Filters Brief](#).

Focus Filters help teams
align everyday decisions
with long-term goals.

SECTION 8: 3-YEAR GOALS

Finally, the facilitator directs the team to revise and update our 3-year goals. To do so, we take the following steps:

1. We move the date of our existing goals forward by one year.
2. We review the 3-year goals and decide whether they are almost right, need just a tweak, or should be revised completely because so much has changed.
3. We update our Numerical Goals with where we think we're going to be in three years.
 - » One question to answer is whether our vision's KPIs still represent our most important nonfinancial KPIs. If they do not, we make the appropriate adjustments and update the KPIs for our 1-year and 90-day goals.
 - » The facilitator then takes the team through the process of updating, adding, or redoing the list of the 5–15 things we want to accomplish by the end of three years. The main question we're answering is: "What will our company look like, feel like, and be like in three short years?"

This collection of financial goals, KPIs, and 5–15 company goals are collectively our 3-year goals.



Day 1 Agenda

continued

SECTION 9: CONCLUDE

We conclude the first day of the APM with the facilitator asking each team member to answer the following questions:

1. What are your highlights or key takeaways from the day?
2. What, if anything, has been missing that we can address tomorrow?
3. Are we on track to meet your expectations?

Based on the responses, we add any necessary items to the long-term issues list.

We recommend the team spend the evening together, sharing a meal for additional bonding, discussing the day, and strengthening trust in each other and the APM process.

Day 2 Agenda

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SECTION 1: OBJECTIVES

We open the second day of the APM with the facilitator aligning the whole team around:

- What outcomes we want to achieve during this meeting, and
- The steps we'll take to achieve them (our agenda)

SECTION 2: CHECK-IN

Next, the facilitator asks every team member to answer the following questions:

1. What are your takeaways from Day 1 of the APM now that you've slept on it?
2. How are we doing with meeting the expectations you stated yesterday? Are we on track or off track? If it's the latter, what's missing?
3. What is one thing our company must accomplish within the next year?



SECTION 3: 3-YEAR GOALS RECAP

The facilitator then recaps the new or updated 3-year goals and asks the team whether everyone is on the same page. If there are any concerns, the facilitator either has the team address them right away or the team adds them to the long-term issues list.

3-year goals take us one step closer to our Compelling and Audacious Goals.

SECTION 4: KEY TOPICS

Key Topics represent essential discussions that need to occur before we set our goals, whether for the year or quarter. These are items of strategic importance that can influence our objectives and alignment.

WHEN KEY TOPICS MATTER

Key Topics may emerge from recent developments, shifts in the market, team insights, or unresolved issues. Their discussion ensures we're aligned on the most critical areas before moving forward with goal-setting. Importantly, there are times when no Key Topics need to be addressed and the meeting proceeds directly into the goal-setting sections.

FLEXIBLE PLACEMENT IN THE AGENDA

The timing of the Key Topics discussion within the agenda is flexible and depends on the nature of the topics themselves. The conversation happens before we establish the goals or Rocks that might be impacted by these topics.

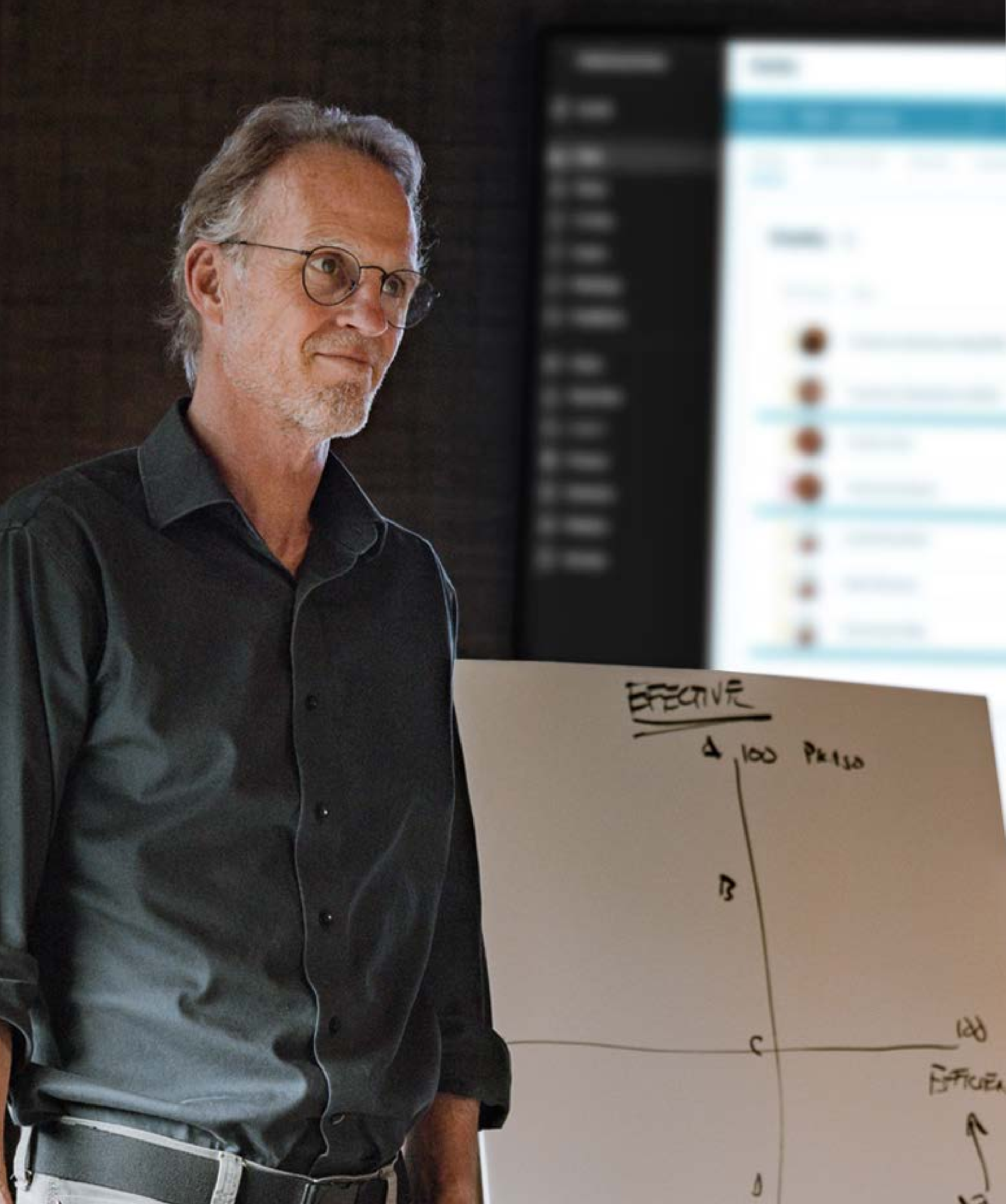
- If Key Topics influence our long-term vision, such as 3-year or 1-year goals, we insert this section before those agenda items.
- If Key Topics only affect short-term priorities, such as 90-day goals, we insert the discussion before the Rock-setting segment.

UNIFIED DISCUSSIONS

All identified Key Topics are discussed in a single, dedicated section. We don't split or scatter these conversations across multiple agenda items. This helps ensure the entire Senior Leadership Team aligns on critical topics before they move forward with any aspect of the planning.

In summary, Key Topics create an intentional space for essential conversations that must occur before we set goals. If no Key Topics are identified, we proceed as usual with the planned agenda. However, if Key Topics do arise, we adjust the agenda to accommodate these discussions at the appropriate time.





Day 2 Agenda

continued

SECTION 5: 1-YEAR GOALS

During this segment, we agree on and document our new Numerical Goals for the coming year and the things the company needs to accomplish to be on track to achieve our 3-year goals. The facilitator starts by asking each member of the team to write down what they think the 1-year goals should be, including:

- **Financial Goals** — These 2–3 goals typically include revenue and some form of profit (such as gross profit or net profit). Other examples of financial goals are cash flow, cash, etc.
- **KPI-Based Goals** — These 2–3 goals are easy-to-measure, typically nonfinancial, markers of progress, such as our percentage of Ideal Customers, prospects in the funnel, new clients, and lost clients.
- **Company and Departmental Goals** — These are the 3–7 priorities that must be completed before the year's end. For SLTs, these goals are for the company. For departmental teams, they are for the department.

At Ninety, we create goal candidates as a team, then go through a systematic, facilitated process to narrow the list down to 3–7 goals. We favor company goal sets that are smaller (closer to 3 than 7) because we believe that the more goals we're aiming for simultaneously, the less focused we'll be and the less likely we are to actually complete them.

Similar to our 3-year goals, we refer to our financial goals, KPI-based goals, and company goals collectively as our 1-year goals.

SECTION 6: 90-DAY GOALS

Once the team agrees on 1-year goals and addresses all Key Topics, we are well-positioned to set Rocks for the next 90 days. Here, it's essential to identify what we need to accomplish in the next 90 days to ensure we are advancing toward our 1-year goals (and hopefully making progress toward our 3-year goals).

Since it involves establishing goals for the new quarter, this segment is often one of the most energizing parts of the APM. It's exciting to think aspirationally and set new targets.

The facilitator leads the team through two goal categories: Numerical Goals and Rocks. We typically start with the former, as new Rocks sometimes emerge from Numerical Goals.

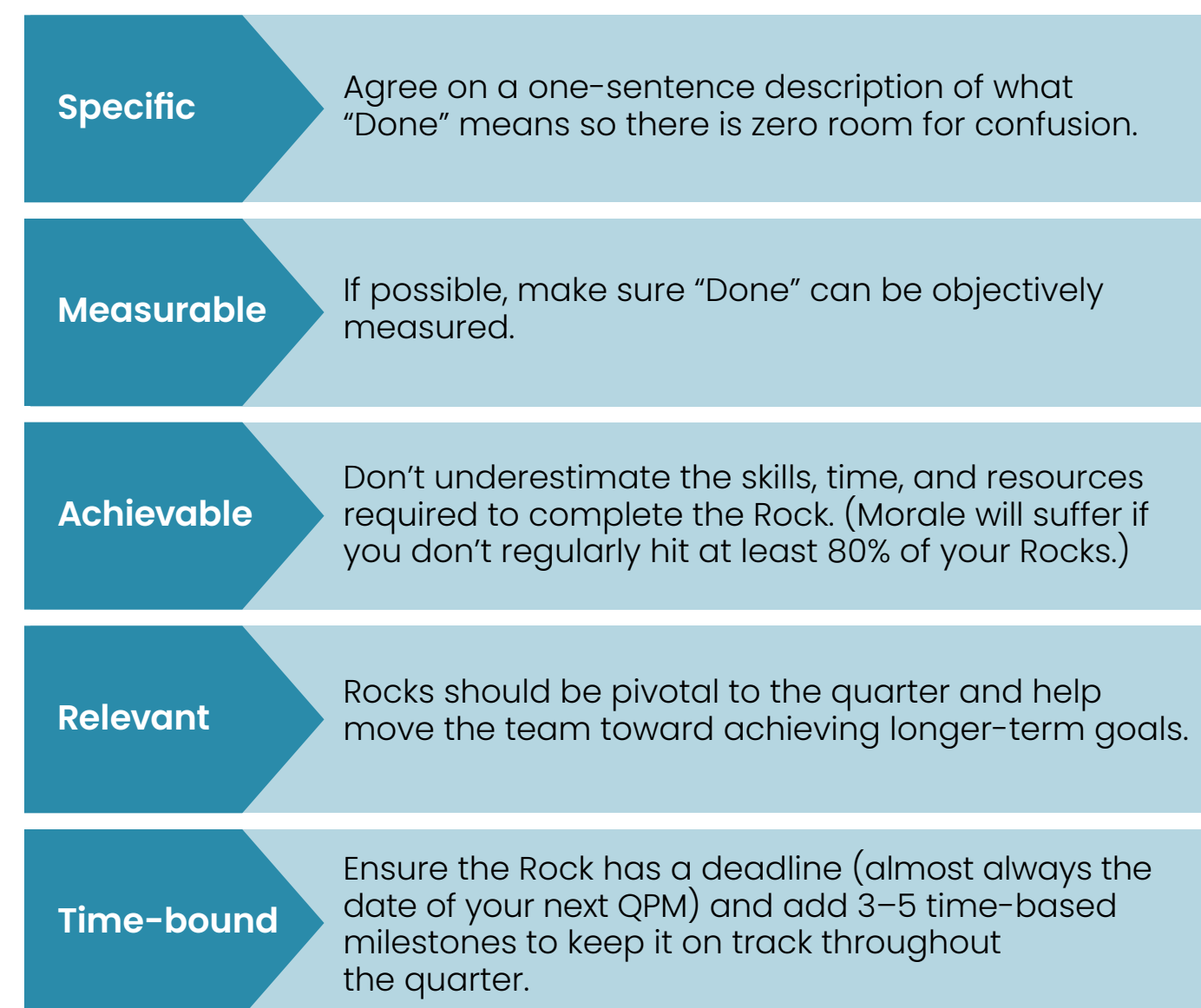
- **Numerical Goals** — These are specific numbers that define what a strong quarter looks like numerically. For us, Numerical Goals consist of 2–3 financial goals and 2–3 KPI-based goals. For this part of the APM, it's useful to have key data from the previous quarter accessible to reference.
- **Rocks** — These are the primary organizational priorities that should be accomplished in the next 90 days. At Ninety, a team's Rocks usually consist of 3–7 company goals and 2–3 departmental goals. We emphasize capping them at these numbers in order to keep our efforts focused and increase our likelihood of success.

IDENTIFYING AND SETTING ROCKS

To identify Rocks for the upcoming quarter, we find it best to employ a systematic, facilitated process. Otherwise, we may end up with an hours-long conversation that results in countless Rock candidates (and a lot of dialogue) but no definitive conclusions.

At a Ninety APM, the facilitator guides the team through three steps to identify and set Rocks:

1. **List** — What are our main priorities for the upcoming quarter? The team drafts an unlimited list of Rock candidates. Ideas often stem from 3-year goals, 1-year goals, the long-term issues list, and currently undone Rocks.
2. **Decide** — Which of these potential Rocks are most pressing or will most help us achieve our 1-year goals? We narrow the list with our 1-year destination in mind.
3. **Make them SMART** — Finally, we make our Rocks SMART so everyone in the room knows what completion looks like when we say "Done." SMART stands for:



As coaches, we can almost guarantee that the better you get at building SMART Rocks, the higher the probability you'll complete at least 80% of them each quarter.

SECTION 7: LONG-TERM ISSUES

This section of the APM is dedicated to making sure the team addresses all the most important, strategic, highest-impact issues remaining. Issues are problems, difficulties, or obstacles that must be addressed, as well as ideas, opportunities, or topics that must be explored and acted upon. Each issue has an owner.

There are four main types of issues:

- A team member wants to share information with the team.
- An issue needs to be solved. The issue owner has a recommended solution and wants to make sure they're not missing anything.
- A team member needs the team's help in dealing with a difficulty.
- A team member has an issue to share with another team member and wants the team's help in finding a solution.

We start by cleaning up the long-term issues list.

1. **Review** — First, we remove any resolved issues, such as those that were converted into 3-year or 1-year goals or Rocks.
2. **Add** — Then, we add any new issues that came up during discussion at any point during the APM.
3. **Prioritize** — Now that our list is complete, we prioritize issues using the priority ranking system we referred to in the Quarter and Annual Review section.
4. **Sort** — Last, we sort them from high to low and determine which, if any, we should move back to the short-term issues list for one of our WTMs.

Once the long-term issues list is cleaned up and prioritized, we move through the list and address as many issues as time allows.

We use the same issues solving process during APMs as during WTMs and QPMs: we [Raise, Discuss, and Resolve](#) (RDR). Using the RDR process, we always get through our “must solve today” issues, and we rarely have to move any “if time allows” back to our short-term issues list.

RAISE

The first step in the RDR process is to **raise** and clarify the issue. This responsibility belongs to the issue's owner. There are several ways to raise an issue — it's up to the team to identify the best method. Here are a few options:

- The owner states the issue in the briefest form possible, aiming to capture its essence. This approach requires a solid grasp of the issue and the ability to be succinct. It may be easier for some than others.
- The owner frames the issue as a question posed to the team, provides all the relevant background information, and then closes by posing the same question again. This approach is great for teeing up discussion.
- The owner talks through five specific prompts: Who, With, One, What, and Why. This approach progressively unpacks the issue and helps the owner — and others present — verbally process it in real time. This is the method we favor at Ninety.

- » **Who** — Who are we solving for? Usually, the issue's owner.
- » **With** — With whom do you have this issue? This may be an individual team member or a whole team, represented by the team leader.
- » **One** — Summarize the issue in one sentence. The one-sentence limitation, though challenging, simplifies the issue, making it easier to resolve.
- » **What** — What does the issue owner need to resolve the issue? The owner may need information, assistance, confirmation, or something else entirely.
- » **Why** — Why are we talking about this issue in this forum? This highlights why the issue needs to be discussed with the entire team.

Regardless of the method used, the team should have the opportunity to ask the owner follow-up questions. The facilitator guides this process to ensure that everyone present has complete clarity on the issue that needs to be resolved and the associated context.

DISCUSS

The second step in the RDR process is to **discuss** the issue. By clarifying it during the Raise step of RDR, we've reduced the likelihood of rambling and tangents, however well-intentioned. Instead, quality discussion centers on identifying a solution.

It's important to remember that collaborative, solution-focused discussion is an organizational skill that may feel unnatural at first but can be mastered with repetition and intent. To that end, it can be helpful to review key principles of discussion.

- The facilitator and team should make an effort to ensure everyone participating in the discussion is heard. That said, every person does not need to weigh in on every issue. It's vital to hear from those closest to the facts.
- Speakers should be brief. Team members should focus their comments on what matters most about the issue and, ideally, only say what they say once. RDR time is not an open mic.
- Everyone should appreciate that each individual has their own way of processing an issue. Some may be analytical, while others may feel their way through. Effectively shared, all can be useful.

RESOLVE

The third step in the RDR process is to **resolve** the issue. Since it has already been raised and discussed, finding the solution is often straightforward. If it simply called for information or communication, the issue may already have been resolved.

If follow-up is needed, the team expresses the solution as a To-Do, or if it's a big issue, we move it to the long-term issues list as a Rock candidate for this or some future quarter.

The RDR process concludes with the issue's owner declaring the issue resolved.

Day 2 Agenda

continued

SECTION 8: NEXT STEPS

During this short segment, the facilitator reviews all the [To-Dos](#) we've created (we always create quite a few during this day-long meeting) and any communications the team must [cascade](#) to other teams.

Additionally, the facilitator sets the date and time for the quarterly [State of the Company](#) meeting that should take place within the two weeks after the APM.



Day 2 Agenda

continued

SECTION 9: CONCLUDE

Finally, to conclude the APM, each member of the team shares their major takeaways along with the degree to which their expectations for the meeting have been met. They also rate the quality of the meeting on a scale of 1–10, with 10 being a great meeting. To focus the process, the facilitator asks everyone the following questions:

1. **Takeaways** — What were your major takeaways or “Aha!” moments during this second day?
2. **Planning (SLT)** — Are you ready to create the 1-year goals and Rocks for each of your departments? If not, what’s missing?
3. **Expectations** — Have we met our objectives over the course of these two days? If not, what was missing?
4. **Rating** — On a scale of 1–10, how would you grade how well we did as a team during this APM?

Synchronizing Planning Meetings

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Depending on its size, an organization may have multiple teams, each overseeing a different department. There may be a Senior Leadership Team (SLT) and several Departmental Leadership Teams (DLTs). In that instance, it's critical for all Planning Meetings (PMs) to be synchronized, whether Annual or Quarterly.

HOW IT WORKS

Ideally, the department leaders will meet with their teams before the SLT meets to have a preliminary set of Numerical Goals, Non-Numerical Goals, and Rocks. At Ninety, we've evolved to the point where our company has 3-year, 1-year, and 90-day goals. The departments have 2-year, 1-year, and 90-day goals. If a SLT sets Numerical Goals and Rocks that contradict those of its Departmental Leadership Teams, the entire organization can falter. The simple solution is to schedule and split the DLT PMs, as needed. Here's how we do it.

First, we schedule the SLT PM to occur approximately every 90 days. The dates are set well in advance so everyone in the organization is aware, especially the DLTs, since their PMs need to occur in concert.

The DLTs then schedule their PMs in two parts. Part 1 occurs before the SLT PM, and Part 2 occurs after the SLT PM.

- **DLT PM Part 1** — In Part 1 of its PM, a DLT reviews their previous quarter's Numerical Goals and Rocks (and, if prior to the APM, their 2- and 1-year goals as well). Based on what was accomplished, they establish proposed Numerical Goals and Rocks for the next quarter (and, if prior to the APM, their proposed new 2- and 1-year goals as well). They also identify any issues that warrant cascading up to the SLT. All this information will be reviewed at the SLT PM.
- **SLT PM** — At the SLT PM, the team reviews every DLT's proposed goals, as well as any issues. Doing so allows the SLT to see how the entire company performed, along with any issues that may impact the company's progress toward its new 1- and 3-year goals. The SLT then sets the company's goals.
- **DLT PM Part 2** — In Part 2 of its PM, the DLT reviews the company's updated goals, any feedback from the SLT on the DLT's goals, and any solutions the SLT created for the issues that were cascaded up. Then, the DLT sets their final departmental goals.

Takeaway

Having a compelling vision is extraordinarily important for building a great company, but it must be reviewed and updated from time to time. That's the goal of the two-day Annual Planning Meeting, along with revisiting and resetting our 3-year and 1-year goals. Each item on the agenda helps us focus, align, and thrive as an entire organization. This annual planning process ensures our vision continues to inspire us and our goals continue to lead us in the right direction.



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PERSONAL HISTORY EXERCISES

Every year, we use a different exercise during the Team Health section of Day 1 to provide variety and enable the team to increasingly bond over time. We have several favorite personal history exercises to share.

BASIC

In the Basic exercise we often use during the first APM, the facilitator asks everyone to answer the following six questions:

1. What was your hometown?
2. What was your greatest challenge growing up?
3. How many siblings do you have?
4. What was your first paid job?
5. What was your worst job?
6. What's something unique about you that no one in the room knows?

LIFELINE

Lifeline is an exercise created by David Novak in his book *Taking People with You*. It is based on the concept that it's essential for every person to know where they've been in order to figure out where they're going.

In this exercise, the facilitator guides the team through five steps:

1. Each person makes a list of key events, relationships, and significant chapters in their life (personal and professional) and notes when (at what age) each of these occurred.
2. Then, they plot these events on a graph where the horizontal axis is time (measured in age since birth) and the vertical axis represents the degree to which an event impacted them, either positively or negatively.
3. Finally, each person shares their lifeline with their colleagues.
4. After the overview, each person may share some thoughts on:
 - What insights or patterns emerged for you today?
 - What experiences in my lifeline have most affected the way I lead and coach today?
 - Who were the people who have had the greatest impact on my lifeline? Who has led me? Who has thwarted me?
 - How will I act on my insights in the future and set goals to develop into the best leader I can be?
5. After everyone's shared their lifeline, the team reflects on takeaways from the session:
 - What new insights have you gained about yourself or others?

- What benefits do you think you derived as a team?
- Is this an exercise that could be cascaded down to your individual teams?

The facilitator gives the team five minutes to jot down their answers. We then go around the room as each team member shares their answers to all six questions.

3X3

3X3 was created by Gregory Cleary, co-founder of Pinnacle Business Guides. In this exercise, each team member shares the three most important people, events, and decisions of their life. They do so by answering these three questions:

1. Who are the three most important people in your life? Why are they so significant?
2. What were the three most important events in your life, and how did they impact you?
3. What are the three most important decisions you've made in your life?

ICEBREAKER DECK

The [Icebreaker Deck](#) contains 150 conversation prompts that spark meaningful discussions and strengthen relationships. The Icebreaker Deck helps teams:

- Move beyond small talk
- Break down barriers, form connections, and cultivate openness and vulnerability
- Get to know people better across six categories: life, random, deep, experience, if you could, and would you rather

THE FIVE DYSFUNCTIONS EXERCISE

Our favorite Team Health exercise is the Five Dysfunctions, based on Patrick Lencioni's book [The Five Dysfunctions of a Team](#). As coaches, we encourage our clients to use this exercise every APM.

The exercise helps teams master the primary attributes associated with teams that don't just do good work — they enjoy doing good work together.

Teams rate themselves on a scale of 1–10 in terms of:

1. Building and maintaining high-**Trust** relationships
2. Mastering **Conflict**
3. Creating genuine **Commitments**
4. Embracing **Accountability**
5. Focusing on **Results**

According to Lencioni, the foundation of a healthy team is trust. [Our founder also writes a lot about trust](#) because we deeply believe that great companies have high-trust relationships with every one of their [Ideal Stakeholders](#). (See our [Trust Brief](#).)

High-trust teams are composed of members who are very comfortable being open with one another. They are unafraid of exposing their weaknesses and mistakes. They don't need to be overly cautious, and they don't develop unhealthy defense mechanisms.

Since each member feels safe, they can individually and collectively focus on their goals and tasks. They have no problem asking for help, and they are more likely to take risks.

As coaches, we always recommend that our colleagues and clients buy a copy of *The Five Dysfunctions of a Team* and read it before the session. If you don't have a coach who is experienced with running the Five Dysfunctions exercise, we also recommend that you buy *The Five Dysfunctions of a Team Facilitator Guide* and that one of your colleagues facilitates the exercise.

THE ONE THING EXERCISE

Experience has shown that most of us would benefit from a little more self-awareness. We use the One-Thing exercise to increase awareness of self and others and to provide concrete feedforward.

Here are the steps of this exercise:

1. The facilitator asks the team to take five minutes of quiet time to answer, in writing, the following two questions about each of the other team members:
 - » What is their most admirable trait?
 - » What is the One Thing you want them to either start or stop doing for the sake of the team?
2. The facilitator asks: “Who’s the brave one to start us off?” One team member volunteers to be the first subject of the exercise.
3. The facilitator asks the team member: “Do we have your permission to be totally honest?” The team member is expected to verbally confirm that they give the rest of the team that permission. The facilitator asks them to hold questions until all have shared.
4. The facilitator asks each person to share what, in their opinion, is the team member’s most admirable trait. Comments should be directed at the team member.
5. Once the “admirables” have been shared, the facilitator asks each colleague to share the One Thing they would like to see that team member start or stop doing in the coming year.
6. The team member should take detailed notes.
7. Once everyone has shared, the team member now has the opportunity to ask any clarifying question. Even if they do not agree with some of the comments they heard, the team member should not argue or debate. The purpose of clarifying questions is to clearly understand what was shared.
8. Once everybody’s answered the two questions about everybody else, the facilitator gives the team 3–5 minutes of quiet time to review the answers they heard and pick one of the “start or stop doing” they are willing to commit to.
9. Finally, the facilitator asks everybody to verbally state their commitments using the formula: “During the next year, I commit to stop or start...”
10. The scribe captures these commitments, and at Ninety, we add the One Things to our short-term issues list (for example, Mark’s One Thing: I will start listening better before I respond) where we can see them each week. Before a Quarterly, we move them over to our long-term issues list to formally check in on our progress.

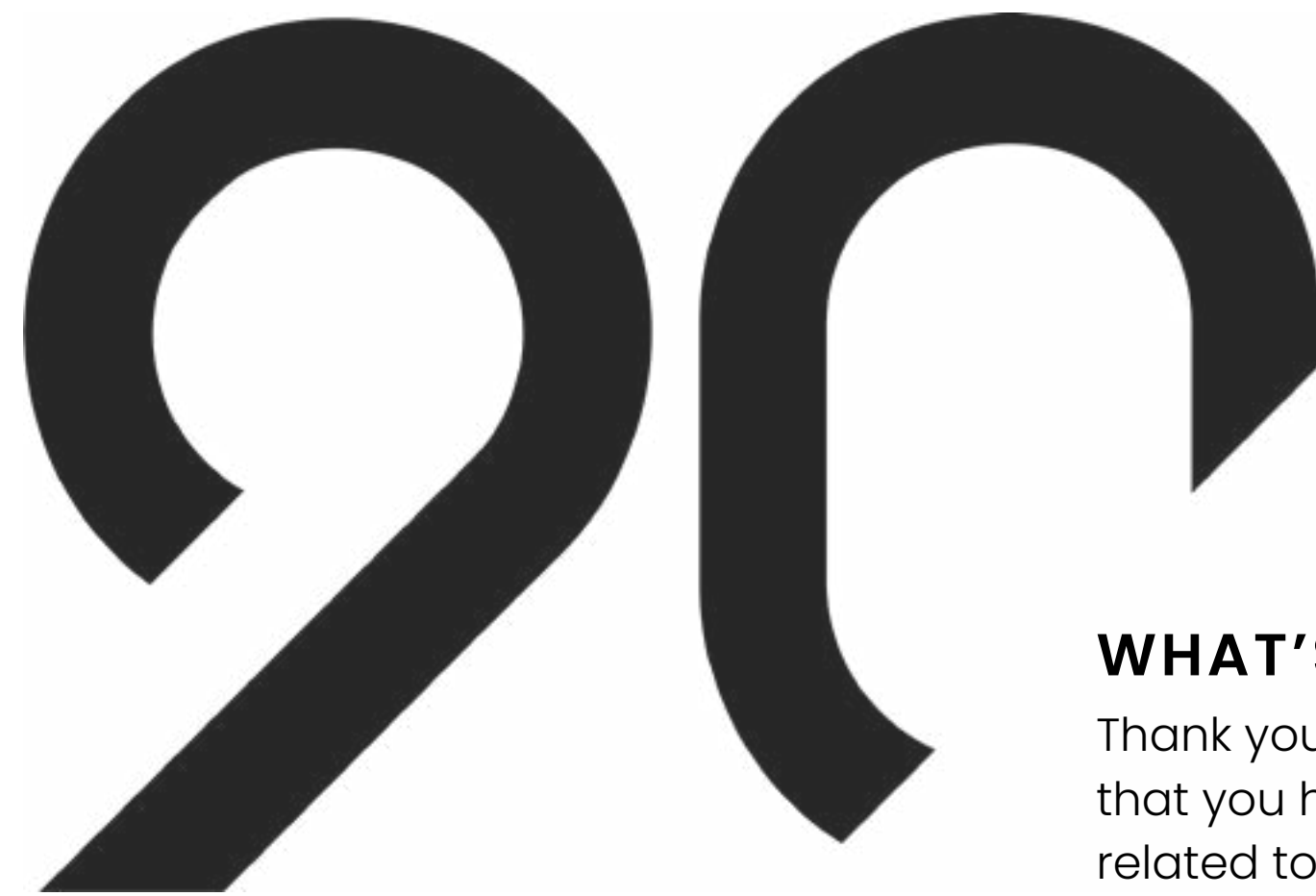


Key Terms

- **9 Core Competencies** — The fundamental aspects an organization must master as it seeks to grow and develop. The 9 Core Competencies are Vision, Goals, Customer, People, Structure, Data, Meetings, Process, and Exit.
- **Annual Planning Meeting (APM)** — A meeting that occurs once a year, usually over the course of two full days, to accommodate longer-term strategic work, a review of the company’s vision, and updating 3-year and 1-year goals.
- **Check-In** — A quick sharing session from each team member at the outset of the meeting that initiates a more personal, collaborative environment and promotes positive dialogue.
- **Facilitator** — A person familiar with the APM process, preselected to guide the team through the segments. The facilitator can be a team member or a third-party participant like a coach or partner.
- **Focus Filters** — The essential elements of a simple but complete company vision: Core Values, Compelling Why, Ideal Customer, industry and niche, Compelling Value Proposition,

and goals (CAGs, 3-year and 1-year goals, Rocks). Teams filter their actions and decisions through these Focus Filters.

- **Issues** — The biggest, highest-impact items or topics facing the company. These can range from organizational challenges to ideas and new opportunities.
- **Numerical Goals** — These quantitative 90-day goals include financial and KPI-based numbers that define what a strong quarter looks like.
- **Raise, Discuss, and Resolve (RDR)** — An efficient and effective process to state, then resolve, issues through collaborative, solution-focused discussion.
- **Rocks** — These qualitative 90-day goals represent the organizational priorities that should be accomplished by the end of the next quarter.
- **SWOT Analysis** — A compilation of a company’s strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats. The primary purpose of a SWOT analysis is to develop full awareness of all the factors involved in building a great company.



WHAT'S NEXT?

Thank you for taking the time to explore this guide. Now that you have a sense of how these concepts and their related tools advance a company's vision, you may be eager to implement them in your own organization. We're here to help! Find more company-building information in the [90u Library](#) or [try Ninety today](#).