



BRIEF

# Focus Filters

By [Tommy Mains](#)

## Introduction

To turn your vision into reality, you and your team should pass decisions through one or more Focus Filters — the essential elements of your vision. This process simplifies decision-making and keeps your organization focused on its primary goals.

When Britain's 2000 Olympic rowing team began training, they embraced a Focus Filter to guide them. It was a simple idea reduced to a short question — "Will it make the boat go faster?"

Passing every temptation, diversion, and interruption through this filter kept the team extraordinarily attentive to their goal of earning a gold medal — a dream they accomplished nearly a century after the last British rowing team lapped the world.



It's easy to get distracted. But to scale your organization, you need to keep your team rowing in the same direction — toward your vision.

The primary **Focus Filters** are your:

- Industry and Niche
- Compelling Why
- Ideal Customer

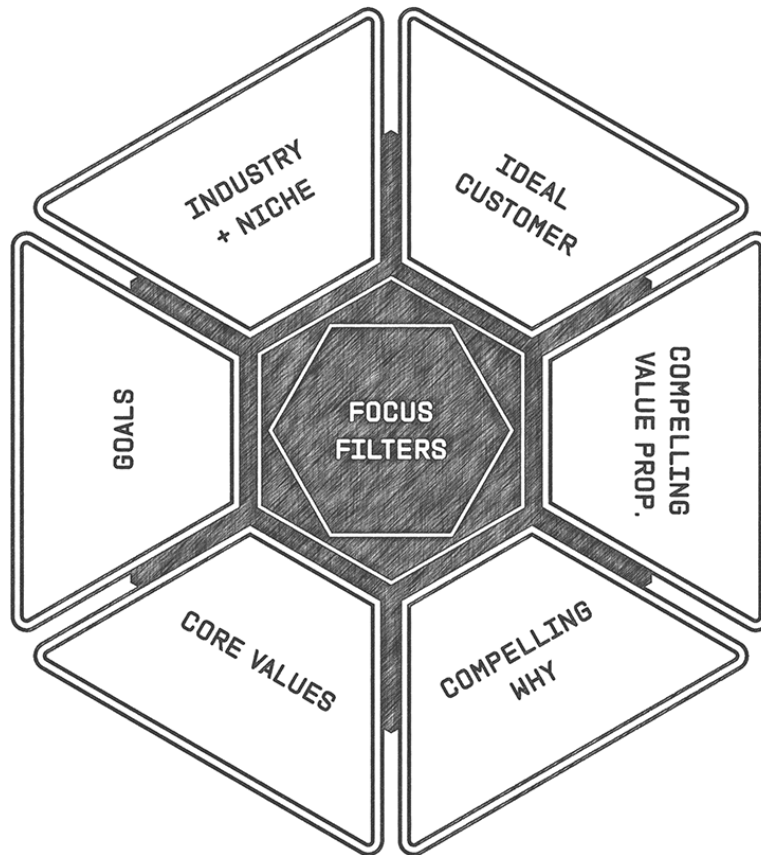
- Core Values
- Compelling Value Proposition
- Goals

## **Context**

Focus Filters help ensure that everyone in the organization is aligned on the things that really matter. They turn the answers to many questions into an automatic Yes or No — saving you time to work on what matters.

When you're considering new hires, sales targets, acquisitions, or setting goals, having a system to determine whether or not the decision fits in with what you do, who you serve, how you serve, why you're in the market, where you're going, and who you are is critical for growth and turning your vision into reality.

Imagine you're constructing a bridge connecting two bustling cities divided by a river. Your vision of connecting these metropolises needs to inform every action and decision for your team. Anything that goes against that vision should be filtered out as a distraction.



Let's dive into each filter to show you how to align your organization.

## INDUSTRY AND NICHE

The first Focus Filter should be the simplest to establish. Knowing and identifying your industry and niche will make it easy for everyone in the organization to understand and explain what you do. These are the products or services you provide – your “whats.”

## IDEAL CUSTOMER

Identifying your [Ideal Customer](#) involves pinpointing three key characteristics:

1. **Geographics** – Where your Ideal Customers are located.
2. **Demographics** – The measurable statistics describing your Ideal Customers (such as age, income, industry, and so on).

3. **Psychographics** — The motivations of your Ideal Customers (such as their values and other consumer choices).

We exist to aid our Ideal Customers' progress through the [customer journey](#) we created for them. When a company has an Ideal Customer properly profiled, attracting and retaining them becomes an intentional step in nearly every process. These are the clients that make your work worthwhile — Ideal Customers are your “who.”

## COMPELLING VALUE PROPOSITION

Your [Compelling Value Proposition](#) (CVP) serves as a promise to your customers. We recommend focusing on one primary CVP while considering a secondary option to define how you serve your customers. With help from Fred Wiersema and Michael Treacy's *The Discipline of Market Leaders*, we've identified four CVPs:

1. **Cost** — Providing the lowest cost to appeal to a wide audience.
2. **Innovation** — Finding unique ways to solve problems and improve people's lives.
3. **Customer Service** — Offering an extraordinary customer experience that makes getting what people want easier.
4. **Status** — Appealing to a buyer's need to feel unique or special.

Your CVP is how you appeal to your Ideal Customers — your “how.”

## COMPELLING WHY

Your Compelling Why is the guiding force behind your organization — its purpose, passion, and/or just cause. The organization's purpose is often the reason it was started in the first place. Your team members, especially the leaders, need to be passionate about this pursuit to make their work meaningful. This purpose and passion lead to your just cause, which describes a future state so appealing that people are willing to sacrifice to reach it. In all, your Compelling Why forms a filter that brings meaning to your organization.

## GOALS

Beginning with your most ambitious long-term goals (Compelling and Audacious Goals) and trailing down in time to your 3-year, 1-year, and 90-day goals, goals keep you

motivated to make your organization better and better.

Your [Compelling and Audacious Goals](#) (CAGs) should align and benefit all your stakeholders while clearly connecting to your Compelling Why.

Your 3-year goals keep you on pace to meet your CAGs while pushing your organization to grow.

Your 1-year goals should be captivating and achievable since their results show whether or not your year has kept you on track.

Your [Rocks](#) (90-day or quarterly goals) are used to build a new project or fix an existing one – they're a fixture of the infinite quarterly lifecycle of your organization.

Your goals define your ambitions of where you want to be and keep your stakeholders invested in what you do – the outcomes of your goals are your “where.”

## Core Disciplines of Focus Filters

**1. The power of 10x thinking.** Having a clear and compelling vision allows you to consider the long-term implications of your choices for your organization. Rather than spending too much time in the here and now, leaders need to look out to the horizon and think big. If you only have quarterly and yearly goals right now, imagine what things would look like if you multiplied those targets by ten. This is the primary idea around 10x thinking. Setting a bold path to your destination inspires those around you and keeps your vision alive.

**2. All businesses run on an operating system.** Applying coherent and explicit Focus Filters is one more way of systematizing how you operate. The concepts, tools, and disciplines you use to run your organization make up your [business operating system](#) (BOS). Every organization has a BOS, even if it's not explicitly recognized.

We've identified five types of BOS. Starting from an unrecognized, Accidental BOS and spreading to an Integrated, data-informed one, the practice of upgrading your BOS is worth a conversation with your leadership team. We have our own BOS (90os), but we support any system you may run through an existing partnership or our [configurable settings](#).

# Hopefully Helpful Hints

**Your vision and Focus Filters provide a necessary foundation.** While it's never too late to establish and document your Focus Filters, the sooner they're agreed upon and shared, the better. These are the inputs of your organization. Starting with this strong base of guiding principles keeps the organization aligned on what really matters and lets the rest follow naturally.

**Consider the relationships with all your Ideal Stakeholders while specifying your Focus Filters.** The seven [Ideal Stakeholder](#) categories include your customers, employees, leadership team, vendors, strategic partners, investors, and greater community. No person is an island and no organization exists in a vacuum.

## Takeaway

Visionaries who are ready to scale their organizations need a clear vision that commits to a core set of guiding principles — Focus Filters. When presented with a decision or a new idea, every team member should pass it through your Focus Filters to make sure it aligns with your industry and niche, Ideal Customers, Compelling Why, Compelling Value Proposition, goals, and Core Values. Use Ninety to document your vision and Focus Filters so everyone in your organization can see them and align their work to them.

What's next? Visit the [90u Library](#) or [try Ninety today](#).

---

Tagged with: **Brief**, **Vision**