

Quick wins

Hands up if you've been in a meeting within the last few weeks where somebody has declared they need to see quick wins. I attend enough meetings to hear this multiple times weekly, but rarely does the conversation explore exactly what that means. It sounds great to say (after all, who doesn't enjoy winning?) but please... a little more detail... please!

This article is really a guide for the next time you hear that magic phrase in a meeting, and how to arm yourself with better questions to clarify what "quick wins" really mean, and how to know when or if you've won. Focusing on the right wins, and achieving them, is an effective way to build buy-in and momentum for your GRC program.

Defining "quick"

The first thing I would ask is: **"What is meant by quick?"** Let's define if we're speaking about hours, days, weeks or months as a time scale. Then I would ask to describe whether this is an entire component, or a partial component to demonstrate progress towards an end goal. This type of approach sets a team up for success because it realizes that the job doesn't need to be complete, but it does have to achieve some minimum mandatory objectives.

I also believe that quick has as much to do with the "perception" of progress as it does with "actual" progress. I have been involved with programs where a frequent touch-point with stakeholders is a perception of progress, and in other cases programs needed tangible artifacts to demonstrate that same level of confidence.

Often the distinction between a "quick win" and a program milestone becomes blurred. Sometimes they can be the same thing, for example, you may have a new process developed and ready for trials defined as both a milestone and a quick win. It has the power to demonstrate that the course of action will generate real results if it continues to receive support.

Cherry picking

Picking something with a higher chance of success usually makes sense, and yet I have seen things selected for quick wins that have the highest chance of failure due to their complexity. There might be good reasons for that selection, but they need to be clearly communicated, along with the risks involved in achieving them.

My recommendation is to make a list of several quick win candidates, and then review the number of variables within your direct and indirect control. It stands to reason that those things within more direct control have a higher likelihood of suc-



By **Kirk Hogan**
COO, Iceberg

khogan@icebergnetworks.com

cess, since you control the risk. The more indirect or independent those variables are, the more risk you run with achieving those wins.

Don't confuse cherry picking with simply identifying the "easy" things ahead and plotting them on a plan as quick wins. Not at all. There is far more power in identifying objectives that will be hard to achieve. Again, it's important to clearly communicate the work involved and the potential risks. You may even want to break down more complex tasks into a smaller series of "quick wins". The goal is to consistently deliver on the goals that you've set out to accomplish. This will create a tremendous amount of goodwill to help weather the storms.

Expectations collection

The magic of quick wins is all about aligning with expectations. The challenge is getting everyone on board with just one set of expectations. Normally there are multiple stakeholders, with different agendas. You can fight the good fight and try and align them all, or perhaps a better approach might be to collect all the big ticket expectations and see if any are mutually exclusive. If not, then see how feasible it would be to meet them all.

If you can meet all the big expectations, you will have achieved something huge. You will have also likely built a following of fans of your predictable capability to meet objectives, and they will gradually become stronger advocates as the program continues. More than likely though, you will be able to align with a sub-set of expectations. The best scenario would be to have at least one expectation met from each of the stakeholders involved.

The other thing to remember here is that expectations should be managed. While you might be able to demonstrate an end-to-end function, it might not be realistic in early days to operate at full capacity, so temper what will be demonstrated.

Demonstrating value: Preparation is King (or Queen)

In this case, value would refer to "the win". A typical phrase associated with demonstration of a quick win might look like **"If we could show you that we have re-engineered the process to reduce the effort required and increase its effectiveness, would you agree that continuing to review and re-engineer other core processes would be of value to the organization?"** Making that statement, and knowing that you could demonstrate before and after results through measurements, it would be reasonable to assume continued support — provided the gain justified the expense in resources.

The key however isn't just the quick win itself. Rather, it is the ability to be well-prepared to demonstrate it with great clarity, so that its success is irrefutable. Practice the demonstration, follow a script, develop props or presentations as companions to the demonstration. There is a lot at stake here, so don't hold back! Your demo has to be flawless. Pull that off, and you can celebrate a small victory. Mess it up, and you'll find yourself under a larger microscope.

I have found that identifying several quick wins is even more powerful. In the case where all quick wins are demonstrable within the criteria agreed to at the outset,

Showing a capability to achieve objectives will win you more advocates as the program continues.

CHAPTER 6: QUICK WINS

it is very hard to argue against continued support. The other benefit of multiple quick wins is that you are not at the mercy of just one thing working out. You can create a buffer for success by taking any single event off the critical path, and through a demonstration of a majority of quick wins, that there is value to continue.

Having multiple quick wins along the path of a program will allow you to record each one as they are achieved, and during major milestone reviews, or tough program status meetings, these lists of wins are like gold. They keep people focused on end goals, and they become less obsessed with the smaller intermediate goals. More importantly, you'll start to see a snowball effect where more and more people (especially the skeptics) come on board and support your broader GRC program vision.

Next in this series

Chapter 7 is **"Executive Sponsorship"**. An effective leader is crucial to your GRC program's success. He or she will need to clearly articulate your vision, explain how it will deliver value to the organization, and break down any barriers that could prevent you from achieving your goals. More chapters from this series are available at icebergnetworks.com/risk-intelligence/