

## What's the Point of an After-Action Review?

By Ann N. Gatty, Ph.D.



Using the After-Action Review process is a great way to make informed decisions to move your business forward. Before you decide on your overarching goal for a new quarter of your fiscal year or craft your annual goals for the start of a new fiscal year, it is well worth the time to complete an After-Action Review. Such an activity allows you to make an overall assessment of how the results measured up to your expectations before continuing your strategic planning.

Once you become accustomed to completing an After-Action Review, you will likely find other ways to utilize this review format, including reviewing completed projects, or events. It's important to note that AARs aren't limited just to large or formal projects. You can use them after staff meetings or regular operational functions, like month-end accounting to improve operational effectiveness.

AAR's provide an opportunity to assess what happened and why. This process provides a learning-focused discussion and opportunities for analysis. It is designed to help you and your organization improve work processes as you move your business forward.

An AAR is centered on four questions:

1. What was expected to occur?
2. What actually occurred?
3. What went well and why?
4. What can be improved and how?

Working with your team, you will discover what to do differently. For example, if you are conducting organization-wide training, you might complete an AAR after the first training session and analyze what to do better in the next session. Or if you delivered a project assignment to a client, you can assess the process and decide what to do differently when you have another similar project.

**This tool is useful in assessing other aspects of your business—including improving your leadership behavior and stopping meaningless tasks.**

### Did You Improve Your Leadership Behavior?

In addition to making an overall assessment to reach your year-end goals, review your own professional development and assess a few other patterns of behavior:

1. Was I more purposeful in my planning?
2. Did I procrastinate less this year?
3. Did I delegate more fully to improve operational effectiveness?
4. Did I show appreciation to the people with whom I work?

### What Can You Stop Doing?

Before you make plans for things you will accomplish next year, list the things that you will stop doing:

1. Stop wasting time on meaningless tasks that don't create real value.
2. Stop worrying about what people think of me
3. Stop taking care of everyone else first
4. Stop undervaluing the successes I create and allow yourself to celebrate.

The After-Action Review (AAR) process was first developed and used by the U.S. military as a way for soldiers to learn quickly from their recent experiences in the field. They would review the results from what had happened before making plans for future actions. With this system, critical lessons and knowledge are transferred immediately to get the most benefit.

In the military, the "field unit" has an opportunity to talk about what happened, so that other teams can then use this experience immediately. Troops need feedback as soon as possible so that they can begin using what was learned from the experience to make improvements. The more objective and accurate the feedback, the easier it is for them to determine what happened and why it happened.

## Here are the steps to follow for an AAR Process.

### Establish the Intent

1. Determine the topic of discussion to be reviewed.
2. Set the conditions. Choose an agreed upon date, time, location, and attendees.
3. Envision how the results from the AAR discussion will be integrated in the business.

### Plan

4. Decide upon an unbiased representative to facilitate the discussion.
5. Prepare necessary materials for visuals, note taking, etc.

### Execute

6. Ensure and enforce attendance.
7. Conduct AAR. Capture all participant responses, and recommendations for improvements.

### Follow-Up

8. Share AAR with organization to enforce transparency and organizational learning.
9. Implement findings from AAR.
10. AAR the AAR. Reflect upon what worked well during the AAR process and what didn't.

The After-Action Review is one of the most useful tools leaders can employ to assess how closely organizations are moving toward their goals. It provides a continuous learning process where staff members can evaluate progress along the way. They can be informed by checking each milestone they reach and make necessary modifications to improve operational performance immediately. When implementing the AAR, productivity becomes more effective and efficient.

### About the Author

Dr. Ann Gatty is a business development strategist. She helps her clients clarify the vision for their businesses, boost their leadership capabilities and add quality talent to help the clients reach their goals. Through a collaborative mentoring process, she and her clients create workable strategic business plans and success initiatives, while improving their workplace processes. Dr. Gatty is a frequent writer and contributor [www.AllBusiness.com](http://www.AllBusiness.com), [www.MarketingInsiders.com](http://www.MarketingInsiders.com), and [www.WomenOnBusiness.com](http://www.WomenOnBusiness.com). Her interactive speaking engagements assist participants in discovering new-found talents and skills that they can immediately apply in the workplace. Join her [Facebook Group, Strategic Thinking Summit Elites](#) for strategies you can implement to grow your business success and enjoy camaraderie with others entrepreneur members.

<https://www.strategicpeoplesolutions.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/Whats-the-point-of-an-After-Action-Review.pdf>