

# Planning with a Purpose

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*Most businesses spend an inordinate amount of time and money on planning. But how do you create a business plan that translates into action? How do you achieve the results you target? How can you build accountability into your organization? What does it take to give your planning a purpose?*

I've seen this scenario play out many times... A business wants to develop a clear strategy and plan for the future. So they spend massive amounts of energy, time and money on planning. They hold planning meetings and go on corporate retreats. They bring in consultants. They hire strategic experts to come up with sure-fire plans for success, and everyone feels good... for a while. But several months later they look around and nothing has changed. Morale is low, sales are flat and costs are on the rise. So why didn't all that brilliant planning make a real difference?

The truth is that companies usually don't invest an equal amount of energy, time and money on achieving the results their plans target. Instead they flounder for several months before realizing that they're not actually reaching any of the results they'd hoped for, and so they say, "Let's revise our plans again." Now what they really need is not more plans. They need to learn to execute the plans they already have.

To conduct business planning with a purpose you need to remember several simple steps that can catapult your ideas into real-world results:

Set clear, specific goals. The most effective business plans are those with specific, detailed goals that are evaluated regularly. Long-range planning that stretches out over three to five years is only useful for establishing and communicating direction, and these plans should be limited to senior management. Short-range planning should cover twelve to eighteen months and contain definitive benchmarks and milestones to be met.

These short-range plans are what front line leaders need most to remain on course and achieve results. Otherwise they find themselves with a lack of clear responsibilities and objectives, so that no one knows their role, what's expected of them, and how their performance will be measured.

Measure results. Business plans and associated measurements must focus on simple goals owned by specific employees. Once you cross that hurdle, it's time to stop planning and start delivering. Most managers struggle with directly tying employee rewards to results. The key is to always encourage hard work, but *only reward real results.*

Understanding that you must reward people who make things happen is usually not a problem. The real challenge is how to bring the people who don't meet expectations up to par.

One of the best ways I've found to help people succeed is to take the time to identify what stands in the way of excellence and help them remove the roadblocks. If an employee is under-trained – send them to continuing education classes. If an employee has personal issues with a colleague – transfer them to another department to get a fresh start. If an employee is not using their time wisely – help them improve their time management skills. If you can begin to help your team eliminate their roadblocks, you'll be amazed at the impact on their results.

A leader's job is to ensure that every member of their team succeeds, and success must be defined as meeting the company's planned objectives. Without a transparent linkage of planned results to employee performance, it's impossible to mete out rewards with any degree of fairness. Simple goals and effective measurements make holding people accountable and handling poor performers a lot easier because there is a strong element of fairness and clarity involved.

Build an accountability-based culture. Accountability is one of the most important words to any business. Building an accountability-based culture that assigns personal ownership to tasks will ensure your company's success in outperforming your competitors. Here's how you create accountability. Assign clear ownership of tasks and outputs to everyone from senior-level managers to the lowest level workers. Why is this so important? Because in an accountability-based culture it's extremely difficult for people to play the victim or blame others for their shortcomings. You do not want to allow a culture of excuses to take root and grow.

Instead, individuals are forced to be 100% responsible for achieving goals. If they don't - there's no one else to blame. And if tasks are measured regularly, and the results are available for all to see, it's easy for everyone to know when objectives have been met. Public responsibility is a powerful motivator. Try different methods like posting department goals and actual numbers in the break room. Have employees report on their own achievements and problems in staff meetings. Get creative about informing the entire company of individual benchmarks and achievements.

Planning and strategizing is great, but it's not the 'end-all, be-all'. The entire purpose of investing time and money into business plans is to accomplish results. Try these three techniques in your own business and watch your plans become reality!