

Not Every Road Gets You There

Achieving results is simply a matter of planning

BY RANDY G. PENNINGTON

Legendary baseball player and coach Yogi Berra famously said, “If you don’t know where you are going, you’ll end up someplace else.”

Unfortunately, simply knowing where you want go doesn’t necessarily guarantee that you will end up with the results you want. Sometimes you can get lost or veer off track, and that is where having a strategic plan pays dividends.

A clear strategic plan helps ensure that you are doing what needs to be done to achieve results you want for your project. For example, let’s assume that you need to build a road from one city to another. Your first thought may be about securing the right of way. But what about all the other factors and decisions you must consider and anticipate? Paying attention to the area you know – right of way – without first creating the overall project plan makes success more difficult to achieve. It is the same as you lead a team in pursuit of your vision.

A well-crafted strategic plan helps you and your team concentrate your efforts while managing your resources in a way that maximizes efficiency and effectiveness.

It’s Not Complicated

Strategic planning sounds like a complicated process. It isn’t. Here is a five-step process you can use to create a strategic plan for your organization, team, career or life.

1. **Define where you want to be.** Think about where you want to be in the future. Knowing your end goal does not guarantee that you will arrive there, but not defining your destination will likely ensure that you end up someplace else.
2. **Assess your current reality.** Be candid and honest about your performance: Where should you invest your energy and resources in a way that will yield results in the future? Where should you grow an existing activity to make the most of the opportunity? What are your “cash cow” activities that should be continued? Most importantly, what are your “sacred cow”

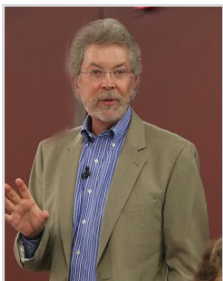


activities that should be abandoned because they do not add value?

3. **Develop specific goals.** Choose one or two of the most important responses to the questions you answered in the previous step. Establish specific and measurable goals to propel forward in each area. Don’t forget to set a timeframe to accomplish the goal. Work expands to fill the time allotted.
4. **Create action plans.** A goal without a specific course of action is really a dream dressed up with more specifics. Decide what is going to be done and by whom. Create accountabilities, and identify the resources and knowledge you will need to succeed.
5. **Follow up to ensure accountability.** One of the most common reasons that strategic plans falter stems from the failure of leaders to review progress and hold themselves accountable. A mediocre plan that is well executed beats a well-designed plan with mediocre execution. Invest 10 to 15 minutes on a regular basis to review progress, refocus energy and celebrate progress.

Why Plans Fail

We’ve all seen or heard of strategic plans that were an elaborate exercise with no value. One reason is that plans were not based on reality. Remember: the quality and usefulness of your plan is in direct proportion to your candor, honesty and acknowledgment of reality when completing the first three steps. The second reason plans fail is lack of follow up. Re-read step five and remember this quote from Thomas Edison: “Vision without execution is a hallucination.” ☘



An expert in leadership strategies, Randy’s latest book is *Make Change Work: Staying Nimble, Relevant, and Engaged in a World of Constant Change*. Follow his blog at www.penningtongroup.com