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PERSONNEL & EMPLOYMENT

Successful strategic plan implementation requires communication

In carefully crafting a strategic plan for your business, you've used your resources wisely, bringing together the best and most reasoned efforts of your executive staff and advisers to build a consensus about where your organization is now and where it is going in the future.

You've spent a significant amount of time, brainpower, and perhaps money if you've hired a consultant. You've invested a lot in your strategic plan.

What's wrong with this picture?

There may be nothing wrong, if you've considered how you're going to involve your employees in the strategic plan, but too often executives overlook the importance of the plan's launch within the organization.

One of the main reasons strategic plans fail is lack of internal communication. If your employees don't buy into the plan, it's doomed from the start.

That's why it's imperative to communicate clearly and frequently with all associates about the plan, its meaning, and the process of achieving its goals.

During the development of the strategic plan, you may have clearly defined the purpose of your organization and established realistic objectives for it, but that doesn't mean that all of your employees will automatically understand their part in the plan. Keep them in the dark, and it won't be a pretty picture.

SEEING IT DIFFERENTLY

Work diligently to help them understand, and the picture changes.

Employees will come to identify with the mission, vision, values and goals of the organization. They'll see that they're integral to the success of their company, which will further motivate them to achieve the goals of the strategic plan.



EXECUTIVE COACHING

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They'll be able to make decisions for themselves based on the plan, too, which will in turn improve the results of implementing the plan.

If that looks like the picture you'd want framed above your credenza, here are a few tips for getting the focus just right:

- Your role as the business owner or CEO is critical. As the leader, everyone will look to you to present a clear overall snapshot of the organization's strategic direction. Be sure you understand all aspects of the plan, even if you didn't personally draft every point of it, so that you can ably communicate its substance and its significance.

- Develop a communication rollout plan just as you would if you were introducing a new product or service. Rather than consumers or clients, though, the target of this rollout is your employees at every level of the organization, from the front line to the executive suite.

- To most effectively communicate your plan to your employees, keep your messages short and sweet. Consolidate your plan into a straightforward, one-page precis so that no one will get bogged down in the fine details and miss the most crucial points.

- Boil it down further and create a slogan or memorable phrase to capture the essence of your strategic plan and indicate your primary emphasis.

It might be something as simple as "Technology for Tomorrow," if you're stressing

the importance of research and development, or something as concrete as "10 New Markets by 2010," if your goals are more sales-oriented.

- Draft a stump speech to communicate the plan at a company-wide meeting if possible. The event should be encouraging and upbeat, if not quite a pep rally. Your speech should highlight the company mission, vision, values and actions. Tell them how their individual actions support and contribute to the realization of the strategic plan.

- Department heads should also hold special meetings with their teams to review the plan in greater depth. During these meetings, managers should explain what the plan means for the department, then solicit feedback and suggestions for implementation.

The result of this exercise should be greater employee buy-in and commitment to the plan.

- You can also use other established internal communication channels such as a company intranet or an e-mail newsletter to share your vision and to report on progress toward attaining the goals in the strategic plan.

Remember that the implementation of the strategic plan requires an ongoing effort, so it's important to provide ongoing communication about the plan, too. Staying in touch with employees will help assure their continuing attention to plan objectives and keep them feeling invested in its success.

Now that's a pretty picture.

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