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Strategic Planning

It's all about the execution

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The strategic planning process can be one of the most exciting times for a nonprofit's leadership and board of trustees. A new vision statement is created. A set of strategic goals, which is needed to achieve the vision, is identified.

Everyone feels a great sense of new energy and excitement about the plan and the future of the organization.

Then, the plan needs to be fully executed.

Based on numerous research studies and experiences, execution is a major challenge for most nonprofit managers and board members. Research estimates indicate that nearly 60 percent of organizational leaders have difficulty executing the strategies that were formulated during the planning stages. The reasons for poor execution are many, but some of the major reasons are:

- Resistance to managing change;
- Poor implementation training of those responsible for execution;
- Self-interest versus organizational interest;
- The lack of clear communication and poor monitoring follow-up;
- Maintaining existing functioning silos and political in-fighting; and,
- Disconnect between planning objectives and operational realities.

The key requirements for successful execution are:

- Having the correct leadership in place to drive and lead the execution;

- Clearly communicated objectives, tasks and goals;
- A means of keeping track of your progress;
- Clear responsibility and accountability;
- Rewards and recognition for employees and/or departments that succeed; and
- Invest in professional support for implementation assistance.

Far too often organizational leaders wait for the strategic plan to be completed before beginning to make any changes. There's an old saying: "Sometimes you have to build a bicycle while you are riding it." This simply means that you cannot afford to wait until the plan is completed before you begin to implement strategies contained in the plan. To build momentum early on, address the "low hanging fruit" first. Don't tackle the most difficult changes first. Gaining success early on leads to positive morale and confidence building.

Consider transitioning your organization from a culture of planning to one of managing for results and achievements. Strategic planning is too often detached from day-to-day operations. It might be more valuable to your organization to spend more time on achieving results than focusing on reporting problems.

When I was a young CEO, I asked my management team for written reports on what they achieved for the month. Their response was: "We never did this before." I said: "Exactly, this is what I want you to focus on, achievements, not problems." It is amazing

what people can accomplish when they begin to get rewarded and recognized for their success.

Truly effective leaders have the courage to overcome any obstacle required for implementing the strategic plan. Leadership is all about being aware of the major reasons for poor execution upfront during the planning process and then building the leadership talent to ensure successful execution of your strategic goals. Every individual has the potential to develop into a truly effective leader. And, every organization can be engineered to meet the goals set out in a strategic plan.

The fun in life is accepting challenges with a positive attitude and in developing those around you to work together towards a common vision. There will always be day-to-day challenges that you must confront. At times it might be very difficult to see the light at the end of the tunnel. You have to work very hard to get there.

When organizations are aware of the requirements of successful strategic plan execution and act accordingly, the mission is sustained and your vision can be achieved. **E**

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