

What's your plan for next year?

It's nearly the end of another year (Wow! How did that happen so fast??). As such, it is a useful time to pause and think about what you want to achieve with your organisation next year.

That bright opportunity to do things differently, to build on the progress to date, to take things to the next level, and maybe to modify, change tack and try some different directions and initiatives. We look at some tips to successful planning.

But first, a few fundamental truths: There is no guarantee of success. There is no certainty. It won't go exactly to plan. But unless you have a plan; it will just go as it goes. (As in; whichever way the wind blows!) Hence for the health of your organisation one should heed the advice of countless management and organisational experts and make a very important investment of some of your time and energies in pausing, reflecting, strategising and then planning.

As grandfather once said: *"If you don't have a plan you'd better hurry up and get lucky. Oh, and by the way; most people seem to get luckier when they have a plan!"*

While we are certainly not management or organisational experts we have a few years under our belts and have helped a few organisations successfully grow and achieve. Hence here are some observations and hard learnings that we hope may possibly be of some benefit.

1. Get away from the daily routine and distractions

If you want to plan well it is generally best done with a clear mind not distracted and muddled by all the "To Do" lists, daily demands and minutiae of our everyday organisational lives. A different space is often helpful. A different outlook. And for one of the authors for some unexplained reason being near water or with a water outlook can be especially invigorating and inspirational and help supercharge the clarity of thought and planning process.

2. Pause and reflect

We seem to spend so much of our lives at pace. Racing forward, always busy, juggling lots of tasks and priorities. This never-ending drive forwards has us focusing on the future and what's next. As such we perhaps neglect investing sufficient time to pause and reflect and consider what we have achieved. Also, to reflect on what worked and why, and just as importantly; what didn't and why.

3. Observe the environment

We are often guilty of myopia. Our focus can be far too narrow. This is perfectly normal. It's also understandable given we spend all our time immersed in our organisations. However, myopia can be unhealthy. Just like the vision condition; another name for it is short-sightedness. The good old SWOT analysis (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats) is always useful as a structure to force one to consider wider perspectives. Albeit, as an aside, recent academic theory is that it should be TOWS i.e. changing the order that you look at these. Partly this is in response to the increased disruption being experienced in many markets. The logic behind this is that unless you are more attuned to potential rapid changes in the external environment, then the impact of these threats and opportunities may completely negate any strengths and weaknesses of your own organisation. i.e. the internal factors.

4. Seek outside input

We generally run the considerable risk of believing our own press. We need to be open to new information, new ideas, and differing points of view. (There is a very valid reason why diversity, in the wider definition of that term, is important: Diversity of thought). Look for ways to gain insights into the wider environment. Bring in outside information, views and perspective. Consider engaging a contrarian, a left field perspective, someone who is brave or brash enough to challenge the status quo. A questioner.

5. Yet don't underestimate internal input

There are usually gems lying latent and hiding within any organisation. And sometimes all you need to do is ask. And yet if you don't positively ask or at least create a suitable forum to gain input then these gems can often lie hidden forever. It can be especially beneficial to engage the new entrants to your organisation. Those not yet tainted by "the culture". As General Patton is reputed to have famously said; *Often the freshest eggs have the best ideas.*

6. Pose great questions

Expecting people to have the answers to all your organisation's challenges straight off the bat is of course unrealistic. However, the quality and framing of questions is a great way to help put creative minds into action.

7. Beware the phrase: "We've always done it this way"

It's a closed mind comment. Just because it worked in the past is no guarantee of it working in the future. Yesterday's cash cow can quickly become today's dinosaur. Think Kodak, think fax machines, think videos, think Blackberrys. The skill is knowing when to let go of the safe and known and jump into the new. And the how big and how boldly you need to jump.

8. Getting it down in writing

Once you have developed and agreed your plan the next skill is getting it recorded in a succinct manner. Unless it is going to be entirely carried out by yourself (Never a great strategy) then the recording of the plan also needs to facilitate easy communication to others. Short, simple, succinct. Graphics can also considerably assist. Less is more.

9. Now, how to make it happen?

Sadly, there is no shortage of excellent comprehensive, strategic plans. However, as good as these may be; they are useless if not put into action. To get traction you need action. So just as important as the quality of the planning process (more important say many!) are the processes you then need to put in place to put your plans into action. Quite simply there needs to be a systematic process to ensure any plan is communicated, referred to, followed, monitored with results measured regularly, and perhaps most importantly; remedial action taken if necessary. In our experience things very rarely go to plan. And that's OK, as long as you recognise this fact early enough, and then can take some appropriate remedial action to get things back on a positive path again.

Summary

Let's finish with a few more pertinent sayings about planning:

Failing to plan is planning to fail.

Plan to succeed. It improves your odds!

If you don't have a map, you're unlikely to get there via the most efficient route.

And ensure you are keeping up.

Yesterday you needed a map but today there is a GPS and app – are you up to date?



About the Authors

Craig Fisher FCA is an Audit Partner and Chairman of RSM. Craig has an interest in and is actively involved in a variety of governance and management roles.

Contact Craig on:

D: +64 (9) 367 1654

E: craig.fisher@rsmnz.co.nz

W: www.rsmnz.co.nz



Liz Groenewegen CA will be the Managing Partner at RSM New Zealand (Auckland) from January 2017. Liz enjoys working with a wide variety of SME clients with accounting & taxation matters, business development, and management reporting.

Contact Liz on:

D: +64 (9) 367 6689

E: liz.groenewegen@rsmnz.co.nz

W: www.rsmnz.co.nz