

## Tips for crafting an action plan

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How many times have you sat in a meeting and listened to a lot of talk with no plan of action--a lot of talk about “old business” and “new business.” Then when the meeting is finished, after long discussions about what needs to be done, you walk out of the room feeling like you have a blind fold on with your arms reaching forward into the vast darkness. Then the next time you meet, status updates reveal the same “old business.” Sound familiar?

Some leaders have a great vision and can communicate well but without a viable action plan, their vision is nothing more than wishful thinking if specific people don't understand their roles in accomplishing specific things. So if you're a leader and want people to truly accomplish desired tasks in a timely manner, here are some tips when crafting an action plan:

1) *Keep it simple.* An overly complex plan will confuse and frustrate even the most capable people. If your flow chart of activities looks like the wiring diagram for a space rocket, revise it with an eye toward simplicity and coherence.

2) *Involve the people who will execute the plan.* Implementation plans are more

likely to succeed if they are not simply imposed on the people asked to push them forward. If the implementers are involved in developing the action plan, they'll be more dedicated to its success. Over the years I've noticed many times over that action plans devised solely by senior-level strategists hardly ever reflected the realities of the business and what the organization could accomplish than the action plans built on the ideas of the people on the front lines.

3) *Structure your plan in achievable chunks.* Overly ambitious plans are usually doomed to failure. When people read through them, they feel defeated from the beginning and believe they'll never get it done. So don't let your people feel that way. Craft an action plan that is both manageable and achievable.

4) *Specify roles and responsibilities.* All required tasks and actions should detail clear roles and responsibilities associated with them. Every planned outcome should be the acknowledged responsibility of one or more individuals and those individuals should publicly state they accept their roles. Doing so puts them on record as taking responsibility for results. I made the mistake once of assuming a specific person was going to do something

because I made a suggestion. Then five weeks later I stood in front of a superior looking like a fool when an important task was not accomplished and the person who I thought did it said they didn't know they were supposed to do it!

5) *Make it flexible.* Business and organizational strategies seldom follow the originally planned trajectory or timetable. Some competitors or rivals may counterattack. Some customers or clients don't behave as anticipated. Sometimes bad things happen--and they often do when you can least afford it. Thus, a good implementation plan is a living document open to revision. Organizations that lock themselves into rigid schedules, goals, and events ultimately find themselves detached from the shifting world in which they must do business.

Now just abiding by these five tips in your action plan won't automatically mean everything will be peachy. You must ensure the people committed to and entrusted with carrying out the plan are provided with the necessary resources (time, money, people, training, equipment) in order to truly succeed. Action plans fulfilled can build mountains!

~ The End ~