Strategic Planning: Good intentions don't equal good results.

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> ***"We have a strategic plan. We call it 'doing things.'"***
> *- Herb Kelleher, Southwest Airlines*

Most strategic plans fail - not because of poor quality but because they're never executed. Better a mediocre strategy that's implemented than a work of art that never gets translated into action.

See if this sounds familiar. You've come back to the office from a one day strategic retreat - all fired up, with charts overflowing with great ideas. A week goes by - the kick-off implementation meeting gets postponed to work on an RFP. A month passes - those great ideas are now buried under a teetering pile of memos. Then the champion of the planning initiative goes on medical leave. And so on, until the retreat is forgotten. If you actually got the darned strategy typed, it's sitting on a shelf gathering dust. Your organization had good intentions in doing the retreat. Unfortunately, good intentions don't equal good results.

For a strategic plan that really works, keep the following in mind.

1. Your Mission. A mission statement should be inspirational and memorable. Forget the tired buzz words like "leading" "premier" or "solution" and focus on what gets you excited. Will it motivate your employees? Will it mean something to your customers or clients? Can it be easily remembered and repeated?

2. Programs' Alignment with Mission. Do your programs support the mission? Are you doing something because you've always done it that way *or* because it's "cool" - versus supporting the mission? (This is a particular pitfall in technology start-ups.)

Also, be wary of those "opportunities of a lifetime." If they don't fit within your original mission and business plan, you could end up going *way* off track.

3. Results. Before you leap into tactics and action plans, think about end results. What would success look like? Don't try to do everything at once. You'll diffuse your efforts and everyone will get frustrated,

Don't try to solve world hunger immediately; focus on feeding one child at a time.

Sure, not everything can be measured in hard numbers - but you can evaluate progress in *some* way, gathering both quantitative and qualitative evidence which will help you change, improve and grow. For example, the Cleveland Orchestra back in 1987 started looking at things such as: increase in standing ovations; increased demand for tickets, including when visiting New York and Europe; repeat invitations to the prestigious Salzburg Festival; cab drivers saying "We're really proud of our orchestra" (yes, really!) and so on. (For more on the Orchestra - and other examples - see Jim Collins' monograph, *From Good to Great and the Social Sectors*.)

4. Processes. This is boring (to most of us) but critical. Have you identified the processes necessary for *consistent* results? Have you thought through the critical relationships you must manage (vendors, internal groups, clients/customers)? Have you considered all aspects of the process, from input to output? What happens if one step is missed? Are you duplicating efforts from one department to another? You should document all processes; however, documentation doesn't work if people don't read it, so aim for quality not quantity.

Here's a key question to ask yourself: What would happen if we *stopped* doing "it?" (whatever "it" is.) All too often, we fall into habits that aren't really accomplishing anything (other than adding busy work to our already busy jobs.)

5. People. Actions are done by people - all of whom have different personalities, perspectives and skill sets. Do you have the right people in the right positions? Do they know what they're supposed to be doing (and how to do it?) Do your employees understand the mission? Were they involved in the planning? Do they know how their responsibilities fit in the plan? Are compensation and recognition programs tied to results? If your employees don't feel valued, they're not going to value your customers.

6. Tools. This includes filing systems, computers, phones, web sites, field technician service kits - whatever it takes to get the job done. Are your tools right for the job? Are the data gathering, storage and reporting systems integrated and easy to use? Do you have sufficient computers with the right applications? Does your web site deliver results? If your staff is constantly doing manual workarounds, re-evaluate your technologies. Also, automating a broken process won't fix anything - it'll just make the problem worse. Technology (of any type) should be an enabler, not an inhibitor. The process and people planning should come before *any* technology changes.

7. Measurements are Key. If you don't measure it , you can't manage it. Make sure you're measuring the right things; you may be basing success on gross revenues when you should be looking at target market profitability. Or, you could be looking at inputs (number of clients served, amount of money raised, number of new customers) and not the *outputs* (better quality of life for clients, increased amount per regular donor, increase in per customer profitability, increased customer retentions, etc.) which are the *real* results!

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