

INFORMATION EXCHANGE

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PERSONAL PLANNING AND GOAL SETTING

Introduction

Why set goals? What can they accomplish? What do they mean to an individual? What do they mean to an organisation? Why are they so important to organisation success?

You may still remember the following dialogue from Lewis Carroll's *Alice Adventures in Wonderland*? Alice asked the Cheshire Cat, "Would you tell me, please, which way I ought to go from here?" "That depends a good deal on where you want to get to," said the Cat. Alice replied "I don't much care where ..." "Then it doesn't matter which way you go," the Cat concluded.

In real life, we need to know which way to go, especially if we are leading an organisation. Goal setting gives us a destination and personal planning guides us through the journey from where we are to where we go.

What is Planning?

In formal planning, specific goals are set and they are committed in writing. Specific action programs chart the path for the achievement of those goals. In informal planning, plans are kept in the leader's head. Nothing is written down and there is little or no sharing of these plans with participants.

In fact, plans link our organisation from the core to the frontline. The core, in the centre, sets long-term strategic plans. And then, each succeeding level toward the frontline develops its plans. Plans at each level should help to accomplish those for the level close to the centre and give direction for the level toward the frontline. As a simple guide, short-term plans are operational and less than one year, while long-term plans are strategic and cover more than five years. Between one to five years, we call them intermediate-term plans.

Questions in Planning

First. Who are we?

The question helps us to assess our strengths and weaknesses as an individual and as an organisation.

Second. Why are we here?

In searching an answer for this question, we look at the individuals who have claims or demands on our organisation. We also look at what happens outside the organisation in order to find out the opportunities and threats facing us.

Third. Where are we going?

We must set goals for ourselves and our organisation. We select these goals to lead from our major strengths and capabilities, and to overcome our weaknesses.

However, a major side issue we confront in this connection is the problem of the moving target that our rapidly changing environments present to our organisation and us.

What is a Goal?

A goal is a statement of a specific and desired outcome with a time frame. A well-written goal should state what is to be achieved and when it will be completed.

In 1961 American President Kennedy gave us a classic example: "To place an American on the moon by the end of this decade". However, "To be the world leader in telecommunications" is only a statement of desired or intended result, because it is neither specific nor time-framed. To put it in simple terms, a goal is a dream with a deadline. It is a desired future state that the organisation attempts to realise. In contrast, a plan is a blueprint specifying the resource allocations, schedules and other actions necessary for attaining goals.

The Scout Approach

S.C.O.U.T. indicates the critical criteria of an effective goal.

Specific with focus. Goals are only meaningful when they are specific enough to be verified and focused.

Challenging yet realistic. Goals should be set so as to require the participants to stretch to reach them.

Observable and measurable. Goals should be observable and measurable. As a result, feedback can let participants know if their effort is sufficient or needs to be increased.

Universal and acceptable to all participants concerned. The Leader can typically set goals to the participants or they can be participatively decided, in collaboration with the participants.

Time-framed. Open-ended goals are likely to be neglected because there is no sense of urgency associated with them.

Toward MBO

In the past, the top management set the objectives for the organisation and then broken down into sub-goals for each hierarchy in the organisation. It was only a one-way process. The top imposed its standards on everyone below.

Nowadays, well-managed organisations have replaced it with Management by objectives (MBO). It is a system in which participants jointly set goals with their leaders, action plans are developed, progress is periodically reviewed, and rewards are allocated on the basis of overall performance results.

Advantages of Goals

Goals provide a blueprint for performance, and criteria for decisions. It also provides a basis for feedback, co-operation and teamwork. Goals focus our attention on the right agenda.

Problems with Goals

First, the measurability problem. In some areas performance results are difficult to quantify or measure.

Second, the stress problem. Goals that are too demanding can result in stress and performance problems over the long-term.

(continue overleaf)

Third, the problem of too narrow a focus. Some goals are so concentrated in their focus that they may result in negative performance results in other areas.

Goal Setting Process

- Establish specific goals to support stated purpose.
- Determine the importance of these goals.
- Make plans for action.
- Arrive at performance standards and measurement criteria.
- State anticipated problems.
- Weigh the resources required to carry out the planned action.
- Provide for other interaction of organisational and individual goals.
- Follow up with actionable performance measurement and evaluation.

Goal Setter Must

- Identify participants' key job tasks.
- Establish specific and challenging goals for each key task.
- Specify deadlines for each goal.
- Allow the participants to actively involve.
- Prioritise goals.
- Rate goals for difficulty and importance.
- Build in feedback mechanisms to assess goal progress.
- Commit rewards contingent on goal attainment.

Tips on Goal Setting

1. Specific and challenging goals tend to result in better performance than vaguely defined and easily attained goals.
2. Feedback on goal attainment progress enhances the process.
3. Goals should be prioritised if there are more than one.
4. Informal competition among participants produced by goal setting and feedback can enhance the benefits of the process.
5. Goal accomplishment and performance should be rewarded.
6. Goal setting can be an important part of performance management.
7. Participants need to develop action plans to carry out their goals.
8. Organisational policies need to be reviewed for consistency and complementarity with goal accomplishment.
9. The climate within which goal setting occurs should be a

supportive one in which leaders help and encourage their participants to succeed.

10. Depending on how they are used, goals can decrease or increase the amount of stress perceived by participants.

Action Plan

Write a goal statement for your organisation, and develop an implementation plan. It should include:

1. The S.C.O.U.T. criteria.
2. Outside factors that might affect the goal.
3. Steps necessary to achieve the goal.
4. By when?
5. What should be a good, a satisfactory, or an acceptable result?

Include any other comments or explanations about your goal and plan.

Conclusion

The planning process should include a contingency plan. It prepares for the unexpected and rapid changes, whether they are positive or negative, in the environment that may have a huge impact on the organisation and that require a quick response. A good plan also makes some provision for the contingent in human affairs. Hence, we should build a certain amount of flexibility into our plan so that we are not caught out by unforeseen, but not improbable happenings.

In short, goal setting defines our direction and personal planning is a step to step guide on how to achieve the goal. As a motto, hope for the best, but plan for the worst.

References

- Locke, E.A. and Latham, G.P. (1984). *Goal Setting: A Motivational Technique that Works*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall.
- Robbins, Stephen P and Hunsaker, Phillip L. (1996) *Training in Interpersonal Skills: Tips for Managing People at Work*. Second Edition, Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall.

PLANNING TOOLS AVAILABLE FROM THE WORLD SCOUT BUREAU

Two books have been published by the World Scout Bureau (Geneva) which will help you implement ideas from the present issue of Information Exchange.

"The Basic Planning Kit" for National Scout Organizations is "a tool for organizations that would rather know where they want to go, distance

themselves from a day to day problem solving approach and influence their future through positive action. It uses a step by step approach to introduce volunteers and professionals to a simple yet effective way of making, implementing and controlling decisions".

"The growth of the Movement" presents a practical application of ideas in the Basic Planning Kit to "Planning for growth". "Growth, normally, is a sign of health. To grow, a voluntary movement must attract and retain more people. In the long run, the attraction will be durable only if the quality of the programme is consistently high. Sustained growth is therefore a synonym of excellence."

The two booklets may be obtained from:

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A double section (3-4) of the "Management Handbook" also deals with Planning. The subject was also covered by issues 3 and 4 of "Management Info" under the title: Planning to win (part 1: Priorities, objectives, indicators and part 2: Plan of action). In each of these issues, an "insert" provides a practical tool that you can use to measure the planning ability or practice within your own association. It is indeed essential that an Association that wishes to embark on a planning project - either for Growth, Programme development or other - should realise that "Planning" is not something that a specially appointed "planning team" does but a concerted effort that involves those in charge of any aspect of the management of an association, at any level. It should therefore involve all leaders, wherever they may be serving the Movement.

The tools presented as inserts to sections three and four of the Management Handbook should help you check that, in your associations, all leaders are concerned and involved in the planning process, that they participate in the implementation process and also contribute to evaluating progress.

Copies of the Management Handbook can be obtained from:

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