



Strategic Planning Successful Implementations: A Framework for Small Businesses

By Jeri Quinn

Every business, large, medium or small needs a strategic plan to make progress. That's pretty well accepted in the business community and a requirement of the financial community that provides capital for business growth. Different size businesses have different vulnerabilities when it comes time to putting the strategic plan into action. Small businesses don't always have the massive bureaucracies that a large or even medium sized company might have. However, other things get in the way. Here are some things I've found in my experience that tend to plague small businesses and derail a strategic plan created with the best intentions.

Potential Problems When Implementing a Strategic Plan

Communication:

The strategic plan doesn't get broadcast to the rest of the staff. Perhaps the owner keeps it on a shelf. Even if s/he shares with it with his/her top managers, it might not find its way down into the actual goals and job descriptions of the individual workers. It isn't mentioned at every company function. Specific parts of the plan are not cascaded down through all levels and into the appropriate departments.

Cash flow:

Small business owners sometimes think, "This is what we'll do if we have the sales revenue to do it." If the sales don't measure up to expectation, they want to cut costs and put the breaks on the marketing/sales investments that might help them stay on track.



Personnel:

Small businesses are very reliant on each employee. When one leaves, especially a manager or key salesperson, it throws everything out of whack until a replacement is hired and trained. That's an expensive proposition in terms of both time and money.

Training and Development:

Business growth requires people getting more accomplished in additional areas or in more specialized areas. Employees need to make more of their own decisions if growth is to occur. Small businesses don't always have adequate budgets for training and developing their employees. If training and development doesn't happen, the staff will be a limiting factor in the accomplishments of the strategic plan.

Owner's Time and Commitment to the Planning Process:

Very often a small business owner is handling the day to day activities of solving customer needs and making new sales. Many people including the owner wear multiple hats running around putting out 'fires'. This sets up a culture of being reactive instead of proactive. A business plan is all about being proactive and preventing those 'fires'. Sometimes it is hard for a business owner to implement the strategic plan and still take care of the day to day details.

A Framework For Accomplishing Your Plan

Training and development and strategic planning go hand in hand. Your people will implement the plan. What good is a plan without staff that are up to the task? Invest in your people. Make them all leaders of the plan. Help them expand their minds with possibility and creative thinking. Invest in their skills and knowledge in the use of their tools and the target markets your firm has identified. Make sure managers and supervisors have people skills in



directing others, communication, decision making, handling conflicts. And by all means have each of your employees go through a practice and application program in goal achievement.

Your whole plan is about setting and achieving individual goals that will be rolled up into each department's goals, which will be rolled up into the company's goals. Each employee's individual goal setting habits will make or break your strategic plan. So help them establish goal achievement habits that become ingrained into the personal and professional fabric of their lives.

Communication of your plan needs to become the core of how you run the business. Everything you do needs to be related back to the plan in a big or small way. Every meeting can mention a portion of the plan. Employee assignments, goals, and reviews should communicate the portion of the plan that that employee is responsible for achieving. Tying the employee's job duties to the larger goal and to the overall picture of the company's growth makes an employee feel valued and valuable. It gives meaning to his/her work. It gives direction and helps him/her make better choices. Communication of the plan also includes communication of the company's core values such as honesty, integrity, customer service, etc. As long as these values are actively pursued by management, the employee's ability to grow and learn in an identified framework of goals and prioritized values makes for a very productive work environment. Everyone likes to feel productive and know that his/her work contributes to the group mission. Everyone likes to feel success. So identify what success is through good communication, and empower each employee to achieve it in his/her own role.

Be committed to the plan. Plan well and stick to enacting it. If you as an owner find it's difficult to not get so caught up in the day-to-day reactive things, then get help. Invest in executive coaching to mentor you through some of the transitions you need to make to empower employees to handle the day-to-day issues themselves. Have your planning consultant come in once a month to hold you accountable for the monthly goals you've established. Focus on the proactive side of your business so you don't get in your own way and sabotage your own plan. Eventually the proactive planning will prevent a lot of those 'fires'



from occurring and you'll have a smoother operation which will delight your customers and make your employee's daily work that much easier. They'll then have more time to accomplish more of the plan.

Employee retention will result from having your employees work focused on the plan you've communicated, directed by the values you've identified, and empowered by the training and development that have been an integral part of the plan. That means your plan will more likely move according to schedule and with fewer monies going to hiring and retraining replacement staff. Your staff will be more motivated to not only stay, but be more committed to their jobs.

Cash flow can become tight when you're investing in staff training and development, in new tools or new market development. This should be anticipated in your plan and, hopefully, you've made provisions for augmenting your cash as you strive for the next level. What if you haven't arranged for enough, or something unexpected happens? This is where your commitment is tested. Do you stop investing? Trust your employees' creativity to generate additional income or reduce expenses? Pull it together for a little longer until the new investments pay some dividends? This is where your executive coach or business planning consultant can be invaluable. S/he can help you evaluate the situation, shed light on resources you may not have seen yourself, encourage you to find the help you need from other sources, or understand the predicament in a new way. Getting help from someone who's been intimately involved in your business and your management style for a while can be invaluable as your plan evolves and changes, and as you gain confidence in your ability to make positive growth changes in yourself and your organization.

In summary I've identified several factors that need to be integral to your plan. Your investment in staff training and development, communication, executive coaching, and on-going accountability consulting will help you and the organization make the transition to the next level of growth. These need to be built into your plan and its budget. If you plan this implementation framework, you will have a higher likelihood of success in ending your year with the intended goals achieved. I wish you a great deal of success in your endeavors.



About the Author



Jeri Quinn at Driving IR helps leaders of small and medium sized businesses who want to grow their companies. Her specialty area is creating cultures where employees show initiative and take ownership of their work. Results include engaged employees, loyal customers/clients, lots of referrals, huge profit increases, more enjoyment and a sellable asset. What makes Jeri unique is her thirty five years experience starting, growing and selling businesses, 25 years at the helm of her own companies. You can obtain a Referral Success

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