

Apply a focused approach to developing and achieving goals

Memphis Business Journal- by Barbara Richman

One common denominator that successful organizations share is the ability to develop and achieve goals that reflect their business priorities. While visions and dreams are catalysts in providing motivation for establishing goals, a deliberate, disciplined and realistic approach is required to accomplish targeted results.

In a thriving economic environment, organizations may have some leeway if plans are delayed, projects veer off course, standards are not met, or costs exceed projected estimates. However, this degree of latitude does not exist for most businesses today. The need for a focused approach is essential to meet present and upcoming challenges.

Developing goals and supporting plans enables organizations, departments, work groups and individuals to create a roadmap for reaching desired outcomes. The potential for achieving these results increases if SMART goals (specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and time-based) are implemented.

Results require attentiveness to all aspects of planning, including preparation, implementation, monitoring, communication and evaluation.

The following are tips for applying a focused approach to achieving goals:

1. Develop a written statement of the goal that defines a specific outcome to be achieved.

Avoid vague or general descriptions, such as reducing costs or increasing profits, which do not sufficiently clarify what is to be accomplished.

2. Establish a goal that is measurable.

Stating goals in numeric terms allows those involved to assess whether results have been achieved. For example, a goal to decrease annual operating expenses by 10 percent establishes a desired outcome and a measurement for monitoring progress.

3. Determine whether the goal is achievable.

Although a goal should be challenging and present a stretch, its accomplishment also should be within reach. One means of assessing whether the potential for achievement is realistic is to identify questions, such as the following, that will elicit pertinent information. Is the goal within the control of the individual or group with responsibility for its results? Do those involved have the necessary skills and abilities to accomplish the goal? What additional resources (e.g. equipment, software) are required? Will the budget cover projected costs?

4. Ensure that the goal is relevant.

Assess the value that the goal brings to the workplace by considering benefits that can be derived from its achievement. Also, gauge the goal's relevancy based on whether it is in alignment with the strategic direction of the organization and other goals established by the department and work group involved. If the goal is included in an individual's business or performance plan, it should be aligned with the essential functions of the job.

5. Create a time-based goal that is anchored with a beginning and ending date.

Before committing to these dates, pose questions, such as the following, to determine whether the time period under consideration is realistic. What is the availability of necessary personnel during this time frame? Will other commitments be impacted by this deadline? When will required resources be procured?

6. Prior to implementing the goal, prepare a written plan that provides a framework for the process that will be followed and specifically defines how results will be achieved.

Identify information to be included, such as performance measurements, required resources, and a detailed action plan.

7. Determine how progress toward goal completion will be monitored.

Define indicators to measure performance, sources of applicable data, and frequency of tracking.

8. Formulate an action plan that describes and prioritizes steps that will be followed in reaching the goal.

Identify the group or individuals with primary responsibility for implementation and oversight at each step, applicable deadlines and anticipated costs.

9. Compare the benefits that will be derived from the goal with the time and costs required for achievement before finalizing a decision regarding implementation.

An assessment of this nature can lead to plan revisions, goal modifications, or a decision not to move forward.

10. Establish expectations for all involved in accomplishing the goal.

The potential for success will be increased if there is a clear understanding of responsibilities.

11. Review the goal and supporting plan on a regular basis after implementation to determine if revisions are needed.

Organizational changes, unanticipated events and other circumstances may create a need to revisit previous decisions.

12. Communicate information on the status of progress throughout the time frame established for goal achievement.

This feedback provides guidance for actions to be taken, including necessary adjustments.

13. Look for ways to reinforce and celebrate successes.

Celebrations, whether formal or informal, are a means of recognizing prior efforts and energizing those involved to maintain a positive focus.

14. Ask for input that is based on insights gained throughout the process to evaluate the goal upon completion.

Frame questions to determine what worked, what should have been done differently and recommendations for future changes and initiatives.

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