

If a business plan is so important, why do only 10% of businesses have one?

Planning is the key to delegation, productivity and financing. It's the ethical thing to do for job safety and providing meaningful work. But a plan isn't a plan until all the managers are on board. So what are the obstacles leaders face in the planning effort?

Managers avoid planning for two reasons. The first is the outdated "strategic" planning method and jargon borrowed from the military in the 1950's: mission, vision, strategy, tactics, objectives, etc. Planning is hard enough to do without the jargon.

The psychological demands of planning

The second reason planning stalls are its surprising psychological demands. Planning takes *creativity, cooperation and courage*; no wonder it prompts strong "avoidance" behaviors.

Using the correct side of your brain

Managers are often surprised to realize planning is a creative, not an analytical activity. While you need data and logic to get managers focused, it takes collective creativity to set goals everyone will support enthusiastically.

There's no spreadsheet or process that automates goal-setting in your unique, complex world. Keep analysis and planning separate.

Cooperation: Planning personalities

Picture all your senior managers sitting around the conference table. It's certain the VP of Marketing thinks differently from the CFO; the COO has different personality than the HR director. This isn't bad: you need these diverse skills, knowledge and perspectives.

This difficult facilitation takes patience: a bold plan strongly affects each manager's work, pay and self-esteem.

A plan isn't a plan unless all the managers are *genuinely excited about it*. Give yourself time get everyone informed and comfortable. Remind them of all the tough, successful decisions they've already made together.

Courage: Risks, humility and faith

Churchill said that the primary characteristic of a leader is courage, "for without courage, nothing else is possible." Who would think planning would be so stressful? There are three reasons:

Courage, to face all the risks at once.

Planning brings all your risks and opportunities into focus at once. This is daunting to any team; it's easier on the corporate psyche to let each department's risks surface one at a time.

Humility, to face all problems at once.

It takes a lot of personal strength to systematically and publicly review all one's business problems. Conscientious managers identify personally with their work, particularly in privately-held or family businesses. It's natural they feel their faults and errors are being watched from above and below.

Faith and trust, to give up control. Both planning and leadership—two sides of the same coin—require faith in each teammate's abilities to face the unknown and not to crumble in the face of adversity. Trust is an important kind of courage. As leader, you must set an example.

Coping strategies

How do you face psychological issues in a practical way? First, see them coming; we hope this article helps. Second, reflect on their personal hero and the planning they did. (Churchill was a famous planner.) Third, help your team visualize the results of a good plan: the intensive pride of genuine cooperation.

Yes, the legendary planner Daniel Burnham said, "Make no little plans," but your first plan can be modest to get your team into focus, confident that, together, they can take on more.

So gather your managers in your conference room. Brainstorm and organize all your big questions (see www.vanmell.com). This is an effective, gentle way to get their thinking aligned and to create new ideas about the future. While it might take a few months to agree on the top six goals; once you've decided, figuring out how to get there is easy.

Everyone will be grateful for the direction, courage and success you've given them.