

Long-Term Vision Is Key to Agency Planning

Unfortunately, research indicates that most people will not keep their New Year's resolutions. My theory is that this failure is closely related

to the failure many businesses have in achieving their goals. And that reason is a failure to plan properly.

Now, because it is February, and most businesses have completed their planning process, you may not think this article is particularly



By Tony Caldwell

to frustration and failure to hit objectives. Instead, fill the bigger picture with a longer-term vision, and when

income and profits? What are other unique distinguishing characteristics of this future business or future career?

As you do this visioning, make every effort not to limit yourself. High performance companies and individuals use Big Hairy Audacious Goals (BHAGS) not only to inspire, but to create a framework for how they will engage the future. As

Jim Collins, author of the business classic "Good to Great," says, "It is a particularly powerful mechanism to stimulate progress." Begin your annual planning exercise with a vision of a bigger future for yourself and your company.

Now it is time to ask the question, "What must I do in the next three years to make this goal possible?"

While 25 (or 10) years is a very long time, and difficult to plan, three years is relatively easy. As you brainstorm about this period of time, think about all the things you can do to move yourself toward your BHAG. Next, ask, "What are the obstacles that I need to overcome to accomplish these three-year goals?" Even if you don't have the answers to those obstacles today, identifying them will begin to allow you and your team to look for tools, techniques and strategies to overcome them and make progress.

With your three-year future clearly in mind, turn your attention to the next 12 months. Notice I said, 12 months, not a year, so whether you are reading this in November, April, or January is not relevant. Plan for the next 12 months. Ask yourself, "What do I need to do in the next 12 months to make the three-year plan work?" The resulting list of tasks and goals begins to form the basis of your detailed 12-month plan.

As you think about this period, ask yourself, "What do I need to stop doing in order to maximize progress?" You may want to eliminate any activities or expenditures that don't bring you closer to your 12-month goals. In fact, beginning

timely. But if you are an independent insurance agency – or any business – interested in consistently achieving at a high level and regularly obtaining your goals, read on.

Most planning is short term, a year or less, which means the plans are made in a vacuum that lacks perspective. And this vacuum contributes

you do, planning becomes more meaningful and productive.

Seeing the Big Picture

My first suggestion is to begin planning with a picture of yourself, or your business, 25 years from now (or at least 10 years). Ask yourself these questions about your business: What does it look like? How large is it? What is it doing? What are its

your planning with “stop” decisions is often much more powerful and productive than adding “start” activities.

Pivot in Real Time

Finally, it is time to plan for the most dynamic period of all, which is the next 90 days. Again, ask yourself the question, “What must I do in the next 90 days to accomplish everything I have set before me for the next 12 months?” This list should be highly specific and identify who is responsible for each goal or activity, as well as how success will be measured. A useful acronym for well-specified goals, SMART, was coined by management guru Peter Drucker in 1954 and, today, is still incredibly useful. SMART stands for Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic and Time bound. If you follow the SMART method you give yourself a head start on achievement.

Committing to a set of 90-day goals will bring you to success and achievement

of your one-, three- and 25-year vision. Focusing on short-term success will bring long-term accomplishment. Even though you won’t likely get everything you plan done every 90 days, if you set a standard of hitting 80% of them every quarter you will be amazed at your progress over time. Even when a project, or a goal, doesn’t get completed in the 90-day window you will undoubtedly have made tremendous progress and will finish in the subsequent 90 days. Planning and working in this short period of time will focus your energy, resources and thinking in a way that makes it almost certain you will reach your 12-month and three-year goals.

As you can see this type of planning is not overly complex, but it is focused on performance. So, to make that performance as high as it can be, I recommend you review your progress every 30 days.

In your review, I suggest you keep it simple by asking yourself only three questions:

1. Is this what I expected?
2. If not, why not?
3. Finally, what am I going to do about it?

These three questions will keep you very focused on your actual progress and allow you to pivot as necessary in real time to ensure the accomplishment of the 90-day plan. And the 90-day plan is the key to the annual plan, which, in turn, is what makes the three-year plan work and the big hairy audacious goals of the next 10 to 25 years possible.

Most entrepreneurs don’t love planning, but most entrepreneurs do have a vision for the future. This twenty-five-year, three-year, one-year, 90-day and 30-day planning process will make it much easier to reach that vision. ■

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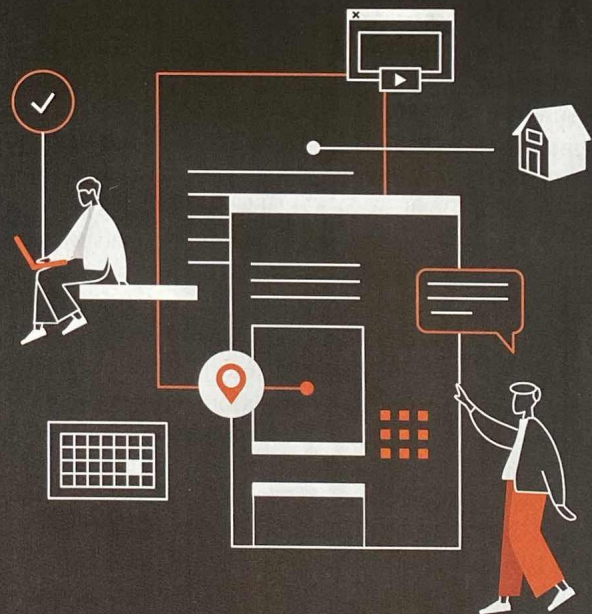


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