

Goal Alignment: Turning Strategy into Results

BY DIANA RIVENBURGH

A new year is just about upon us with continued opportunities and challenges. You have hopefully created your strategic objectives for the upcoming year. Now all you have to do is achieve them – a challenge for small and large companies alike.

Broadly communicate your strategy

First, communicate your strategy and vision. Everyone in the company needs to hear a clear, consistent message and hear it often. Keep it simple to focus on what is most important.

Align goals through and across all business units

Next, cascade the strategy through the organization – to each and every individual that works for you. Your executives must work through the management ranks to make sure that each work unit understands how they fit into the big picture. Goal alignment must also occur across the organization. If your finance department plans on putting in a new billing system, the IT department must have the resources needed to make this happen.

Cascade goals to all employees

Translate the business unit goals into targets for each function in the department. Consider the nature of the role and department, as well as your culture. Some organizations hold collaborative meetings to brainstorm how each person or function should contribute to achieving the objectives. This may include how to market products, assign customers, cut expenses, make investments in new business development, etc. In other organizations or departments, it may be more appropriate to drive the objectives from the top (e.g. production quotas in a manufacturing environment).

Teach employees to set SMART goals

When setting goals, it's useful to give employees some education on how to set appropriate goals. Many companies use the SMART acronym to teach others how to

describe their objectives.

S = Specific

M = Measureable

A = Achievable

R = Relevant

T = Timely

Don't underestimate the importance of training. I've seen executives struggle with articulating their goals in a clear and measurable way. If they can't do this, then those reporting to them may have difficulty as well.

Drive accountability

Put all goals in writing. This not only enables you to ensure that your staff is on the right path, but also helps to establish commitment.

Once goals are set, be diligent in following up throughout the year to ensure all members of your team are focused on achieving these objectives. Set up processes to make sure this happens such as requiring feedback on monthly reports or at staff meetings, publicizing status, celebrating success and reminding others of the goals whenever you can. If you don't ask, your staff is likely working on something else that someone is screaming for.

Measure results on a periodic basis and provide feedback regularly – not just in the employee's performance evaluation. Positive reinforcement goes a long way in motivating others for better performance.

Involve others

When possible, try to have your staff involved in setting their goals to align to those of the business unit. The more input they have, the more they will own the objective. Even if your employees don't define what their goals are, perhaps they can have a say in how they achieve them.

Set others up to be successful

While setting stretch goals can help to promote development, be sure that targets are still realistic. Research has shown that when goals are deemed to be unachievable, people

will likely stop trying to reach them. Not only do the goals need to be realistic, but employees must feel that they have the ability to achieve the goals. This may require training or mentoring. Adequate resources such as sufficient staff, budgetary dollars, equipment, etc. must also be available. Conditions don't need to be ideal (in fact, they rarely are), but they do need to be reasonable.

Remove obstacles

Obstacles will inevitably exist in business as they do in life. Coach your staff to identify, remove or work around those hindering their performance. In some cases, you must intervene to remove the obstacle. Sometimes the greatest barriers can be rooted in the existing work. If more responsibility is piled on top of other work, employees may feel overburdened. To be effective you must continuously evaluate what your department is doing and how it is doing it. Ask questions such as "Do we still need to do this?" "Why?" "How often do we need to do this?" "Is there a better, more efficient way?"

Be flexible to meet the changing needs of the business

The business environment is a moving target. The economy fluctuates, new products and competitors come and go, technology changes the way work is done, and the company can be acquired or re-organized. Constantly re-evaluate your priorities. When needed, refocus your efforts, communicate broadly....and continue the process to promote alignment of efforts to achieve your business objectives.

May the New Year bring you good fortune and success!



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