



Turning Dreams into Reality

A template for strategic planning.

This template is organized around this “Implementation Equation”:

- Our team starts with a collective *DREAM*.
- A *DREAM* + *STRATEGIC PLANNING* leads to an *ACTIONABLE VISION*.
- A *VISION* + *COMMITMENT* + *EXECUTION* leads to *REALIZATION* of the *DREAM*.

Strategic Planning

Inspirational dreams--by themselves--do not lead teams to make the full commitment they will need to carry the dream forward to realization, especially when times get tough. Significant accomplishments need more than mere enthusiasm, good intentions, and heroic efforts -- they need to be well planned and flawlessly executed. Following are the components of a professionally-designed strategic plan.

While these steps represent a lot of work, it lays out a comprehensive framework for challenging people to go beyond themselves -- that which we as leaders are called to do. I would caution against removing any step until after we’ve carefully considered the risks in doing so.

Strategic Planning Process
Scoping. Determining what’s in and what’s out; fine-tuning the dream statement (as needed)
Cost-Benefit Analysis. Estimating the costs, both “to get to our dream” and “to live there” as well as the benefits, both quantifiable and intangible
Approval. Obtaining official approvals, funding & staffing
Staffing. Assessing/acquiring the requisite people and skills; and ensuring that work is effectively divided up based on backgrounds, qualifications, skills and passions
Milestones. Planning what major objectives need to be done, and in what timeframe
Work Breakdown. For each milestone, especially the next one, what key tasks need to get done, and in what sequence
Status Reporting & Review. Establishing how progress will be measured, reviewed and corrections made
Values/Priorities. Agree on what principles will drive our decision making, especially in crisis situations
Change Control. How mid-course corrections may be suggested; how approvals are made & communicated
Decision Making. Defining who has what authority, and delegating specifically-defined decisions to the lowest level possible to facilitate promptness
Contingency Planning. Backup plans for unpredictable events; plans for knowledge transfer of key skills
Quality Control. How we ensure delivered products meet our standards of acceptability
Project Planning. Detailed planning for each deliverable and milestone needs to be laid out (this task may be delegated to the individual team leads)

Commitment

Once an appropriate level of strategic planning is done, we will be ready to challenge the broader team to step up to the leadership roles defined in the plan, and to make personal commitments to them. We need people to make well-thought-out, reasoned commitments that will sustain them through the difficult days. We need commitments that will be consonant with their personal passions, that are sustainable, that will endure, that will not lead to burnout, and that will be supported by their families. In Maxwell's vernacular we need people to be "all out" in their commitment.

In order for people to make that kind of commitment, a number of factors must be in place when the challenge to them is presented. They are no shortcuts to this. It seems to me that the mandatory components are these:

Component
A personally-compelling vision that resonates strongly with my most-heart-felt values.
A full understanding of exactly why the current situation is intolerable.
A beginning-to-end plan that clearly details what is to be done and what my part is in it. What am I signing up for and for how long?
A personal assessment that the dream is worth all the sacrifice and hard work I'm being asked to make.
A confidence that all other team members are as ready, willing, able and committed to do their parts as I am.
Signing of my name to the dotted line to pledge "my life, my fortune, and my sacred honor" to this cause.

Execution

Once the proper people have made the commitments we need, the final element to making the dream real is Execution. There are a number of factors that are critical to successful execution, specifically:

Component
Strict following of the decision-making rules that were established, communicated and agreed upon by all
Strict following of the change control process
Singular focus on goals and deadlines, with:
- Consistent status/progress reporting against goals
- Proactive, honest feedback offered constructively and received humbly with a servant's heart
- A healthy dissatisfaction with missed goals or broken commitments
- Team support rallying to recover after setbacks
Ongoing, regular team-wide communications
- Honest communication of progress & issues
- Recognition & celebration of goal attainment
- Proactive mechanism for early warning of issues
Partnering for synergies and mutual accountability
- Defined, supportive process to ask for assistance, especially for those working alone
Ability to quickly shift direction, as needed
- Maintenance of flexibility
- Intentional delaying of irreversible decisions till the latest possible time, while avoiding paralysis by analysis
Minimizing of politics; Resolving people issues quickly
Minimizing of turnover; Staying sensitive to people
Use of an admin to enforce discipline & do paperwork

There is a saying that problems cannot be solved with the same mentality that created them. This disciplined approach is very likely to be a different mentality than you've ever use previously. But, it is one that is logically consistent, and has proven itself to be effective time and again, as witnessed by those who have been on successful major initiatives.