

Tactical Management: The Big Picture

By Richard A. Reda and Jean B. Lenderking

Taking a deeper look at the first step in making decisions that address immediate needs while keeping a longer term goal in focus...

In an earlier article, we provided an overview into the concept of Tactical Management and supplied six milestones towards focusing on long term goals while addressing short term demands. This article centers on the first step in that process: **the big picture.**

In today's world of high speed information exchange, a pace that seems to increase exponentially, and a state of change that is all too often unpredictable, a natural trap for managers to fall into is that of fire fighting rather than fire prevention.

Mission Statements Supply Vital Clarity and Direction

In organizations where the leadership itself undergoes frequent turnover, new styles and new approaches that are inflicted on mid and lower level managers are frequently the only things that are unchanging or predictable. The development of mission and vision statements and the exercise of strategic planning, unfortunately, in many organizations, have fallen victim to being viewed as the "cliché de jour."

One of the "Habits" in Stephen Covey's book, *"The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People,"* is to "Begin With the End in Mind." New York Yankee and baseball great Yogi Berra is said to have put this a bit more colorfully: "You've got to be very careful if you don't know where you're going, because you might not get there."

An even more fundamental question than "Where are you going?" is "Why?" If your organization doesn't have a clear idea of why it exists, or what its purpose is, it is doomed to failure from the onset. Too often, the mission of an organization is taken for granted. A clearly defined mission statement is essential to success and provides guidance, clarity and direction for all.

Stop a minute and think about how the following examples offer vision and inspiration: "Quality is Job One," "We bring good things to life," "We try harder."

Are these advertising slogans? Yes. But what they advertise is the mission of the company. They also send a clear message to both employees and the management team as to what they are all about.

Vision Statements Define the Future

Coupled with the mission statement, and equally important, a vision statement is a look to the future. John F. Kennedy clearly stated NASA's vision for the sixties when he said we would put a man on the moon before the end of the decade. NASA employees and the public as a whole had an unmistakable picture of where the agency was headed for the next several years.

With a mission and a vision in place, the next step in the process is developing a plan to get there. There

Tactical Management

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are a number of approaches to creating strategic or business plans, and there are a number of theories about the value and interconnectivity of strategic plans with business plans with action plans.

Most of them follow the same procedures for outlining how to get from point A to point Z. Basically, the drafters look at where the organization is now, compare it to where the organization plans to go at some point later in time, and then analyzes the gap between the two. A key part of that background analysis includes addressing internal strengths and weaknesses as well as external opportunities and threats.

Outcomes along with goals and related time frames are then developed. This strategic or business plan is an effective way to guide that organization forward over the life of the plan—if it's one that doesn't anticipate major changes: changes in leadership, changes in objectives, changes in resources, etc.

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Building on Success

In a tactical management environment, often a more useful approach is to build on other successes. Most of us have been involved in, or are at least aware of, efforts or endeavors that were very successful. In all but perhaps a few of those efforts, the success was a shared experience. In other words, it was a team effort.

The most successful, or, as Covey refers to them, “Effective Efforts,” rely on several factors. The first have already been discussed: a clear understanding of the organization’s mission and vision. Other factors include sound communication strategies to ensure everyone knows what’s going on; fixing problems rather than fixing blame; seeking to understand expectations and needs rather than assuming; and valuing the diversity of the members of the organization—the different perspectives and backgrounds we all bring to the table, and building on that synergy.

Tactical management uses an approach that organization development consultants refer to as *Appreciative Inquiry*. This starts with the management team sharing their own best experiences with successful projects or programs. From there, they examine the characteristics of those projects: what made them successful?

These characteristics form the basis for defining either the vision statement of the organization (if one hasn’t already been established), or the overall objectives of a strategic plan. How can these same characteristics be applied to the present organization to get it to its goal?

Characteristics of Strategic Plans that Really Work

Strategic plans need to be long term in nature, broad in scale and provide for periodic revisions. They need to include contingency plans in the event of unexpected changes in resources or demands. Remember, this is the big picture.

Business plans and action plans take the elements of the organization’s overarching strategic plan to a deeper and shorter term level. Each component: its own mission statement—why does it exist; what is its role in support of the organization’s mission; its own vision statement—what are its goals for the future, how does it plan to be seen by its customers; and its own plan of action—what is its piece of the road map? Each piece of the organization is linked, tactically, to the other; each in support of the bigger picture. ↗

Richard Reda is the former Director of Employee and Labor Relations for the Department of Energy, and a graduate of the National Training Laboratories Organization Development Program.

Jean Lenderking is the former Labor Relations Program Manager, Department of Transportation, and first Interagency Labor Relations Forum chair. Both are currently consultants with Lenderking, Reda and Associates (LRA). They can be reached at redacon@msn.com and lenderki@erols.com, respectively, or by writing 6551 Mockingbird Lane, Manassas, VA 20111.

