

To Plan or Not to Plan...

...is that really the question?

Business Owners are often caught with this question – knowing they should take more time to plan their business, but thinking that a time-consuming planning process will often end up collecting dust on someone's desk, or worse still, on the floor. So they keep asking themselves what the value is in planning, and end up doing very little of it, if anything at all.

However the question shouldn't be whether or not to do it, rather how to do it effectively. Most business success stories involve some kind of plan and vision from the very early stages and certainly the businesses that successfully graduate from infancy to maturity all put in place some kind of business plan. That alone should be reason enough to start planning.

But there are other benefits too...

- having a clear idea of where you are heading, a focus and purpose for going to work everyday
- having a way of measuring progress, other than the bank balance; and
- having a way of motivating and enrolling your staff in the 'bigger picture' of your vision?

All of these things can be achieved with a good business plan... so how do you develop such a plan and make sure it doesn't end up as a door-stop?

Probably the biggest fallacy of business plans is that the plan needs to be a great tome, bound, beautifully presented, and kept in the CEO's office. Really, the only time a plan needs to look that good is when you're looking for certain kinds of finance... and that's a completely different story.

But to achieve all the other advantages, a plan just needs to be documented, preferably in as few pages as possible. In fact, we promote the concept of a 'one page plan', a one-page summary of your entire organisation's strategy. Such a plan can be stuck to the wall above your desk, and everyone else's, as a regular reminder of what you are all working towards.

The other myth about a business plan is that once it's written, it's written in stone. This puts a lot of people off, because they like the flexibility of changing strategy if a new opportunity arises, or if the environment changes.

However a good business plan is dynamic – it is a working, organic, living document that operates as a guide, not a rule-book. This again is the advantage of the one-page plan, it is so easy to update and redistribute one page to your key stakeholders.

So how long should it take to develop a good, one page plan? With the right tools and the focus, a one-page plan can be developed in as little as a day – working through key issues of the business and identifying where are we Now, Where do we want to be in the future, and How are we going to get there?

So are you still asking 'to plan or not to plan?' Or are you thinking 'what would happen if we had a one-page plan?' To find out, email me and I'll send you a template and some instructions to get started.

And as you consider your plan, consider this thought from Marilyn Van Derbur (former Miss America), 'The vital, successful people I have met all had one common characteristic. They had a plan.'

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