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Communication strategy during a time of strategic planning

By Lee Hopkins

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"Rubbish!" shouted the large, aggressive man in the red-striped shirt (we had to pay attention to him because he owned the company).

"The staff don't need to be told anything. When we've sorted out all the details and have the adverts ready to run, then we'll tell them. They don't need to know beforehand, it'll only stop them working" he went on to loudly proclaim.

It's hard to ignore the wishes of your client, especially when he's paying you so well and has browbeaten every other consultant, as well as his management team, into submission.

Yet my experience, again and again, is this:

If you don't tell them what's going on, they'll make it up anyway!

Employees not present at strategic planning offsite meetings aren't dumb; they're just not present. They know you're away (they think probably planning the future of the company, their jobs and their salary cuts), so they will gossip and rumour-monger to their heart's discontent while you are not 'minding the store'.

So planning your internal communication is an essential prerequisite to effective and committed implementation of any business strategy. It also goes a long way towards problem minimisation.

In order to minimise the internal and external risks of gossip and rumours, therefore, you should have it very firmly set in your mind that a communication outlining the outcome of the planning should arrive with all due speed, consistency and completeness.

The following guidelines have been tested by experience and found useful:

1. Design and agree

The communication strategy should be designed and agreed by all

as part of the planning process, not an adjunct activity delegated to a junior manager who, in all probability, wasn't even at the planning meeting.

2. Tell everyone ASAP

Feedback to all those affected should take place at the earliest possible opportunity — preferably first thing next morning, before the rumour mill has had too much time to gear up. A useful strategy is to have planning meetings on weekends, with the staff briefing occurring first thing Monday morning.

3. One meeting to bind them all

Aim for one single briefing or feedback session, rather than multiple sessions where watering down or distortion of the original message might occur. Thankfully, technology largely allows such a single session to occur, even across multiple timezones. In such an instance, scripting of the communication would prove a valuable tool to consistency, especially where the text of the session will appear on a company intranet.

4. Follow up and re-purpose

A follow-up message (via audio, video or even simple written) to all from the CEO, emphasizing the key points, is very useful. It too can be re-purposed to appear on the company intranet, or as a briefing to investors and the marketplace.

All of this might seem like overkill, a tremendous amount of effort for very little gain. But such a view must be evaluated against the fact that the long-term strategic plan will drive the company for anything from the next five to fifteen years.

Investing time at the beginning to 'get it right' will pay massive dividends over the longer term.

When you match consumer psychology with effective communication styles you get a powerful combination. Lee Hopkins can show you how to communicate better for better business results. At you can find these secrets to communication success.

Three Planning Myths

By Denise O'Berry

Are you — like 70% of business owners — working without a plan? Here are three myths that need to be dispelled about strategic planning for small business.

1. It has to be formal — Not so. The value of a strategic plan for your small business is in putting the ideas on paper, creating action steps that will get you where you want to go and implementing those action steps.

2. I'm too small — Not so. Even a one-person business can benefit from a strategic plan. A strategic plan can help you make decisions about time management and budget. Use your strategic plan to help you determine whether to attend an event or advertise in a publication. It's a check and balance tool.

3. A strategic plan is like a ball and chain — Not so. It's your plan. Too many business owners feel like once it's on paper, it can't be changed. Wrong! It should be an active document that gets reviewed and updated at least monthly, if not weekly. You're the business owner, you wrote it, you know what's happening in your market — adjust as necessary.

Denise O'Berry helps small business owners take action to grow their business. Find out more at

Three Planning Myths

Strategic Planning Steps For Optimum Business Management

Persuasive Communication

Being a leader in network marketing

Your Very First Steps To Outsourcing

Create a Website in 5 Days

Hitting the Search Engines

One Million a Year

Help Your Child Succeed In School

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