

Each quarter, TNLA will produce an article and a quiz. Those holding TCNP, TCLP, or TMCNP certifications can complete the quiz and return it to TNLA to earn 1 CEU credit. The quiz for this quarter can be found on page 41. Fill in the quiz and return to TNLA according to the instructions on that page.

Turning Goals into Actions

Courtesy of Dr. Charles R. Hall, University of Tennessee, Department of Agricultural Economics

Planning is central to the attainment of all goals. It's true for short-term, medium-term, and long-term goals, as well as those of either a personal or professional development nature. And, needless to say, an individual's effectiveness at planning often has great impact on that individual's effectiveness at achieving goals. Planning does take some time, but it needn't be excessive if approached correctly. In fact, when done effectively, planning represents time well spent in that the "benefits" well exceed the "costs."

What Planning Is and Isn't

Perhaps some common misconceptions of what a plan is and what it does have caused many people to shy away from the planning process. First, planning is not deciding each step in detail in advance and then blindly following through. Nor is it taking a leisurely stroll through the mind in hopes of coming up with a loosely connected stream of thoughts.

Good planning lies somewhere in between these extremes. What's more, a good plan should be looked

on as a means for achieving goals, not as an end in itself. While it's impossible to completely avoid crises and unexpected events, you should still try to plan as much as you can. Good planning pays off by creating direction, excitement, and motivation. It also increases your ability to manage those around you.

Turning Goals Into Action

A key consideration in effective planning is learning how to transform goals into attainable steps (actions). Many businesspeople have trouble with this; consequently, many of their goals (especially long-term goals) may never get addressed adequately (or at all).

However, there is hope. By developing effective monthly, weekly, and daily plans, businesspeople can more clearly see the attainable steps needed to fulfill their goals. And there are several approaches that can be used for this. One simple, four-step method for converting goals into actions includes:

1. Pinpoint intermediate "target" to hit.
2. Decide on tangible measures to identify when each "target" has been reached.

3. Create a plan to reach those tangible measures.
4. Break the plan down into daily actions.

A similar way to transform goals into a workable plan of action is with "planning inventory." First, list five major goals you'd like to achieve in your lifetime, either regarding your business or personal life. Select the goal you'd like to achieve first. Next, identify the steps you must take to reach that goal, moving in chronological order. Finally, break down the first step into one-day tasks you can accomplish. Subsequent steps can be used to develop subsequent daily plans.

What you can realistically hope to attain each day is a matter for your own judgment, but you can make it easier by regularly referring to your planning inventory, and carefully assessing the tasks that go into the steps needed for achieving each goal. In a sense, these steps are interim targets, and they provide a good measure of your progress.

The Planning Process

The more often you plan, the better

and more comprehensive those plans will become. As much as possible, try to integrate your short-term, medium-term, and long-term goals.

Step 1: Yearly planning The best way to find time for important but easy-to-delay tasks is to include those chores in your annual “time budget.” Start by making a yearly plan that allows the long-range projects enough time so that you can make steady progress toward completing them. Then assign specific dates so you know when to work on these projects, what you will accomplish each time you work on them, and how much time you’ll need. Mark those target dates in your calendar, and don’t break them!

Step 2: Monthly planning At the end of each month, take an hour to decide what you want to accomplish over the next month. Decide on plans for reaching those goals on a week-to-week basis. Include items from your list of long-range goals.

Step 3: Weekly planning Every week, decide and list what tasks you want to accomplish; the priorities for each task; and the time, effort, and materials required to complete each task. Once a week (Friday is best), select the goals for the following week, and work up a plan for reaching those goals. Break the upcoming week’s goals down into lists of daily objectives, and detail these objectives on daily “to do” lists.

Step 4: Daily planning Use the same procedure you used for weekly planning to sketch out each day. Start on the highest-priority task, working at it until you have finished it or can’t go any further. Then move on to the task with the next-highest priority. Be

sure to leave 25-50 percent of your day unscheduled. Unexpected tasks or emergencies may arise that require your immediate attention. These types of top-priority tasks generally can’t be put off.

Planning Aids

Many types of planning aids are available to help keep you on course. Planning aids include pocket planning books, electronic planners, computer programs, simple “to do” lists, and wall charts. Choose the one that best fits your needs. Whatever method you choose to log tasks, make sure you maintain your list!

Starting a “To Do” List

First, make up a list of all the tasks you need to complete in the next week. Then develop priorities for the tasks on this list. As needed, include notations of calls to make, people to see, letter and reports to write, deadlines, assignments, and priorities.

Of course, the most important items on this list are the tasks that need to be done that day. Include the deadlines for those tasks, as well as the estimated time it will take to complete the work and notations of any special requirements.

Write out the list first thing in the morning or at the end of the previous workday. The latter generally works better, because you can arrive at work knowing what needs to be done. The list can be as detailed or simple, as creative or straightforward as you like, although a certain amount of detail helps avoid confusion later.

Periodically, consult the week’s master list of things to do, and update it as

needed to reflect any relevant changes. But keep in mind a word of caution: Don’t get caught in an “activity trap,” wherein you’re doing tasks just to keep busy.

Organizing Priorities

The key to managing time is setting, starting and then finishing high-priority tasks. The trick is to develop a ranking system:

“A” tasks have a high level of importance. They must be completed right away or by day’s end.

“B” tasks are of moderate importance. They should be done sometime, but not necessarily right away.

“C” tasks are of low-level importance. It would be nice to finish them, but getting them done isn’t essential. They can often be skipped or delegated.

When setting priorities, determine which activities have the greatest effect on profits or success, and place them first. Focus on results, not activities. Don’t become so involved in finishing tasks or “busy work” that you lose sight of the real priority – completing high-payoff tasks. ☺

Looking for additional CEU opportunities?

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