

Surroundings



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A Company Plan that Works

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There is that old adage that says something like, Be careful what you wish because you might just get it. There is also the question, If you don't have target, how will you know if you have hit it? These thoughts and many more have gone through my mind numerous times over the last seven years as we have implemented a long-range plan, or LRP, at the beginning of each business year. With few exceptions, we have achieved, and in many cases surpassed, our goals. It has made me and others here at A.D. Marble & Company die-hard believers in the power of developing, communicating, and working toward concrete goals.

What kind of goals do we set for ourselves as environmental consultants? According to conventional business planning wisdom, they have to be quantifiable, measurable, and achievable. For a business such as ours, that means goals such as deciding how much we want to grow, how much work we need, and as how many people to hire. Goals have included opening up new offices, enhancing client communication, and entering new markets. We always have personnel goals that include boosting morale, minimizing turnover, and enhancing communication. It is amazing what can be achieved with this planning process that relies on dedicated people involved in the process.

An essential element to the LRP process is the involvement of the entire company. The LRP is written down and accessible to all employees, including our progress on the plan throughout the year. Employees who are working on specific tasks are identified and have visible deadlines.

Here is a brief outline of how our LRP process works:

Employee Questionnaire. This is probably the most difficult, but in the end, the most rewarding task. All employees are asked to fill out a questionnaire with three basic questions: What do you find rewarding about the company? What do you want to change or improve? Where do you see us going in the future? We always get insightful and important feedback that is folded into the plan.

Long Range Planning Session. This is a two day session involving all executives as well as group leaders in the company. It is geared toward identifying the long range goals and how to achieve them for the upcoming year. First, we review the past year's goals, asking ourselves: have we met our

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goals? Why or why not? We also take a look at the results of the employee questionnaire for inclusion into the plan. Afterwards, we envision where we want to be in five years, and brainstorm what this might look like. In the end we identify four to five goals for the current year's Long Range Plan. Each of these goals has a detailed action plan identifying the steps and the people involved and responsible.

Draft and Final IRP. A draft of the IRP is written and sent out to all the employees. We discuss the goals set forth in the IRP at staff meetings as well as in group meetings, explaining how we developed the goals from the information received. This part of the process gives the staff another opportunity to comment and share ideas.

Report on the IRP Status. During the course of the year, we provide status reports to employees on how well we are meeting our goals. We also keep the actual plan and its status on the company's network. At the end of the year, we give a final report and celebrate our achievements.

We keep refining the planning process and how best to do it. This process changes over time as we continue to grow, add staff, and get better at doing the planning. The IRP has become the hub of what we do (and don't do) guiding us through the year and helping us stay focused on what is important.

Seeming to be almost magical in its power, the IRP has been an excellent tool in helping us meet our goals. To do without it would be like being lost at sea without a compass.



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