



THE SEVEN KEY STEPS TO ALIGN EMPLOYEES BEHIND STRATEGIC GOALS

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When you, as the CEO, have led your company through the careful process of crafting a strategic plan, the most important step in implementing the plan is to make sure that your employees will be moving in tandem with the intent of the plan and with its strategic goals. There are seven key steps to follow to get this accomplished.

Step 1 – Know Your Employee “Audience” and Test the Water. You’ll need to do some basic fact-finding to understand how prepared and/or dedicated your employees are to goals endorsement. If this was not clear as a result of your strategic planning process, the best way to approach learning the needed information is through an all-inclusive electronic data gathering process known as the Delphi Process. This process is a relatively simple one, but will require that you hire a technological consultant to run the Delphi, unless you have such a person internal to your organization. Once the process has been structured and implemented, the data that you will receive will portray an in-depth picture of your employees and their motivation, relative to your organization’s strategic goals. The process will also provide you with insights into a collective intent to act to carry out goals directions. Barring an ability to conduct a Delphi Process, the second best way to gain insight about your employees’ interest in and dedication to your strategic goals is to use “focus groups” as a sampling process to discover that. The agendas for focus group meetings can be pre-cast to provide the answers you will need for later steps in the adoption process. Focus group discussion questions should be structured to accomplish two purposes: Gain information about employees’ dedication to the tasks ahead; while at the same time, to serve to “seed” information that will serve the organization well. Focus group questions should be structured so that no more than 20-30 minutes is needed for the facilitator of a focus group to gain needed information and to convey some “key ideas” to the employees in attendance.

Step 2 – Discover Your Major Movers. During the focus group [or, other “testing the water”] process, you will discover your major movers, which constitutes the 2nd Key Step of realizing goals implementation. As you, or a trusted member of your leadership team, talk to your people in the focus groups and as you hear and see them interact with others, you will discern those who are the natural or assumed leaders and who demonstrate an interest and a talent for the tasks ahead. Tap into this latent leadership talent and use it to best advantage by selecting and forming these individuals into a cadre of Major Movers for your organization.



Step 3 – Train Them Well. As you discover and identify these *major movers* you will want to prepare to train them well. By immediately setting up a training program for these leaders and drawing them together, at once, into a cadre for further training and support, you are instituting the next critical step. This training should have two thrusts: 1) to prepare the “M&M” cadre with a common body of knowledge so that everyone is singing from the same hymnal; and 2) to set up the “corporate creep process” -- that is, to ensure that the notion of “how to’s” for employees to work within the organization’s goal framework is embedded in the thinking/processing mechanisms of this group of employees. The common body of knowledge that is presented to the company’s “major mover” (M&M) group will be talking points that have been carefully refined and “test-driven” as those that most closely depict the “message” of the organization’s goals development function. It is this M&M cadre who will become your knowledge dissemination process within the organization.

Step 4 -- Arrange for a Rewards Structure. The rewards structure should be set up as part of your CCP, or, “corporate creep process.” A structure of rewards, or incentives, should be designed to promote the effective attention to goals by your employees. Incentives programs especially selected as appropriate rewards for employees who promote the organization’s goals should be created [for more information, see Dr. Blair’s article, “Why Does an Incentive Structure Work in Corporations?”].

Step 5 – Test The Thoroughness of Coverage. Once *Steps 1-4* have been covered and there has been time for the information to be disseminated, or “to percolate” through the company, you will want to set up *Step 5*, which is a process to test the thoroughness of coverage. That is, you’ll want to determine, through informal sources, surveys, and other means, how well the information is flowing through the organization; how widespread the coverage has been; how well-received it has been; and how adequate you would judge the results of the overall effort to be.

Step 6 – Look for the Gaps and Close Them. Armed with data and other information from *Step 5*, the next step is to look for the gaps and close them. In looking at the success evidence at hand, you and/or other experts, will be able to identify employee groupings (work groups, matrix teams, departments, divisions, and so on) where the employees seem to have little knowledge of the goals determination and the effort that surrounds goal implementation. Once these pockets have been discovered then additional, educative measures will need to be undertaken with targeted groups of individuals, essentially repeating the work done in *Step 3*, but on a grander scale and with larger numbers of employees.



Conversely, if the spread of coverage can be seen to be satisfactory, then congratulate yourself that the process is going well!

It is important that one not consider the processes of Step Six as finalized until substantial increases in attitude and behavior changes can be seen through the use of “testing the water,” (TTW) measures such as those described in Step 1.

Step 7 – Maintain Consistent Demeanor in Support of Goals. Throughout the process of cultural change, from Steps 1-6, the executive must maintain consistent demeanor in support of the organization’s goals. For goals to be wholly-embraced by employees, the CEO must show a strong interest and dedication throughout the goal implementation stage. He or she must show strong intent for carrying out goals. This can be done through talks and conversations with employees, through formal presentations and news releases, and, of course, through participation in and support of the other six steps of the goals adoption process.

In addition to the strong show of support, the CEO will need to be constantly aware of how he or she is modeling “goals directedness.” As employees most often follow the behavioral examples they’re shown, they will become acutely aware of the CEO’s commitments, as portrayed by *actions*, not solely by *words*. Should these deviate or be in opposition to the originally-established goals and the CEO’s rhetoric, the CEO must be prepared to explain these actions and to provide comprehensible answers as to why a goal was skirted. And, certainly, if it becomes necessary to abandon a goal, that fact should be made clear to the company’s employees at once. In fact, should jettisoning a goal become necessary, a new, mini-version of the strategic planning process should be instituted.

Nothing prevents chaos in the corporate structure quite as well as these seven steps, that focus on getting employees on board and formulating strong support of the organization’s goals, from the top down. Without employees’ endorsement of an effort of goals directedness, it will certainly fail. Rosabeth Moss Canter has said that, “employees can be energized – engaged in problem solving and mobilized for change – by their involvement in a participative structure that permits them to venture beyond their normal work roles to tackle meaningful issues.” And, Peter Drucker recommends strategies such as those described in this article, to avoid the management pitfalls of “intellectual arrogance [that cause] disabling ignorance.”

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