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Aligning Tactics with Strategies by Andrea Norman

Do any of the following sound familiar?

Three requests for proposals have been issued. You have the experience to complete all of the projects. Unfortunately, resources permit you to propose on only two of them. Which do you choose?

You get routine calls from various advertising vehicles, direct mail houses, print experts and web site developers. Where do you devote your marketing dollars?

Do you feel carried away by the events of the day? Do you wonder if the constant running and problem solving is really making a difference for your company?

If these scenarios form a regular part of your workday, or if you answered yes to any of these questions, you need a clearly defined mission, goals, strategies and tactics. Once you make those business decisions, the answers to the above questions will flow easily and effortlessly.

Many business people are familiar with the terminology listed above. Who hasn't heard of a mission? Business strategy? Goals? Practically everyone. However, there is little clarity or straightforward definitions of these terms, and their application to individual businesses (especially small business) is fuzzy at best. It is as critical, if not more so, to understand and define these terms within the context of your business as it is to understand the state of your accounts receivable. A business's mission, goals, strategy and tactics create its foundation and give it the footings to support a large and evolving business structure.

"Mission," a term used heavily in the 1990's, usually consisted of a very long sentence developed by a committee in a boardroom or on a retreat. The drafters of these missions sought to bring clarity and purpose to their companies. Too often, however, the missions consisted of confusing statements with competing components that, in turn, resulted in some serious "eyeball rolling" by staff. The simplest mission statements are the most helpful. For example, "The Alexander Studio creates profitable, exciting and thought-provoking architecture with integrity and enthusiasm." Missions are stated as though they are already occurring, even if they are not. A mission's purpose is to state why you are in business and, frequently, includes the values your firm espouses.

Goals are defined as measurable milestones that drive the performance of the business. A goal is, "to sign contracts with three of the local municipalities for projects in excess of \$1 million in the next six months." A goal has specific



numbers tied to it. Revenue, profitability, time, and other quantitative assessments can and should be components of goals.

After you and your colleagues craft and commit to the firm's mission and goals, you must develop strategy to implement the mission and achieve the goals. MBAs and consultants regularly bandy about the term “strategy,” but what is it really? A clearly defined strategy answers the “how?” to achieving your firm’s mission and goals. Strategy, simply put, is the direction in which your company is headed, while considering your services, your competitors’ services, opportunities in the marketplace, your strengths and weaknesses, and those of your competitors. So, really, strategy determines what markets you are trying to penetrate and how you are positioning your firm against the competition.

Ordinarily, you should strive to fill a market niche. The Alexander Studio, for example, could state its strategy in the following way: To establish its architects as experts in the municipal marketplace, to build a portfolio of projects that are increasingly complex, and to serve as the executive architect with firms that have a bigger design reputation.

Once you have given meaningful thought to the issues discussed above and, over time, create a substantial mission, goals and strategy. Not another fancy binder, destined for a dusty shelf but a set of living documents designed to fulfill the firm’s mission.

Yet, even the most compelling mission, goals and strategy mean nothing without action. Tactics, represent that action. Tactics execute the firm’s strategy. Tactics typically involve more practical marketing decisions, like which type of advertising to purchase, where to spend your marketing dollars, what type of prospects to target.

Ironically, most firms, especially small ones, spend most of their time on tactics. How often are marketing professionals working on proposals, developing marketing brochures, and participating in business development lunches? In fact, when businesses get in trouble, they concentrate their focus on tactics. (How often during a tense internal meeting does someone proclaim: “Everyone just needs to DO something”?) It can be tempting for principals and marketing professionals to feel as though they are making progress when they are actively placing advertising, creating direct mail campaigns, preparing proposals and “doing lunch.”

The Alexander Studio’s tactics will include placing at least six articles in publications widely read by municipal facility engineers; proposing to be the “on-call” architects for the annual service contracts at various municipal facilities; meeting with at least six larger architecture firms and developing partnership agreements with them; and developing and executing a marketing campaign informing their prospective clients



about their successes in the marketplace. Their executives can determine if their activities are consistent with the strategy of the firm.

What if you don't have a clearly defined mission, vision, goals, or strategy? What if you are wrapped up in daily activities and are so wrapped up in the crisis du jour that you have little time to think about strategy?STOP! Stop your activity insanity and pause. It is critical to define each of these areas. Branch offices, special divisions, and even projects can benefit from the clarity of direction that this exercise will bring. There will no longer be excuses like "I didn't know it was that important!" And these areas should be defined and evaluated annually, at a minimum, with goals being checked quarterly, if not monthly.

Once you determine your mission, goals and strategy and apply the appropriate tactics, your results will multiply and exponential growth will soon follow. The firm will have a focus, as will the people within it. The mission, goals, and strategy will establish an atmosphere where only exceptional results can result. Good luck. You can do it!