

Plan + Execution = Success

In the January issue of *The Director*, I wrote about the importance of planning, awareness and accountability as the bedrock of your business success in 2024. Having a plan is the first critical step.

Next, and most important, is execution – putting a predetermined course (your plan) into action. It means carrying out tasks, activities and steps outlined in your plan to achieve your goal(s). If you don't do those things, your plan will likely fail.

In other words, a well-crafted plan is just the beginning. Its true power lies in the commitment and discipline necessary to make it happen. Execution marks the real difference between success and failure.

CLEARLY DEFINED ROLES The key starting point is laying out clearly defined goals about what you want to achieve. Make sure they are specific, measurable, achievable, relevant and time-bound, i.e., SMART goals. Incorporating these elements into your goals increases the likelihood of success. SMART goals provide a clear road map, increase motivation and set the proper tone and direction. Consistency and alignment in goals keeps everyone pointed in the right direction.

PLANS INTO REALITY As you make things happen, it's essential to recognize that execution is more than a mere checklist of tasks. It's a dynamic process requiring adaptability, continuous communication and teamwork. Turning plans into reality requires a systematic approach and persistent effort.

Consistency and attention to detail matter. Consistency doesn't mean perfection, but it does mean showing up regularly, putting in the effort and staying committed. Even small consistent efforts matter. The combination of little things can end up making the difference.

ACCOUNTABILITY IN ACTION The single greatest threat to any plan's success is absence of accountability. It's not enough to merely create a plan and hope for the best; consistent tracking, evaluation and ad-

justments are vital. Establishing clear roles and responsibilities for your team and fostering a culture of accountability will ensure that everyone is pulling in the same direction.

Accountability really involves taking ownership for your actions, being transparent, keeping your word and delivering results. Accountability fosters trust, collaboration and a sense of responsibility and teamwork. It's that sense of commitment to self and each other that delivers results.

ADAPTING TO CHANGE Flexibility is key to successful execution but, let's face it, few of us feel eager to change. The funeral service profession is changing faster than ever, and that transformation can feel scary. Rather than view these challenges as the beginning of the end, however, look to them as opportunities for improvement. That means constantly seeking knowledge and feedback, and being objective and willing to pivot. By simply being proactive and open to embracing new ideas, you will be well ahead of the game.

COMMUNICATION AS THE CATALYST

Communication and collaboration are critical. Effective communication is the glue that holds everything together by promoting clarity, collaboration, coordination, engagement, accountability and adaptability.

Regular updates, team meetings and open dialogue create a shared understanding of your goals and progress. Encourage feedback from team members and be open to adjusting the plan if something isn't working.

MEASURING SUCCESS You must define clear metrics in order to measure the plan's success. Whether that involves market share growth, improved customer satisfaction, community involvement or financial milestones, quantifiable targets provide a map for progress. Make those targets aggressive but realistic.

Your targets also need to feature milestones that allow you to celebrate the victories and make course corrections, if necessary. Milestones are the "mileage markers" that keep you on the right path. It is about

making things real and celebrating the victories.

Taking time to measure, communicate and hold people accountable demonstrates leadership. Putting the correct measurements in place reinforces the behavior(s) you're striving for. With the right milestones, it's really difficult to get too far off-track.

Regularly assess your performance and celebrate along the way. Recognizing and rewarding achievements motivates everyone, and it's also fun!

AWARENESS In January, I mentioned awareness of self, awareness of business and awareness of community. Maintaining this awareness throughout the execution phase is as crucial as during the planning stage. Keep your eyes open and your head on a swivel. Awareness provides you with perspective and something to compare against. You must be objectively attuned to shifts in your organization, the market and the consumers walking through your door. It is vitally important to take in as many different points of view as possible.

Awareness provides a foundation for contextual understanding, real-time decision making, effective communication and learning. Awareness is knowledge, and knowledge is power. Your ability to be objective about what is going on around you will give you an advantage. If you know what's going on, you can react while others twiddle their thumbs.

SEEKING ASSISTANCE WHEN NEEDED

You will run into roadblocks and problems – and that's okay. How you respond is what really matters. Address your problems quickly and head-on for far fewer headaches. If you don't have the answer, it's okay to ask for help.

Nobody has all the answers, but too often our egos stand in the way of simply asking for help. Those four little letters can save your world, however. Help can come through internal collaboration or through external resources. Your profession is filled with resources and professionals who are well equipped to handle most any challenge.

When in doubt, reach out to NFDA, your state association or a colleague. If you are willing to make the call, then you will find plenty of resources available to help you on this journey.

IT'S A JOURNEY, SO ENJOY THE RIDE

In the infamous words of Mike Tyson, "Everybody has a plan until they get

punched in the mouth." Life and business will punch you in the mouth at times, but if you have a plan, maintain your awareness and are willing to adapt, you're as ready as you can be. Execution is about making a plan happen. This means not accepting excuses and finding a way.

Finding a way, or executing a plan, is not a solitary endeavor – it's a collective effort that involves every member of your team. (Yes, every member!) Get your team involved, give them responsibility and accountability, and start making 2024 the best year your business has ever seen.

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