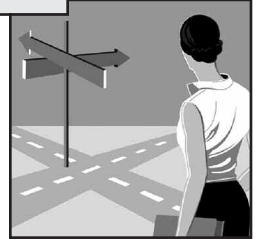


Enhance Your Business with Connections

The Importance of Having a Business Plan



Why Plan?

Take a look at these questions:

- Are you tracking your business progress?
- Do you have an effective strategic plan?
- Will you meet your sales and profit objectives this year?

If you answered *NO* to any of these questions or you don't know what these questions mean, you may want to consider developing a plan for 2009. Planning allows you to chart your path *now* for where you want your business to be down the road.

"The single most important element that determines the success or failure of a small business is not developing a long-range business plan."
Improving the Health of Your Business,
Nolo Press.

Most sole proprietors and micro business owners don't use a plan. Planning is mistakenly thought of as something for "big business." If you are one of these women, and the idea of planning overwhelms you, scale it down and just write down your goals. Keep them at a high level; don't create a lengthy task list.

Think about the two or three *big* projects you need to accomplish in the next six months and put them on a timeline. Then create a task list for each project. Be accountable. This requires you to pay attention to the timeline and stay committed.

You get to remove the goals once they are achieved, and make updates and changes as deadlines pass and the projects aren't completed. Rather than feeling defeated and using this as an excuse not to pay attention to your goals, you get to reframe them, set new dates and carry on. This is a process, not a static exercise. This means you can change the content and the dates as often as necessary.

Be sure to get rid of the goals that looked good when you wrote them down, but you now know aren't going to happen. You must keep your goals current and in harmony with your capacity and intentions or they become meaningless.

Planning will require you to track your monthly progress or you won't know if the plan is working. Tracking begins with the simple act of paying attention. The first step is keeping to your timeline and keeping your progress updated. You enhance this process by having simple systems in place that allow you

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to capture and monitor what I call "big picture" information. These are standard categories that all of us need to track. For example, income and expenses, tangible results of our marketing actions and perhaps most importantly, our time.

From here, your specific business will dictate additional categories such as billable hours and/or quantity of products sold. The most important information to track is financial. You need to know how much money you are making and how much money you are spending. It is time to stop flying by the seat of your pants and take steps to be informed, on a regular basis, about your financial situation.

If you put everything in a shoe box and leave it until tax time, break that habit. Create a simple log where you track your income and expenses and reconcile it each month. This will help you know if

you are meeting your financial goals. If you use accounting software, like QuickBooks, create monthly profit and loss statements. If you don't know how to create and/or read a financial statement, ask your accountant or bookkeeper to show you, take a class or ask an informed colleague.

Recently a colleague said to me: "All roads lead somewhere. If you aren't using a map you'll arrive at a destination, but will it be the one you were trying to get to?" Mapping where you're trying to go and tracking the progress you're making, keep you informed and in a proactive mode.

Remember the road to success is a rollercoaster. You have to weather the down-turns and keep the upside in perspective. Build momentum over time and moderate yourself with conscious goal-setting, consistent tracking and overall accountability.

by Cynthia Riggs

Cynthia Riggs knows what it takes to create and run a successful business. She's done it herself, several times. Over the past 25 years, Cynthia started and ran three profitable businesses. She sold her last business, Making It Big®, a multi-million dollar manufacturing and mail order company in 2004. Making It Big's success was the subject of a University case study. Since then, Cynthia has devoted herself to helping women succeed in business as she did. Please call or email for a complimentary phone consultation. (707) 823-1602, cynthia@bizdiva.biz • www.bizdiva.biz