

OD Mistakes

1. Mistake number 1: Arbitrarily selecting planning team members

Some managers don't give sufficient consideration to selecting their planning team members. They simply select a few people with too little thought about their potential contribution to building a viable plan. Also, they don't consider whether each team member is positioned to drive the successful implementation of the resultant strategies.

How to avoid this mistake: Consider carefully the selection of each and every member of your planning team. And keep these two criteria in mind:

- Willing and capable of strategic and goal-oriented thought - to assist in the development of the change plan.
- Positioned, in the organization, to drive the successful implementation of your resultant strategies.

2. Mistake number 2: Thinking of planning as an event, rather than a process.

Some managers will set aside time to develop their plan. So far, so good. Unfortunately, they'll then adopt - and communicate - an attitude of "let's get it done and get back to work." Clearly, they fail to integrate their plan into the day-to-day operation of their business.

How to avoid this mistake: Adopt the attitude that planning is an integral part of the operation of your business. In fact, your strategies, once detailed, will become a description of work to be performed. So when you and your planning team "get back to work," you'll be working at accomplishing your objectives strategies.

3. Mistake number 3: Not educating your planning team members to the planning process.

Believe it or not, some planning teams enter their planning sessions "cold." Without first learning the process in which they're about to engage. This is a terrible mistake - for two reasons. First, the resultant lack of understanding seriously affects performance. Thus the quality of the resultant plan - and the strategies within the plan - suffer. Second, failure to educate misses the opportunity to build enthusiasm among the members of the planning team.

How to avoid this mistake: Conduct a Planning Workshop for your planning team members. It will not just educate, but also build your managers' enthusiasm for the process. And make sure that the workshop includes a case study - so your team members will experience building a "mini OD/change plan." While doing so, they'll extend their thinking to your own organization. They'll then be eager to apply the process "in real life."

4. Mistake number 4: Not involving employees beyond the planning team members.

Some managers don't even think about asking employees (beyond the planning team) to help. This mistake guarantees that the organization will miss valuable input. Also, it will have lost the opportunity to build enthusiasm for implementation of the resultant strategies.

How to avoid this mistake: Consider the many ways to include your employees in the process - both for the benefit of their input, and to build their enthusiasm as well. For example:

- Providing thoughts (through interview or survey) on issues to discuss
- Assistance in gathering pre-planning information
- Detailing resultant strategies through development of action plans (lists of tactics)
- Estimating resources required to accomplish strategies
- Implementation of resultant strategies and action elements

5. Mistake number 5: Ignoring the question of timing.

Some assume that any time of the year is as good as any other for developing a needed plan. Not true. Planning out of phase with your budgeting process will leave you trying to implement this year's goals with last year's resources.

How to avoid this mistake: Make sure your timing is such that your action items "feed your budgeting process." That way, you'll be able to allocate resources in support of your elements.

6. Mistake number 6: Failing to gather applicable information for the planning sessions.

At times, planning teams meet to develop their plan without having gathered the information necessary to effective thinking and decision making. Naturally, planning suffers.

How to avoid this mistake: Have the members of your planning team meet to decide on the information they'll need to gather, and later communicate with each other, in preparation for their upcoming sessions. Then, just prior to your sessions, conduct an Information Sharing Meeting. At that meeting, each person responsible for information gathering should present to the entire planning team... hand-outs, viewgraphs, and question and answer all work well. The intent is to build the knowledge of all on your planning team... giving all team members a more general management overview... preparing each to make more knowledge-based, strategic decisions at your up-coming sessions.

7. Mistake number 7: Conducting planning sessions at the office.

Conducting planning sessions at the office generally comes complete with numerous interruptions most disruptive to concentration. The quality of the discussions, thus the quality of the resultant plan, suffers.

How to avoid this mistake: Meet "off campus." Your meeting location doesn't have to be any place fancy. In fact, you can assemble a bunch of chairs in someone's living room. Just get away from the office and its accompanying interruptions.

8. Mistake number 8: Not allowing enough time.

Some management teams want to get through their planning process just as quickly as possible. Here again, they're interested in "getting back to work." So they run through each of the process steps as quickly as they can. As a result, their discussions are hardly strategic and usable, and the resultant plans prove disappointing.

How to avoid this mistake: Allow sufficient time. Make sure that each of your discussions goes to sufficient depth. Remember, planning is a long-term investment. Properly performed, your planning sessions will pay back many times your investment.

9. Mistake number 9: Doing it alone.

Instead of retaining a skilled OD consultant to lead their sessions, some managers decide to lead those sessions themselves. Unfortunately, they can't do a good job leading the process and, at the same time, participating in the discussions. Both process and content suffer.

How to avoid this mistake: Retain a skilled strategic OD consultant to lead your sessions. You and your team take responsibility for content and your consultant, for process. You'll benefit in both areas.

10. Mistake number 10: Stifling communication.

Unfortunately, some managers stifle team members' opinions which differ from their own. The results are quite predictable - loss of valuable input plus damage to team members' buy-in.

How to avoid this mistake: Allow, in fact welcome, input from all. Heck, you might just learn something.

11. Mistake number 11: Keeping the plan a secret.

Some decide not to publish a written change plan, but rather keep it private among the few top managers who developed it. But since others must help to implement the resultant strategies and action items, they'll certainly need to know "what's up"? Of course, implementation suffers.

How to avoid this mistake: Be open with communication of your plan. You'll improve the implementation of your plan - for two reasons. First, your employees will know what in the world they're working on, and why. Second, they'll feel more like "insiders." They'll simply care a whole lot more.

12. Mistake number 12: Putting the plan on the shelf and keeping it there.

Some management teams stop short of defining specific action steps (tactics) to detail their strategies. And they don't conduct quarterly reviews. They simply assume that once they've developed their strategies, those strategies will simply happen - almost automatically. No way! As Peter Drucker wisely advises, "Nothing happens until we reduce strategy to work."

How to avoid this mistake: Detail your crucial elements in action plans descriptive of work assignments. Conduct quarterly reviews of your plan and more frequent reviews of your action plans. Thus, you'll link your plan to individuals' work assignments.

13. Mistake number 13: Failure to link the plan to the budgeting process.

Believe it or not, some actually fail to allocate resources to their strategies. They simply assume that the money, people, facilities and equipment will automatically be available. Far more often than not, this assumption leads to disappointment.

How to avoid this mistake: Estimate required resources while developing your action plans. Then use those estimates to request resources in your budgeting process.

14. Mistake number 14: Reluctance to revise the plan

Some managers consider their plan "cast in concrete." No matter what happens "out there in the world," they stubbornly insist on sticking to their plan. This works just fine until something changes. Unfortunately, our world - more and more often - is characterized by significant change. So reluctance to alter the plan "no matter what," can prove a recipe for disaster.

How to avoid this mistake: Remain alert to significant change in the internal and external world around you. And if change should occur which might affect your plan, call your planning team

together. Ask your team two questions: (a) "How is this change likely to affect our plan"? and (b) "How should we, therefore, change our plan in response"?

15. Mistake number 15: Resistance to change

Some resist developing any plan which calls for significant organizational change. This is understandable, for such plans are most often difficult. But organizational change, at times, is required.

How to avoid this mistake: Remain open even to tough, though necessary, decisions. Try this - when discussing a problem, ask your planning team to consider each of the following four choices:

- a) Is it a resource problem?
- b) Is it a management/leadership problem
- c) Is it a people problem?
- d) Is it a culture problem?
- e) Is it a process or a systems problem?
- f) Is it an organizational problem?

Agreeing which of the six is true will bring clarity to your discussions.