

LESSON 14: Business Performance

Planning Like Nehemiah

For many small business leaders, developing a formal plan for their business sounds like an exercise in futility. But is it really? According to a *Harvard Business Review* article written by Francis Greene and Christian Hopp titled, “*Writing a Business Plan Makes Your Startup More Likely to Succeed*,” these two researchers discovered that it pays to plan.

After reviewing a study that followed 1000 businesses over a period of years, they discovered something important.

“Entrepreneurs who write formal plans are 16% more likely to achieve viability than the otherwise identical nonplanning entrepreneurs.”

As Christian leaders we need to recall that Proverbs 21:5 teaches, “*The plans of the diligent lead to profit as surely as haste leads to poverty.*” Planning should be a key part of our business; however, we do also need to temper our plans with the wisdom of Proverbs 21:30, “*There is no wisdom, no insight, no plan that can succeed against the Lord.*”

NEHEMIAH THE GREAT PLANNER

There are people good at planning, and there are people adept at executing a strategy, but the truly effective leaders develop a clear plan and then execute it to the desired result. Nehemiah was one of those rare leaders effective at both developing and executing a plan.

In this lesson we will provide a brief overview of a seven-step process that Nehemiah modeled while working towards his goal of rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem. Then, we will highlight how this approach can help you develop an effective plan for your organization.

In Rick Boxx's book, *Unconventional Business*, his opening chapter highlights the book of Nehemiah and seven steps for developing a plan. You can read that chapter for more detail, but the seven steps identified are as follows:

1. Pray fervently
2. Assess thoroughly
3. Seek God's vision
4. Develop strategies and tactics
5. Count the cost
6. Implement the plan
7. Follow up and be accountable

Let's discuss a brief overview of each step and then drill deeper into steps two through four to provide you with practical applications for your planning process.

Step 1: Pray Fervently

For some, prayer can feel like an impediment to action. Nehemiah, however, was obviously a man of action who greatly valued prayer. Due to his prayers, Nehemiah miraculously received time off and financing from his boss. He formed his team, cast a vision for them, and then led the entire community in a successful effort to rebuild the entire wall around Jerusalem in only 52 days.

But, prior to starting the project, Nehemiah invested four months in prayer before ever presenting a portion of his plan to the King of Persia. If you desire God's favor on your business, don't overlook praying fervently.

Step 2: Assess Thoroughly

Nehemiah needed to clearly know and understand the challenges he faced. He asked others who had recently been to Jerusalem about their opinions and assessment of the situation. More importantly, he spent the first few days in Jerusalem privately assessing the damage in detail before expressing his ideas to local leaders.

Knowing the condition of your business is critical before you develop the details of your plan. Spend time not only reviewing your business yourself, but also ask for the opinions of others who are less likely to be biased and more likely to share concerns about your shortcomings in varying situations.

Step 3: Seek God's Vision

Although Nehemiah primarily pursued the physical act of rebuilding the wall, through prayer he discovered that, more importantly, God wanted to bring spiritual revival to Jerusalem as well.

Because he pursued God's vision for Jerusalem, he was a part of much more than building a new wall.

God has a vision for your business much bigger than just the selling of your products and services. Ask Him for clarity on what His vision, mission and values might be for your business.

Step 4: Develop Strategies and Tactics

Nehemiah could have attempted many different approaches to rebuild the walls, but instead he thoughtfully developed an array of strategies and tactics that assured his work would succeed. He implemented a strategy that resulted in the right leaders buying into the plan. He also developed specific tactics that overcame some of the obstacles faced along the way. Time spent on the front end of your plan thinking through your strategies and tactics will save you time, trouble and money later.

Step 5: Count the Cost

Plans require adequate resources to be successful. Nehemiah knew that and gave significant thought to his needs in the very beginning. When the king asked what it would take for Nehemiah's dream to succeed, he didn't squander the opportunity, he listed specifically what he would need in funding and people. Because of his preparation in counting the cost, the king granted Nehemiah's request.

Step 6: Implement the Plan

Nehemiah knew that distractions would come but his success would hinge on his ability to implement the plan and to stay the course. Part of his implementation was to say no when his adversaries were trying to distract him from the work. Some distractions required action for the remainder of the project to be finished. Part of implementing the plan well is to discern the difference and take appropriate measures.

Step 7: Follow Up and Accountability

After Nehemiah's success, he was eventually required to go back to work for the king of Persia, but he was given the opportunity to visit Jerusalem years later. When checking back in, he was angered and disappointed that the plan had been derailed. Nehemiah took the appropriate action to hold the people accountable to the original plan and to renew their commitment to God.

A good plan will also include provisions for what happens after the plan has been implemented. If God has a long-term vision for your organization, you will need to have checkpoints to assure the team is keeping the plan on track and that there are accountability measures in place.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What sort of plans have you developed for your business over the years? Are they formal or informal?

What has worked for you and what hasn't?

2. How do you feel about taking the time to invest in developing a plan for your organization? Is it something you can do alone, or do you need someone who is unbiased to help?

3. Discuss your thoughts on which of the seven steps seem most critical to your future success.

DEVELOPING YOUR ORGANIZATION'S PLAN

While you begin praying fervently about your plan, you can begin tackling step two: **assessing thoroughly**.

Assessments need to be done from your perspective but also from the perspective of your team. Then, compare any gaps. When possible, outside objective assessments are invaluable. Your banker, accountant or consultants can all be sources of information as to their perceptions of the strengths or weaknesses of your organization.

ASSESSMENT EXERCISE

- ▶ Take 5 minutes to answer the attached Organizational Assessment. At the end of the assessment, review your individual scores. Summarize the top 3-5 categories that you scored highest. Then summarize the lowest 3-5 categories.
- ▶ Discuss with the group ways you might leverage your strengths and what steps might need to be addressed in your plan to overcome your weakest areas. Make note of those for your future strategies and tactics.

SEEKING GOD'S VISION

The world encourages us to go away and come up with a grand vision for our business. An *unconventional* leader who desires to honor God realizes that God reveals His vision to His people and expects us to implement His vision.

In previous lessons, we have discussed and worked on developing vision, mission and values for your organization and the importance of pursuing God's vision for your organization rather than your own limited view.

If you have those statements already developed, they should be added to the core of your plan for your business and used as a grid to test the rest of your plan against. If you have not yet developed vision, mission and values for your business, this is an important area that you might consider completing. There are many great books and tools to help with that, including an in-depth discussion in Rick Boxx's book, *Unconventional Business*.

VISION _____

MISSION _____

VALUES _____

DEVELOP STRATEGIES AND TACTICS

Bobby Albert, author of *Principled Profits*, says that your vision answers the question, “Where do we want to be?” Once you’ve answered that question, your strategy should answer the question, “What do we want to accomplish?”

Reaching your vision will require an overarching strategy. Since there are many different approaches to accomplishing your goal you need to outline your approach and define it well enough for your team to understand what you expect. This typically requires that you begin with the end in mind and back up to your current situation so that you can consider how the strategy will need to be developed to get from here to there.

Once your strategy is developed you will need to break it down into tactical plans. These tactics should answer several questions including, “How can we get there?”, “When do we want to arrive?” and “Who can make it happen on schedule?”

SUMMARY

There are many different types of planning processes in the marketplace. Some use a one-page format, others have a lengthier approach. The key is that you should have a plan that identifies (1) who you are, (2) where you are going, (3) how you plan on getting there.

It is not feasible to think you can even come close to developing a plan during this group session. Instead, the purpose and hope of this lesson is to prompt some thoughts for you during the next 12 months and to put together a plan that enables you to succeed in your pursuit of reaching the vision God has given you.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Describe God’s vision for your organization. If you do not know, what steps will you take to seek and discover His vision?

2. Take a moment and write down what you desire to accomplish through your business during the next 3 years.

a. What is a basic description of your overall strategy to get there? _____

b. How can you best get there? _____

c. When do you want to arrive? _____

d. Who can make it happen on schedule? _____

- If you don't currently have a written plan for your business, consider finding a template you like and begin the journey. It may take some time and hard work, but just like the *Harvard Business Review* study discovered, it pays to plan.