

# ***LeaderPerfect Newsletter***

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## **Make Time To Plan — Today!!**

by Dr. Mike Armour

"Somehow we never have time to plan. But we always make time to fix things that go wrong because of poor planning." Sound familiar? I hear this litany regularly in all types of businesses, across all types of industries.

When planning is inadequate things inevitably go awry. And we usually spend more time and resources to redo the project than proper planning would have required in the first place.

Few things are more rushed than planning. Even in the best of times we tend to hurry the planning process. And when time pressure mounts, planning is one of the first things we scratch from our schedule.

Ironically, we can all quote the old adages about planning. "To fail to plan is to plan to fail." Or, "if you don't have time to plan, you don't have time for anything else." So knowing that, why do we routinely fail to plan adequately and thoroughly? Here are some of the contributing factors.

### **It Doesn't Feel Like You're Doing Much**

We are an action-oriented people, we Americans. So much so that when you're planning, it doesn't seem like you're "doing" much. We keep playing in our heads another old adage, "Don't just sit there. Do something!!"

We fall victim to the bias that only action ultimately matters. We want to measure up, especially in a world where management bases so many of its assessments on metrics. The sooner we can get from planning to actually producing something tangible, the more it feels like we're doing our job.

On almost a weekly basis, in my role as a leadership coach, I help executives and managers set their priorities for the weeks ahead. Rarely, if ever, do they include in their priorities "creating more time for planning." No, their priorities revolve around "action items," getting things done.

### **It Doesn't Look Like You're Doing Much**

Onlookers, too, share this bias toward action. They typically admire the results of good planning, but not the process itself. Knowing that, none of us wants to look bad in their sight. Perhaps that's why, when we do set aside time to plan, we talk about needing to "hole up someplace" to do it. By retreating into our hole, we minimize the risk of

someone seeing us "waste" all that time. Off-site planning retreats serve the same purpose at the corporate level.

Of course, we can defend management retreats as a way of distancing ourselves from disruptive distractions that impede the planning process. And having guided scores of off-sites, I would agree with that rationale. But off-sites also serve to minimize the number of people who see us "doing nothing but planning" all day.

### **It Doesn't Sound Like You're Doing Much**

If planning doesn't *feel* like we're doing much, we hesitate to confess that we're "only planning." Imagine the boss sticking his head into your office or cubicle and asking, "What are you up to?" Somehow, it sounds a bit ill-advised to answer, "I'm doing a very thorough job of planning."

Or imagine a gathering with peers over lunch or coffee, where the topic turns to the latest stellar accomplishments. How many of them would "ooh" and "aah" if you announced that you had just done some of the best planning in your life? Similarly, when listing your recent achievements for an annual review, how eagerly would you say, "I devoted 60 hours of quality time to planning"? The very fact that these two scenarios seem laughable merely illustrates the light esteem we accord to planning.

One reason "planning" doesn't sound like you're doing much is that the word "planning" itself has been terribly debased. We commonly use it as a synonym for "thinking about." Someone says, "I'm planning to go on a cruise for my vacation." But when pressed, they have no clear idea about where they will go, what cruise line they will take, or how many days they'll be at sea. They aren't genuinely "planning." They are merely "thinking about" a cruise.

Because we hear "planning" misused this way on a daily basis, planning and execution are not linguistically bound together as tightly as they should be. Genuine planning always aims at execution (as opposed to day-dreaming), and execution is always at its best when there is solid planning behind it.

### **Planning Doesn't Build Your Resume**

Organizationally, especially in larger corporate settings, we've formally identified planning as a "staff" function, not a line function, which furthers the perception that it's the "doers," not the "planners" who are performing the most important roles. That then sends a significant message that if you want to climb the corporate ladder, you better build your reputation as an achiever. If you can plan well, that's nice, of course. But it's achievement that counts.

After all, how many CEOs do you know whose promotion was attended by wholesale praise in the press for their planning ability? No, their write-ups, just like the resumes people submit for coveted positions, chronicle what they have done, not how thoroughly they plan.

So you're swimming against the tide to press for adequate planning time, whether personally or within your department. But it's worth the swim. Remember, you'll always

find the time to rework the things that go wrong because of inadequate planning. Why not save that morale-killing time for rework by spending some extra time on the front end planning more effectively?

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