

A background image showing four business professionals in business attire standing on a wide set of stone stairs. Two men are on the left, one holding a briefcase, and two women are on the right, one holding a tablet. They appear to be in a professional meeting or discussion.

10 Steps to Building a Successful and Lasting Business

By Mark Goulston

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The more that people who execute strategies understand and agree with every step, especially where their job fits it, the more successful execution is likely to be.

There are many reasons why companies fail, but perhaps the most common one is that what made sense on paper was not executable or implementable. Strategies that made sense logically could not be carried out by the people tasked with executing them.

Something I learned as a former suicide specialist and FBI/police hostage negotiation trainer is that as soon as steps in a strategy become “abstract,” execution falls through the cracks, which from my prior role could mean the difference between life and death.

Therefore, I had to come up with steps that fit together like Lego blocks.

Translated into business terms, the more that people who execute strategies understand and agree with every step, especially where their job fits it, the more successful execution is likely to be. The less people understand or agree with a strategy, the more likely they are to just keep on doing what they were already doing until someone confronts them bluntly to tell them to stop.

What follows is a 10-step road map for building a successful and lasting business where each step follows the other, and where everyone who works in a company understands, agrees, accepts and can explain it to someone else. Everyone being able to explain a strategy in a cogent and an understandable way greatly increases its chances of being implemented.

1. Needs

For the majority of people in a company, the word “goal” is confusing. That is why if you ask people their goals they often hem and haw or just throw out some number to get their boss off their back. Not everyone has goals, but everyone has needs. And there are generally three needs for any company that everyone in the company will understand, agree with and accept: a. To make money — to pay for overhead, grow and provide a return on investment to investors; b. To consistently exceed (a.k.a. delight) customer, client, investor and community expectations; and c. To fully engage employees to enthusiastically commit to fulfilling “a” and “b.”

2. Results

Identify what result(s) which if achieved will fulfill the three needs above. For most companies, it is “b” above. When your company greatly and consistently exceeds expectations of all stakeholders, that company will make money (unless it is poorly managed) to invest in growth and satisfy investors.

Furthermore, employees will love working for a company that delights and excites vs. frustrates and disappoints customers and clients. For instance, by Apple creating products that were simple, reliable and beautiful, it took technology from the business to business to the business to consumer market.

3. Strategy

Identify what plan that will generate results. For Apple, it was to build products that were simple, reliable and beautiful.

4. Tasks

These are the specific actions that need to be taken to fulfill the strategy above. For Apple it was to research, design and manufacture products that were simple, reliable and beautiful and execute marketing and sales to take them into the marketplace.

5. Skills and Resources

Identify the skills needed to complete the tasks above. With Apple, that included design, engineering, technical, marketing and sales skills. It also involves people from a particular specialty being able to identify and access additional resources beyond the skills that they will need to perform the tasks above.

6. Casting

Identify, hire and place people with the skills, ability to access resources and a track record of successfully doing both to perform the tasks above. This might include discovering someone in one department with amazing skills that aren't being used and moving them to another department to make the most of their potential value to the company. Most of this is under the aegis of the talent recruitment and Development.

7. Motivation

Doing what needs to be done to consistently motivate, incentivize and when possible inspire the people selected above to enthusiastically want to make a maximum effort. Again, identifying these people is part of the talent recruitment and hiring process. It's important to only hire people that bring positive, can-do energy to their jobs. It's also important to identify recalcitrant, negative people and not hire them, fix them or fire them.

8. Accountability

Keeping people on track with commitments with regard to time and quality and also to have in place a reparative process when it appears they won't be able to keep those Responsibilities.

9. Review

Formally reassess on a monthly basis steps one through eight to make sure that the needs, results and strategies haven't changed, and then adjust as needed. In this step, tell people that they are expected to veer off course (vs. shaming them when they do, which will cause them to hide such problems) just as air traffic controllers expect planes to never fly in a straight line.

Schedule follow-up meetings as a way to respectfully "nudge" people and the entire process back on course and do a course correction when needed.

10. "Go to" Crisis Team

Crises are unavoidable in business as they are in life. It is essential that the company have a handful of "go to" skilled crisis-management people in the event that such an event happens.

The above will no doubt seem cumbersome at first, especially if it is not currently being followed. Train people in these 10 steps over a period of time until they can internalize it.

One of the greatest benefits is the positive effect on culture. The clarity from individuals knowing what their company is doing and why, and why their job is essential to the process, does more for culture than an entertaining offsite.

Dr. Mark Goulston is an international thought leader in empathic communication and former FBI hostage negotiation trainer and crisis psychiatrist. He is the author of: "Just Listen" Discover the Secret to Getting Through to Absolutely Anyone (Amacom, \$17.95) and Talking to Crazy: How to Deal with the Irrational and Impossible People in Your Life (Amacom, \$24.95). For more info visit: www.markgoulston.com or contact him: info@markgoulston.com.

