

Avoid common mistakes that derail success

Have you wondered why your employees are not getting on board to help you achieve your company's goals? Have you overlooked one of the following?

1. **Clearly communicate your vision of where you want the company to go.** Think of your company's vision as a destination—where you want to be if you're truly successful. Even if *you know* exactly where you want to go, it won't be obvious to everyone else. Define your goals in measurable terms like company size, employees, products/services, customers and location(s). Create a "story" of what the company would be like and tell that story to *everyone*—employees, suppliers, customers and colleagues.
2. **Develop achievable plans with measurable objectives and milestones to gauge progress.** Once you're clear on your destination, realistically assess where you are and set goals to help you get there. Develop a plan that includes your assumptions, measurable objectives and milestones to check progress. Here's a simplified example of what I mean.

Let's say your "vision" is to reach San Francisco by car in a week—a trip of about 3,000 miles. If you drive 500 miles in about nine hours each day and leave one day to make up for problems along the route, you can see that you'd have to start each day at 8:00 AM to be done by 5:00 and that Chicago is a milestone to reach by the end of day two. If you encounter traffic or bad weather, you can easily see how plans must be adjusted. By having measurable objectives and milestones, you can adapt to changing conditions and unexpected challenges.

Business plans are, of course, much more complex, but the idea is the same. Some business owners who have achieved a level of success without detailed plans are stymied in getting to their companies to the next level. A good plan is worth the significant effort it takes to create it. Don't shy away from this important step.

3. **Engage employees in all aspects of planning and implementation.** Involving employees is critical. If you ask *and listen*, you can often learn a lot about your company's strengths and weaknesses, get good ideas for how to improve *and* develop a more committed workforce. Employees who are consulted about what will change and how become committed through the process of evolving a plan. Conversely, employees who feel they are kept in the dark or are not active participants in making and implementing plans will often resist.
4. **Communicate to everyone what you want to accomplish and progress along the way.** Communicate your vision, goals and plans honestly and openly to everyone. If plans change, make sure your employees are the first to know. Employees will often create a "worst case" explanation for anything that isn't explained to them beforehand. Even when the news is good—for example, new customers or products that will expand opportunities for everyone—if it's not clearly communicated, employees may reason that it's bad news because it's "secret." Some business owners readily communicate good news about their businesses but are closed-mouthed about any problems. Even bad news is better than no news. Be honest about any reversals. Your employees will be more likely to pitch in to try to help if they are given the respect that your honesty implies. If you feel your employees are resistant to change or lack focus, make an objective assessment of whether you have taken these four key steps.