



DON'T MAKE EXCELLENCE A GOAL, MAKE IT A HABIT!

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Most quality organizations have a desire to improve—they just don't know how. Weary of “flavor of the month” leadership programs, management buzzwords that change with the seasons, and goal-setting processes that are long on promise but short on delivery, many leaders as well as employees simply give up on ever seeing meaningful change. Complacency becomes a way of life and excellence remains a hoped-for but largely unrealized dream.

In the words of Willa A. Foster, “quality is never an accident,” and neither is achieving excellence. In today's world, the barriers faced by organizations striving for excellence are ever-present and significant. Excellence will only be achieved by those who find ways to overcome those barriers.

The following scenario depicts an organization struggling unsuccessfully to overcome some very real barriers to excellence, barriers which exist in almost every organization.

The Way It Is for Far Too Many

Linda had been staring out the window for nearly ten minutes. It wasn't the scene on the street below that held her attention, interesting though it was. It was “the problem.” She wasn't even sure what to call it, so whenever she found herself pondering it, she just thought of it as “the problem,” or perhaps more accurately, “the problem with no solution.”

It wasn't that they were a bad organization. Far from it—their financial stability was the envy of many of their peers, they managed to retain a relatively stable workforce, and they generally enjoyed a good reputation in the community. They weren't “bad”—they just weren't great, or anything close to it.

Not that they hadn't tried. Linda had lost track of the number of quick fix approaches and leadership programs they had tried over the years. The most frustrating were their many attempts at goal-setting. *Setting* goals never seemed to be a problem, though she had often wondered if they were setting the right goals. No, the problem wasn't in the *setting*, it was in the *accomplishing*. The heady optimism of the goal-setting process always seemed to vanish like the morning mist within weeks, if not days, of committing the goals to paper. Most of the time, people left the goal-setting retreats pledging their support and sincerely believing the goals would be accomplished but with no clear sense for how they were actually going to get the organization from Point A to Point B. Deep inside she often wondered if anybody (including herself) even knew where “Point B” was, let alone how to get there. On the several occasions when they had attempted to develop a plan for achieving their goals, the document they produced rivaled the New

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York yellow pages in length and might as well have been written in Latin. Two months after completion, nobody could understand what it meant, who was supposed to be doing what, or when anything was supposed to be done.

But their problems weren't just related to goal-setting. Change—really moving the organization forward in a meaningful way—required energy and there just didn't seem to be enough of that to go around. Tomorrow or next week always seemed to be a better time to get a task accomplished. Linda knew that many of her employees were operating well below their capacity. Yes, there were complicating factors—constant interruptions and uneven work flow, to name just two—but there were at least partial solutions for those problems. Somehow, the gap between what she knew people were capable of doing and what they actually were doing had to be narrowed.

In her now nearly twenty minutes of staring out onto the street below, nothing had really changed there. And, unfortunately, nothing had really changed in the organization either.

Having read the above, you may be reacting to this scenario that same way many people respond to the daily Dilbert cartoon—wondering if it's really your organization we've just described, with only a few rather transparent name changes. Read on.

A Better Way

As she gazed out the window, Linda found herself saying, “It hasn't been easy, but oh my, it's been worth it!” Now, nearly a year after being introduced to Blueprint for Excellence, it was hard to believe that this was the same organization. No, Blueprint hadn't solved all of their problems—that was *their* job—but Blueprint had certainly given them the understanding and the tools to do that job.

First, they had developed a common, compelling vision of where they wanted to be in three years. Not ten years down the road—who in the world could get excited by anything that far in the distance?—but three years, so close you could almost but not quite touch it. The power of that vision seemed to breathe new life into every box on the organization chart.

Next, they had developed meaningful goals. Each goal was then clarified, so that everyone knew what it meant. The obvious as well as unseen benefits of achieving each goal were identified, along with factors critical to accomplishing the goal. Goals were then moved to the task level, with specific assignments and due dates. Each team member knew exactly what they were expected to do to help achieve the goal, when they were supposed to do it, and how they would be held accountable for getting it done.

Staff meetings took on new importance and meaning. Instead of each meeting beginning as if no previous meeting had ever been held, they became times for team members to report on assignments completed, seek the help of peers in solving problems, and measure the team's progress toward accomplishing goals.

With an exciting vision of where the organization was headed and a clear plan for achieving that vision, there was no room left for complacency. Next month or six months from now was no longer acceptable when the goal details report specified next week for getting a particular task accomplished. The gap between what, one year ago, she intuitively knew people were capable of accomplishing and what they were now producing had been significantly narrowed. She felt especially good about that, but perhaps more importantly, her employees understood what had happened and felt good about it as well.

It had been an interesting year—not without a few major bumps and even a couple of resignations—but worth the effort? No question about that.

The Barriers

“The Way It Is for Far Too Many” illustrates in hopefully a very real way the barriers faced by most organizations as they strive for excellence. Let’s now be very specific about what those barriers are. Here’s the list, along with a few words of explanation for each barrier.

- ✓ No Process for Achieving Goals – Many organizations know how to set goals; few have a process in place for achieving them.
- ✓ “Chance for Success” Approach – Most endeavors are approached with a “chance for success” rather than a “leave nothing to chance” approach.
- ✓ Lack of Commitment – Leaders often feel they have commitment from stakeholders when, in reality, all they have is support. There’s a huge difference between the two.
- ✓ Lack of Accountability – Goals are set and assignments are made with no system of accountability...and then we’re surprised when nothing happens.
- ✓ Procrastination – The right time for change and course corrections almost always seems to be any time but the present.
- ✓ Effort Gap – Closing the gap between each employee’s maximum effort and the current level of effort (the effort gap) should be—but seldom is—a primary goal for everyone in the organization.
- ✓ Lack of Vision – Few organizations have a clear, compelling vision that motivates all employees to give their best effort.
- ✓ Lack of Concentration – With interruptions occurring an average of every ten minutes, productivity can’t help but suffer.

The Solution

Most of us are pretty good at identifying problems, but solutions...well, that's often a different story. In this case though, we believe we have the solution and we're very excited to tell you about it.

Our focus at Upstream NorthWest is to help leaders build legacy organizations. A legacy organization is one that is built to last beyond its present leadership – built on strong process, clear vision, compelling purpose and continuous improvement - to create lasting value. We believe that Blueprint for Excellence is the solution for overcoming the barriers our friend Linda was battling in her organization, and we believe it's the solution for any organization that wants to overcome the barriers listed above and achieve excellence – to create a legacy organization.

So, just what is Blueprint for Excellence? Blueprint is a process for creating excellence, a proven program that helps organizations overcome significant barriers and achieve excellence through a guided process of continuous improvement. The Blueprint program contains the step-by-step processes and tools organizations need in order to create a dynamic future.

Unlike many improvement programs, Blueprint for Excellence moves beyond theory and carefully blends training, mentoring, peer interaction, processes, tools, and practice to produce both immediate and long-term results for your organization. It has been said that one definition of insanity is doing the same thing over and over again in the same way and expecting different results. Stated in a more positive way, Richard G. Scott once said, "To reach a goal never before attained, you must do things you have never before done." The Blueprint process will help everyone in your organization do the things—either those not done before or those done at a poor level—that will take your organization to new heights.

Blueprint for Excellence will give you the keys for removing the barriers to excellence in your organization. The Blueprint program will enable you to:

- **Elevate your vision:** Identifying a compelling vision motivates employees to give their very best effort, function as a team, and work together toward accomplishing the vision. The vision serves as a compass for your strategic plan.
- **Measure progress:** Thomas S. Monson has said, "When we deal in generalities, we shall never succeed. When we deal in specifics, we shall rarely have a failure. When specifics are recorded, performance improves. When specifics are recorded and reported, the rate of performance is accelerated." The Blueprint program allows you to carefully track performance and measure progress.
- **Standardize every process:** Every organization is made up of dozens of repeatable processes. A critical element in creating excellence within your

organization is creating excellent processes. In the words of John Maxwell, “We overestimate the event and underestimate the process.”

- **Use a strategic goal process:** The Blueprint goal-setting process produces clearly defined goals, articulates goal benefits and critical success factors, and results in a detailed task list that identifies responsible parties and due dates for each task.
- **Ensure accountability:** David H. Maister has said, “If people are not prepared to be held accountable for what they do, it is unlikely they will achieve much. To choose a goal without being prepared to be accountable for progress towards it is to choose nothing.” The Blueprint program holds employees accountable to an action plan and sets them up for success, not failure.

How does Blueprint for Excellence accomplish this? Much of it comes as a result of the **Blueprint Tool**.

Many good ideas never get implemented because of the effort required to put them into practice. The Tool enables you to immediately apply the processes learned in the Blueprint for Excellence program. You’ll use the Tool to conduct an organization evaluation and produce a report card which can then be used to continuously measure progress. The Tool will help you develop goals and a detailed action plan with specific steps for accomplishing your goals. And you’ll use the Tool to monitor progress and print reports that make follow-up and accountability a way of life for your organization.

We have enjoyed our role in helping leaders move their organizations to the next level through their implementation of Blueprint into their organizations. The Blueprint for Excellence process can be put to work in your organization by participating in a chapter with leaders of other successful organizations, by creating a chapter of leaders internal to your organization, or by a custom implementation. If you see Blueprint as the way to change the culture of your organization, call us for a private executive briefing to learn more.