

5 Tips For Your Next Strategy Session

Will your next strategic planning retreat resemble the book title, “Death by Meeting” or be more akin to another best-seller “Good to Great?”

Consider the “burn-rate” – the real cost of 8-12 executive’s time over the course of two-three days, plus the hotel, meals, travel and facilitation fees. The costs are staggering! Sufficient pre-planning will help you maximize the benefits of this investment.

Tip #1: Envision Your Outcomes

Imagine you are driving home from this retreat and you are reflecting on what happened. Ask yourself:

- What take-aways do I want my team to be pondering as they head home?
- What core business issues are we in the process of solving?
- How much clarity was produced?

Tip #2: Plan your Agenda

Keeping your outcomes in mind and review the following sample of typical topics. Remember you cannot do it all and do it well. Decide what topics are most relevant, what order they will be addressed, and how much time to devote to each area.

- 3-5 year vision creation/or vision update
- Annual goals and implementation plans
- Decision-making on new products, marketing ideas or technology
- Acquisition plans
- Build teamwork, alignment and the ability to work together more cohesively

Tip #3: Have Everyone Come Prepared

Identify the information and pre-work that will make decisions go smoothly. This will likely include:

- External data requirements – trends in the economy and your industry
- Internal data – key indicators and all other relevant measures and information
- Reading required by each team member attending – this may be a chapter of a book, an entire book or articles that pertain to the topics being addressed.

Tip #4: Choose a Great Location

Choose a venue that is conducive for your focus, your team’s interests and style. Most teams enjoy getting out of town, but do not want extensive travel. An hour or two drive from your office is ideal.

Tip #5: Have a Method to Ensure Accountability

95% of all strategic plans fail not due to poor planning but because of a lack of follow-through. The last thing you want is for your brilliant strategic plan to sit in a binder on a shelf. It's a leader's job to assure that the plan is alive, in action and visible to all. A quarterly check-in meeting is the best way to keep it alive and on the playing field.

In summary, the point of your off-site is to envision the future, gain a fresh perspective, build relationships and come away with true team alignment. If done well, this will change your organization's future!

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