

A Discipline of Planning

Managing a hospitality operation without a plan is like driving through a strange land without a road map. Given the size, complexity, and money invested in making an enterprise successful, why would anyone consider operating it by the seat of one's pants? Yet, this is exactly what managers do when they fail to establish a discipline of formal planning. And make no mistake about it, **it is a discipline** – requiring managers and supervisors at all levels to conceive and document their plans for upcoming periods and specific events. It also requires that the General Manager review all planning documents, as well as review progress toward completing those plans on an ongoing basis.

Every enterprise demands a plan. Without a formal, written plan to focus attention and action upon the completion of specified goals within a specified time period, the business will lack clear direction and purpose. By putting plans in writing, the responsible manager formally commits to its accomplishment. Further, there is a common understanding on the part of both the subordinate manager and the General Manager of what will happen and when. Often, the planning and execution of one department will impact other departments or the operation as a whole. Written plans ensure that all managers and department heads are fully informed about where the enterprise is going and when things are supposed to happen. Taking all this into account, planning is not a luxury, but a necessity for efficient operations.

Types of Plans

Planning is necessary on many levels and in many settings. Formally, the operation should have the following:

- An annual Enterprise Plan covering a period of 12 months, coinciding with the budgeting cycle. This plan lays out the specific goals to be accomplished during the year as part of efforts toward continual improvement.
- A General Manager's Work Plan for the 12 months covered by the Enterprise Plan. This plan lays out measurable accountabilities for the General Manager and is the basis the GM's performance appraisal.
- Departmental Plans for the 12 months covered by the Enterprise Plan. These plans lay out the goals and objectives of each operating department.
- A Work Plan for each department head for the same 12 months. These plans do the same for the club's department heads.
- Plans for major project and events. These are plans developed for specific major tasks or activities such as purchasing new kitchen equipment, renovating a facility, leasing new golf carts, or preparing for major events or activities.

Having gone through the planning process a number of times, I offer the following advice to all General Managers:

- **Start early.** Procrastination results in poor, disjointed planning.
- **Involve your staff.** Departmental plans for the coming year usually impact the overall Enterprise Plan and budget. Also, since no department works in isolation, one department's plan may affect others – either materially or in the timing of events and accomplishments.

- **Challenge staff.** General Managers should explain the big picture of enterprise direction and progress and then challenge department heads to work on specific initiatives within their departments, for example, implementing Benchmarking, setting up Tools to Beat Budget, reviewing departmental training material and plans, Continual Process Improvement.
- **Planning is a process.** No plan is completed after one pass. Back and forth discussion between the General Manager and department heads and among the different departments will further refine plans insuring a well-integrated club plan.
- **Use planning as a team-building exercise.** Given the preceding tips, I encourage General Managers to use the annual planning process as a team-building process. Call an early planning meeting with all department heads to lay out the purpose, process, and planning timeline. Then establish a series of planning meetings at which each department head presents his or her plans to the rest of the staff for input and feedback. One department head's ideas may spark others to similar accomplishment. Encourage critical review of plans and challenge groups of department heads to work together to work on larger organizational or departmental initiatives.

Lastly, plans must not be a one-time task not to be looked at again. To be truly useful departmental and Enterprise Plans should be reviewed often. I recommend a brief review of plans and accomplishments during the Monthly Review of Operating Statements. This ongoing review and discussion of planning will ensure timely completion of tasks and keep the club on target to meet all of its Annual Goals.

Summary. The importance of disciplined planning cannot be overstated. Haphazard planning results in haphazard operations and equally haphazard performance.

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