

## Commando Strategic Planning

By Trenton Hightower

The 1990's introduced three important words into the business vernacular: Vision. Mission. Values. **Vision**, we were told, means what you aspire to be, while your **mission** is comprised of the steps you'll take to get there. Your **goals**, we learned, advance your mission.

Identifying our company's vision, mission and values became a hot topic. Businesses invested in retreats that lasted for days. Untold hours were filled with discussion and exercises aimed at identifying the Big Three: Vision. Mission. Goals. It was a procedure that ultimately yielded results—but at what cost in time, money and energy?

Don't get me wrong. These three things—vision, mission and goals—are the bedrock of every business, every company, every organization. Building a vision and mission statement as a team is important. Setting goals is crucial. Taking the time to define these as a team makes all the sense in the world. My suggestion, however, is that you tackle strategic planning in a way that can abbreviate the process without sacrificing the outcome. When you can keep the group focused and provide appropriate direction, you can arrive at consensus in hours rather than days.

Start the process by doing your own analysis. After all, as the leader of the group, you are the one who will ultimately be accountable for its success or failure. Therefore, giving the matter some thought before you take it to the group is well-advised.

Where to begin? Consider your own mini-SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats) analysis. What are your strengths and weaknesses as a group, team or organization? What opportunities exist for you in the marketplace to leverage the best you have to offer? And, finally, what are the threats you must get around to achieve your full potential? Spend some time reflecting on those four areas, and you will be better prepared to facilitate a group strategic planning session.

To further guide you in the strategic planning process, try listing all the functions of your organization: sales, marketing, service, production, staff development, quality assurance, etc. Using a scale of 1-5, rate each of these areas. Your goal is to see balance across the board. For example, excelling in sales when the quality assurance rating is low is going to result in dissatisfied customers. Use this mini-exercise to zero in on areas that need to be addressed.

While you don't want to do your strategic planning in a vacuum, taking the time to formulate some thoughts and ideas in advance of the group session makes sense. Arrive at some conclusions about where you'd like your team to go, and use them as a place to start. Be flexible. Get team buy-in. Strive for consensus, but don't be afraid to guide your team in a winning direction.