Managing The Seasons Of Performance

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When most leaders create annual plans, they typically do not take into consideration the different rhythms that occur in each season. And by not doing that, they can miss out on opportunities to build on natural behaviors that occur throughout the year that can impact performance.

The 12-month plan itself is obsolete. Not only does it not take into account ways to capitalize on variations in performance, the plans usually do not allow for the unforeseen obstacles that will inevitably get in the way. Instead of developing a yearlong plan, you should consider a strategy that creates the greatest productivity within each season of the year, culminating in four quarters of growth.

First Quarter—Energized Planning

At the beginning of the new year, you should be very ambitious about the planning process and able to determine what items of the plan need to be set in motion to give the desired results at the end of the year. You may not complete all of those items, but by initiating them, you will be moving your organization forward.

The first three months are characterized by great energy in creating the plan, gathering resources and ensuring that everyone understands what must be done to achieve the outcome.

The new year brings a natural spike of adrenaline and a desire for change. By capitalizing on this with a new plan for business success, you can channel the energy of employees toward the outcome.

Second Quarter—Renewal and Implementation

Spring is the growing season. For businesses, that means it is time to put into place those plans that were made in the first quarter. This second natural spike in adrenaline pushes us to start generating the results we want from the plan.

During this time, however, the plan may encounter its first obstacle. Whether it's a new player on the market in direct competition with you, a new regulation to incorporate or a limitation on necessary resources, at some point, even the perfect plan will encounter a pitfall.

Most plans derail here because leaders, facing this unexpected barrier, tend to give up on the plan or the goal. But instead of deciding that the plan is not workable, they need to be flexible, creative, innovative and persistent enough to ensure the plan does work.

Third Quarter—A Fight to Keep Momentum Going

Summertime, and the living is easy. It's also easy to slow down in this third quarter because so much work has been done in the previous two. That's a natural inclination, but in order to reach your goals, you must keep the momentum going. Think of a ball that you've rolled on the floor. Eventually it will stop rolling and you'll need to tap it again. Plans are like that. The momentum that plan garnered in the first and second quarter can begin to slow as you reach those lazy summer days.

Remember, this is a critical season to ensure that you are able to accomplish as much as possible in your plan.

Fourth Quarter—The End Is In Sight

As the end of the year approaches, your employees will feel another spike in adrenaline — a sense of urgency — from seeing what has not been accomplished and figuring out how to finish your agenda.

Surprisingly, the spike in adrenaline makes employees more open-minded. This is good because the last quarter is when your team needs to be exceptionally innovative and creative in order to overcome obstacles and meet goals.

By understanding the patterns of productivity, you can create short-term plans for your organization that take advantage of these rhythms to generate the best results.

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