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Are you still on course for 2008?

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(September 2008) The process of business planning and execution can be likened, in many ways, to a captain laying in a course for his ship and crew. Do you still have the inspiration that you set out with on your voyage of 2008?

Do you have clarity of vision?

Is your business plan written?

Is your time management system in place?

Is your expense and income budget complete?

Do you have well-defined 90-day goals?

Are you and your team all taking consistent action towards reaching your goals for 2008?

Or are you lost in a sea of overwhelm?

A captain must first have clarity of vision in order to convey it to his crew.

Crew members *need* a clear vision. They need to be on deck and must be rowing in the right direction. If the ship has no captain, half the crew may be rowing in one direction, while half row in the other. The ship, or business, will only go in circles instead of progressing forward.

Captains of Viking ships were on deck at the bow of their ship, pointing towards their destination. All hands were on deck, with a clear view. They knew where they were going, all rowing in the same direction, with the reward clearly in sight — 'pillage and plunder' thought the crew!

Captains of Roman galleys, meanwhile, were up on deck while their crew was below, in the dark, rowing to the lash of the whip and the beat of the drum. There were few rewards for the crew in this case; only the constant whiplash and drumbeat resonated in their collective mind, along with the thought that they were not good enough. The crew deserted at the first sign of trouble. To them, there was no sense in rowing through challenges — they had no sight of the vision.

Does your crew have vision or are they rowing to the lash of the whip and the beat of the drum?

Captains with vision have a ship's log or journal to record their ports of call and journey. They acknowledge and affirm their progress by writing down their positive actions and accomplishments. It confirms they are on track and reaffirms their course of action going forward.

The captain with vision communicates and reminds the crew of positive actions and accomplishments. This keeps the captain and the crew inspired and keeps them focused on the actions they need to take to reach the next port of call. It keeps them from getting sidetracked by serpents and pirates — negative self-talk and patterns.

In business, "ports of call" you can acknowledge include areas of measure like finance, marketing, sales, service, systems and teamwork.

Take the time to complete the following quarterly review process steps with each member of your crew to ensure smooth sailing ahead.

1. Advise your team members that you are planning to conduct individual quarterly review meetings with them. Invite them, *in advance*, to participate in the process by preparing to answer the following questions:

A) What do they like best about their job?
What do they like least about their job?
What changes do they recommend?
What help do they need from the leader?
In what areas would they appreciate more training?

B) Write or review their existing job description with recommendations, including additions and changes.

2. Schedule a quarterly review meeting with each member of your team.
3. Conduct a quarterly review meeting with each member of your team by first inviting their input from points listed in step 1. Listen to what they have to say.
4. After your team members have provided their input, ask permission to offer your feedback by providing your input to the same points.
5. Establish 90-day goals and agree upon specific actions to be taken.
6. Let each team member know that their future compensation is performance-related and that members who demonstrate vision will be paid 5 to 10% above the industry standard.
7. Review their progress in 90 days.
8. Meet with team members on a weekly basis, at least, and ask what their priorities are for the day or week. A good captain asks rather than tells.

After having this discussion, a captain with vision says thank you for the feedback. When priorities change, a captain with vision says "I need your help to re-prioritize," explaining that recent developments require a change of priorities for the group. Thank your employees for their help with this along the way. If additional feedback or changes are required, ask first if they would like some feedback.

Permission-based feedback goes a long way. This style of communication helps the crew feel that they are not slaves, but part of a larger plan. Telling your crew *what* to do, however, enables them to become complacent. It makes them feel as if they are rowing to the lash of the whip and the beat of the drum.

With today's shortage in the job market, you will eliminate the danger of your high-quality team being hired away by the competition through the implementation of enhanced coaching, communication, management, above-average compensation, and continued recognition of work done well.

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