

“Business planning boosts employee performance and possibly profits,” says expert.

By: Christine Van Matre

Smart Business

Think a business plan is just a way to woo a bank into granting a loan, or to court other investors? Consultant



Mark Holmes says this business tool has relevance that you may not have considered.

“Writing a yearly business plan at all department levels has

tremendous merit for companies that want to stay competitive and profitable,” Holmes says. “Whether your business is large or small, old or new, every operation can benefit from having congruous planning among its managers,” according to Holmes.

Holmes has led businesses of all sizes and industries through the often intimidating planning process. The results can exceed expectations. “Mark’s process kept us focused on what’s important and assisted us in making company-wide changes that we didn’t think were possible,” says Barb Pohl, vice president of Great Southern Bank.

Holmes says the negative effects of not having a business plan start at the top and trickle down. “When companies lack well thought-out strategy, then they will lack direction,” he says. “Companies without tactical direction often underperform in the marketplace. Sales is like war, you must have a game plan when you fight over limited market share.”

Even the slightest degree of ambiguity among mid-level managers can bring on a host of business ills. According to Holmes, “Failing to map out a plan of what you want your business to look like limits the results you can achieve. If your staff works with a question mark hovering over their heads, then you aren’t getting the most out of your employees.”

Writing a business plan is not the intimidating or mysterious process that some business leaders might think it is, Holmes says. “It doesn’t have to be cryptic or complicated, it can be surprisingly practical. Going back to basics and developing a business plan that includes the formulation of goals, strategies and action steps are the keys,” he advises.

One CEO of a third generation family-owned business says Holmes’ business planning direction has become the company’s foundation for success. “Mark’s help has been a cornerstone of our success during the past three years,” says Hammons Products Company president and chief executive Brian Hammons. “Mark helped us solidify our company’s business plan, mission and goals, and led a critical strategic planning retreat with our management team. His help with planning has helped us achieve greater productivity, quality and financial success.”

Under Holmes’ direction, a business plan can emerge in just a few hours. “I can lead any manager to develop a very thorough first draft of a business plan in an hour and a half,” he says.

“Then we work with the management team to fine-tune the plan. The final step comes when we put a practical, ongoing implementation of those plans in place.”

Having a business plan though, is not really the point says Holmes. “Let’s face it, business plans can be written on a paper napkin or bound in a fancy binder. What matters most is implementing your plan intelligently.”

Business plan formulation puts everyone in an organization on the same page, and more companies seem to be embracing that notion. “Managers start to help each other instead of clashing with the goals of their peers,” Holmes says.

“This creates a dynamic synergy of focus and direction that shows up in the bottom-line.”

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