Achieving Organizational Excellence

Through Teamwork

Most contractors do a pretty good job of surviving and seem to make the day-to-day decisions that are necessary to complete their piece of the project on a timely basis and remain somewhat profitable as each year passes. Today's contracting firm has most likely gone through an evolutionary process of change, without really changing the way it operates or manages the business. Someone like a family member started the business from scratch. He worked hard, put in long hours and did whatever it took to survive. The company grew, other family members or friends were probably added; everybody was working, but there was no organized plan to move forward. Although sales volume was increasing, profits were not, and it seemed to get tougher and more frustrating to succeed, even though more so-called “experts” were on the payroll.

Many of you reading this article may be saying: “This sounds familiar, as a matter of fact, this is what’s happening to me right now. What can I do to make things better?”

Hopefully, this article will begin to give you the blueprint you need to install a management system that includes all of the elements to help you grow and achieve optimum profitability as you move toward the future. This article will provide the blueprint to build a sound management system, that of achieving organizational excellence through teamwork.

Today’s contracting firm has not likely gone through an evolutionary process of change, without really changing the way it operates or manages the business.

Excellence

• A striving for perfection
• Painstaking attention to detail
• Commitment to be the best
• Endless work
• Projecting positive attitudes
• Working smarter, not harder

Teamwork

• Individual commitment to a group effort
• Different and diverse talents of individuals blending together to achieve organizational objectives
• Each individual develops talents and abilities to the fullest

Excellence and teamwork now become the key focus points in the development of a strategic plan: a process by which members from all levels of the organization envision the organization’s future and develop the necessary procedures and strategies that will shape and guide the organization to its new vision of the future. It focuses on the process of planning, not the plan that is produced.

Strategic planning is characterized by organizational self-examination, confronting difficult choices, action planning and setting priorities. Once the strategic direction has been set, three steps for success become critical.
1. Developing the strategies and processes that will comprise the management system.
2. Implementing the plan.
3. Effectively monitoring and managing the strategy.

In order to shape strategic success and develop a management system based on excellence and teamwork, it is essential that all members of the organization are made aware of, understand, and commit to the following nine keys:

1. Decisions must be based on values.
2. The mission must be made crystal clear to everyone in the organization.
3. The leadership must sound a “rallying cry” that excites and involves people.
4. The people must be empowered and encouraged to be innovative and to persevere, to make decisions at their level to insure continuous quality work.
5. The people must successfully overcome obstacles.
6. Productive risk-taking must be seen as a desirable investment in establishing strategic success.
7. Strategies must be carefully implemented, with built-in, well-established feedback mechanisms.
8. All along the way, strategic directions must be managed with “down-board” thinking: constant tracking, continuing feedback, and redirecting and refocusing.
9. Maintaining a market focus, the key that determines the success of the organization. The critical question becomes: “Is the organization desirable in the eyes of the customer?”

The foundation is now in place. It’s important now to “make it happen!” It’s time to build a new view of organizational reality by using a model that will provide both new direction and new energy to the company. It’s also important to realize that change doesn’t come easily. Everyone needs to understand that it will take from nine to 12 months to successfully implement the process. Significant stumbling blocks will arise at various intervals that will need to be resolved before the next step can be taken.

**The Nine Step Strategic Planning Model for Achieving Excellence Through Teamwork**

**Step One:**
**Organizational Commitment to the Process (Formation of Teams)**

Upper management must not only commit to the process, they must be willing to invest time and effort that is visible to the rest of the company. Representatives of upper management will form a Management Strategy Team (MST) to energize the planning process. They’re the ones responsible for steering and guiding the process at each step along the way.

An Executive Strategy Team (EST) is then formed with representatives from each functional area of responsibility. This team reports their progress to the MST at regularly scheduled meetings and is charged with the prime responsibility of problem-solving and quality improvement as the process unfolds.

Each EST member is responsible for forming Productivity Action Teams (PATS) in their area of responsibility. A PAT is a group of four to six employees who come together as a work improvement team to remove barriers to productivity on the job site and/or to establish better teamwork between the office and the field. The team disbands after completing their assignment. Teams can be energized at any time when there are new obstacles or problems to resolve.

**Step Two:**
**Future Focus**

Top management needs to forecast the future by asking themselves some very important questions, such as:

1. Where do you want to be five years from now? (size of company, total sales market niche, etc.)
2. How will that success be measured?
3. What will be done to achieve it?

Once this “future vision” is crystallized, it must be communicated to all employees so that they can focus their energies on activities that will maximize creative output within realistic parameters.

**Step Three:**
**Formulating the Company’s Mission and Values**

Employees representing various functions in the company (approximately 12) will come together with management to develop a mission and values statement. (This should be the EST.)

The **mission statement** is a clear statement of the business the company is in, along with a declaration of the purpose the company is attempting to fulfill in the marketplace. A sound mission statement answers the following questions:

1. What is the company’s primary reason for existing?
2. What function does the company perform?
3. For whom does the company perform?
4. How does the company go about fulfilling this function?

The **values statement** is the company’s “philosophy of operations,” which is a series of statements identifying how the company does business and what is really important to them.

Once the mission and values statements have been formulated, they should be communicated and explained to all of the employees. These two statements comprise the “company creed,” and all employees are expected to use it in their daily work.
Step Four:
Organizational Assessment (OA)

An assessment team or an outside consultant will conduct an organizational assessment of management /supervisory effectiveness and identify barriers to job site productivity and any blockages that have a negative impact on teamwork, employee morale and productivity.

Step Five:
Reviewing the OA Results

The assessment team will provide feedback to management and the employees about the organizational assessment results. They will present the strengths of the organization, areas where improvement is needed, and the specific actions necessary for facilitating organizational change.

Step Six:
Establish Strategic Planning Priorities

The assessment team will begin the “action planning process” by indicating the organization’s capacity to move in the identified strategic directions. They will prioritize the strategies that need to be implemented and develop a preliminary schedule for meeting those priorities over a nine to 12 month period.

Step Seven:
Energizing Action Planning

This is where the productivity action teams are formed to participate in and carry out their role in implementing the strategies for quality improvement and for improving overall organizational effectiveness in their specific function. It is their responsibility to develop “action plans” for accomplishing desired results in specific time frames. This is where excitement and empowerment builds and people become key players in the strategic planning process.

Step Eight:
Developing the Measurement Indicators

It’s important to develop job specifications to appraise employee performance, to pay people for results, to install effective job controls, to provide incentives for excellence, to conduct effective employee orientation, to communicate company policy and procedures, to establish a sound jobsite safety program and to install a tool/equipment /material inventory / distribution system. These are the strategic planning “pieces” that solidify the process and strengthen our quest for excellence through teamwork. These “pieces” need to be developed and should be done with employee involvement through PATS.

Step Nine:
Ongoing Environmental Scanning

The EST and Pats must continually “take the temperature” of what’s going on around them. This ongoing scanning or monitoring will make the organization members aware of ongoing blockages and pitfalls that affect employee morale and productivity. As those blockages, issues or concerns are identified, PATS can be energized to formulate “action plans” to eliminate them. Environment scanning is not a phase of the strategic planning process; it is an ongoing strategy that becomes especially critical in assessing the day-to-day effectiveness of each operating unit.

When all of this is in place, what you will have is a high performance, high commitment, integrated management system that requires consistent and continuous attention to:

Excellence: always striving to be the best by establishing a bias for achieving high quality results within specific timelines.

Teamwork the MST, EST and PATS blend together and maintain close communications with each other to ensure that all elements of
the strategic planning process are congruent with the stated objectives and end results. The ongoing effectiveness of this high performance, high commitment system requires constant planning and interaction among the various teams to achieve optimum quality and profitability on each project.

Sound Leadership: the challenge for the organizational leaders is to continually ask themselves these questions and keep them in the forefront of their thinking:
- Do we want to seek quality in everything we do?
- Will we overcome the struggle to move forward rather than return to traditional ways of doing things?
- Are we willing to become systematic thinkers and planners?
- Do we believe that this management system will make a difference in the marketplace?

If the answer is yes, then the leaders need to understand that they are “buying into” and initiating a redistribution of power, which leads to:

Empowerment: power is extended to people who do the work. Their intelligence is valued, their potential for learning and getting involved is encouraged, and their interest in caring is fostered. Middle and upper management begin to treat people as adults and value them as resources to the success of the company. Delegating responsibility and commensurate authority, expanding employees’ roles and sharing information about the company will foster a management and worksystem characterized by high energy, continuous learning and quality improvement that becomes an obvious choice for all team players.

The strategic planning process and a management system of achieving organizational excellence through teamwork is a systematic effort by your company to deal with the inevitability of change and to attempt to envision its own future. The importance of this process and the accompanying elements will enable an organization to shape its own future rather than to simply prepare for the future.

About the Author:
Norb Slowikowski is a professional trainer and a management consultant who concentrates on all aspects of Human Resource Development. Norb and his wife, Mary Kay, founded Slowikowski and Associates in 1975.

Since 1982, Norb has worked extensively in the construction industry with a variety of contractors representing diverse trades. He has trained over 5,000 field supervisors and has provided consulting expertise to a number of companies in the areas of management development, organization development, strategic planning, designing performance appraisal/incentive programs and installing new management systems.

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The inspecting authority will sometimes accept a letter from the gypsum board producer, independent testing agency or other professional opinions and base their acceptance on evaluations of similarly tested designs. One should not anticipate the success of a job based on convincing the building official that an altered assembly is equal to that which was tested or specified.

Be on secure ground by doing it right the first time. In this day and time, a lack of knowledge is not an acceptable excuse.

There are numerous places where you can obtain excellent educational materials, reference standards, test details and proper installation procedures. Before you start the job, check with the gypsum manufacturer, the Gypsum Association, your local or national trade association such as AWCI or the Foundation of the Wall and Ceiling Industry, etc.

All you have to do is ask!

Incidently, School may end, but learning is a life-long process.

References:
1. ASTM C 840, GA 216
2. GA 600, Fire Resistance Design Manual

About the Author:
James L. Houser recently retired from Domtar Gypsum, as Director of Technical Services, after almost 40 years in the gypsum industry. He is the author of the “Glossary of Gypsum Board Terminology,” the “Levels of Gypsum Board Finish” and numerous articles of technical significance.

Jim has been awarded two patents and given a Lifetime Honorary Membership in AWCI. He has formed his own consulting business and resides in Ann Arbor, MI with his wife, Harriette.