

QUESTION-BASED PLANNING

Clarity and leadership without vision statements, strategies, or retreats

Seriously frustrating problem

Most people prefer root canal over writing a mission statement. This is why as many as 63% of businesses now do no planning at all—which is bad for everyone. Every CEO we interviewed said the exact same things when asked what they didn't like about traditional "strategic" planning:

- Confusing terminology: strategy vs. tactic, vision vs. goal, objective vs. task, etc.
- Getting planning tangled up with analysis
- Poor use of time: neither the 2-day retreat nor 4-month process works
- The idea that there needs to be complete consensus before moving ahead

Focus, efficiency and financing

But they knew perfectly well planning is essential to their business and personal success:

- Getting their managers heading in the same direction, not at cross-purposes
- Using money and time efficiently
- Motivating managers with an exciting career path
- Being able to say yes or no to new ideas
- Allowing directors or the family council to focus on the right things
- Securing and maintaining bank and investor financing

Elegantly effective solution

The point the CEO's made most often about planning was about the facilitator: "We don't want them to tell us what to do; we just want them to ask us good questions." This was the seed of a big new idea.

Question-Based Planning (QBP) asks good questions in plain English in a systematic way. It's completed in five 2-hour meetings over five weeks and ends in a 1-page plan. It includes monthly progress reviews and updates. It transforms planning from a frustrating, contentious exercise into a productive and positive—and economical—act of leadership. It's based in common sense:

- We all know that asking questions is the best way to get a group onto the same page
- Time has to be managed more carefully today than ever before
- Unless the plan fits on one page, no one's going to remember it
- Unless there's regular review, the plan gets forgotten right away

QBP provides effective focus fast: the overall time commitment is 12 to 15 hours:

1. Outline all the big questions using www.3GoodQuestions.com as the tool (diagram)
 2. Ask each department about their accomplishments, challenges and tasks
 3. Ask the keystone leadership questions about competitiveness, the future, and purpose
 4. Brainstorm a long list of possible goals and tasks
 5. Distill the year's goals and tasks onto a 1-page plan.
- Review progress every month and adjust as you go.



Traditional strategic planning works for perhaps 10% of businesses—which means it's a failure. Question-Based Planning gets people doing what they love: working together on something important. *It's time to try something that works.*

Derrick Van Mell is Principal of 3GoodQuestions, providing question-based business planning: derrick@vanmell.com or (608) 260-9300

Business Structure	Marketing & Sales	Operations
Purpose & position Business plans Family business Mergers & acquisitions Facilities Industry specialists	Brand & marketing plan Market research Communications & PR Internet/websites Customer relations Sales management	Work process Job design Quality Innovation Purchasing & inventory Supply chain & logistics
I.T.	Human Resources	Finance
IT planning Software Intranet Hardware & systems Security Telephones & other devices	Leadership Compensation Diversity & compliance Organization & culture Retention & recruitment Training & development	Analysis & financial planning Financing & fundraising Reporting & tax planning Wealth management Risk management Succession & exit planning