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Ducks in a row?

By Carolyn West Price

Think about this for a minute. We all use the word on a daily basis—we write it in business plans, we speak it in staff meetings, and we use the term to evaluate performance, but just how much time has gone into clearly defining it for your organization? for your life?



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According to Webster's, the definition of "objective" is "goal." "Vision," on the other hand, is defined as "mental image." So, if you spend time clearly stating each and make sure they are complementary, you will be in a better position than many large companies or their leaders, which state their objective as some diluted version of their mission or in ambiguous terms, such as "we want to grow the business." And, in many cases, they don't differentiate between vision and objective, and then throw their positioning statement in for good measure.

So, now that you know which word I'm referring to, let me give some suggestions to ensure your objectives are as effective as they can be.

First, to be an effective objective, it must be: quantifiable, realistic, and have a time line attached. Often the quantifiable aspect will be specified as revenue dollars, profit, numbers of clients/customers or something else you can measure.

I would also suggest that you may have "sub-objectives" for different product lines or even different marketing tactics, but all will "feed" your main objective. For instance, you may state that your overall objective is to "increase revenue by 20% by December, 2002." That meets two of the criteria; only you will know if it is realistic.

On a tactical level, if you're planning an event, you may specify an objective such as "We want 200 people to attend a seminar on June 30." That, too, meets the criteria. Obviously you will be able to evaluate this objective sooner than the "macro" objective...and you should always evaluate so you can continuously fine-tune your marketing plan (or your objectives). As you can envision, this tactical objective, and other well-expressed tactical objectives, should lead your organization toward achieving the macro objective.

Here's where the challenge comes in. Too many organizations don't share that objective with staff, they don't involve them in the strategy sessions to plan how to achieve the objective, and worse than that, they don't evaluate it when the date they specified rolls around.

With summer here and many of our lives just a little less frenzied than the rest of the year, now is the perfect time of year to re-visit your objectives. Make sure they are leading you down the path to achieve your vision—personally and professionally. And, make sure you design methods into your schedule to inform and empower your staff so they become more involved in the big picture and can see how vital their roles really are to the success of the organization.

While you're at it, think about your positioning statement, too. How do you want your customers, prospects and referral sources to think of you whenever someone mentions your name at a networking event or to that person they want to refer? Are your ducks all in a row?

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