

# Keeping Your Eyes on the Prize

By Gayla Hodges

How do you keep your eyes on the prize – meaning finishing strong all of the goals you've set for 2008 – while also planning and setting goals for 2009? You are faced with two very critical tasks which can easily become muddled. When a business loses focus and allows current year goals to become muddled with goals for the coming year, the result is often lack of momentum to finish current year goals and initiatives and a lack of clarity in 2009 goals and strategies. So, how *do* you do both at the same time?

*The major key to keeping your eyes on the prize and finishing strong in 2008, while also moving progressively into 2009 is **focus**.* Where are you focusing your attention? As a leader of the group, you will want to make sure there is focused attention on what remains to be done in 2008, evaluating how well you've done. But you also need to put a focus on the next year so people can prepare.

Part of the leadership challenge is maintaining focus on two related, yet separate, tasks. People can get excited about what's going to happen the next year and not want to finish off the things that need to happen this year. Or things like cultural initiatives can fall by the wayside in the ardor of trying to complete the production-type goals you might have set.

As a leader, what you will want to do is to create different focuses and not try to do everything at one time. You might bring together your leadership team at this point in the year and evaluate where you've been, where you're going, and what needs to happen in order to finish strong for 2008. At this time of year, it is also important to be looking at whether you will be able to complete everything planned for 2008 or if you will need to roll some things over into 2009?

You will also want to plan a *separate* session, which is your visioning session and your planning session for 2009. In this meeting, your focus needs to be more visionary – looking forward to 2009. Your evaluation of 2008 achievements will inform your 2009 planning and will indicate any goals or initiatives from 2008 that need to carry over into 2009.

It is important for leaders to remember (as I've said a thousand times) that *what you focus on as a leader is what people in your organization will focus on*. So, it's important that you focus on both things, but it's equally important that you don't try to focus on them at the same time.

In working on your plan for 2009 you might have noticed that a five-year plan is actually more practical. However, if you want to use this as a communication plan for the people in your organization, to keep them focused, a yearly plan is really the best method to do that. Keep in mind that content of your yearly plan is very important; but the way you roll it out is equally important.

Some of my clients write an *accomplishments letter*, and this is the time to start gathering this information. The purpose of the letter is to say, “Here’s what the 2008 plan was and how well we did on these different areas.” As you begin to capture what’s been completed, you can actually write a letter to your folks telling recognition. You will want to use the letter as an opportunity to recognize individuals who are responsible for significant accomplishments or achievements. This letter will result from your 2008 evaluation session.

During this time of year, companies are also beginning to look at performance. You will want to be sure you have talked with people about where their performance is on track or off track and what they need to do to get it on track before the end of the evaluation year (assuming that you are using the calendar year as your fiscal year). Your performance updates are a good way to share information on outstanding achievements and to take note of performance issues that need to be considered in planning for 2009.

At this point in the year many companies have also looked at budgets. They have planned some budgeting. You will want to have that information for your 2009 strategic planning cycle. So, for 2008, you’re going to be looking at how close you have been on budget, on scope and on timing. You will look at what needs to be done to make sure you stay on budget or that you are able to recoup if you haven’t stayed on track. You will also need some information for the 2009 plan. This will be: What is the budget for 2009? What is going to carry over? What do these things look like?

An example would be things that are longer-term strategies that you are putting in place. You might have started a strategy – maybe a safety strategy – that in the first year you have certain specific areas that you want to emphasize. And maybe in the second year the emphasis will change. Your 2009 plan needs to reflect this. And, of course, this goes across the board. Assessing the progress made in 2008 and deciding what should be the strategy for the next year in those specific areas provides integration and continuity across time.

You don’t want to “cookie-cutter” your plan from the year before. You might want to be sure to hit on each topic to show that you’ve completed what you’re trying to do or look at where you are going in the next step. Your strategy might not change, although it might. If you had, for example, established a strategy of having senior leaders carry forward with certain cultural initiatives, like safety or workforce development, and possibly in the next two years you will roll that out to maybe first line leaders and/or the employee population as a whole, your plan needs to reflect that. These are the strategies you need to discuss in your business strategy sessions for the next year.

There is a lot to talk about, and there’s a lot to think about. If you are able to establish two focuses you can lead the company in giving adequate attention to 2008 goals and initiatives to ensure a strong finish. You will also be able to use

the information from your evaluation of 2008 plans and your performance analysis to begin to establish a vision and create a plan for 2009. This allows you to keep the two sets of goals from becoming muddled in the minds of your employee population. You will be able to maintain strategic momentum through the end of the current year and build that momentum to launch strategic efforts in 2009.