



Dear Friend,

Outsmarting the Gator

Did you hear the story about the little girl and the gator?

No, that's not a set up for a very bad joke. As I turned on the morning news, there actually was a story about a spunky 10-year-old who, while wading in shallow Florida water, was attacked by an alligator. But, there she was, on my screen -- talking, explaining, and in fact doing a rather animated show-and-tell (complete with toy gator) of how she managed to break free from this creature which, in her words, saw her as a "ginormous piece of chicken".

Apparently, in the face of a situation that was going really bad really fast, this little one had the presence of mind to begin beating the 9-foot-long being on the head. When that proved fruitless, her mind ventured back to something she'd been taught on a recent visit to Gatorland -- that is, stick your fingers up the gator's nose. When the beast can't breathe that way, it'll have to open its mouth. And, that reminder is what allowed her to get free.

Remarkable story, but what really got me was how this pixie described her split-second decision making. When her initial approach of nose beating didn't work, what did she do? She "had to go to Plan B!" Wow! Smart thinking!

What's your Plan B? When the path you've chosen for the task, the career, the project, the company isn't panning out, where do *you* go next?

Join me for this month's edition of **EA Insights** as we consider Plan B.

Never fear. If a 10-year-old can do it, I know you can too!

All the best,

June

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What's Your Plan B?

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"The best-laid plans of mice and men often go awry."

That common adaptation of the line from Robert Burns' "To a Mouse" is true indeed. We often develop wonderful plans -- we know exactly what we're going to do and how we're going to pull it off -- only to wake up to an unexpected occurrence that, at a minimum, throws a monkey wrench into the plan or, in the worst case scenario, derails everything completely.

When those best-laid plans go awry, what do you do? What's your Plan B? How you do rebound?

See the signs. It is impossible to create or switch over to a viable plan B, if you're missing the signs that Plan A isn't working. Your vision regarding Plan A may be fuzzy when you're too close to be objective, too tired to have good perspective, and/or too stubborn to let it go. Yet, recognizing that the initial plan isn't yielding the anticipated outcomes is a necessary first step.

Address what's really happening with Plan A. Okay, but what happens once we really with Plan A problem? People are likely to take one of three options.



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"Quotes"

"As a team, we had a little higher expectations coming in. But we've had to look at Plan B. We've tried to evaluate performance rather than wins and losses."

~Lonni Alameda

"The record shows very long lapses of time when there's no movement ... at all. That is inexcusable."

~Chris Alexander

"He who is not courageous enough to take risks will accomplish nothing in life."

~Muhammad Ali

"Things just didn't go well ... today. I'm sure we'll go to Plan B[.]"

~Frank Brothers

"His ability to execute (the plan) is what makes me keep faith."

~James Dolan

"I'm always competing with myself. I'm always looking to get better, always looking to tweak things and find a way to improve."

~Zach Duke

"[Y]ou're always asked to do something that you're not sure you know how to do. So, you make an educated guess as to what you think will work, and you hope between that and plan B that you can end up with a product that's really good."

~John Dykstra

"I'll just keep watching it and ... to see how it's going and to tweak it to make it better."

~Kenneth Edmonds

Option 1: Do nothing. Now, there's a good "do nothing" response and a not-so-good "do nothing" response. Let's start with the latter.

Someone contacted me recently, lamenting about being in the wrong job. Well-paying, prestigious, but not what the person wants to do ... all day, every day. The person is miserable; the person is aware of the misery; and the person openly admits to being miserable. So, we arrived at an approach (within budget) to help this individual reconnect with self and develop a plan of attack for the future. In fact, we have talked *numerous* times, and each time there has been excitement and commitment to get going. So, what has been done? Absolutely nothing.

You see, sometimes we know that Plan A is clearly flawed, but we do nothing to correct it. That inactivity may be a byproduct of fear. Plan A actually may be meeting some weird need, even if not the ultimate desired outcome. Or, perhaps the Plan A pain isn't great enough yet to encourage that change. In any case, there's an acknowledged problem, but we ain't moving. And so, we practice insanity -- we keep doing the same thing over and over again, while expecting a different result. We get stuck in the Plan A cycle and do nothing to get out.

On the other hand, there are times when we start down the Plan A path, and the immediate results don't work out as expected. But, what's unknown at this point is whether these results will self-correct with a little time, experience, and attention or whether they represent the new normal under Plan A.

In that instance, it may be appropriate to do nothing -- that is, make no changes -- for the short term. Hold fast until things can settle and assessments can be made in order to understand fully what's happening. So, while this technically is a "do-nothing" period, it really is far from a time when nothing is happening. It's a very intentional, time-limited, pause in order to examine the situation and determine the appropriate next steps.

Option 2: Tweak the plan. The 1.0 version of Plan A may have some flaws, but perhaps it's possible that, with minor tweaks, a 1.1 version could be more effective.

I was meeting with a client recently with whom our firm's been working on improving an organization-wide process. Our conversation for the day revolved around a particular online form (Plan A) that was yielding some unexpected outcomes. As we explored, we confirmed that the form still was useful and necessary; however, we traced the difficulty back to one set of questions. We did some wordsmithing that we believe will correct the challenge experienced by the organization and those using the form, and we're moving forward.

The take-away? Sometimes, Plan A is still, at its core, a solid approach for the situation. It simply needs slight retooling in order to accomplish the desired outcomes.

Option 3: Do a full pivot. Sometimes, things make sense in the moment. Plans are great while everyone is around the table brainstorming and getting giddy over "*what we could do*". But then, there's tomorrow. Real life comes into play. New factors become apparent. Changes occur. And that grand plan just isn't so grand anymore; Plan A just is not getting us where we thought it would.

In these instances, it is critical to stop; take a step back to gain perspective; and examine the plan, its implementation, and its anticipated outcomes. And, if there's a gap that a little time or some tweaks won't correct, the best option likely is to overhaul. (Remember when Coke changed its classic formula and everybody went bonkers? Plan A didn't work. What did they do? Pivot!)

Pivoting takes courage -- the honesty and willingness to admit to self, and possibly to others, that Plan A isn't panning out and needs to be changed. It takes unbiased assessment -- dedicated time without finger pointing or negativity to do the best possible self-assessment and to determine what, where, and how big the problem is with that first chosen approach. And, it takes realistic planning -- truthful and strategic thinking and action preparation in order to revisit goals and devise a new path forward.

Advance the plan. Whether it's giving Plan A's original version a bit more time, working with an updated Plan A, or taking on a completely new approach, what's most important is to keep moving. What you do may succeed or not, but you will *always* fail if you do nothing at all. Though trite sounding, it really is essential to plan the work and then to work the plan...whatever iteration of the plan you have before you.

So, is your Plan A working as expected? Do you need help assessing it? What's your Plan B? How are you doing at advancing those plans? If you're not satisfied with your answers to these questions, let **Executive Advantage** partner with you. We're here to help you develop and execute effective personal and/or business plans. Take the first step. [Contact us today.](#)



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"The good news is that, because of the hard work of people who are with me, we have had a huge breakthrough, which will allow us to pivot[.]"

~Bill Frist

"The signs are there that they can do it. It's going to take a long time for them to get to that ... level."

~Todd Jones

"Whenever you find yourself in a situation like [he] is in, you want to find a 'pivot point' that will allow you to pivot away from the source of your problems -- and get people to focus on the future."

~Chris Lehane

"You're always looking for what's going to happen, Plan B, Plan C, Plan D, in case of a breakdown."

~Joe Maddon

"For some reason it seems so difficult to build a plan, and then work the plan."

~Ann Marshall

*"I'm not going to lie to you. There were some times -- and I think everybody knows when that was ... -- that I don't think our plan was working. *** [I]t was time for significant changes. Things are working much better now because I think we're working our plan better."*

~Kevin McClatchy

"All along, we have had two plans put together. One if a deal got done and one if it didn't. Plan A and Plan B. Everybody hopes for A, but you made the other one for a reason, I guess."

~Floyd Reese

"We need to continue to do what we're doing and continue to implement the plan we've put in place."

~Ingrid Reisman

"[W]e are going from day to day. At the moment ... the signs are very positive."

~Arsene Wenger