



Dear Friend,

So, Call Me "Compulsive"!

Most Saturday mornings you can find my husband and me in the grocery store. We get up early, before most of the world is awake and moving, and we make the trek to our local haunt...to pick up what we need for the week and to check in with folks we've come to know there at the store.

To prepare for our jaunts, at some point on Friday, you'll find me in the kitchen scouring through recipes, preparing daily menus and the list of must-haves for the next day's grocery run.

Now, I'm a stickler for my list. Even before age began making it clear that a grocery list is nonnegotiable, I carefully prepared my lists, intent on capturing every ingredient and the proper quantities.

Invariably, though, despite my aim to have a complete list in hand before leaving the house, I miss something. And, in those instances, I will admit that I've been seen in the grocery store, mid-aisle, adding the forgotten item to the bottom of my list right after depositing it into the cart. Why, you ask? Well, of course, so that I don't deprive myself of the joy of crossing it off!

Some would call me "compulsive". (*It's fine. You're in good company. My husband does.*) On the other hand, I prefer to see it as one who likes to plan AND to see her plans executed.

Are you a planner too? Okay, maybe your planning doesn't go to the lengths that mine does. However, planning is essential...for businesses and for individuals. And, developing solid strategies both for carrying out those plans and for tracking progress along the way is equally vital.

As we begin 2014, do you have a plan for the year in place? It's never too late to start or to tweak. Below, we share "*Are You Wasting Your Time in Planning*". Also, at the bottom of this *EA Insights* edition, we have a special offer for our business readers. Join us, and make 2014 a year in which you thrive like none other!

All the best,

June

June Melvin Mickens
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Are You Wasting Your Time in Planning?

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There are some among us who view planning as a waste of time.

I understand the sentiment, though I don't agree with it. You see, far too often people invest significant energy in **developing** a plan...for a year, for a project, even for a life. But, they base that plan on partial or flawed information. Or, they create vague plans that are difficult, if not impossible, to carry out. Or, they view plan development as the whole assignment.

("Thank you! We've got a plan. We're done.") Yet, **implementation** of that plan gets lost and nothing ever happens. And so, when planning is undertaken in any of those contexts, it is understandable why it's viewed as a waste of time.

However, as we enter 2014, let me offer five reasons to plan in and for this year that, I hope, will help you to see the value in strategic thinking (and then in implementing the resulting plans) for your business, your career, and/or your life.

Pausing to plan allows you to bring the prior period to a close.

Have you ever wondered why many people make resolutions at the beginning of a new year? If you think about it, the entry of a new year signifies a fresh start. January 1 ushers one year out and a new one in.

Carving out time to plan, whether it occurs in conjunction with a new calendar year, fiscal year, or some other period, can serve the same purpose. Pausing to plan allows you to stop and to take stock of the period that just ended -- its successes, its failures, and its lessons. You're able to note what was accomplished and what was left undone. And, you can carry all of this into your thinking for the next period.

Pausing to plan allows you to determine (or recommit to) your long-term direction.

There are times when we get so caught up into the minutia that we



In This Issue

[Are You Wasting Your Time in Planning?](#)

[Special Offer: An Invitation for Your Company](#)

["Quotes"](#)

Quick Links

[EA Home Page](#)

[About Us](#)

[News](#)

[Contact Us](#)



"Quotes"

"This is laying the groundwork of future, more extensive review of the ... planning process."
~Dee Boersma

"This is an exciting time when you see the time and energy spent in planning coming together."
~Jim Bryant

"It's back to the drawing board and planning for the future."
~Augustine Eguavoen

"I personally am pleased with the strategic planning process. Staff, and the board, set goals and are accountable."
~Evelyn Fox

"We're still going to be able to accomplish our goal... In our schedule and planning we assumed that we'd have some ... problems along the way."
~William Gerstenmaier

"Our gradual and steady growth toward that has made it much sweeter. It's a lot of work to stay afloat, and a lot of foresight and planning."
~Will Johnson

"Planning is bringing the future into the present so that you can do something about it now."
~Alan Lakein

"Whether you are just entering the workforce or nearing retirement age, planning for the future is critical."
~Ron Lewis

"You win not by chance, but by

forget what we are trying ultimately to achieve and why. However, as you pause to plan, you have the ability to step back and consider the big picture. (*What's your corporate or personal mission? Is it unchanged from the last period, or is there a necessary adjustment because of internal and/or external changes? Is the overall strategy that you've set in motion to accomplish that mission still relevant, or is a shift in strategy warranted?*) Pausing to plan allows you to come out of the weeds and regain perspective.

Pausing to plan allows you to assess your current status.

Would you attempt to make a gourmet meal without knowing the equipment in your kitchen or the ingredients in your fridge? Of course you wouldn't. So, why set out to operate a business or advance a career without taking stock of what you're working with?

When done effectively, the planning process allows you to pause and assess where you currently stand. You are able to step back and examine what you've got, what you need, where you're strong, where you're vulnerable, and more. It gives you the opportunity to shine the light on yourself, in as unbiased a manner as possible, so that you can use what you learn to plan honestly and strategically for success.

Pausing to plan allows you to set realistic goals to advance your direction.

We all have ideas. Oh, my goodness, we want to accomplish this, and that, and more. We want to do it all, and we want to do it all NOW. Trust me, I know.

When you engage in a solid planning process, though, you're able to get all of those ideas on the table. You can sift through and determine which ones really are stepping stones along the path that will get you to your desired destination. You can prioritize those ideas because, despite what we'd like to believe at times, it really is impossible to do everything at once (that is, without killing yourself, exhausting others, or making everyone extremely unhappy in the process). Pausing to plan allows you to map out action steps that transform the winning, and most critical, ideas into a workable blueprint for moving forward.

Pausing to plan allows you to define success so you will be able to measure progress.

In working with organizations and professionals, I've noticed that one significant reason for frustration is that too many people function without clear plans. When plans are fuzzy, it's hard for people to grasp the goal at which they're aiming, and it's hard for them to know when they've hit the mark. As a result, they feel as if they're just churning ... almost like that gerbil on the wheel, peddling at a maddening pace but getting nowhere.

Pausing to plan, though, allows you to clearly define success; that is, you're able to link planned actions to anticipated outcomes and be explicit in outlining how you'll know when you've accomplished the task at hand. That way, whether it's you or someone else stepping in to assess success at a future point, there is an image against which to measure.

Additionally, in planning, it's wise to build in a process and a timetable for periodically measuring progress. There's nothing worse than getting to Month 11, Day 25 of a 12-Month project, only to learn that a critical error was made back in Month 3 that has thrown all work thereafter off course. Instead, when you pause to plan, you can develop an approach that provides interim milestones and ongoing check-ins so that you can applaud progress and make course corrections, as appropriate. All of this is difficult, at best, when you're operating in "Planning on the Fly" mode.

Ongoing planning is essential for any business and for any professional. Have you paused lately to plan? There's no better day than today to do so.

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An Invitation for Your Company:

Take Your Company through **Executive Advantage's Where Do We Stand?** Process for Free

We know that charting your company's direction is hard work. It's even more difficult if you're operating without data.

So, we're offering the **Executive Advantage Where Do We Stand?** process for free for up to 10 staff members in your company.*

Use **Executive Advantage's Where Do We Stand?** process to supply valuable information for your decision-making.

- Recognize company strengths that you can build on.
- Highlight progress in previously identified trouble spots.
- Pinpoint challenge areas that could derail your success if left unaddressed.
- Learn where your company stands in the eyes of the people who are most crucial to your success -- your staff.

Use the link below, and contact us today to schedule **Executive Advantage's Where Do We Stand?** process for your company.

[Yes, I want to take my company through Executive Advantage's Where Do We Stand? Process!](#)

*Additional staff members may be included for a fee.

preparation."

~Roger Maris

"Strategic planning will help you fully uncover your available options, set priorities for them, and define the methods to achieve them."

~Robert McKain

"Organizing is what you do before you do something, so that when you do it, it is not all mixed up."

~A. A. Milne

"They really didn't put the time into planning what's best. They rushed into a project that really required a lot of thought and a lot of planning."

~Jon Preiksas

"Our students need to learn that planning is key when picking a career and deciding what you want out of life."

~Chris Ross

"Employers are very focused on 'today,' on their bottom lines. They are not doing the kind of planning needed to identify their critical needs...."

~Deborah Russell

"This much planning doesn't happen overnight. It takes time and dedication."

~Pete Schmidt

"Without leaps of imagination, or dreaming, we lose the excitement of possibilities. Dreaming, after all, is a form of planning."

~Gloria Steinem

"The idea that I'm trying to get across is that we're always planning for the future. And the future arrives, whether we want it to or not."

~Eric Taylor

"Planning is thinking beforehand how something is to be made or done, and mixing imagination with the product -- which in a broad sense makes all of us planners. The only difference is that some people get a license to get paid for thinking and the rest of us just contribute our good thoughts to our fellow man."

~Paul Williams

About Executive Advantage

At **Executive Advantage**, we are committed to providing results-based business and management consulting, leadership development, and coaching support. We partner with business leaders to build healthy, well-functioning organizations, where goals are met and people thrive. We also partner with individuals to create professional (and personal) lives with clearer direction, improved results, and greater balance.

To learn more about **Executive Advantage**, contact us [online](#) or at (301) 280-5950.

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