

Where is *Your* Omaha?

by Tom Stocker

If you were about to take a multi-day cross country drive with your family,



would you just say, 'Ok everyone, get in the car; we are going for a ride'? Of course not. You would take some time to plan, discuss options with your family and sooner or later pull out a roadmap to plot your trip. So why is planning your company's future any different? It shouldn't be.

Planning your business direction is extremely important. Without it how do you know you are on track or taking a major detour? Does your team know the destination, your Omaha? If not, they can't help you get there very well. You are only taking them on the ride. But they deserve to know where you want to take them. Are they focused on it? If your business is like most private businesses, the answer is probably no.

Why? Because most business owners either don't share their goals, don't take the time to think about it and thus don't ask their team to help achieve them. Most owners get up, go to work, make stuff and sell stuff. That's the plan. Sad but true. 90% of businesses don't plan

or the owner says they have one in their head but haven't written it down.

Either way, there is no plan. To be fair, the reason planning isn't done is most don't know where to start, how to articulate it or have the expertise to implement it. But there is a better way. Use a process I call 'Find Your Omaha'. Here is how it works.

Like planning any major trip, you the owner must have a vision for the business's destination. This is your 'Omaha'. Only you the owner can define your Omaha. This first step is not something you can delegate and it must be clearly articulated and achievable. Another way to view this is akin to clearly choosing your destination on a map. There can be no mistake about where your business destination is.

The next step is figuring out how to get there. This is the same as charting the route you want to take. To get the most direct and best route is best achieved by including all those who are going on the trip. Your employees must be part of this conversation. For professional sports teams, this is the same as the coaching staff creating the season plan to get to their goal. The owner can't do this alone, nor would the coaches stand for not being part of the process. Why

would you treat your employees any different?

If your business team does not have the capabilities, there is an entirely different problem that must be corrected in order for your business to survive. For you to take that road trip, you may be thinking about new transportation, and if you don't have the resources in your business, why would you ignore it. You can't get to your 'Omaha'.

Why is it so important to include your staff in planning how to get to your Omaha? Because if you don't you will have each area in your business going where they want to go, choosing their own Omaha or each planning their own way to get to yours.

In your business, it would be akin to the sales department choosing their own distribution channels, engineering designing their own products or services and marketing promoting what they think best, all without knowing the owner's true vision. They might get there eventually, but it can be a long, frustrating and expensive journey. The frustration you feel when this happens is your fault. You left it up to them to decide where Omaha may be and they built their own roadmap to get there.

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So, 'where's your Omaha?' is a strategic planning process we use in everyday life. The map is your business strategy, the destination is you. The navigators are your senior management team, the vehicle is your employees, as are your customers and vendors. Why shouldn't you include everyone in getting you to Omaha? They all have a stake in your getting there together, safe and sound and if they know where you are going they will be enthusiastic about getting there too. So who says strategic planning needs to be such a mysterious process. You already know how it works. You have used a form of the process many times. The trick is making it transparent.

We at Owner's Edge live this process and so do our customers. We can help you implement this competitive advantage in your business. Your Omaha is too important a destination. Build the map, and don't try to get there alone. It is too dangerous a journey without anyone else's help.

Oh, I didn't tell you where my Omaha is, but it isn't the one in Nebraska. Now won't that make an interesting trip?