



Helping leaders and organizations live up to their promise

"After the Dance" - From Promise to Performance

Last week I helped agency directors from around the country develop their strategic plan for an important federal initiative. It was an energizing experience, and participants were very positive about the action plans they agreed to. I had two very different feelings on the plane trip home: First, I was happy about what we did and about the promise of what the group could accomplish. Second, I was a little anxious about the factors that many of us know can derail these kinds of experiences and cause them to fall short of their potential. Let me share some of the things I've been thinking of that can help assure these kinds of efforts live up to their promise:

1. Double-check for consensus and that everyone is aboard. Sometimes, upon reflection or returning home and gaining new perspectives, things feel different; it's best to check in with everyone to see if all is still "a go."
2. Assess what external factors might adversely affect execution. For example, identify who or what group might have different ideas about the way forward and determine how to manage that. How much time and what resources will be required? (And are we realistic about what that will take?) What might get in the way of people doing what they say they want to do?
3. Assess internal factors that might get in the way. Do participants have the will, capabilities, influence and means to do what they need to do? How can the group and individuals compensate for shortcomings?
4. Determine how to harness any factors, assets, resources and partners that might contribute to achieving desired outcomes.
5. State assumptions - conditions and things that we're assuming will be in place or true. Have mechanisms to validate those assumptions, to periodically check whether they are still accurate, and to make adjustments as needed.
6. Be focused and disciplined. Reality intervenes after these kinds of peak experiences, along

with all of the other important things that compete for our attention. "Out of sight, out of mind;" keep plans and commitments visible, and remind everyone why they are important. Think of daily, weekly and monthly disciplines or rituals that will keep things on task and chip away at what needs doing.

7. Be accountable. What gets counted and what gets paid attention to gets done; make sure there are sufficient measures and methods for all to know "if we are there yet" and what needs attention. Arrange for periodic "check-ins" with individuals and groups to revisit commitments.
8. Manage expectations; under-promise and over-deliver, especially for near-term targets. Aim for "early wins;" make sure that everyone knows when milestones are achieved, recognize the contributions that got you there, and build momentum.

Let me know what you think; I would appreciate hearing about your ideas for helping assure that development experiences and planning retreats live up to their promise.

"Good resolutions are a pleasant crop to sow. The seed springs up so readily, and the blossoms open so soon with such a brave show, especially at first. But when the time of flowers has passed, what as to the fruit?"

L. Malet

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