

Planning Possibilities

News & views brought to you by Michelle Coussens

Welcome to my December 2018 Issue!

No matter where you live or what your views are, it has been an exhausting year—exhausting mentally, emotionally, and physically. Tensions, challenges, and strife have left many of us feeling disillusioned, frustrated, or at the very least, increasingly uncertain about the future. But, perhaps we can let the season of hope bring us reflection, caring, and healing.

As you plan for the coming new year, I send you my deepest best wishes for a better, more caring, more collaborative time for all of us. As one of my friends often says, “Onward, forward, upward”. Here’s to bringing our best selves to each organization, each relationship, and each day.

Michelle



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Planning for Good Decisions

PLAN B CONSULTING MISSION STATEMENT

To assist organizations in becoming more effective and efficient through practical business planning, resulting in meaningful and measurable outputs, outcomes, and impact.

Prepare
Communicate
Execute

As you look toward planning for 2019, careful consideration of what projects to pursue will allow you to focus on those that will bring you the biggest short-term, and long-term, benefits. Check out my checklist on page 2 to help you in the selection process.

Project Selection: A Checklist

Here's a checklist to help you in selecting which projects to make priorities for the coming new year:

- What organizational strategy does this project align with? Does it solve a problem? Address a new opportunity?
- What impact will the project have? What would be the impact of NOT doing this project?
- What are the risks associated with this project? What are our assumptions?
- When will results from the project start? End?
- What are the project's quantified objectives?
- Does our culture support this project?
- Do we have the resources needed to execute this project? If not, what would it cost to get them?
- What "people" changes will need to take place regarding skills, numbers of workers, etc.?
- What technology changes would be required?
- What is the net benefit of the project, considering both direct and indirect costs, as well as projected benefits?
- How does the project affect other projects and operations? How do they affect the project?

Planning Predicaments: Schedule less or cancel more?

*Where
planning
concepts
meet
reality*

I just read this recent [HBR article](#) on how to stop canceling and rescheduling things. In today's pressures to be responsive and attentive, we often fear disappointing others by declining invitations or refraining from commitments to return calls within short time windows. Consequently, we end up overbooking ourselves, setting overwhelming turnaround times, and managing a multitude of reminders to ourselves, consequently creating additional stress.

This situation can be even more complicated when we host a meeting, seminar, or event, and people register but then do not show up. This leaves us demoralized, and even sometimes embarrassed. While the HBR article calls out concern, it doesn't provide many proactive tactics. Beyond saying "no" to overcommitments (by self and others), what can we do differently?

Communication Corner

According to [Wikipedia](#), "In Australian Aboriginal society, Walkabout is a rite of passage during which males undergo a journey during adolescence, typically ages 10 to 16, and live in the wilderness for a period as long as six months to make the spiritual and traditional transition into manhood".

Similarly, it may make sense to take a break from the workplace— think of it as a sabbatical. While this might sound unrealistic to some, there are progressive workplaces that not only allow such practice, but encourage it as a way to reinvigorate its workers and foster returning creativity.

As much as you need your employees on site, engaged and communicating with others, it may be worth considering checking them out of the workplace and allowing them to cease communication for a bit. They may not only appreciate it, but return further motivated to appreciate your organization.

Online Plug of the Month



Want to know more about the area around your school or business? I found this handy resource when checking into my Twitter feed the other day. This SAFE Map, provided by NCES (National Center for Education Statistics), tells you what schools, and how many schools, are located within a certain radius of a given address. This may be useful if you are targeting schools, or perhaps avoiding them. Check out the map tool at: <https://nces.ed.gov/programs/mapED/SafeMap/>.

Then, check out other NCES resources at:

<https://nces.ed.gov/>



Book Banter

Be the Hero: Three Powerful Ways to Overcome Challenges in Work and Life, by Noah Blumenthal, 2012, Berrett-Koehler Publishers, Inc.

Sometimes you find books, and sometimes they find you... and at the right time in your life to better gain perspective. That was the case for me. You might cynically take from the title that this book is about the power of positive thinking, but that would be selling it short. Through a powerful, yet realistically descriptive parable, the author provides illustration of how seeking out and telling ourselves hero stories not only shifts our perspective from glass-half-empty to glass-half-full, but that such story-telling can have tangible business results. Such results can manifest themselves in better working relationships, ability to change, lowered stress levels, and improved clarity, as well as solution-building.

Blumenthal divides the stories into three types-- stories about other people, where we essentially seek out empathy for others' situations; stories about situations, where we identify and appreciate what is good in our lives; and third, stories about ourselves, where we take stock of our situation and deliberately choose to affect our futures. (Those familiar with locus of control will find the third story akin to a shift from victim syndrome external control to that of driven internal control).

I particularly appreciated the emphasis that a hero is not perfect, but rather he is self-aware of "victim" lapses and can thus re-calibrate his perspective. "Heroes are heroes because they stand up in the face of the challenge. You can feel afraid and still be a hero. You can even become overwhelmed sometimes. It's how you act despite your fear that makes you a hero" (p. 107). When we allow ourselves to be victims, we implicitly (if not in some cases, explicitly) make others the villains.

On a practical note, the book made mention that when working with someone who is not performing, instead of merely questioning their efforts, we might actually get better results by asking what we can do to help make the results all that the person wants them to be. Now, when was the last time someone asked YOU that at work?

Personally Yours

A Positive Spin on Nomophobia



The Cambridge Dictionary has selected "nomophobia" as its word of the year. While you may not have heard of this word, you likely will feel more familiar with its definition and associated symptoms. It represents a fear of not having your mobile phone, and all the panic that goes with it. I can relate to this phobia, as I often do a sort of nervous twitch to check on my phone, and if I cannot find it, I don't rest until I do. And, if I leave the house without it, I'm a little off until I return!

I decided to consider why I need my phone (in a productive sense) and how I can further leverage this clearly necessary item in 2019:

- Use subway transport time to sift through my various newsfeeds (compiled in my News app) to stay current on business and my craft.
- Read books on it when on the plane with limited desk space.
- Monitor my health, sleep and fitness with the included app.
- Meditate for as little as 2 minutes at a time using the Headspace app.
- Save money by making use of points kept in my CPK, Starbucks, and Cosi apps.
- Track my various task lists using the Notes/List Keeper feature

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- Customized market research and competitive intelligence analysis
- Strategic facilitation of the planning process
- Board retreat facilitation

This newsletter is intended to provide useful information but should not be construed as legal or financial fact, advice, or opinion.

Coming in January...

- * **Matching your structure to your strategy**
- * **Book discussion of The Art of Choosing, by Sheena Iyengar, 2010, Hachette Book Group.**
- * **And more!**



Have an idea or comment to share? Have a topic suggestion or planning question? Send it in! I would love to hear from you!

Be My Guest/Reader Feature

Have a planning success or horror story? Have some tips for others? I would love to feature you. If you are interested in being included in a future newsletter, let me know if you would like to write a guest column or be interviewed.

UPCOMING TRAINING & SPEAKING EVENTS

- * 02/04/19-02/05/19: Strategic Thinking, American Management Association, Dallas, TX, register at www.amanet.org.
- * 02/07/19-02/08/19: Critical Thinking, American Management Association, Chicago, IL register at www.amanet.org.
- * 02/11/19-05/13/18: Organizational Behavior (online), College of DuPage, register at www.cod.edu.
- * 02/21/19-02/22/19: Strategic Thinking, American Management Association, Chicago, IL, register at www.amanet.org.
- * 02/25/19-02/26/19: Critical Thinking, American Management Association, Lake Buena Vista, FL, register at www.amanet.org.
- * 03/19/19-05/07/19: Leadership (hybrid, Tuesday night class), College of DuPage, register at www.cod.edu.

Email me for details!