

## Success begins with a Vision -----One Team- One Goal

For some of us, January is the month when goals and strategies are written down.

Documentation is good for accountability and motivation. For others, most notably some professional football players, this is the time of year when the fruits of planning and hard work are realized and goals are finally achieved. As you read this, many Americans are focused on the Super Bowl, showcasing the two best teams in professional football. Football is a business, a big business. There are similarities between successful football teams and successful companies.

How do teams get to be the best in their sport? As in business, team success is the result of a grand vision and a comprehensive plan. A team, like a company, must rally around meaningful objectives to achieve the vision. And hard hitting strategies are required in order to stay focused on the plan.

For coaches, the dream is the Super Bowl. To be successful, football coaches need:

- **a vision** that articulates the dream,
- **objectives** to define what needs to be done to get there,
- **strategies** for putting a winning team together,
- **an action plan** for successful execution of strategies.

Winning teams stay focused on specific goals. A few weeks ago the Indianapolis Colts had a 14-0 record but several players were hurt. The coaches elected not to go for the greatest season ever (19-0) and instead rested key players they could not afford to lose during final games, like quarterback Payton Manning. This illustrates how focused they were on their highest priority goals. Their objectives were to win the AFC South (done), get home-field advantage through the playoffs (done) and then win the Super Bowl. Everything else was secondary. A record of 19-0 was not one of their primary objectives. The coaches felt that going for that 'outer' goal might put their 'core' goal at risk. While there is certainly debate about whether they made the right decision, one thing is clear (and anyone who has seen their backup Quarterback play in those last two games will agree) ....if Manning had been injured in the last 2 'meaningless' games, they would have eliminated themselves from the Super Bowl. The Colts stuck with a plan to achieve their core objectives. They refused to take unnecessary risks and, as of this writing, are now on a solid path towards a championship.

We would find it unbelievable if we heard that a football coach did not have a written plan and a playbook. We, as business leaders, also need that written plan. We must also set a clear vision and then convey that vision to those who are part of the plan. We need to formulate

SMART Goals which are Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Realistic and Timely. Finally, we need a well defined action plan that tells us who will complete specific tasks and by certain dates.

Sports figures who are also team leaders, like Payton Manning, enthusiastically believe and spread the vision created by the coach. That's what following a plan means. We in the business world must generate that same enthusiasm and commitment for our vision from all involved, from the entire team.

Each week, the coaches review game performance, modify game plans and prepare the players for the next week. A football season is long and has many unexpected events; players get hurt, opposing teams invent new ways to execute their own plans, and weather conditions can vary. In order to be champions, we must also constantly evaluate our goals and performance, refine them when necessary, prepare ourselves for the unexpected and address changing competition. Flexibility and nimbleness are critical.

In business, as in sports, we can have the perfect plan and things may still not work out. But if we stick to our plan and remain focused on our primary goals, we are more likely to succeed.