



A New Way of Thinking and Planning

The 70% solution can help your IGC to make better, more informed decisions that can be executed with better odds of success.



By Stan Pohmer

The year 2020 brought us a whole new set of variables we hadn't anticipated or planned for; this got me thinking about some inadequacies in our traditional planning processes. We've always had to contend with the one persistent variable — weather — in our business, but 2020 brought us a whole new set of variables we hadn't anticipated or planned for, and this got me thinking about some inadequacies in our traditional planning processes.

Historically, most business leaders have adopted a planning philosophy whereby you attempt to predict the future environment you might anticipate in the next year, and then establish your mission on how you might achieve your financial and operational goals.

You've analyzed last year's performance to help determine what worked/didn't work so you can incorporate your findings into next year's planning. You've conducted SWOT (Strength, Weakness, Opportunity, Threats) reviews to help you honestly and objectively identify your real competition, and your competitive advantages and limitations to help build a framework for planning your future.

Then, you built your strategies and activities needed to accomplish your mission. You probably know this process as "Plan your work, and work your plan," establishing measurable timelines, milestones, action plans, etc., that you can benchmark your progress and achievement upon during the course of the season or year.

On its face, there's absolutely nothing wrong with this traditional planning process; it's served many businesses well for many years, and it's a great foundation to include in future planning processes. But it's a somewhat rigid process, allowing us to respond to minor known variables and leaving us woefully unprepared for major variables we hadn't anticipated (like pandemics).

I continue to be extremely proud of the way companies in the horticulture industry reacted to the significant challenges presented to them in 2020. Note that the key word to focus on in the prior sentence was "reacted" — our 2020 success was due much more to consumers themselves deciding that our products were enjoyable and would enhance their quality of life than anything we did to ensure our success.

There are many small businesses out there that didn't have the products consumers wanted, weren't viewed as "essential" and weren't able to react to the massive change they experienced ... and are no longer with us. Not to take away from your accomplishments, but we were as lucky as we were good!

Planning to Adapt

What I've identified in my thinking is that, in addition to our traditional planning processes, we now need to add the element of "planning to adapt." If you've followed this column over the years, you know that based on experience and study, I'm a huge fan of the leadership principles of the Marine Corps and SEALs, two teams where the missions are critical and the stakes are much higher than what we deal with. But many of their leadership principles, characteristics, traits and actions are directly applicable to business operations — and apply not only to the managers/leaders, but equally to the rest of the team. At their core, everything these teams plan is based on flexibility, agility, adaptability and speed — all traits that are required to react and respond to sudden and unplanned changes, while still remaining focused on accomplishing the original mission and doing it faster than your competition.

One of these planning and execution principles is to "aim for the 70% solution." The idea behind this concept is that, based on experience, you cannot have 100% confidence that all the factors you considered when you initially made your plans will still exist when it's time to execute. The battlefield is dynamic, and things are constantly changing; your original plan likely will not allow you to achieve your objectives in this new environment.

Under the 70% solution, your team would meticulously train and practice to achieve your objective, using the known factors and conditions in place when you initially generated your plan. Just prior to execution, the team re-assesses the playing field, looking for new or changed obstacles, threats, and opportunities in a process known as situational awareness. Using this new information or intelligence, they craft new and different ways to accomplish the original objective.

Often, these new approaches result in untried innovation and improvisation that will be tested on the battlefield.

Facing these new conditions, the following questions guide the new decision-making process:

- Do you have 70% of the intel you think you'll need to make your decision and execute? In a competitive situation, fast is better than perfect; If you wait to compile more information, you may miss the moment of opportunity or, worse yet, get stuck with analysis paralysis and make no decision.
- Do you have 70% of the resources you need to accomplish your goal? You might never have all the resources they need to meet their objectives, but if you have good people and most of what you need, it's often enough to get the job done.
- Are you 70% confident your new plan can succeed? Do you feel good about your new plan's success with the information and resources you have? These high-

performance teams have proven again and again that a well-conceived (even mediocre) plan, with excellent execution and fast and timely implementation, is more likely to succeed than doing nothing or reacting to the competitor's initiatives in your marketplace.

If your team feels good about hitting the 70% mark on all three questions, move forward. If not, you have two options: 1) Come up with a new plan, or 2) Change your goals and objectives.

It's important to view decisions as fluid and, based on rapidly changing variables, that you can't afford to blindly stay married to your original plans or decisions if you want to be successful. Decisions are meant to provide guidance, and can and must be constantly modified based on changing conditions.

The 70% solution is all about making better, more informed decisions that can be executed with better odds of success, while building adaptability, flexibility, agility, and speed into the process. The world we operate in today is non-linear and moving at warp speed. Decisions made closer to the point of execution will help you respond to more current conditions and consumer needs and demands, providing you with a competitive advantage. 🌙

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