URL: https://ecorner.stanford.edu/in-brief/empowerment-and-accountability/

How do you set a vision for your organization or unit, and then hold everyone accountable? Voicea founder and Cisco Contact Center VP and GM Omar Tawakol explains how he sets quarterly plans in a way that both incorporates significant team feedback and sets crystal-clear expectations. He has found that this approach keeps everyone — including the CEO — focused on three to five major goals each quarter.

Transcript

So, empower and hold people accountable.. This one seems obvious, where I think everybody falls apart here is in the tactics of it.. Everybody thinks they're whole teams accountable.. But then you go speak to the team and they don't have an agreed vision on what exactly are the small number of goals, three to five, this quarter, so that they understand everybody in the business, from the CEO to the very last person in that company, how they contribute to those goals.. So, I evolved this over time, but generally what I do before the beginning of every quarter, even in big business I still do this.. I start out with, before the quarterly plan is developed, I start out about a month in advance with my own vision of what I think needs to change, how the ecosystem's changing, what the goals should be.. I then start, week number one, go to my exec team and say, this is what I think, you have one week, go back to your teams, and you tell me what you think it should be.. So I come, week number two, I just do a read-out, they tell me, what the bottoms up vision is for what changes we need to make, what's important, what's not.. Week number three, we do all the planning, so that we end it with an offsite, and collectively decide what the goals are.. Week number four, we come up with a goals poster, that basically says, these are the four goals, or three, or five, with precise measurements, that we can use..

And then every week, that goal poster is put up in front of my executive team, and we basically say, where are you here, what help do you need, and we keep the focus on that.. - [Man] Yeah, is there are reason that you don't get your teams vision before sharing the boards with them, do you think sharing yours first kinda buys who's there, they're thinking on whether they're-- (clearing throat drowns out speaker) - It definitely does.. The question was, is there a reason why that I don't hear them first, before I come up with mine.. It's a really good question.. I thought a lot about that, and you want to have, I tend to be someone who cares a lot about the vision, and finding that unifying vision through the company energizes everybody.. And if it doesn't come from the top and you have more of a democratic vision that's coming from everybody, it's easy to get off track.. And when I'm talking about vision, I'm talking about real fundamentals.. So by me spitting it out, I'm able to set some guardrails, so people don't feel like they're completely being rejected.. So if somebody comes in and says hey, I want us to do sock puppets.. It's a really hard conver, well it's an easy conversation you know, but you don't want to outright just be cutting out the ideas that are problematic..

So instead what you're doing, is you're saying, here are the bounds, and it's a wide bound, you're execution boundary may only be like this, but at least by setting it here, you're cutting out the rest of the area where, you're just pretty sure we don't need to go there.. You make a good point, that, that might not be the right answer.. But if you're doing this on a quarterly basis, with an execution mindset that you've got to actually get this stuff done, in those 90 days, you kinda want those bounds to be tight.. The conversations you want more open ended are a little bit longer term like that, horizon two, horizon three ideas, where, hey where do you wanna take this? Those can be completely out, and there you want kind of a little more inbound.. Now recognize that week two is all inbound.. So I don't really constrain people to say, oh, you said something I didn't say.. Most of the good stuff pushes the edges.. But you make, you made a good point.. So in any case, the last thing is, that you take your team, and now they take those goals, and they take it one level deeper, all the way down, and execute.. And then you stand up in front of the company, you give anyone permission to say, if I come, as a CEO with real excitement, about a new idea, that falls outside of these goals, you have permission to tell me, if you want me to execute that, tell me which of your goals you're gonna drop..

And that happens all the time.. I will come in and say, hey, customer says this, can we get it out, and my product guy, who knows me really well, is like, here it is, which one drops? And you have a lot more discipline in your execution, as opposed to, people get excited about what the CEO says, then they drop what they should be doing because they think the CEO liked it, and you get all this randomness.. So, empower your team to get stuff done.. Now, once you've agreed on these goals, you get the hell out of their way.. All your job is to make sure they have what they need to succeed.. And you don't script them on how they work, 'cause you've already agreed on what, let them figure out the how, and if they need to change in the next what, one quarter out...