

As CEO, it's just as hard to sell your plan as it is to create it.

After Tom Oakley, CEO of Bridge Laboratories, propped a framed copy of his one-page business plan on his desk, managers stopped wasting time on ideas that pulled them off course.

No matter how long the document, your real plan is *only that small set of goals the managers are excited about*. This article is about inspiring them to follow you and your plan. Business plans sputter, die and disappoint when managers aren't deeply excited by it.

An old saw about communications is "say it seven times in seven different ways."

1. Form of presentation

Your two-page plan might be brilliant, but readers won't remember what's on page 2. Boil it down to one page and format that page powerfully, even professionally: your plan is as important as your website.

A tightly connected set of goals can be shown as a diagram, a great communications opportunity. There's a sample "goal tree" at www.vanmell.com. The numerical system makes it easier to track.

2. Restatement

Describe your goals in different ways. If a goal is *Reduce direct cost of labor 15% in 12 months*, you could restate it from time to time in a more inspirational way: *Ratchet up productivity a big notch*.

Once the managers absorb the plan, you can then use short phrases to cue it up, as in *Efficiency = Quality + Profit*. An outsider might not get it, but they're not the audience. One CEO simply says "15%!" Staff know this means the target for sales, for productivity and for profit.

3. Vision as restatement

A vision statement is another expression of the same plan. It is the literal image of success in each department: marketing and sales, operations, information, human resources and finance. This demands real writing skill. Your statement could start like this: *In ten years, I see us triple in size or even larger, respected around the world, with stable cash flow. We see a dedicated, innovative workforce...*

4. Formal briefings

While the planning process is a forum for communication, once the plan is complete, make rehearsed presentations to each audience: staff, directors, investors, owners, analysts. The leader *must* show passionate, personal commitment. Showmanship is needed.

5. Communications media

A plan published in different forms makes it easier to reinforce in different venues. You could use webinars, video and your intranet as media. Larry Schroeder, CEO of Sauk Prairie Memorial Hospital, props a poster-sized version on an easel in board meetings.

6. Personalization

Linking progress to a manager's performance evaluation and their bonus will get their attention. It also reinforces the need for cooperation everywhere. But private and public praise for progress is more effective for some personalities.

7. A big step: make your plan public

People can't help you if they don't know where you're headed. Success depends on strong relationships with partners, customers and vendors. So, craft and present a version for them. Bolder still is to post a version on your website for the world to see.

You know your plan is a hit when you overhear your managers reciting it.

The weakest word: "strategy"

Many people think the inspirational version of a goal (*Ratchet up productivity*) is a "strategy" and the managerial version (*Reduce direct labor cost 15%*) is an "objective" or "tactic".

These are *not* different ideas, but different versions of the exact same idea.