

# **In Business as in Mountain-Climbing: You Can't Prepare Too Much!**

by John McQuaig

The most important element of a successful business or mountain expedition is a well-documented and executed plan. In 1963, Sir Edmund Hillary became the first person to reach the summit of Mount Everest. He had a carefully crafted plan in place before he started to climb.

How did Sir Edmund prepare? Here are a few items on his list—followed by some personal commentary on their relationship to success in business:

1. **He established his vision.** In this case, the vision was simply to reach the summit. Simple and obvious!
2. **Then came mission.** Why was he doing this? Most likely, he wanted to be the first person on the highest point on earth—a feat that would undoubtedly bring him great fame and fortune.
3. **Next he needed to put his objectives in place.** These were measurements that would let him know how well he was doing. His objectives measured his progress as he worked his way to the top.
4. **Strategies.** What strategies would Sir Edmund employ to reach the top of the world? One choice was to use Sherpas, a local labor force that could lug and carry his gear to the base camp and then to various higher camps above. A good Sherpa guide would also be crucial to making sure he kept to the right trails that would lead him, safely, to the summit.

**5. An action plan to describe how he was going to actually do it.** His action plan detailed the many specific steps he had to take to attain his vision. In the case of a mountain climb, this runs the gamut from getting into appropriate shape before even arriving at the mountain, to putting together a first-class climbing team to make the ascent with you.

To link mountain-climbing preparations with a success in business, I recommend the work of Jim Horan, author of *The One Page Business Plan*<sup>™</sup>. This masterful prescription for writing a business plan on a single page in fact incorporates all the elements Sir Hillary himself needed to achieve his vision of climbing Mount Everest. Let's look at each item again, through a business lens:

**1. Vision.** The question to ask is: "Where do you want your company to be in three to five years?" Important attributes to consider for answering this include: gross revenue, the types of product you want to sell, who your customers will be, net profits desired, etc. The goal here is to clearly define how you want your company to be functioning in three to five years, and what you will consider to be success.

**2. Mission.** According to Jim Horan's One Page Business Plan<sup>™</sup> methodology, state the reason your business exists from your customers' perspective. Look strictly at the benefit(s) that exist for your customers. Put yourself in your customers' shoes and ask why you exist from their point of view.

Federal Express for example has defined its mission as "absolutely positively overnight." FedEx believes it exists solely to provide guaranteed overnight delivery. If they fail there, they fail altogether. What mission do *you* see as defining the success or failure of your business?

**3. Objectives.** These delineate the results you will measure. What is it that tells you that you are making progress toward your vision? What benchmarks can you

create? What feedback will help you know? Generally these are stated in terms of objectives that are measurable for the next year.

4. **Strategies.** How will you accomplish your vision and how will you go about growing your business? You might, for example, decide to focus only on large companies, or perhaps only on small family businesses. By making such strategic decisions, you'll identify your "sweet spot," i.e., who will be benefiting most from your services.

It's very important too that every stakeholder in your organization knows what your strategy is. If your clients, for example, know that you only wish to work with larger companies, they will know to refer such prospects your way, and not approach you with tiny mom-and-pop firms. Keeping everyone aware of your strategic thinking will help them align with, and contribute to, the attainment of your vision.

5. **Action Plan.** This final component outlines what you will actually do over the next year. In the case of the mountain climb, it's important to get into great physical shape for both the challenge of the climb itself and potentially adverse atmospheric conditions. In the case of business, you must also put your affairs and procedures in order for day-to-day operations as well as stay ready for unexpected business "atmospheric" changes.

The One Page Business Plan™ works this way: Create not one but *nine* action plans spaced out over the course of the coming year. That way, you'll have a year-long view of what you will actually do to move your business toward your vision. In addition, this nine-plan model requires monthly reports for the purpose of updating you on how much progress you have been making relative to your overall plan. I have found, by the way, while working with my clients, that using this model makes things much simpler than many of the much more complex

traditional models. Doing it this way seems to greatly increase the likelihood that your interim steps will actually be executed.

For a plan to be effective, it must also be in writing. This is critical so that the plan can be shared among your team members and other stakeholders. When written down, a plan takes on a power of its own. This also allows it to clearly communicate the other items on the list: vision, mission, objectives and strategies, as well as the nine “mini” action plans.

In the end, you can't prepare too much! By following the example of Sir Edmund Hillary and other intrepid mountaineers in both the past and the present, you too can reach your summit. If that summit is grounded in business rather than snow-covered rocks high above sea level, the satisfaction of managing to get there will smell just as sweet.

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