

Aligning Around Priorities

You know the 3-4 key things that you and your business must do to be successful this year. Do your employees? Does your board? Is everyone in agreement and aligned? Is everyone personally committed to success?

Establishing, your top 3-4 priorities for the year is the critical first step but the journey doesn't end there. Everyone, from your leadership team and employees to your board, must understand your priorities, be aligned around them and be committed to them.

Communication is Critical

Alignment and commitment starts with effective and frequent communication. Most companies conduct "all hands", "town meetings" "national sales meetings" or other large group meetings in January to review past year performance and present plans for the coming year. These meetings provide the platform to present a clear and concise view of what you want to accomplish in the coming year and the 3-4 key initiatives that everyone must get right for success.

Tailor Your Message

When you effectively communicate, everyone should be able to answer these questions.

- What do we want to achieve?
- What is my role?
- Why is it important?
- How will I know if I'm successful?
- What's in it for me?

Provide time to ask questions to clarify, understand and challenge. In my experience, questions, especially challenging questions, are not negative but an important part of the process for people to internalize what you want them to do. When their challenges and questions are answered effectively, they are more committed than ever and really aligned with you.

Display the Right Attitude

I've seen CEOs get defensive when asked these tough questions. This is a missed opportunity to repeat and reinforce your message. Some people need to verify what you want and why. In these situations, patience wins the day. A substantive dialogue with your team is always better than one-way presentation.

Communicate With Your Board

Don't forget your board. At your January board meeting, after you review past year performance, take time to concisely present your main initiatives for the coming year. Invite questions, comments and suggestions on how you can be more successful. The more they jointly own your priorities, the more supportive they'll be.

In the case of your board, also review your key tactical plans for each initiative. Propose and get agreement on the key performance indicators that you and they will use to track progress and performance.

Once Is Never Enough

Finally, communicating your message once is never enough. When I was a sales representative, I needed to detail a physician 5 times before they prescribed my product. I was bored to tears saying the same thing. For the doctor, it was new!

This is a valuable lesson for all CEOs. Repeat, repeat, repeat and then, when you think they heard you, repeat it one last time!