



CONFIDENTIAL

Business Plan Quick Start Guide

Name: _____

Business Name: _____

Overview

Strategic business planning is an ongoing process where your business:

1. Clearly defines its values, purpose, and vision
2. Evaluates its internal and external environments
3. Confirms people’s roles and responsibilities
4. Develops strategies, goals, and action plans to achieve success
5. Evaluates results and updates the plan

The strategic planning process is documented in a written strategic business plan. This plan is a central focus for managing your business. Effective implementation of plan goals and action plans, including follow-up, drives accountability and determines the overall impact and long-lasting success of the strategic planning process.

Quick Start Guide

This Quick Start Guide provides tools to inform your planning process and is not a complete strategic plan. This guide includes the following key elements of an aligned strategic plan that balances the needs of the business and individuals:

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History Timeline and Lessons Learned

Overview and Objectives

Even if it's short, all operations have a history with valuable lessons, traditions and beliefs which become part of the business culture ('how we do things around here'). Business history is also influenced by the business environment, commodity cycles, interest rates and other factors experienced over time. Assessing the past, gleaned lessons learned and considering the present is a great first step in evaluating future milestones and goals.

After completing this activity, the participants should:

- Inventory business milestones.
- Recognize changes over time.
- Appreciate achievements and recognize lessons.

History Timeline Review

Begin your conversation and strategic planning process by inventorying the history of your business. For each decade (or year if the business is <10 years old), outline the following:

- Important milestones.
- People, roles, and business structure.
- Land and production.

Group Discussion Guide

Including all key members of the operation is important to ensure transparency, understanding of all perspectives, and to maintain relationships.

Prepare Participants

- Schedule a dedicated time (1-2 hours depending on the group size) for a focused discussion.
- Provide this guide to all participants.

Define Roles

- Identify a facilitator to keep the group focused and moving through the discussion.
- Designate one person to take 'official' notes, documenting the discussion and any decisions.

Instructions

- Use the space in the following table to inventory perspectives. Answer the questions presented to assess milestones, lessons learned and how they may be applied to the future.

History Timeline Discussion Worksheet

Assessment Questions	Discussion Notes
What were some important milestones in the business history?	
What did the business look like (size, crops, production) at each of these milestones and who was involved?	
What does the business look like today and how has it changed?	
What do we appreciate most about the business today?	
What lessons from business history could be valuable to achieve future success (production, people, finances, making decisions, other)?	

Core Values

Overview and Objectives

All businesses have core values, or tightly held beliefs, that guide decision-making, priorities and the way individuals interact with each other inside and outside the business. Even if values are not written down, they're present, and when values don't align, conflict is common.

Strong and clear core values create clarity, assure alignment, and enable individuals to hold themselves (and each other) accountable in a positive and constructive way. Core values also help new employees understand what's expected of them (and what they can expect from others).

In many businesses, core values are present already, and the leaders' work is to identify, define and share them. In established businesses, values do not change significantly over time, but evolve slowly. In new businesses, defining values is a discovery process that may take time and multiple reviews to 'get them right' as the business and team strive to find their purpose and identity.

There is no 'right' set of values, and a common mistake is to include values members of the business think they 'should' have instead of the true values that guide day-to-day decisions and interactions. It's ok for values to be aspirational (we aren't there yet, but want to be), but they must be authentic. Identifying and discovering values takes time and can be challenging, but the effort pays off in the form of alignment and a solid foundation during the planning process and in day-to-day work and interactions.

Discovering Your Business Values

Values are the lens through which members of a business view the world and their work together. They help people understand "how we do things around here" and what's expected of everyone.

It is especially important to consider values together as a business forms, new members join and/or when preparing for transition. Values established collaboratively create shared understanding and accountability and help ensure the decisions made during the planning process are consistent with the values identified.

After completing this guide, participants should:

- Identify shared values.
- Define each value and how it is exhibited.
- Confirm and commit to shared core values that all are accountable to.

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Define Roles

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Instructions

- Use the table below to inventory all perspectives on “values” and “definitions.”
- Give participants 5-7 minutes to write down and define values they see in the business.
- Start with one person and ask them to share the value they are most passionate about.
- Go to the next person and ask if they had the same value (or something similar) and if they described it differently. To the extent it’s different, the scribe should add the additional clarity to the definition.
- Continue around the table until discussion “comes back” to the person who proposed the value.
- Repeat the process with each participant sharing their next highest priority value (no repeats), until all participants’ values have been listed and defined.
- Once the exercise is concluded, go around the table and have each participant read one value and description aloud. Discuss differences of opinion and refine if needed.
- Ask the group to reflect on each value and confirm if it accurately describes shared values.

What are values?

- Essential and enduring beliefs; the lens through which all decisions are evaluated.
- Personal and business convictions.
- Independent of the current external environment.
- True to who you are as a team and a business, not just what ‘sounds good.’

How to define values:

- Definitions should describe how values are demonstrated in the business. For example, the value ‘integrity’ may be defined as: “We do what we say and follow-through on commitments.”
- Definitions should apply to all individuals and situations instead of just being specific examples of when a value is or was exhibited.
- Definitions should not include the value itself. For example, the definition of ‘honesty’ should not be “We are honest in all we do,” but could be, “We tell the truth, even when it’s difficult.”

Core Value (one or two word description)	Definition (*begin each definition with “We...”)

DISC Self Evaluation and Effective Communication

Overview and Objectives

Effective communications are essential for any healthy relationship and foundational for success in business. There are many types of behavioral assessments available that can be useful in guiding these conversations and identifying behavioral and communication preferences. The following guide uses concepts from the DISC assessment which is grounded in decades of behavioral research and used by millions of individuals and companies each year. After completing this activity, the participants should:

- Have a basic knowledge of behavioral preferences.
- Recognize how they are different and the importance of understanding oneself and others.
- Appreciate strengths and adapt behavior to create more effective communications.

Behavioral Styles

The DISC Model of Behavior was first proposed in 1928 by William Moulton Marston, a physiological psychologist. The big idea is that each individual has a unique “style” or blend of styles that represent an opportunity to leverage strengths and understand weaknesses. The four primary styles are:

- **Dominant:** People who have both outgoing and task-oriented traits often exhibit dominant and direct behaviors. They usually focus on results, problem-solving, and the bottom-line.
- **Influence/Inspiring:** People who have both outgoing and people-oriented traits often exhibit inspiring and interactive behaviors. They usually focus on interacting with people, having fun, and/or creating excitement.
- **Steady/Supportive:** People who have both reserved and people-oriented traits often exhibit supportive and steady behaviors. They usually focus preserving relationships and on creating or maintaining peace and harmony.
- **Conscientious/Careful:** People who have both reserved and task-oriented traits often exhibit cautious and careful behaviors. They usually focus on facts, rules, and correctness.

No DISC style is “better” than any other. DISC simply helps individuals find out which style they tend to gravitate toward most — their comfort zone. With that knowledge, individuals and teams can understand their underlying tendencies and preferences. Effective work teams share appreciation for all styles and optimize each other’s strengths and weaknesses.

Assessing Your Own Style

Understanding DISC styles begins with taking a short online assessment. The assessment provides a report showing where an individual “fits” into the four main personality types. There are many online providers where a DISC assessment can be obtained. Complete an online search for ‘DISC Assessment’ to identify a provider or email bmc@agwestfc.com for suggestions.



DISC Group Discussion Guide

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Prepare Participants

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Define Roles

- Identify a facilitator to keep the group focused and moving through the discussion.
- Designate one person to take 'official' notes documenting the discussion and any decisions.

Instructions

- If you have ordered a DISC report, read it in advance of the meeting. Highlight what is most like you from the report and come prepared to share during the meeting.
- Have each individual (one at a time) share the highlights from their report.
- Use the space provided below to inventory perspectives. Answer the questions presented to assess milestones, lessons learned and how they may be applied to the future.

Assessment Questions	Discussion Notes
Why is understanding each other's behavioral style and communication preferences important?	
What behavioral styles are in our business? Note: Each participant should share their behavioral style assessment and what is most like them.	
What do you appreciate most about each other's DISC styles?	
How might a strength be overused and what can be the result?	
What communication preferences work best with your style?	
How does each behavioral style deal with conflict most effectively?	
How might you adjust your behavioral style to work more effectively with others?	
What can we do collectively to make our communications more effective as a business?	
What is the next step in the process (see recommended steps below) and when should we meet again?	

Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats (SWOT)

Overview and Objectives

A SWOT analysis is a simple and useful framework for analyzing a business' internal and external environment. The SWOT acronym stands for Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats. It helps businesses identify priorities that build on what they do well, address weaknesses for improvement, minimize threats and take the greatest possible advantage of opportunities. Preparing a SWOT analysis is an important aspect of strategic planning and should be updated annually or as needed. After completing this activity, the participants should:

- Understand SWOT and how it fits into the planning process.
- Identify the business' Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats.
- Prioritize key issues to address later in the planning process.

Preparing a SWOT Analysis

Strengths and weaknesses are internal to the operation, meaning these are areas management can influence or control. Strengths and weaknesses usually include human competencies, products and services, production and process capabilities and resources (financial, physical or natural). The plan should leverage and build upon strengths, while minimizing or eliminating weaknesses.

Strengths (internal)
Qualities enabling the business to fulfill its purpose, build competitive advantage and meet its full potential.

Weaknesses (internal)
Development areas keeping the business from fulfilling its mission, building competitive advantage and meeting its full potential.

Opportunities (external)
Favorable trends or developments that allow businesses to increase success and profits.

Threats (external)
Unfavorable trends or developments that could endanger business integrity, success and profits.

Opportunities and threats are external factors that can affect the business positively or negatively. Management cannot control opportunities or threats. However, they can identify and prepare to take advantage of opportunities or mitigate/defend against external threats and forces

Group Discussion Guide

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Prepare Participants

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- Provide this guide to all participants.

Define Roles

- Identify a facilitator to keep the group focused and moving through the discussion.
- Designate one person to take 'official' notes documenting the discussion and any decisions.

Instructions

- Use the SWOT analysis worksheet to capture the strengths, weakness, opportunities, and threats for the business. Next, complete the SWOT Assessment.
- **IMPORTANT!** Avoid developing solutions or strategies at this point in the process. Focus instead on developing a complete list, and then identify top priority focus areas for potential discussion.

SWOT Analysis Worksheet

<p>Strengths (internal): Qualities enabling the business to be successful, build competitive advantage and meet its full potential (internal and controllable).</p>	<p>Weaknesses (internal): Development areas keeping the business from being successful, building competitive advantage and meeting its full potential (internal and controllable).</p>
<p>Opportunities (external): Favorable trends or developments that allow businesses to increase success and profits (external and uncontrollable).</p>	<p>Threats (external): Unfavorable trends or developments that could endanger business integrity, success and profits (external and uncontrollable).</p>

*Focus on listing all strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats. Avoid developing solutions or strategies at this point in the process.

SWOT Assessment

Assessment Questions	Discussion Notes
What strengths represent competitive advantage that can be built upon?	
Which weaknesses can be improved over time and enhance the business?	
What opportunities are most strongly aligned to the strengths of the business?	
Which threats present higher risk and should be considered further?	
What are the highest priorities to address from the analysis? Consider the business vision and identify items with the most impact in achieving the vision.	

Top Priorities for Next 6-12 Months:

Based on the SWOT, what are your top **two to three** priorities? What are your metrics for success in each area? Consider Patrick Lencioni’s definition of strategy from The Advantage: A collection of intentional decisions a company makes to give itself the best chance to thrive and differentiate itself from competitors.

Priorities	Metrics for Success
1.	
2.	
3.	

Personal Goals

Overview and Objectives

To survive, a business must meet customer needs and make enough money to fund its operations. To thrive, a business also must provide compelling opportunities for owner and non-owner employees, generate solid financial returns, and provide for the personal and lifestyle goals of owners.

Personal goals are an important part of the planning process. They inform the business vision, enabling the plan to align with what's most important to the people involved. Personal goals are also critical for understanding each other and reducing unproductive conflict. Without understanding underlying motivations, it is easy to misinterpret others' opinions and difficult to find mutually beneficial solutions when there's a difference of opinion.

It is important for business owners to clearly define both business goals and personal goals during the strategic planning process. When goals are clear and understood, decision makers can use them to inform management, leadership, and/or ownership succession plans. Personal goals also make it easier to know when someone is not a fit for the business, which is much better to know early in the process.

After completing this activity, the participants should:

- Understand the importance of personal goal to business and planning.
- Define their own personal goals
- Understand each other's personal goals

Defining Personal Goals

Many think of earning more money as a primary personal goal. Financial goals are important, but people are motivated by much more than money. For most businesses, employees and owners won't automatically become rich, so understanding non-financial goals is important to providing engaging and fulfilling opportunities. Other goals include opportunities for growth and development, doing meaningful work, legacy, community impact, spending time with family, traveling, and other work-life aspirations.

For personal goals to be most effective, it is important for each person to be open and honest, without fear of judgement from others. When people share their personal goals, it is important for everyone to be open and accepting. There are no 'wrong' personal goals, only those that are different from yours. And those are the most important ones to understand and appreciate.

Developing Personal Goals

Instructions

Answer the following questions about your personal goals, reflecting on what is most important to you. Be honest with yourself, prepare to share your responses, and be ready listen as others share their personal goals.

Professional	Goal Details
What career goals are important to you at this point in your life?	
What does professional success look like for you?	
How will your current position and career track help you achieve success?	
What professional skills do you desire to develop?	
Financial	Goal Details
How much do you want or need to earn (what level of disposable income will provide the financial freedom you want)?	
What are the major material possessions you wish to acquire or the financial investments you want to make?	
Relationships	Goal Details
What kind of relationships do you want with your business team, partner, family, and others?	
How do you want to strengthen existing relationships?	
What new relationships do you want to build?	
Sense of Purpose	Goal Details
What goals or activities help you feel at peace and give you satisfaction in life?	
What goals, personal development or activities help you identify and act on who you are and what is important to you?	
What goals or activities help you develop your desired faiths/beliefs?	
What goals or activities do you feel make a difference to those around you?	
Well-Being	Goal Details
What are your goals for your personal health and fitness?	
What are your goals for creating a balanced life and mental wellbeing?	
How much time would you like to be available to do what you want?	
What leisure activities do you want to pursue (e.g., hobbies, social, community)?	

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Instructions

- Spouses and partners should review their personal goals with one another prior to the larger group discussion.
- Take turns sharing every individual’s goals with the larger group in each personal goal category.
- The designated note-taker should inventory goals in a shared document.
- Discuss the questions below and note perspectives. Give everyone an opportunity to share their perspective and be heard.

Assessment Questions	Discussion Notes
Why is it important to explore personal goals in the strategic planning process for this business?	
What key themes or ideas did you observe during the process?	
Were there any surprises?	
What did you appreciate most about this discussion?	

Business Vision

Overview and Objectives

A vision statement is a clear and detailed description of the business at a specific future date (commonly 3-5 years in the future). A well-defined and accepted business vision assures owners, managers, employees, and stakeholders understand the direction of the business, providing a ‘north star’ or ‘destination’ around which to align decision-making and priorities.

The process of creating a vision statement helps decision-makers identify and reconcile differences of opinion about the direction of the business. If the parties can’t reconcile opinions about the future, there will likely be confusion, ongoing conflict, and communication challenges. In such cases, the parties may consider splitting the business or options for party/parties to exit.

A clear and agreed-on picture of the ‘destination’ is a powerful tool for making strategic decisions and even in the day-to-day to assure resources (financial and people) are moving the business towards a common end point.

Defining Vision (and what it’s not)

There is often confusion about terms relating to business vision. Below are brief definitions to help clarify and show how these elements of the business plan fit together.

Vision:	A clear and detailed description of the business at a specific future date (the ‘north star’ or ‘destination’).
Strategy:	A set of tactics or approaches the business will employ to achieve its vision.
Goals:	Targets or milestones along the way to gauge progress towards achieving vision (shorter timeframe than vision).
Action Plans:	Step-by-step plans and assignments to complete specific tasks in pursuit of goals and strategies (includes timeframes for each step).

Elements of a Vision Statement

The vision statement should be **clear and simple**, making it practical to reference in decision-making and priority-setting. It should also be **realistic and aspirational** (but not too aspirational), with enough ‘stretch’ for a 70% chance of achieving success. Elements include:

- **Timeframe:** Identify a date or year when the business will achieve or reach its vision (commonly 5 and 10 years in the future for annual and permanent crop businesses respectively).
- **Enterprises and Sizes:** Define future enterprises (commodities, products, or services) and their size (acres, pounds, revenues, etc.) at the end of the defined time period.
- **Leadership and Management:** Identify major areas of responsibility, decision-making authority, and formal positions key players will hold at the end of the defined time period.
- **Ownership:** Define ownership of the business, including ownership percentages in operating, land-holding, and other business entities at the end of the defined time period.
- **The Big Idea:** Identify a major theme from all elements of the business vision to help everyone focus on what’s most important. This should be energizing and inspirational.

Example Vision Statement:

XYZ Farms is an employee-owned and managed cattle and hay operation. Success as of 20XX will be achieved by:

Vision Elements	20X0 (today)	20X5 (future)
Enterprises	Cattle – 400 head Hay – 800 acres (160 irrigated)	Cattle – 800 head Hay – 1,000 acres (320 acres irrigated) Custom Hay (small bales) – 200 acres
Leadership and Management	Skip – Board Chair and Cattle Operation Management (mentoring Jake) Jan – Bookkeeping Jane – Hay Operation Management Jake – Learning Cattle	Skip – Board Chair (not required day-to-day) Jan – Bookkeeping (mentoring Jake) Jane – Hay and Custom Hay Operation Management Jake – Cattle Operation Management and Learning Bookkeeping
Ownership	Operating entity - Skip + Jan Real Estate Entity – Skip + Jan	Operating entity – Jane + Jake (under contract to purchase using wages) Real Estate Entity – Skip + Jan
The ‘big idea’	Establish a custom hay operation, grow the cattle business, and transition key responsibilities to Jane and Jake.	

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Instructions

Using the Business Vision Building Blocks Worksheet below, each individual or couple take 10 minutes to define their vision for the future. Take turns sharing each individual vision with the group to identify your collective vision for the future.

The designated note taker should write down all vision elements in a shared document to compare and identify differences. Use the Conversation Guide on the following pages to discuss and reconcile differences.



Business Vision Building Blocks Worksheet

Vision Date: 20XX (when will this vision be achieved)

Vision Elements	20XX (Today)	20XX (Future)
Enterprises and sizes		
Leadership and management		
Ownership		
The 'big idea' (key theme)		

Business Vision Conversation Guide

Use the space provided below to capture discussion notes as you compare and contrast your Vision Building Blocks with others.	
Assessment Question	Discussion Notes
Where do our vision building blocks align?	
Where do our vision building blocks differ?	
How can we reconcile the differences to create a single, common vision?	
What metrics could you use to measure success?	

SMART Goals and Action Plans

Overview and Objectives

Build SMART goals based on top priorities. Use your vision to determine what's most important. Develop goals together to agree on accountability, timelines, and definition of success. Be sure you have a way to follow-up on progress and drive accountability. After completing this activity, the participants should:

- Establish accountability for follow-through and execution of top priorities.
- Create alignment around strategies and specific steps to achieve results.

SMART Goal Definition:

SMART goals are a powerful tool to drive results and accountability. SMART goals are:

Definition	SMART Goal Components	
S pecific M easurable A greed-to R ealistic T ime-Driven	Goal:	Define success and the desired end-result . Include the target completion date. Be specific.
	Action Steps:	Identify major steps or milestones required to complete. Include as many steps and as much detail as needed.
	Responsible:	Identify who is responsible for each step. Others may be involved, but one person should be responsible to make it happen.
	Due Date:	Identify a target completion date for each step. Work back from the overall goal target completion date and use realistic timelines.
	Notes:	Add information regarding additional parties involved or details relevant to each step. Indicate how decisions will be made.

SMART Goal Sample:

Below is a sample SMART Goal and Action Plan. Use the provided templates to develop SMART goals.

Goal: Develop job descriptions for Bob, Bobby, Billy by XYZ date.			
Steps	Responsible	Due Date	Notes
1. Draft template JD	Billy	XX/XX/XX	• Contact HR firm for sample
2. Team review template; provide feedback	Billy	XX/XX/XX	
3. Finalize template	Billy	XX/XX/XX	
4. Draft own JD text	Individual	XX/XX/XX	• Reference Roles Spreadsheet
5. Team review drafts; provide feedback	Billy	XX/XX/XX (Meeting)	
6. Final revisions	Individual	XX/XX/XX	
7. Team approval	Billy	XX/XX/XX (Meeting)	• See notes on decision process (XX/XX/XX meeting)



SMART Goal Templates

Goal:			
Steps	Responsible	Due Date	Notes

Goal:			
Steps	Responsible	Due Date	Notes

SMART Goal Templates

Goal:			
Steps	Responsible	Due Date	Notes

Goal:			
Steps	Responsible	Due Date	Notes