The Annual Plan
Setting Goals, Charting the Course

One of the smarter fundraising colleagues I worked with lived by the six P’s: Proper Planning Prevents Piss-Poor Performance. She was right (if a little crude).

Then why does planning get overlooked so often? The answer is because it’s easy to overlook. Indeed, it is so incredibly tempting to make that one additional phone call, to send one more e-mail, or schedule one more meeting on the road. Because every moment a fundraiser spends in a meeting or planning is a moment that he or she is not raising funds, which is his or her purpose.

Planning often gets overlooked, but an organization does so at its own peril. Planning is important for a few simple reasons.

- It provides you with a framework for your year (or quarter).
- It gives you goals against which you can measure success.
- It enhances workflow and helps you prioritize the innumerable tasks that you have.
- It gives you a chance to strategize out loud, as a team, about micro-goals (i.e., certain prospects) and macro-goals (dollars to be brought in).

Why Set Goals?

Why bother with setting goals? Why not just get out there and ask for as many gifts as possible? Setting goals achieves the following things:
- It challenges and empowers your fundraisers.
- It provides you with material to bring to your supervisor/board.
- It informs your strategies and planning, both at the individual, targeted level and at the more general, participatory level in a way that cannot be achieved without goals.

In other words, goal-setting and planning are inextricably tied together. Let's explore both of them.

**Goal Setting: Dreaming Big, Realistically**

Goal setting is always a fun exercise—it allows you to dream big, to think broadly about your organization’s fundraising capabilities, and to think creatively about how to improve upon last year. It also empowers you to think about the impact that your operation can have upon the institution as a whole.

Where do you start? Well, it’s best to begin by asking the central questions: What can our organization currently NOT do due to lack of funding? What incremental increase in funding would we need in order to carry out those wishes?

It’s a better place to start than by looking at last year’s data, especially if your shop is still in its nascent stages. The expectation should be that you’ll raise more money than last year, especially if you’ve been able to expand your fundraising staff.

My own bias is to start as big as possible and then pare back once you get into planning the implementation. This is an evolved opinion—I have often been accused, somewhat accurately, of being the one to shoot down big ideas, big goals. While the accusation has merit, it is motivated by the fact that I’m very much implementation- and process-oriented; so, while I sometimes come off as someone who enjoys shooting down big ideas, I like to think of it more in terms of me serving as a counterbalance to the dreamers. The “idea people” have their place in the organization, without a doubt, but so do the folks who devote their time to thinking about pitfalls, capabilities with limited resources, and getting from A to B without losing their sanity. In other words, you need both types of folks (remember the operations and logistics staff member from Chapter 4?), and both of them should be given equal voice when setting goals and coming up with your annual plan.

Goals should be ambitious, yet achievable. On the one hand, you want to challenge your staff to think creatively about how to improve both themselves