

TIME TO PLAN

PLANNING FOR CHANGE



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- When faced with a big project, heavy workload or period of change, things can seem daunting. But there are techniques we can use to navigate through these periods and manage our stress levels.
- As part of FCN's Time to Plan initiative, we are asking people to tell us how they approach change and planning.
- Here are a few tips from FCN's staff team.

DON'T PANIC – MOST CHANGE IS A JOURNEY

The thought of change can overwhelm us – but the reality is that most change happens over time, not overnight. When faced with a new project or responsibility, take a few deep breaths and don't let the 'what-ifs' and the self-doubts dominate your thinking. You can do this!

MAKE A PLAN, BUT STAY FLEXIBLE

Having a plan is important – it provides some guide rails and lets you measure how you are doing. But like any game plan in sport, it will need to adapt as it progresses. A rigid plan that doesn't take account of new ideas or changing circumstances, is a bad plan. Getting to your destination is what counts, the route may change as the plan evolves.

DON'T BOIL THE OCEAN – BE AMBITIOUS BUT REALISTIC

It's easy to have great ideas – the difficult bit is turning them into action. I have been involved in many projects that started with huge expectations that were not realistic. There can always be a phase 2 or 3 but make your initial goals achievable.

INVOLVE OTHERS – BUT RECOGNIZE THEY WORK DIFFERENTLY

Involving others in your plan will shine a light on areas you may not have thought about. But recognize that people work in different ways. You may be a great ideas person who sees all the possibilities. But the detail person on your team will not believe your plan until they see the facts clearly laid out in triplicate. You may find this frustrating, but they are equally frustrated by your 'dreaming'! A strong team has a range of personality types – welcome them all and embrace their different approaches because it will shape a more robust plan.

RECOGNISE YOUR STRENGTHS AND WHERE YOU NEED HELP – BE HONEST!

You may think you know everything you need to about marketing and can doodle up a great new logo. But the chances are, others will be more skilled in certain areas. You can own a plan and lead a team without having to be an expert in everything. And the chances are that recognising others may have particular skills and involving them, will result in a better plan.

SELL THE DESTINATION – COMMUNICATE

One of the most inspiring people I ever worked with was an Irishman who could bring an idea to life and catalyse everyone around him with the possibilities of their involvement and how life would be when we achieved the plan. We didn't always succeed, but he secured the full commitment of everyone involved and I know that where a plan didn't come together in the end, we gave it everything during the process. Keep talking with your team even if progress is slow.

REVIEW REGULARLY – EVEN IF IT HURTS!

When you are fired up about your plan, it can be painful to take stock and realise that progress may not be as fast as you would like. Put a regular date in the diary to review progress with everyone involved. You may not always have a lot to report, but it keeps everyone's mind on the plan. There is nothing quite like knowing you have a meeting to report at next week to engender some action today!

SMALL STEPS – AVOID EARTHQUAKES

A big transformational plan can seem daunting. But like many things, when you break it down into smaller steps it can seem more achievable. People around you will be more likely to buy into change if they can see the logic and believe it's needed and realistic. Communicating an urgency is sometimes necessary, but scaring people with the scale or speed of change can be counterproductive. Most people need time and space to adapt if it's to be sustainable change.

KEEP IT SIMPLE

Try not to over complicate your plan. You might understand it, but others may get lost and that will lead to confusion, disharmony, and increased stress. Avoid corporate speak (no 'flipcharting areas of commonality' please!). Be clear and be yourself.

DOES THE PLAN PASS THE JOHN HUMPHREYS TEST?

We can sometimes get so absorbed by our plans and ideas that we overlook some obvious flaws or questions that will need to be answered. I try and imagine being interviewed on BBC Radio 4's Today programme by the 'rottweiler' John Humphries. Think about the awkward questions that John would ask you and how you might answer them. It will help you to think about the feasibility of your plans and address, in advance, any weaknesses that will undoubtedly come to light at some point.

GET A(N HONEST) MENTOR

When thinking about any big decision, plan or change, it is valuable to talk it over with someone who will give you an objective opinion. Select someone who knows enough about your situation, but is not too closely connected. You are looking for honest feedback, so don't pick someone who will just be nice! Hearing it can be painful, but if it helps you to think harder about aspects of your plan, or consider things from a different angle, it will be worth it.

CELEBRATE!

Finally, make sure you celebrate the process with those who have worked with you and provided support. Whatever the outcome, you will have applied yourself and worked hard. Take time to recognize what everyone has contributed and the progress you have made.



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