



**Strategic Business Planning**  
*A Foundation for Business Building*

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## Strategic Business Planning

Have you ever been invited to a Strategic Business Planning retreat where you go away with your team and plan for the future of your business? I can recall being invited to my first session of this type in the early 70s as an Account Executive for the IBM Corporation. IBM invested about \$4M-\$5M in the process and had a dedicated planning manager who led us through that one-week process.

It was a long week, involving about 50 hours of intense planning, and produced a plan that in the final analysis was totally useless. Why... Because it did not reflect reality. We had about 1/3 the resources needed to pull off the plan. Most people involved had no idea where to focus their energy and resources, there were no priorities, and the manager that we had kept trying to impose his will on our group even though I was the Account Executive in charge of making it happen. I vowed to never attend another one of these sessions as long as I worked for IBM. I kept to my promise during the next 10 years of my employment.

I take you through that little story because I know that many of you have had a similar reaction to planning and you have your stories regarding negative experiences and much time wasted.

In 1982 I began to learn the beginnings of the best process for Strategic Business Planning that I have seen. I was running a large sales organization involving over 60 people and about another 100 support personnel. It was very much like a large agency in the financial services industry. I started looking carefully at what was good about the planning methodology and what was not perfect yet.

Working with my team and with much trial and error, we discovered a process that worked. It could be completed in about 5 to 7 hours, so one day versus one week. We learned about all the little things that made the system work... such as **everyone participates** and there are **no titles or egos**.

It was part of our process that—once the plan was developed—everyone signed off on it. Everyone knew what they were accountable for, and we began to use it to run our business. It worked for us and became the most important tool that we had as a communications vehicle. It took a high energy group and focused them on the primary objectives. We had an executable plan.

Over time, we became experts in this process—not just one person, but everyone. Then we started to expand its use to go way beyond our team. Any time we needed to engage another group in a cooperative effort, we used the process.

Eventually we began to run planning sessions for our primary client, which was AT&T. This was a \$70 B Corporation so you would expect that they had a good system and that it was being used across the company. Nothing could have been further from the truth, so

it was easy to show a senior level business executive how the process worked. We began facilitating planning sessions so that we could align our sales initiatives with the AT& T business initiatives, and this made our entire organization even more effective. We ran more than 100 planning sessions for them.

In the early 1990s when we began our journey into the financial services world, we introduced this process to our first client. Today, it remains the primary tool that they use for all planning activities. In fact it's known as "*Building Your Benchmark Plan.*"

**Today, more than 100 firms and over 500 teams have used this process.**

I am confident that as you explore the Strategic Business Planning Curriculum you will see that it is designed to enable you to make planning a core competency in your business. We will show you everything you need to know to use the process effectively.

It integrates a set of business building strategies that you will find will insure that you are setting the right strategies in place. We will show you how to apply it to your overall business planning, your departmental plans, your strategic initiatives, your sales team's plans, individual producer's plans and specialist's plans. In other words, it is the one process that once mastered can be used indefinitely.

As a manager responsible for many different initiatives and strategies, it will become your tool to be able to most easily understand the status of each initiative.

Coaching Services are available from Benchmark to assist you in using this methodology and getting the most out of the process.