



# Insight Sue Crampton

WITH

## **The Importance of Strategic Planning.** Where are you going and how are you going to get there?



With uncertain economic times upon us, now more than ever it is vital for practices to have answers to these questions. Understanding and defining who we are, whom we serve and what goals we are aiming for creates a foundation for creating strategic plans and actions, and in turn, positive and profitable business outcomes.

### **So, what is Strategic Planning and why is it useful?**

Strategic Planning is the process of determining where a practice is going, how they are going to get there and how they will know if they got there or not. Whilst there are a multitude of models and approaches to creating a strategic plan, the overall emphasis is on goal-based planning and clear KPI management strategies. Strategic plans are commonly created for a three year period although they can range from 1-10 years.

Whilst it is often the case that practice owners and Partners know where they are going, strategic planning is a meaningful developmental tool for communicating goals and strategies to other members of the team. It ensures

all staff are on the same page and 'buy in' to the practice plans for success. Additional benefits come from clearly defining the purpose of the practice, stakeholders involved, goals and objectives and ensuring the most effective use of resources available. Moreover, strategic plans foster a sense of ownership and pride in the practice and forms the foundation for establishing mechanisms to measure success. I am always delighted to see when this process bridges the relationship between Partners and practice staff through mutual goal setting and group problem solving. The positive knock-on effect is greater job satisfaction, increased productivity and pride in the practice.

Attempting a strategic plan is a daunting task, especially when practices are caught in the cycle of 'fire fighting', meaning they are constantly reacting to problems. It is always difficult to find the time to stop and analyse what needs to be accomplished to make real, measured progress. Uncertain economic times also means that the formula which once was successful may not work in the near future. The important thing to remember is that the PROCESS of planning, or re-planning, is more beneficial than the plan itself. There is no perfect plan! Keeping it simple is the key.

Ideally, to create your strategic plan, a team of participants should be involved. Consultation with strategic planning consultants can be useful for getting over the initial hurdle of where to start. Think about those staff members and Partners who can provide key information, make decisions or can handle the administrative tasks associated with planning.

A combination of 'big picture' and micro thinkers is important too. Ideally, have planning meetings 2-3 weeks apart to avoid losing momentum, and continually check in with participants that the plan is realistic and achievable.

The biggest challenge that is faced by Practices is not creating a strategic plan, but implementing it once it is complete. Unfortunately, without thorough implementation, a strategic plan becomes yet another dusty document on a shelf. If a strategic plan is executed correctly, from it should flow action plans which include timeframes for completion and those responsible for it. In turn, action plans should also include timing for monitoring and evaluating, and if necessary, deviating from the plan.

In essence, a Strategic Plan should be a living, breathing document, designed to give you peace of mind or help you map change in times such as these. Is it not good business sense to simply trust your practice to grow in a haphazard fashion. As the saying goes "plan the work and work the plan" to achieve success and survive in this ever-changing and evolving profession.

**Sue Crampton is the lead consultant for Crampton Consulting Group (incorporating Animal Industries Resource Centre). In March 2009 Provet CCG will launch its Practice Fitness 'Insight Leadership' Boot Camp Series, focusing on Strategic Planning, Business Financials, Marketing Savvy and Investment in People. If you would like more information, contact the AIRC/CCG office on 07 3289 1900 or speak to your Provet Business Account Manager.**

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