

Predicting the Future

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Three simple predictions that are sure to happen: The future will be different than it is today. There will be new opportunities and new threats. Some agencies will thrive; others will struggle.

The Most Important Prediction

If you thought the first three predictions were somewhat simple, this last prediction may be the simplest.....yet most profound of all. There will be one factor that will tend to separate those agencies that thrive from those that struggle. That factor? Planning.

Planning provides agencies with direction, helps effectively and efficiently allocate limited resources in the best way possible, provides clarity for the future direction the agency will pursue, eliminates efforts that are no longer viable, and generates buy-in and commitment by staff and board alike.

Planning helps agency leaders step back and define where they want to go and how they will get there. Planning serves as the beacon that guides the future efforts of an agency. It provides agency leaders with the best way to ensure that their agency will thrive in the future. But, if planning is so important, why don't more agencies do it?

Three Reasons Why Agencies Fail to Plan

There are numerous reasons why agency and board leaders fail to initiate systematic planning efforts. Three reasons tend to stand out.

- 1. We don't have time.** Things are happening too quickly. We've got too much to do. Everyone is too busy.
- 2. We already know where we are going.** We don't need to plan. We've been doing this for a zillion years. We're the experts. We don't need a planning session to figure it out.
- 3. It's a waste of time.** It doesn't matter what we plan. Things are always changing. Talk, talk, talk. Planning is for people who have nothing better to do.

Do any of these reasons sound familiar? They are great excuses; unfortunately, they don't make sense.

The Rudderless Ship

Planning is the rudder of the home care ship. It provides direction and enables agencies to traverse the treacherous home care waters. There are lots of excuses that agency leaders use, but do these excuses really make sense?

Don't have the time.

Have you ever gone on a car trip with someone who doesn't have the time to plan where they are going or what they need to get there? If you jumped in that car for a trip to New York and the next sign you saw said, "San Francisco - 200 miles," you'd know why it's important to plan before you start.

We already know where we are going.

Before you buy this argument, take a look at any of the major home care newsletters or publications. Start collecting a list of the agencies, some of whom are mighty big, who professed to be the experts but failed to adequately plan how they were going to get from where they were to where they wanted to be.

It doesn't matter.

Do you really believe that? Just take a look at agencies affected by the Interim Payment System, particularly those agencies that had an October 1 fiscal year. They were the first ones affected. Some started planning immediately. Others were overwhelmed by the magnitude of the problem and felt there was little they could do. Which agencies do you feel had the better chance for survival?

Predicting Your Future

Effective planning alone can't save a weak agency. What planning can do is help all agencies recognize their weaknesses, identify their strengths, determine their best future directions, and define what strategies and what efforts they need to initiate to make that future a reality.

When you start thinking about the future of your agency, keep in mind the words of one of the management field's greatest gurus, Peter Drucker: "The best way to predict the future," said Drucker, "is to create it." Planning is your creative means to predict and create your agency's future. It's well worth your time and effort.

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