



PCM Strategy for Growth

Planning sets the foundation for success in life and career but crisis management is equally important and we must be prepared to meet any contingencies.



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Life throws many games at us. Nowhere we need to go and look, but for the ongoing COVID-19 crisis. While government and public health agencies plan to tackle crisis situations, in extreme and unforeseen circumstances things go out of control and hence pivoting and crisis management capabilities are warranted for individuals and public agencies. Yet another apt and timely lesson from the pandemic.

Life lessons from COVID-19

It is well understood by all that there is no better preceptor than life. Foundation of a good life rest on

good planning, which is the first step. Planning starts from young age and is a dynamic process as we plan for future all the way up to retirement. Even in scientific experiments there are occurrences of serendipitous events, which may turn out to be boon or disaster – hence managing situations matter a lot. Life is uncertain and hence events may happen unplanned or unexpected. Does that mean planning is of no use? That is not the case! Planning brings some sort of stability, hope and builds confidence. In life even with some sort of planning, one faces some crisis, imagine what will happen with no planning at all? That would be a real disaster, as if run over by an 18-wheeler. Hence there is a critical need to plan such as having life insurance and a good will to provide a safety net. These acts of simple planning will go a long way particularly where situations go beyond one's control such as managing life farming, etc., where we are dependent on many unexpected and uncontrollable factors such as health issues, weather, etc.

“Planning is a constant effort put forth by any leader that desires to progress or even stay consistent with where you may be on the way to achieving the strategies and/or goals of the entity. You should stay engaged with what is occurring around you while monitoring and studying activities that are occurring,” commented Sean Childers, Assistant Vice President for Operations at Lubbock-based Texas Tech University.

Planning Strategy

A simple planning strategy will be mandatory and beneficial to start with. A simple rule is to have one or more plan of actions to attack one problem. I personally learnt this while undertaking doctoral research at the University of Leeds, England some years back. My doctoral research which was a machinery-based project was going nowhere leading me into

mental stress in a foreign land. Dr. Manickavasgam Sundaram who is currently a practicing physician in Lakeridge Health, Oshawa, Canada was undertaking research on molecular biology at Leeds then gave me a sage advice which serves me well in professional and personal life. Dr. Sundaram was undertaking a difficult project to clone a gene. Having seen no light at the end of this project tunnel, he worked on multiple sub-projects that resulted

in useful findings in Vitamin A field. Not being stuck with one path but having substitute plans to reach the goal post is an important lesson in management and life. This lesson from Dr. Sundaram led me to switch my research area from machinery to haptics or evaluating the feel or quality of fabrics. That work resulted in the development of an artificial human finger to simulate the touching of fabrics by humans, which led to visits to prestigious



Sean Childers

institutions such as MIT, Harvard and leading corporations such as Dupont in the United States. Unless one experiences, it is not easy to feel the absolute importance of planning and pivoting sometimes towards reaching attainable goals. Financial managers often advise us not to put all eggs in one basket. Having Plans B and C will help if Plan A is not successful. Managing quickly to pivot from the original plan, if it is not leading to fruitful result is indeed a lesson in crisis management.

It is important to plan for future projects and contingencies, such



Manickavasgam with Seshadri Ram

as weather-related events and/or financial reductions. Planning needs to be for near, mid to long terms so it enables individuals and institutions to target their goals. While explaining such strategic planning Ms. Noel Sloan, Senior Vice President of Administration & Finance at Texas Tech University stated our institution prepares 5-year capital project plans along with multi-year life safety and deferred maintenance plans emphasizing the importance of multiple levels of planning.

Planning Process Helps

Corporation and government agencies allocate resources and personnel for planning based on their goals, commonly referred to as strategic planning. Truly, individuals should also do the same. In fact, first lessons we learn in strategic planning is from our mothers and from close family members. How amazing is that our mothers plan for our monthly expenses which is some sort of short-term strategic planning. When some unexpected event happens, it is

amazing to see how our mothers pivot and make things work. This is crisis management 101!

In talking about crisis management, Ms. Sloan stated, “The term “crisis” is relative. Those that are unforeseen changes, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, require a cooperation throughout the institution to effectively make changes. The resources reserved for such crisis events allow for a smoother change without severe disruptions in operations. Flexibility should always exist to pivot if a strategy does not work.”

Planning is first step and will serve as an aide memoir in achieving our goals. But as things change one must be nimble enough so that goals can be accomplished. These acts involve thought process, analyzing situation and changing paths to attain results, engaging in good consultation and listening. Leader or good team player



Michael Ballew



Noel Sloan

takes all these steps into decision making.

“You can plan for anything, but you should keep in mind, it does not and in most cases cannot occur exactly as planned. Pivoting, redefining, replanning, re-strategizing, retraining, retooling and refocusing are a part of every successful project. In every circumstance you should be ready and able to pivot and be as nimble as possible to overcome any obstacle,” stated Sean Childers, who is responsible for strategic planning at Texas Tech University.

Better Planning and Crisis Handling

In summing up, Michael Ballew, Co-Founder & Principal of Anthem Executive stated, “No matter how hard we try to avoid it, we will all experience crisis at some time or another. The best leader will be ready to step in with grace and understanding. A strong leader will always plan, have contingencies, and consider others involved. When a crisis happens, one must step back and breathe and think carefully before speaking or acting. Remain calm to help calm others. Listen to others and their needs. Identify the issue(s), consider the alternatives. Then, and only then, take appropriate action. Exude a calm confidence and communicate openly to all involved. Choose words wisely, keeping mind that human emotion can run wild in a crisis. And most importantly, don't forget to take care of yourself. Breathe, rest as time allows, and tell yourself that you can do this. Your grace under pressure will go a long way towards leading others forward.” These are sage advice indeed!

Planning alone is not enough, but managing the plan when crisis hits, and altering goals towards successful finale are also important. PCM is an important growth strategy. 