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Our University – The Long and the Short of It

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Our University – The Long and the Short of It

Any organization, public or private, for profit or not-for-profit, large or small, new or old, and governmental or non governmental, lives and dies based on a long view. This does not mean the short-term view is unimportant. The difference is between long term strategy and short term tactic. Both are needed but without strategy, tactics may not produce desired results.

Undue focus on tactics will hamper, smother, and eventually snuff the life out of a bank, a car dealership, a church, a grocery store, a flower shop, and a university. When expediency leads the way, which is what a short-term or tactical view of an organization is always based on, long term goals are rarely achieved and only then by providence, not by plan.

It is not uncommon in any organization with a secure long-term view to experience an amortization curve in the implementation of new ideas and new vision. An amortization curve in a real estate mortgage implies that the real value: ownership is gained slowly at first. If you look carefully at a thirty-year mortgage, real value gains are almost nonexistent compared to the interest paid.

The long view guides the short view.

Over time, gains in ownership value pick up more precipitously relative to the amount of interest paid or cost. So it is in an organization with big ideas and a bright sense of the future. At first you expect higher costs and over time a significantly realized increase in value, if and only if, you continue to make the payments, if you continue to “stick to” the vision of the organization.

Political organizations, our towns, states and nation, and some state bureaucracies, have a difficult time assessing long-term costs because leadership needs short-term gains in order to address the issue of the immediate future.

Short views - all tactics - never produce a quality result.

It is completely common in organizations with an expediency-based short term view, to experience some achievement; however, the long-term prospects may not be bright, as expediency causes people to do things they would not otherwise do to achieve tactical success regardless of its strategic importance.

Vision.

When a swimmer is struggling against the current, about to drown, what is the first thing the lifeguard does? She tells the swimmer to relax. If the swimmer continues to fight for the next breath rather than think about the longer term nature of survival, sometimes the lifeguard may actually have to knock the

swimmer out. Incapacitate him because he is so focused on the next breath he cannot see a positive future.

Punch him in the nose.

Short-term view does the same thing to any organization. If it is all you see, it will blind all other thoughts and the organization will gasp for air. Either because of a plan with a natural and healthy amortization dip or because of the constant struggle against a tide of difficulty, without a long term view organizations will perish as surely as the swimmer for the misplaced focus on the next breath.

Properly focused the balance of views long and short term, strategic and tactical, must be carefully selected but should always be vision guided.

So it should be at a university.

That is the long and the short of it.