

# Not-for-Profit Industry

## Mission Driven...Off the Rails?

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- Effective mission statement?
- Inspiring vision statement?
- Thoughtful strategic plan?
- Hardworking board and staff?
- Goals accomplished?

You and your colleagues put a lot of time and effort into creating your nonprofit's goals. Together, you identified strategic objectives that would enable your organization to fulfill its mission or move ever closer to achieving it. Yet when the year ends, you find goals have not been met, and you sense staff are frustrated about it. How did this happen? No one is slouching; activity levels have been high for the organization, and it seems a lot has happened. So where did your organization get derailed? There is a good chance the answer falls into one of three categories.

### 1. GOALS NEVER OPERATIONALIZED

It is one thing to have a good strategic plan. It is another to have thought through the detailed tactics needed to implement that plan. Part of the planning process should include defining the steps and activities needed to accomplish each goal, the resources (either financial or human) required, and possible impediments. This more detailed planning can be done by staff or a subset of the group who developed the strategic plan, but it must be done. It should be thought through with specific actions, deadlines, and individuals responsible for leading or executing each effort. Additionally, it needs to be reviewed regularly, ideally with the board during meetings. A lack of specificity will often lead to the next possible derailment.



### 2. DISTRACTIONS FROM THE OUTSIDE

It is common for foundations and nonprofits to be inundated with good ideas presented by individuals or groups who sincerely believe they have a solution to your mission. I can't count how many times I have had good ideas brought forward by well-meaning folks. They can solve this problem, if only they can get some resources (financial or human) to execute their program initiative. They truly believe in their solution and are so vested in it that they believe you should be as well. Sometimes their ideas have merit, but often they become distractions that prevent you from accomplishing your goals. I have found that the only effective way to stay on task is to hold up the operationalized strategic plan like garlic to a vampire and tell these well-meaning persons/groups, "This is what we have committed to accomplish and what we will be putting our resources into. Without questioning the merit of your program initiative, it is not in our plan for this year. We may evaluate it for our next planning cycle." As difficult as these outside distractions can be, they are not nearly as challenging as the final derailment.

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### 3. DISTRACTIONS FROM THE INSIDE

Committed volunteers are wonderful ... until they are not. Typically, volunteers, especially board members, are highly vested in the operationalized strategic plan because they were part of developing it. But a well-meaning board member, especially one in a leadership position, can derail progress toward your goals if they come up with “just one more idea” or “something we should try” after the planning process is complete. Again, it is possible that an opportunity that can’t be passed up presents itself. But more often than not, these new programs, events, fundraisers, or initiatives will distract from the primary plan. The reality is that strategy is about choices; to win, an organization must choose to do some things and actively choose NOT to do others. When board members come forward with ideas, it is often a challenge for staff leadership to dissuade them. Remind them of the process (that they were involved in), how all the board is committed to moving in the agreed-upon direction, and that following this plan is the best way to maintain focus. These are difficult conversations to have, but they would be even more difficult if the planning process has not been thorough and inclusive.

### STAY ON THE RAILS

Strategic planning doesn’t end when your board approves a plan. You need to flesh out the details as part of the planning process. When you do this, it becomes much easier to devote your organization’s entire resources to working toward the plan’s success. As you plan, you need to define specific tactics, agree who will do what by when, and allocate resources. Once the plan is set, you need to exhibit strong, discerning leadership to execute the plan without distractions.

It is entirely possible that situations will change or an unanticipated opportunity outside the plan will present itself. Those instances are usually few and typically will be easily recognizable. More often than not, however, you will need to focus on keeping the organization moving along the agreed-upon path without internal or external distractions. When you do, you will end your year with completed goals and a sense of accomplishment throughout your organization.

*The preceding is an article by Bill Hoffman, CEO of [Bill Hoffman & Associates, LLC](#), a Tampa-based consulting firm with national-level expertise in nonprofit leadership transitions, and organizational and board development.*

### Contact Us

If you would like to discuss how Cole, Newton & Duran’s not-for-profit team can help your organization with its tax, accounting, or consulting needs, please feel free to give me a call.

Denise Scally, CPA  
Assurance Practice Leader  
734.427.2030  
[dscally@cndcpa.com](mailto:dscally@cndcpa.com)

**CND** Cole, Newton  
& Duran  
Certified Public Accountants

Cole, Newton & Duran CPAs  
33762 Schoolcraft Road  
Livonia, MI 48150  
P: 734.427.2030  
F: 734.427.3004  
W: [www.cndcpa.com](http://www.cndcpa.com)