

SCORE 5 Tips

5 Tips on Technology Planning

1. Create a master plan for technology, just as you would draw up a business plan, a budget or a marketing plan.
2. Design the plan so that it supports your business strategy and goals. Use it to guide technology buying decisions.
3. Think of technology purchases as investments, not costs. And, remember, when you have an overall plan, your company avoids wasting money on unnecessary purchases or quick fixes.
4. Start by determining your company's needs. Look at what problems need to be solved and how technology can help.
5. Get expert help to guide you. Check your *Yellow Pages* under "Computers-System Designers & Consultants," or ask your local chamber of commerce. As always, get references.

5 Tips to Help You Prepare for Growth Spurts

1. Get outside help. Growth is tricky and stressful, so smart business owners rely on outside assistance—such as consultants or SCORE volunteers—to get them through it.
2. Hire ahead of the need. If you're growing fast, add a chief operating officer and/or chief financial officer—even if only on a part-time or consulting basis.
3. Change your own role. Stop "doing everything yourself." Delegate day-to-day operations to others and become the leader, the strategic thinker and the planner—in other words, the CEO.
4. Weed out customers that don't contribute sufficiently to your bottom line. Let go of those who distract you from your goal—for example, because they are outside the area in which you want to work or take too much of your time.
5. Have reserve capital to weather growth's inevitable bumps. Reserves don't have to be all cash—they can be excellent receivables or something else that can be turned into cash quickly.

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5 Tips for Hands-On Leadership

1. Be there. Entrepreneurs warn that a successful business can slip when an owner is not there at least part of every day, keeping in touch with how things are going.
2. Set an example for working hard. One wholesale bakery owner sometimes sleeps on the couch in his office so he can be there when the early shift comes in at 4 a.m.
3. Don't confuse "hands-on" managing with micro-management. Set objectives and offer guidance, but don't make employees do every little thing your way. Gauge what they do by the results.
4. Understand your business down to the last detail. The founder of a toy-store chain visits the stores and spends time doing each job (selling, clerking, etc.) and observing customers' reactions.
5. Stay in touch with "stakeholders"—including customers, employees and suppliers.

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5 Tips on Cultivating Confident Employees

1. Ask them to be responsible for progressively larger projects.
2. Use them as examples (in their presence) when describing to others how to do something.
3. Give them feedback at various times during a project—not just at its completion.
4. Send a note of praise to them or better still, to their direct boss.
5. Ask for their opinions and advice on matters not necessarily related to their normal duties.

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5 Tips on Effective Leadership

1. Communicate clearly and routinely. Lay out your company goals and principles in a mission statement and keep sharing your vision with your employees.
2. Involve employees in setting objectives. Give them feedback on how they are progressing toward meeting those targets.
3. Give your people authority, then hold them accountable. But don't go after them personally when things go wrong. Find out first if the process is at fault.
4. Be accountable yourself. Install an advisory board or executive team to help you make good strategic decisions and give you feedback on your own performance.
5. Be trustworthy and extend trust to your employees. That will help you earn their loyalty and strengthen your company.

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5 Tips on Exemplary Leadership

1. Give employees their freedom. Communicate the goals and let them figure out how to reach those goals. They want control over their working lives.
2. Create an environment that encourages energy and spirit. That leads to happy customers.
3. Strive to help employees feel that when they have accomplished the business's goals, they have also accomplished their own personal goals.
4. Create a sense of meaningful purpose. Most workers want to feel they are engaged in something "larger than themselves."
5. Recognize that leadership means responsibility and stewardship. "Leadership is not rank, privileges, titles, or money," says management thinker Peter F. Drucker.

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5 Tips on Creating an Innovative Environment

1. Show your employees that you think of innovation as an ongoing process. Some ideas will work and many won't. Keep experimenting.
2. Listen, listen, listen. Innovation is a collaborative process.
3. Be open to "accidents," the unexpected connections that spark new ideas. Inspiration comes from everywhere—often from outside your own field.
4. Draw on your own employees—they know the company's problems and goals best. This is probably one time you don't need outside consultants.
5. Be patient. Creativity can't be hurried.

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5 Tips on Empowering Your Employees

1. Organize an orientation session; answer the most frequently asked questions and walk employees through solving problems common to your business.
2. Provide employees with the history behind procedures and policies. Background is essential for good decision making.
3. Furnish the necessary resources. Whether it is a list of your contacts or where to find appropriate forms, give your employees the opportunity to succeed.
4. Teach employees where to turn when they can't solve a problem; always going to the president should not be the solution.
5. Learn to delegate. Delegating tasks will build confidence and teach employees the necessary steps to follow in your business.

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5 Tips on Knowing When You're Getting Stale

1. If you've been running your business 10 years or more, it's probably time for fresh leadership. Consider bumping yourself up to chairman and getting a new CEO.
2. Recognize that fatigue and boredom are signs you've been at the helm too long.
3. Answer honestly: Are you resistant to new ideas and risks? If so, you may be impeding your company's progress.
4. Ask yourself if you are still growing and learning. If not, that's another sign of personal stagnation as a leader.
5. If you think you're becoming too set in your views, surround yourself with people who challenge your thinking.

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5 Tips on Managing Yourself

1. Recognize when you've outrun your abilities. When one entrepreneur saw that her skills were not adequate to manage her company, she hired a president to handle day-to-day operations.
2. Get a CEO coach. Skilled consultants can help you learn how to take your company to the next level. SCORE can help.
3. Open yourself to being transformed. Listen, really listen, to employees. Let go of old notions of leadership (managing by fear, for example).
4. Be self-aware. Many business owners say self-awareness is essential to understanding what leadership style works for you.
5. Be a servant leader. Consider it your responsibility to serve employees and customers.

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5 Tips on Teaching Employees to "Own" Their Work

1. Include them in long- and short-term planning efforts.
2. Ask for their input on projects for which they are held responsible.
3. Include them on top-level discussions, conferences and meetings when appropriate.
4. Allow them to byline the work they wrote or to speak at the presentation they helped prepare.
5. Help them to become more vested in the work by asking for their opinion. Ask what, if anything, should be done to make the next project easier.

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5 Tips on What Employees Want from You as a Leader

1. Employees want to trust you and you to trust them. Begin by being trustworthy and extending trust.
2. Employees want good two-way communication. Begin by being a good listener.
3. Employees want to be challenged. Set forth your vision and goals clearly and then let your workers exercise their creativity and authority in meeting your goals.
4. Employees want accountability. Not only should you hold them accountable for their own performance but you should measure your own performance as well.
5. Employees want recognition. Offer praise and express appreciation at every opportunity.

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5 Tips on How to Be More Efficient

1. Don't start your office organizing by shopping for containers. Survey what files and books you need to store, measure them, then go to the store.
2. File, Act or Toss papers and emails instead of letting them pile high on your desk. You should be able to make a decision immediately as papers cross your desk.
3. Take advantage of electronic devices such as email, PDAs and database file management to categorize work.
4. Choose the calendar system that's best for your organizational style, and stick with it. If it is computer-based, back up, back up, back up!
5. Manage your time ruthlessly. In a sense, it is what you are selling.

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5 Tips on How to Stop the Work Pile-Up

1. Discard old magazine, books and articles. The information is probably stale by now anyway.
2. Maintain a list of sources (actual and potential) by topic. If you need the information again, you can contact your source and get updated information.
3. Minimize duplicates of documents. Keep the original in a plastic sleeve to prevent damage and one copy on hand for easy circulation.
4. Keep files current. Retain only the final version of letters and proposals. After all, the old versions primarily contained material you decided not to use!
5. Streamline supplies. Get rid of bulky, space-taking supplies you don't use. Post a list of basic supplies on the inside drawer or cabinet door to remind you of what you do need.

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5 Tips on Preparing for Disaster Recovery

1. Recognize that your business can suffer a natural disaster. Small businesses the world over have been affected by disasters such as hurricanes, tornadoes, floods, earthquakes, tsunamis, volcanic eruptions and fire.
2. Develop your recovery plan before disaster strikes. Make sure everyone in your company is familiar with the plan and knows what steps to take in emergencies.
3. Have adequate insurance. You'll need coverage not only for property damage and loss (including inventory), but also for business interruption.
4. Draw up a list of telephone numbers for all employees. Assign certain employees to call others if disaster strikes. That way, you can learn who is all right and who needs help, and you can quickly communicate instructions about your business.
5. Don't forget your computer system. Keep backup programs and duplicate records (accounts receivable, client information, and the like) at a different, safe site.

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5 Tips for Building Your Referral Business

1. Referrals always begin with providing your current customers with prompt, reliable, quality service. They'll be happy to spread the word on your behalf—often without you having to ask.
2. Ask your current customers if they know of any colleagues who are looking for the kind of service you provide. Follow up with a call or letter to those businesses. Make sure you get your customer's permission to cite them as a referral source.
3. If a customer compliments you on your work, ask them to put it in writing for use as a testimonial in your marketing materials. Again, make sure you have their permission to use their name for that purpose.
4. Always acknowledge a customer's referral with a thank-you note or phone call. If you send a card, consider including a coupon to popular restaurant or discount on a future purchase.
5. Many retail and service businesses lend themselves well to formal referral incentive programs with cash, gifts, or discounts. Make sure these "rewards" fit in your budget, and that you have clear rules and guidelines (e.g., only one referral reward per customer during a defined period).

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5 Tips for Great Telephone Customer Service

1. Never let the telephone ring more than twice before answering. The last thing a customer wants to do is wait, no matter how routine the call may be. Greet your caller in a warm, professional manner.
2. Document everything that happens with the customer's call, including time and date; a description of the question, problem or request; actions taken; and any follow-up contact. Keep the information on file, particularly for your regular customers.
3. If you're short of time and the service call is not urgent, politely explain the situation to the customer and get his/her contact information, including a convenient time when you can call back and discuss the issue at length.
4. If you need to use automated answering system, your customer service line should be one of the first options. Limit any subsequent menus for routing calls by specifying to as few selection options as possible.
5. Always follow up with customers to make sure the issue was addressed to his/her satisfaction. You may receive some valuable suggestions for improving your service or—even better—a happy customer who will refer your business to others.

5 Tips on Hiring Quality and Reliable People

1. Examine your own skills carefully. Know your own strengths and weaknesses and hire to complement your skills, not duplicate them.
2. Assure yourself plenty of applicants by casting a broad net. Interview applicants in a structured way by asking all applicants for a job the same questions.
3. Draw applicants to your Web site by placing the Web address in all advertisements.
4. Use an 800 phone or fax number as a toll-free way for applicants to contact you.
5. Offer a signing bonus—anything from \$25 to \$2,500 could be an incentive to help bring on a fence-sitting applicant. This is a common practice for "super starts."

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