

THE DONALD COOPER CORPORATION

Speaking and coaching internationally on management, marketing and profitability



Management tool #A-4:©

As business owners, leaders & managers, our 1st job is 'clarity':

Regardless of what anyone tells you, as business owners, leaders and managers, our first job is 'clarity'. Without 'clarity' at every level of our business there can be no clear focus, compelling value, team commitment, urgency or accountability. And 'clarity' begins at the top. If we as leaders are not clear about the 10 things listed below, who else in the organization could possibly be? Lack of clarity, urgency and accountability are three of the biggest challenges in many businesses today...but it all starts with 'clarity'.

I'm sorry that there are '10 clarities'. That's a lot. It would be so much easier if there were just 3 or 4 ...but there aren't. Management is complicated.

Print a copy of the '10 Clarities' listed below for each member of your management and supervisory team (yourself included) and, working separately, use the boxes on the left to rate the business's clarity from their perspective, on a scale of 1 to 10 (with 10 being 'we're very clear'). Collect the completed sheets then summarize and analyze the results. Is there 'clarity...or not so much? Do you and your team agree on the degree of clarity in the business in each of the '10 clarities'? Often, the 'boss' thinks that there's absolute clarity...but no one else sees it that way.

Then, use the 'calculator model' at the top of Page 3 to determine your businesses' total **Clarity Score** out of a possible 100%.

The 10 'Clarities: Rate your business on each of the '10 clarities', on a scale of 1-10 in the boxes below:

1. Clarity about who our **target customers** are and what life's really like for them. What they value, what they fear and what they really want from us. When buying, using, maintaining or disposing of what we sell, are we clear about what they're really trying to do, what they want or need to know, how do they want to feel and about how much do they expect to pay?
2. Clarity about the **compelling customer value and experiences** that we commit to always deliver. Compelling value and experiences that will give us a clear competitive advantage and make us the 'wise choice' for our target customers. Value and experiences that will 'grab' our target customers, clearly differentiate us from our competitors, make us 'famous' ...and grow our bottom line.
3. Clarity about how we'll effectively **communicate** our compelling value story in a crowded and cynical market. There's no point being the best if we're also the best kept secret.
4. Clarity about the extraordinary **future that we commit to create (our 3 to 5-year Vision)**. How our business must be different and will be different in 3 to 5 years. How big must we be? How big do we want to be? How 'good' must we be to be a market leader? How good do we want to be? Are we willing to do the work to become what we must become?

How might our business model have to change? What are the disruptive market-related, technology-related or societal changes coming down the road that could change how we do

business, who our competitors are and what our customers value? Will we become the industry disruptors, or will we become irrelevant? What or who could replace us?

There's huge confusion about what a **business Vision** is, what it isn't and whether it even makes sense to have one. Businesses waste thousands of dollars to create vague, airy-fairy 'aspirational' Vision Statements that achieve nothing. To be effective, our Vision Statement should be a clear, specific and measurable, 1-page statement of what we commit to become in 3 to 5 years. It will inform, focus, challenge and inspire everyone on our team from top to bottom...and contribute considerably to our 'clarity'.

- 5.** Clarity about **how we will get to that extraordinary future.** Specifically, each year, what decisions will we commit to make and what action will we commit to take (**our annual Mission**) to get to our 3 to 5-year Vision?

Note: For help in creating:

- a) a clear '**Statement of Purpose**,
- b) a 3 to 5 year '**Operational Vision**' on one piece of paper,
- c) an annual '**Mission**'...and,
- d) a specific, detailed step-by step '**Commitment to Implementation**'...

...for your business, you can purchase our 34-page, step-by-step '**Vision Critical Guide**' as a downloadable PDF, for just \$24⁰⁰ at donaldcooper.com.

- 6.** Clarity about the extraordinary **bottom line** that we commit to generate. A bottom line that generates funds to reinvest in the business, pay our staff well and provide our investors with a competitive rate of return.

- 7.** Clarity about the **talent, team and organizational structure** we need to make all of this happen. The real battle in business today is the battle for talent. How clear are we about the employment experience and career opportunities that we commit to deliver in order to attract, lead, engage and retain a dedicated top-performing talented team. Is there clarity about how we measure and reward performance and how we deal with non-performance?

Then, that talented team must work within an organizational structure with clear responsibilities, authority and accountability.

- 8.** Clarity about how **we must grow as leaders and managers** and what talent and experience we need to add to our management and supervisory team...and who is being trained to replace us.

- 9.** Clarity about the **technology, systems, processes, equipment and facilities** we need to be innovative, cost-effective, customer-centric and profitable industry leaders and disruptors ...and to make our Vision happen effectively.

- 10.** Clarity about how we commit **to behave** along the way. The values, ethics and standards that we commit to live by and the culture we commit to create.

Your individual 'Clarity Score' out of 100 (the total of your scores in the 10 boxes).

Note: To calculate your total company 'Clarity Score' out of a possible 100%, total the individual 'Clarity Scores' from the bottom of each team member's completed survey. Then, divide that total by the number of team members who completed the survey. For example: If your total of all scores is 528 and 8 team members completed the survey, your total company 'Clarity Score' is 528 divided by 8, which is a 'Clarity Score' of 66 out of 100.

Our 'Clarity Score' is ____%. The closer our score is to '100%', the more clarity we have in our business. What does the variation in individual 'Clarity Scores' and the total 'Clarity Score' tell us about what needs doing, fixing, clarifying or communicating in our business or department?

1. Do we need more clarity at and from the top...and in which of the 10 key areas? What action do we commit to take to create this improved clarity? It must start at the top. When will this happen? Specifically, what will be done, by whom, by when, at what cost, communicated how and measured how?

2. Do we need more effective and consistent communication in all or parts of the business so that everyone is 'on the same page'? Specifically, how will we achieve this more effective communication? How and when will we measure our improvement? Will it be by using this Biz Tool #A-4 again at a set time in the future?

Note: Forget 'goals, targets, aims and objectives'. Let's talk about 'commitments':

You'll notice that throughout the listing of the '10 clarities' on pages 1 & 2, there is consistent reference to 'commitments' and 'committing'.

Most businesses make the mistake of talking about 'goals, targets, aims and objectives'. They have sales 'targets', customer satisfaction 'goals', profit 'objectives' and they 'aim' to be a good employer, etc. One of my recent Business Coaching clients proudly stated on its website, "*We strive to be ethical.*" What the heck is that?

'Goals, targets, aims and objectives' are weak and wishy-washy words that leave way too much wiggle room to not perform. I believe they should all be replaced with one powerful word...**commitments**. We need to stop 'aiming' and start committing.

There's a huge difference between a goal or a target and a commitment. A 'goal' is something we score sometimes and don't score other times...and that's life. At least we tried. A 'target' is something we hit sometimes and miss other times...and it's OK. It's just a target. But a 'commitment' is something fundamentally different. It feels different, because it *is* different.

Some folks argue that we're just playing with words here...but it's much more than that. You see, when we change our language, we change our business culture. You can't have an engaged, committed and effective team without clear commitments.

So, please, never again talk about goals, targets, aims and objectives in your business. From now on, in every memo, every meeting, every email and every conversation, talk about your clear commitments to customers, to your team, to efficiency and profitability, to safety, to the environment and to your community. You'll be amazed at the difference it will make. We become what we speak.

Part 2: To improve clarity and engagement in your business, work with your Management Team to ask and answer the following 16 questions:

What's working and what's *not* working in our business?

"The beginning of wisdom is the recognition of reality!" Use the questions below to improve clarity and engagement by finding out what's working and what's not working in your business...and where you need to improve. Set aside 90 minutes with your management team to consider these 16 questions. Print and distribute the questions one week before the scheduled meeting so that your team can prepare. Answer and discuss honestly and the results will amaze you. You will likely need more than one session to complete this important project.

As you and your team examine and discuss these 16 key questions, for each idea that you want to explore further and for each action you decide to take, be specific about what will be done, by whom, by when, at what cost, communicated how, measured how and rewarded how. Remember, businesses do not die from a single shot to the head. They die, slowly but surely from a 1,000 uncompleted tasks.

- 1. Do we truly **understand our various groups of target customers** and are we passionately committed to delighting and amazing them at every touch point, every time? Or, are we trying to please everyone just a little bit or, even worse, have customers become a necessary annoyance that we barely tolerate?

Discussion: _____

- 2. Do we have the **'right stuff'**? Given who our target customers are, which of our products or services are:
a) ___ clearly world-class, b) ___ undifferentiated, boringly mediocre...or, c) ___ 3rd rate?

What are we doing to ensure that we have 'the right stuff' 3 to 5 years from now?

Do our **customer experiences** at every 'touch point' delight our target customers, clearly differentiate us from our competitors and make us 'famous'? Or, are we stressing, confusing, disappointing or frustrating our customers in any way? Do we go out of our way for them? Do we create 'fans'?

Discussion: _____

3. Marketing: What is our clear and compelling value message? Are we consistently communicating that value story to the right people and are we doing that clearly, congruently and convincingly in everything we do? There's no point in being the best if we're also the best kept secret.

Are we using readily available systems and technology to understand, serve, communicate with, thank and build relationships with customers as individuals? Are we focused on doing what we do so well that we become 'famous' to our target customers? 'Famous' is good.

Do we use Social Media effectively?

Do we have a Media Database and are we using it to build relationships with the local media, industry media, bloggers and key influencers in our market?

Discussion: _____

4. Pricing: Are we charging enough or have we taken the lazy approach and made it all about low price? Getting just 5% more for what we sell can improve our bottom line by 60% to 100%. Or, are we greedily over-charging, damaging to our Brand and making us vulnerable to more honest, innovative or efficient competitors? What would we have to do wonderfully to make it **NOT** all about price?

Discussion: _____

5. Profitability: Is our business consistently generating a Return-On-Investment (ROI) of at least 8%? If not, it's a hobby. 10% to 18% is better. **Note:** For guidance on how to plan and improve our profitability, check out Biz Tools #B-4, B-5 and B-6.

Discussion: _____

- 6. Do we have a **clear Vision** of what our business *must* become to be a profitable market leader in 3 to 5 years? Do we have a **clear Vision** of what we, as owners, leaders and managers, *want* the business to become in 3-5 years?

How 'good' must we be in 3-5 years? How will our business be different...and, realistically, do we have the burning desire, the right business model, the team and the ability to get there?

As leaders, who must we become and how must we grow to take this business where it must go?

Will the **type of business and industry** that we're in and the **specific market that we serve** be a financially and emotionally healthy place to be in 5 to 7 years? Or, is it even now? If not, what's our reinvention or exit strategy from our industry or market...and what's next for us?

Note: For help in creating a clear operational Vision for the future of your business, purchase Donald's complete 34-page '**Vision Critical Guide**' for just \$24 at donaldcooper.com.

Discussion: _____

- 7. Do we have **the right talent, team, leadership and organizational structure** to deliver our value promise, become our Vision and grow our bottom line? Are we recruiting people who fit our culture and values and who can help us achieve our 3 to 5-year Vision? And then are we continually coaching, training, encouraging and communicating with them to help them to perform and to grow? We can't grow our business without growing our people.

Discussion: _____

12. Do we have **the right technology, equipment, systems and processes** to create the world-class operating efficiency and customer service that we need to be service-competitive, price-competitive and profitable?

Note: See Biz Tool #A-6 for '9 ways that technology can deliver the competitive advantage you need.'

Discussion: _____

13. At all levels in the business, do we as leaders, managers and supervisors **have the information we need** (and the ability to use it) to measure performance and profitability, make good business decisions and proactively communicate with and serve our customers? Or, do we just 'hope for the best' at the end of the year? There's no excuse for not having this information in today's world....and not having it puts us at a huge competitive disadvantage.

Specifically, what financial, management or customer information systems do we need to sell more proactively and manage more effectively...and what authority and empowerment do we need to give others in the business so that information is used more effectively and decisions are made more efficiently?

Discussion: _____

- 16. For us, as business owners and managers, are we building **an extraordinary business as part of our extraordinary lives**...or have we made the business our 'neat fort' where we go to feel safe, comfortable and in control...or to hide from our spouses, our kids and all the other things that we could do, experience and become in our lives? Business is where we go to engage in reality. A 'neat fort' is where we go to hide from reality. *'Don't make the business your 'Neat Fort!'*

Discussion: _____

In conclusion: Having worked through this Biz Tool, you and your Team should have much improved clarity about all aspects of your business and a list of decisions to be made and actions to be taken. Remember, for each project or initiative that you agree to and every action you commit to take, be specific about what will be done, by whom, by when, at what cost, communicated how, measured how and rewarded how. And, who will follow up, at what intervals, to make sure that commitments are being met?

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