



## SmallBusiness

### FACT SHEET: WHAT IS ACTION PLANNING?

Action planning is a process which will help you to focus your ideas and to decide what steps you need to take to achieve particular goals that you set. It is a statement of what you want to achieve over a given period of time. Preparing an action plan is a good way to help you to reach your objectives in business and in life.

An effective action plan should give you a concrete timetable and set of clearly defined steps to help you to reach your objective, rather than aimlessly wondering what to do next. It helps you to focus your ideas and provides you with an answer to the question: “What do I do to achieve my objective?”

#### Action planning involves:

- Identifying your objectives
- Setting objectives which are achievable & measurable
- Prioritising your tasks effectively
- Identifying the steps needed to achieve your goals
- Using lists
- Being able to work effectively under pressure
- Completing work to a deadline
- Having a contingency plan

It’s OK to have several objectives, but you will need to make a separate action plan for each, otherwise things get confused.

#### The main steps in preparing an action plan are as follows:

- **Have a clear objective.** “Where do I want to be?” To be motivating a goal needs to be challenging enough to stimulate us, but not too difficult or far reaching to become demoralising. It should be just outside your comfort zone: stretching but not highly stressful. Be precise about what you want to achieve.

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- **List the benefits you would gain by achieving your goal.**
- **Start with what you will do NOW.** There is no point in having an action plan that will start in six months' time.
- **Define clearly the steps you will take.** "How do I get there?" Think of all the possible things you could do to take you closer to achieving your goal, no matter how small. Break down any large steps into smaller components, so it doesn't seem so difficult to achieve. What is the biggest obstacle? What could go wrong?
- **Identify the end point for each step and** give yourself a small reward for achieving it!
- **Arrange the steps in a logical, chronological order and put a date by which you will start each step.** Put these dates into your diary or onto a calendar. Try to set yourself weekly goals: what part of your pharmacy business will you focus on, which staff do you need to get on board and what skills will they need etc.
- **Try to map out several paths to your goal,** then if one becomes blocked another is available. You need to consider if your plans are attainable and what would happen if you failed to achieve your goals. Build flexibility into your planning. People tend to strongly underestimate how long a project will take, especially if working in a group because they tend to visualise everything going to plan with no problems.

Think about the type of problems you might encounter at each step. What barriers might get in the way of achieving your goal? What you would do to overcome these problems? Concentrate 10% on the problem and 90% on the solution. Try to turn every problem into a challenge and every challenge into an opportunity.

- **Review your progress.** Keep a diary or blog of your daily activities and record your progress as things happen: this keeps your plan as concrete as possible. A good time to start your review is about two weeks after you have begun. Review how far you have got towards your objective, identify any mistakes you made and what you can learn from them, look at any new ideas or opportunities that may have presented themselves and then revise your plan to incorporate these.
- **Mix with positive people** who will encourage you to keep going! Tell your business partners or colleagues about your goals. They will provide support when the going gets tough and will also give you an incentive to keep going as you'll feel embarrassed if you have to tell them you've given up! If you take a stand that is visible to others, a drive arises to maintain that stand in order to look consistent. Public commitment makes people stubborn.

*From the Excellent Influence: The Psychology of Persuasion by Professor Robert Cialdini (1998)*