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The **12 steps** for Aquatic Professionals who wants to lead their organization towards more than single focused programming.

1. **What does your picture of success look like?** Sharing administrative time with daily “hands on” responsibilities is a challenge. You have to have a personal vision and a passion for you goal. There has to be an underlying motivation for you to want to be the expert in charge.
 - a. There are two forms of motivation: internal and external. Your internal motivation realizes what the business will accomplish short term. Your external motivation defines how the business will affect other people.
 - b. It doesn't exist unless you write it down –even if only on a post-it-note! Write down your internal motivation phrase and share it with others. It provides you with direction and self-confidence. When people hear and understand your objective, they can become motivated to help you.
 - c. Then record your external motivation phrase, describing what you want to accomplish with your leadership. What problems does it solve and who will benefit and how? People have a self-interest in benefits, and they'll become advocates for your plan.
2. **Share the vision** – when your clients or the people you work with hear your idea or plan, they should immediately ask themselves "How will I or someone I know benefit from this idea?" To motivate others to help you succeed, you need to develop a “vision message” that helps people immediately recognize the value you offer. Use the “elevator pitch” concept. If you only have a minute-or-so riding with someone on an elevator, how will you convey your message? Your vision message has to be a brief, powerful message that's based on the benefit you offer to your clients. They will then become an advocate and share your vision. To develop the message:
 - a. First, write down how you will help your clients. **Bold** any action key words – these are your Values.
 - b. Use these Values to form a short statement that focuses on the key benefit you will provide.
3. **There is no substitute for experience** – Organizations pay allot of money to professional consultants to find out what people really want and how they want it. You can help yourself by researching and visiting existing businesses. Not necessarily internet searches (although they are valuable in their own right), get out and talk to people – those who have succeeded to discover what really works. This real-world information you gather will save you time, money and frustration.
 - a. In addition, research recent articles written about your industry.
 - b. Investigate the marketplace and report the latest trends and best strategies.
 - c. Find new resources, outstanding ideas and new contacts that will help you grow.
 - d. Try to keep your unique ideas at the forefront – don't lose the good ones.
4. **Record your planning** – Use a logbook (daily planner) and create a paper trail-- track all meeting dates, attendees and discussions. This will be a great resource later on. Sample of things you may want to be very detailed on:
 - a. Things you discover for which insurance is either too costly or unavailable.
 - b. Types of corporate or business structures you considered.
 - c. Consult a lawyer early in the startup process, and obtain advice on how to best protect your business.
 - d. For great referrals, contact your local SBA office or chamber of commerce.
5. **Don't sell used-cars** – No quick one-liners – No “trying to convince”. Develop a one-page script. When you speak positively about your vision it inspires others to help you succeed rather than question your abilities. Your one-pager can quickly generate trust by showing key supporters the value you offer and how you will successfully deliver on your promises. In your script:

- a. Confirm your passion and share your successful experiences
- b. Focus on the benefits you bring
- c. Show how it will work
- d. Reference where it is now working
- e. Share a brief biography of yourself
- f. Give all of your contact information.

Your one-pager becomes the foundation for all your planning. It can be used to open conversations or when speaking to potential clients.

6. No one said this was going to be EASY. - As you begin developing your plan, you will uncover unforeseen pitfalls and setbacks. This doesn't mean you are no longer passionate about vision, it means "welcome to the real world". Never ignore a problem – they seldom go away by themselves. This is what planning is all about.

- a. Review everything you have accomplished and list any opportunities you uncovered.
- b. Write down any challenges you've discovered and mark them either solvable (if there's a way to counter them) or "to be decided later" TBDL.
- c. Create action steps to manage any TBDL challenges by connecting with someone you trust. Ask that person how he or she would overcome the challenge and turn it into an opportunity.
- d. Create your own system for taking advantage of and the actions you will take to counter any challenges.
- e. Promise yourself to work through any challenges you encounter.

7. Always plan to improve your plan - Passion can cloud judgment. Automatically thinking that you know what is best for your clients can be a pitfall. Rather than lead by committee, try gathering your supporters into focus groups. They can provide honest and objective feedback on how to improve your methods. It's important to obtain these fresh ideas early in your planning process. Think of your focus group as a business meeting.

Open by reading your one-pager and then ask for honest feedback:

- a. "How can I improve my idea?"
- b. "Is my vision appropriate?"

During the session, keep an open mind and don't defend yourself. Write down every idea. Afterward, analyze the ideas, and keep and implement those that are most useful. To continually discover new ways to improve every aspect of your planning you may need to hold more than one focus group gathering.

8. Evaluate the Cost of Doing Business – You cannot lead if you do not understand every aspect of what it takes to operate the business. If all you want to do is manage or all you want to do is coach, you need to re-evaluate your plans. This does not mean that you will be working 80 hours every week, but you will have to spend some time in the proverbial pool to understand what it takes to learn how to swim.

9. Create Your Strategy – you do not need to persuade people they need something; you need to tell the right people about the benefit your plan provides.

- a. What is the unique benefit you offer?
- b. Create a list of who needs that benefit.
- c. Implement your favorite idea. Choose one program you would love to change or add. Test it. If the idea works, do it again. If it doesn't, try another. This verifies sustainability.

10. Value Received Pricing - Set Prices for Success The service must be priced to entice clients and cover your overhead, operational, labor and marketing costs. And most important, you need to make a profit. To do that:

- a. Define your personal financial goals. Your goals impact your pricing strategy.
Do you want to have allot of money in reserve or do you want to fund club development activities?
- b. Investigate market trends. Pricing is subject to market forces and client demands. Obtain information to help you predict your market in terms of growth prospects and trends.
- c. Obtain competitive information. Clients price shop. Make sure you provide special features for which clients are willing to pay more; your price has to be competitive.
- d. Cover the cost of doing business. At first, you may be using your "best guess" cost estimates. As the business grows, track your real costs of doing business, and reflect them in the pricing structure.

11: Organize and Present – Planning sheets define the action steps and resources associated with key day-to-day business activities. They enable you to identify, develop and test your business planning which saves you time and frustration. They will be the start of your "operations manual" - the policies and procedures for running the business. Writing everything down shows people how you will conduct business, which makes it easier for them to have confidence in you. Develop your own planning sheets using these steps:

- a. Name the plan and put it at the top of each page--for example, "aquatic exercise program"

- b. Create a three-column table beneath the name of the plan. The first column
- c. lists the action steps necessary to complete the plan. The second shows the person who is responsible, and the third states the expected time frame for completing each step.
Objectives – Strategies - Tactics
- c. Create planning sheets for every area of your business as appropriate.
- d. In addition, improve your planning sheets by periodically reviewing them with staff and supporters.

12. Live a Business Action Plan –This is really the start of a whole new process. Similar to a business plan, the business action plan synthesizes your research and describes what you will do. It identifies the necessary steps you will take to keep the momentum going.

- Start your plan by clearly defining your goals.
- State your plans main benefit.
- Review your one-pager
- Break your plan into sections by outlining the operational and administrative areas of the business, including legal, marketing, pricing, finance and internal process controls.
- In each section, explain the work, research and market testing you've completed to date.
- Conclude each section by specifically stating the next action steps you will take to create results.

Your business action plan continually evolves as the club evolves and grows. It monitors and allows you to evaluate what has worked to date--resulting in continued success.
