

Just ask almost any successful parent or teacher, small business owner, corporate leader, politician, medical director or military officer. Anyone, any group or organization with important goals. They're likely to agree with the simple proposition that in order to achieve great results, you need great plans.

The effectiveness of careful planning comes across resoundingly in General Tommy Franks' extremely well received book, "American Soldier" (HarperCollins Publishers, 2004). Franks provides a fascinating look into his own and many of his coalition teammates' roles in fighting the Taliban, Al Qaeda and Saddam Hussein's forces during the wars designated Operation Enduring Freedom and Operation Iraqi Freedom. They had some of the best soldiers, sailors, airmen and operatives in history . . . and the best planners who articulated troop and equipment buildup, logistics requirements, resource allocation and contingency details.

Anticipating regime change in Iraq, General Franks noted that the final operations plan "would be hundreds of pages long, with thousands of pages of specialized appendices covering everything from basing and staging to emergency landing fields, to the frequencies of enemy air defense radars, to the number of MRE's to be shipped to the forces."

Closer to home for many of us, the importance of solid planning stands out like a sentinel in a red jacket in everyday business and commerce. Milestone charts, customer feedback targets, product performance data and real-time scheduling that includes training and development (think UPS or Amazon, for example) are some of the drivers of success. And what good teacher wouldn't vouch for the importance of lesson plans?

As Richard Cushing once said, "Always plan ahead. It wasn't raining when Noah built the ark." □ Or, if you prefer to listen to a great football coach, in this case Tom Landry, "Setting a goal is not the main thing. It is deciding how you will go about achieving it and staying with that plan."

So I'm a big fan of good planning. Here are three products that were advertised recently in *Hammacher Schlemmer's* catalogue that seemed to be aimed right at me—maybe right at my head and all the planning gears (rusty and otherwise) within it. Let's start with the "Gravity Defying Clock." How can I resist this one: "The sphere advances in 15-minute increments to

provide casual timekeeping that attempts to usurp the tyrannical rule of schedules and deadlines.” There are no hands on this clock, just a single red magnetic sphere that appears to float around the face of the clock. And hey, it’s driven by quartz movement. Who doesn’t love that? Best of all, this clock “assumes the hour can be deduced from daily context.” That’s a nice way of saying that the clock simply shows a 12, 3, 6 and 9 above which this magical red thingy floats. So you can plan to be late. Or early, just not necessarily right on time.

At #2, couldn’t I use a motorized fork (forget those old electric knives) “whose tines rotate to twirl strands of spaghetti into the perfect neat bite”? Now I can plan on “mess-free” mouthfuls without the need for a spoon or pile of extra napkins. Plus, I can plan to look like a dweeb when my dining mates start to suspect that the hands-free clock and I are maybe a little too cool. And guess what else? Two forks come with each purchase, so you get to spread the dweebiness around a little and probably save enough on napkins alone to pay for the batteries if not the forks, too!

And here’s a third product just a few fleet pages away from the spinning forks—it’s the “Hands Free Hair Rejuvenator.” In need of more hair myself for, say, thirty years or so, this item has real planning potential for me, possibly for tricking our sons into thinking I’m really enthusiastic over “low level laser therapy that provides pain-free light stimulation for cells in hair follicles.” Even better, they might think I’m finally over listening to only CDs, as this gizmo has built in speakers that play music from an iPod which is *required* so I won’t be able to easily wriggle out of this venture. (Well, in theory anyway.)

Yes indeed, with my cool new clock, spinning forks, advancing hairline and iPod savvy, they’ll think I could fit in perfectly (well, almost) with their Millennial friends. Check it out, dude!

But on a day to day basis, I’m really just interested in leading a pleasant and productive life while staying safe in the process. One vital task here starts with me stretched out on the almost *too* comfortable couch. Half of my brain says “stay where you are, let’s not try anything too risky like shoving off willy-nilly.” The other half says, “Gee, we could use some frozen peas with dinner tonight . . . where are they?” Time to start some serious planning.

First of all, the plan needs to include a destination: are we talking the kitchen fridge or one of the old freezers in the garage? If the garage, will footwear be necessary and just how cold is it out there? Now the really challenging part . . . planning my exit off the couch. How to arrange my weight, or is it just a center of gravity issue? Do I need the walker that’s around here

War and Peas

Written by Jack Sparacino

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somewhere to push off with? What happens if I get to the freezer and can't remember what I was looking for? Is there anything else out there that could serve as a substitute? Should I write myself a note?

OK, seems like the ducks are all in order. Ready, now . . . set . . . set again . . . lean forward and . . . *oomph*, off we go. Gee, I didn't hear any cracking sounds. Another fine plan off to a good start.

Here's another example from the other side of the coin that kind of snuck up on me. Let's call it 'battlestar pa-las-tica.' The request was simple enough, one for a highly rated set of earphones. In went my effortless order to Amazon and within just a few days the item landed in our mailbox. Oh boy, let's try this baby out, I enthused. Trouble was, I hadn't planned on going to war with heavy duty scissors or a low level explosive charge to extract the earphones from the battle-ready plastic packaging. Or on needing night vision goggles to read the black on black (seriously) designation of each earbud as right or left. Yup, next time I'll know better.

Well my days of creating milestone charts and related documents at work are over, but this planning business is more important than ever now. And I see that the little red sphere over my new clock says it's almost dinner time. Now if my hair is sufficiently rejuvenated and we can locate the spinning forks—and those peas—maybe we can rustle up some kind of spaghetti dish.

It's going to be a wonderful meal. I'm planning on it.