



CEO COACHING®
international

15 Steps

To A Winning
Annual Planning Session



15

As we move into another annual planning season, my challenge to CEOs is this: What do you want 2022 to be like?

Are you facing another year of supply chain issues? How much time are you devoting to resyncing your decentralized employees with your essential brick-and-mortar team? Is COVID-19 still your reason for lagging behind long-term sales targets? Are there longtime employees you haven't moved on from who will challenge you with another 12 months of the same mediocre work? Effective annual planning provides the surest, straightest path through these kinds of obstacles. It's the most significant differentiator between companies that stay small and companies that get BIG.

Your annual planning sessions should be all about alignment. You and your leadership team will need to set top goals for the next 12 months, and then break those goals down into actionable steps that sync together and generate progress day by day, week by week, quarter by quarter. In short, your people need to see a clear path forward and they need to feel like you're all taking that journey together.

As you move into annual planning, I urge you to consider the importance of breaking the process down into three phases:

**Part
1**

**Before the Annual
Planning Session**

**Part
2**

**During the Annual
Planning Session**

**Part
3**

**After the Annual
Planning Session**

If you, as the leader, have a clear vision of what you hope to accomplish during each phase of planning, you'll be better equipped to articulate your vision and keep yourself and your executive team on track to create a clear and actionable plan for the year ahead.

I wish you the best of luck on your annual planning journey. If you need any assistance along the way or once your vision for 2022 is set, please don't hesitate to reach out. Our coaches — all former CEOs, Founders, and Presidents — have been in your shoes. They can help you push through obstacles, develop measurable action plans, and keep you accountable. Whether you need help as the CEO, with your executive team, or your company as a whole, we're standing by at the ready.

Here's to Making BIG Happen!
Sincerely,

Mark Moses

Mark Moses

Founding Partner and CEO,
CEO Coaching International



Before the Annual Planning Session

The more prepared you and your C-suite are going into the session, the more productive and effective the session will be. These three steps are essential to crafting a focused planning session that will set a strong tone for the year ahead.

1. Look Into Your Crystal Ball and Think BIG

The single most important question a CEO can ask is: “What do I want?”

Everything your company does starts with you, the CEO, seeing the future and determining what you want. What's your BIG goal? Where do you want to be at the end of next year? How will that goal feed into your 3-year goal? A 5-year goal?

If you can't picture yourself a year from now celebrating with your whole company because you achieved BLANK, then your BLANK for 2022 isn't BIG enough or specific enough. See a new version of your company that inspires you, and you'll be able to inspire your team to make that vision real next year.

2. Assign Homework

Get your leadership team together and prep them for the upcoming planning session. Share your 10,000-foot view of the year ahead and share some context on where you see your company and your industry heading.

At the end of the session, distribute the following questions and ask your leaders to send their answers to one member of the team who will then collate them into the annual planning session workbook:



- What went right over the past 12 months?
- What went wrong over the past 12 months?
- What did we learn over the past 12 months?
- What are our greatest challenges?
- What are our greatest opportunities next year?
- How did we do on our HOTS or Goals compared to how we said we would do?
- How did we do on the specific and measurable activities that we said would lead to the desired outcome?
- Envision you were starting a new company that would compete with the company you have today. Then answer these three questions.
1) What would you stop doing that you're doing now? 2) What would you start doing that you aren't doing now? 3) What would your new company do to try to put your current company out of business?
- What do you see coming around the corner that we should prepare for?
- Which potential competitors should we keep an eye on who might eventually affect our business?
- Rate your direct reports on a scale of 1-10. Whom can you coach up? Whom should we replace?
- What is the number one goal you think we could achieve next year that would have the biggest impact on our company's growth?

Their answers —and yours — are going to form the blueprint for what you cover at your annual planning session.

Make sure you tell your leadership team that COVID-19 is not an acceptable answer to any of these questions, or a reasonable excuse. By the time you're holding your 2022 planning session, we'll be nearly two years into the pandemic. If you've made it this far, then you've pivoted, you've protected and rearranged your employees and customers, and you know the best practices that will allow you to keep doing business. A team leader who still thinks COVID-19 is an insurmountable obstacle might not belong in your plans for 2022 and beyond.



Answers to these questions form the blueprint for your company annual planning session.

3. Hire a Facilitator

When the CEO facilitates an annual planning session, other leaders often consciously or subconsciously feel compelled to agree with the boss. Participants who are further down the chain will be less inclined to voice their honest opinions, which limits the free-flowing exchange of ideas and feedback you need for a successful session. Facilitating also forces the CEO to constantly switch back and forth between being the organizer and being a meaningful participant, to the detriment of both responsibilities.



Whether this year's session is going to be virtual, in-person, or a hybrid, step away from the podium and dig in with the rest of your team. When the CEO is a full participant in the planning session, it sends a powerful message: "We're all in this together. I'm responsible for what's working and what isn't working, just the same as you are. We can all do better, including me." That's why hiring a third party like one of the coaches at **CEO Coaching International** to facilitate your annual planning session is always a best practice.

The coaches at CEO Coaching International are experts at running these sessions virtually or in-person. They know how to probe when your team is not fully bought in, dig for root causes of issues being discussed, insist on defining measurable activities and outcomes for key initiatives, call out the elephant in the room that everyone is avoiding, etc. This expertise makes all the difference between a superficial, inconsequential meeting and a true planning session that powerfully aligns and energizes your team around the goals for the coming year and the key activities required to get there.



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During the Annual Planning Session

Now that you, your leadership team, and your professional outside facilitator have completed all the necessary prework, it's time to talk about how an effective one- or two-day annual planning session actually works.

Remember, this is THE most important business meeting on your calendar for the year. Done well, it will set the stage for explosive growth and BIG accomplishments.

Year after year, we've seen the below steps help companies at every stage of growth get better. Our template allows for nuance and flexibility in an annual session plan, especially when so many companies are facing critical turning points. Over the course of the session, a skilled facilitator will know when to prod, poke, drill down, zoom out, press, or pivot in order to meet the exact needs of that leadership team at that moment.

Let's nail down the basics for a successful annual planning session:



4. Align on Success

You've all done the prework and have come into the session with your own ideas and expectations. Now, the facilitator will ask each attendee to share their expectations. Then, she'll distill those responses into a set of statements that everyone is aligned with.

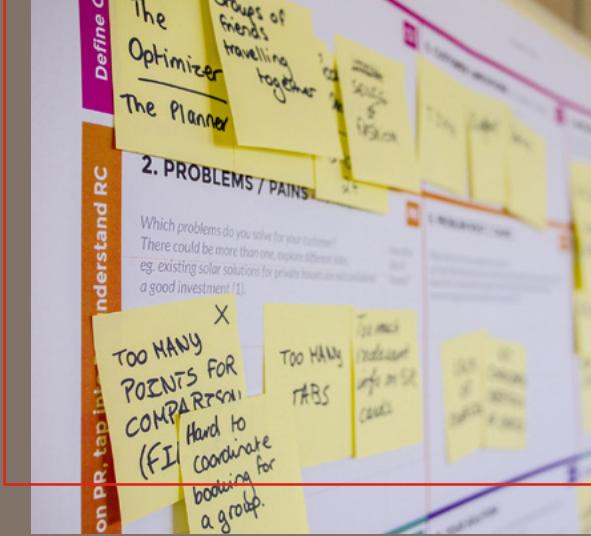
By the end of this brief discussion, it should be clear to everybody "what success looks like" for this session.

5. Review Prework

As you review the prework, what pops out? What patterns are apparent? What is becoming clear?

If every answer revolves around COVID-19, your attendees are going to have to dig deeper. The pandemic probably exposed more problems with your business than it caused. Those deeper structural issues that would have dragged you down eventually in any environment are where you need to focus.

Having said that, don't dismiss any lingering pandemic issues that touch upon employee safety and emotional wellbeing, especially if there are legitimate problems that could be dragging down overall productivity. The annual planning session probably isn't the correct forum for wellness discussions, but if your employees don't feel like you care, they're not going to align to your larger purposes. Listen, empathize, and make a clear plan to tackle EQ issues at a later date.



6. Review Last Year's Results

On a scale of 1 to 10, how well did you execute on last year's plan? How large is the gap between where you are and where you'd aimed to be? What could you do to improve your execution this year? Were any of your answers to the prework informed by your results from the past year? Are there any problems or issues from the past year that will need to be resolved this year?

7. Determine High-Level Outcomes for the Year Ahead

Now it's time to crystallize the specific and measurable outcomes you want to achieve. As facilitators, coaches at CEO Coaching International typically start by looking out three years: just far enough to achieve a Huge Outrageous Target (HOT), but not so far that it's easy to forget about those long-term objectives. From there, we'll zoom in and look at the next 12 months and determine the specific objectives we want to achieve that will keep us on pace to hit our long-term HOTs.

8. Determine Specific Initiatives

A skilled facilitator will walk you through a process that could include divergent thinking, convergent thinking, prioritizing, voting, and challenging so you arrive at a manageable number of initiatives that have a high probability of leading to your HOTs. This year, that list might include some new opportunities that the pandemic has created, such as:

- Acquiring distressed assets
- Expanding community outreach
- Upgrading staff training
- **Recruiting displaced or dissatisfied talent**

9. Drill Down and Assign Owners

Break down your annual initiatives and identify the specific, short-term milestones along the way to measure your progress. We'll answer such questions as:

- What will it take to guarantee it happens?
- What will stand in the way of making it happen?
- How will we overcome what stands in the way?
- Who owns it?
- When will it be done?
- How will we keep score?

10. Commit to Making BIG Happen

We'll end the session with a strong, united commitment to the plan and a clear understanding of "who will do what by when."

And then comes the hard part: following through.

Not even the most thorough annual plan is going to take care of itself. Hitting your targets requires consistent KPI review, a sustained meeting rhythm that reinforces accountability, and a culture that embraces both clear responsibilities and bold innovation.

Annual planning provides the framework that makes these activities possible. Strong leadership from the CEO is what drives those activities forward through the rest of the year and makes BIG happen.

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After the Annual Planning Session

11. Review the Takeaways from the Annual Planning Session

You should have left your annual planning session with:

- A small number of HOTs for next year.
- A list of actionable, measurable steps that will allow the company to hit weekly, monthly, and quarterly targets that build toward the HOTs.
- Deadlines for all short and long-term targets.
- Specific people who are responsible for progress on each activity.

The highlights from the annual planning session should be communicated throughout your entire organization. A company-wide meeting and even an all-company email are good places to start, but the planning session results should also be item number one on every department's next meeting agenda. Reinforce the HOTs, short-term tasks, and who's responsible for what and by when.

12. Create Scorecards

Shared group spreadsheets, big whiteboards, weekly email reports—it doesn't matter what your scoreboard looks like so long as it's visible to everyone and tracking the right numbers. And what are the right numbers?

They're tasks within your employees' control that can be measured and tracked as they lead toward your HOTs.

If you're a SaaS company, that scoreboard might track the conversion rate on weekly demo sessions.

Your sales team scoreboard might track the number of phone calls being made daily, weekly, monthly.

Your customer service team might have a scoreboard that tracks delivery time. Accounts receivable can track your cash operating cycle and look for ways to get the company paid more quickly.

Remember: scoreboards are for measurable activities, not outcomes. "Sell X more product" sounds like an activity, but it's actually the end result of smaller daily, weekly, and monthly activities. Drill down until you find those leading activities. If you can't measure what your teams are doing, you can't track their progress towards your HOTs.



13. Establish Healthy Business Rhythms

Here are the business rhythms in the Make BIG Happen System that will set you and your team up for extraordinary business growth:



DAILY

Increase Productivity — This business rhythm focuses on developing daily skills as a leader. Focus on getting the right people in the right seats, providing candid, constructive feedback, time management, and accessing how individuals behave under pressure and what motivates the behavior.



WEEKLY

Focus on the Outcomes — Create engaged and autonomous teams by conducting weekly sessions with your leadership team, departmental teams, and one-on-ones. Discuss and review progress on initiatives that are critical to achieving your annual HOTs. That's it. Don't waste your time or your leaders' time chasing shiny objects or putting out fires. Those are topics for different meetings.



BIMONTHLY

Hold Yourself Accountable — At CEO Coaching International, our world-class coaches hold CEOs and the rest of the management team accountable aligned with bimonthly sessions that cover:

- In-depth diagnostics around what is going right or wrong with the plan
- How to overcome unexpected obstacles
- Detailed set of specific and measurable commitments to make progress week-to-week
- Neutralize curveballs and shiny objects that might otherwise distract the team



MONTHLY

Stay on Track — After carefully crafting detailed annual and quarterly plans, CEOs stay on track with these two key monthly alignment sessions:

- Financial performance review—understand the financial health of the business and spot any trends.
- Strategic assessment—proactively challenge the strategy set for the quarter and make incremental changes as warranted.



QUARTERLY

Execute a Thirteen-Week March — Start with a quarterly alignment session, where each quarter's objectives and key activities align to achieve the overall annual goals and initiatives set in the annual planning session.



14. Consider Hiring a CEO Coach

Clear communication through scoreboards and a meeting rhythm will create a sustainable culture of accountability that reinforces itself.

But how are you and each member of your leadership team going to hold yourself accountable? Hire a coach. Even the best in the game — Jack Welch, Bill Gates, and Eric Schmidt — had a coach. Our clients will tell you that it's one of the most powerful growth levers they've invested in for their business.



BIG Happens Here.

Every coach at CEO Coaching International is a been-there-done-that former CEO or President who has made BIG happen, leading double-digit sales and profit growth in businesses ranging in size from startups to over \$10 billion at companies including Samsung, Procter & Gamble, Home Depot, Goodyear, Kohler, Kendall-Jackson, Cold Stone Creamery, Tektronix, Hewlett-Packard, Xerox, Manulife, and Under Armour.

If you're committed to holding yourself accountable or are curious about exploring working with a CEO coach, let's chat! Get in touch with us.

[Learn More](#)



15. Consider a Copy of **Make BIG Happen** or **Making BIG Happen**

The very best plans can go awry if an action plan and specific and measurable activities are not in place to ensure directional clarity and operational results. For a proven framework, trusted by the world's best CEOs, Founders, and Presidents, consider the Make BIG Happen System as featured in the new book, **Making BIG Happen**.

The Make BIG Happen System is comprised of three simple elements:

1. Establishing and maintaining the Make BIG Happen Rhythms to establish structure
2. Applying the Make BIG Happen Questions to take action
3. Leveraging the proven Make BIG Happen Tools to accelerate your success

With thoughtful prework, a well-facilitated annual planning session, and a disciplined system to bring your vision into reality, you'll be well on your way toward a 2022 BIGGER than you had ever imagined.

About the Make BIG Happen System and **Making BIG Happen**

The Make BIG Happen System featured in **Making BIG Happen**, is a structured planning and execution framework that creates directional clarity and operational results with a set of expert-crafted tools layered on top. It enables companies to grow rapidly because it gives leaders a clear picture of where they want to go and a repeatable system with specific and measurable activities that will get them there.

Born from the authors' collective experiences running, turning around, and successfully exiting complex businesses, the Make BIG Happen System is enriched by the crowdsourced practice of having been applied to hundreds of companies around the world. It brings together all the conditions that success requires — thoughtful strategy, meticulous planning, a system to keep score, and an empowered team of the world's best talent — operating within a culture of accountability that drives constant achievement and consistent growth.

Making BIG Happen breaks the system down in a way that is easy to understand and implement and is sprinkled with the fascinating stories of dozens of companies that have experienced the tremendous success that the system enables.

[Learn more about **Making BIG Happen**](#)

Get the Book 

Download The Free Tools 





About CEO Coaching International

CEO Coaching International works with CEOs and their leadership teams to achieve extraordinary results quarter after quarter, year after year. Known globally for its success in coaching growth-focused entrepreneurs to meaningful exits, CEO Coaching International has coached more than 875 CEOs and entrepreneurs in more than 45 countries and industries. The coaches at CEO Coaching International are former CEOs, presidents, or executives who have made big happen. The firm's coaches have led double-digit sales and profit growth in businesses ranging in size from startups to over \$10 billion, and many are founders that have led their companies through successful eight, nine and ten-figure exits. Companies working with CEO Coaching International for three years or more have experienced an average EBITDA CAGR of 30.4% during their time as a client, more than three times the U.S. average and a revenue CAGR of 18.6%, nearly twice the U.S. average.

[Visit Our Website](#)



About Mark Moses

Mark Moses is the Founding Partner of CEO Coaching International and the Amazon Bestselling author of *Make Big Happen*. Mark has won Ernst & Young's Entrepreneur of the Year award and the Blue Chip Enterprise award for overcoming adversity. His last company ranked #1 Fastest-Growing Company in Los Angeles as well as #10 on the Inc. 500 of fastest growing private companies in the U.S.

[More About Mark Moses](#)

